

Do Bianchi – Jeremy Parzen - 24 Agosto 2010



The story behind Nascetta (and Anascetta)

Romeo, doff thy name!



Above: **Valter Fissore** of Elvio Cogno (Novello) single-handedly delivered the Nascetta grape from oblivion after he tasted a wine made using this once highly praised grape in 1991. The wine had been bottled in 1986.

It's regrettable that **when I tasted the Nascetta grape** for the first time last year, it was served to me ice cold and was described as a "light-bodied white wine."

While in Piedmont in March of this year, I happily learned that Nascetta is actually a noble white grape variety that can produce long-lived, structured wines. And I had the great fortune to taste Valter Fissore's excellent 2001 bottling — a nearly decade-old expression of this grape. In my notes, I wrote "rosemary, sage, petrol," and was blown away by the structure of the wine, its lively acidity, and most of all its gorgeous, unctuous mouthfeel.

Yesterday, in a **wonderful post** on drinking the last extant bottling of a vintage, **Cory** nudged me to fulfill a promise to explore the origins of the name. And so here it is.

First of all, a little history.



The name Nascetta was coined by 19th-century Piedmontese enologist **Giovanni Gagna** (left, 1833-1881), who believed erroneously that the grape was related to the Sardinian grape Nasco (from the Sardinian *nuscu*, from the Latin *muscus*, meaning *moss*). Remember: for the better part of the 18th and 19th centuries, Sardinia, Nice, Savoy, and Piedmont were ruled by the

House of Savoy (the Kingdom of Sardinia), with its court in Turin and so commerce between Sardinia and Piedmont was fluid during that period.

In 1877, **Count Giovanni di Rovasenda** listed the grape using its dialectal name, Anascetta, in his landmark *Saggio di una ampelografia universale* (Essay on Universal Ampelography). The fact that he uses the dialectal inflection of Gagna's name for the grape is an indication of how popular the grape was in Piedmont at that time, when it was commonly blended with Favorita (Vermentino) and Moscato. (In Piedmontese dialect, an initial *a* is added to certain words to compensate for syncopated, i.e., lost vowels; in this case, the acquisition of the initial *a* would appear hypercorrective, a phenomenon not uncommon in the morphology of Piedmontese.)

Here's where it gets a little complicated.



Above: The confusion regarding the name of this grape was created in part by Valter's frustration with labeling requirements. In 2001, he bottled the wine as a non-vintage vino da tavola (table wine) because the grape was not yet authorized for the Langhe Bianco DOC appellation.

Let's start with some chronology:

1991 – Valter tastes a bottling of 1986 by farmer Francesco Marengo (Novello).

1994 – Valter produces 800 bottles from his own planting of the grape, labeled as Nas-cetta; following this vintage, Valter is forced to stop labeling the wine as Nas-cetta after he is fined for listing an unauthorized grape variety name on the label.

2000 – Nascetta (the grape) is added to the catalog of authorized grape varieties for Langhe.

2004 – Valter bottles the wine as Langhe Bianco DOC but cannot list the grape variety on the label; he labels the wine “Anas-cëtta” using a “fantasy” name because the grape is not authorized for the Langhe Bianco DOC labeling (it’s authorized for the blend but not the label).

2010 – After Valter’s successful lobbying, the 2010 vintage will be first labeled as Langhe Nascetta [sic] DOC.



Above: Valter’s Nascetta is an excellent value for a structured, age-worthy white. Be sure to serve it at cellar or room temperature.

When I asked Valter directly about his use of diacritics (in this case the **umlaut** and the hyphen), he told me flatly that he introduced them in the labeling for purely proprietary reasons. The mutation of the grape names Nascetta and Anascetta was inspired by his frustration with labeling requirements. The good news is that the confusion has been resolved and this noble white grape will be labeled as “Langhe Nascetta DOC” beginning with the 2010 vintage.

(...)

Be sure to read **Cory's post** on the last bottle of 2001 and **Whitney's post**, too.

*... O, be some other name!
What's in a name? that which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet;
So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd,
Retain that dear perfection which he owes
Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name,
And for that name which is no part of thee
Take all myself.*

One Response to "The story behind Nascetta (and Anascetta)"

Charles Scicolone says:

August 24, 2010 at 10:10 am



Ciao Jeremy- another great post. I had the wine last year when I visited Valter and his wife in May. I have had one or two before. It is a very interesting wine.