

# PORTOVINO

## IL SASSO AMARONE CLASSICO DELLA VALPOLICELLA 2020

From Verona, walk up Negrar's valley until you reach a 'Rock' of Limestone - this is Il Sasso. Here, the grape varieties Corvina, Corvinone, and Rondinella's grow deep into the terraced limestone<sup>1</sup> searching for water. Soon enough, the interaction of roots, water and limestone soils will bring a palpable tension to the bottled wines. And, as we'll see below, Il Sasso's young owner Stefano Bellamoli focuses on preserving this tension with a rigorous minimalism, from his knowledge of expositions and sun exposure on the terracing to using vessels of unlined cement diamonds and ceramic eggs for fermentation and elevage. All of it done with an exacting certified organic viticulture.

### Negrar and Il Sasso's Terracing

From the Latin *Vallis-poli-cellae*, Valley-of-many-cellars, derives the denomination Valpolicella. The valley and subzone of Negrar is Vallpolicella's most well known on account of the number and fame of its historic producers (e.g. Giuseppe Quintarelli). It's here at just over 300 meters in the Pigneto cru that newcomer il Sasso is making its mark. Many producers in Valpolicella have tracks of limestone; yet, Stefano reminds us, "the old system of terracing gives the wines just the right exposition, both less and more sun, to give lower yields while retaining acidity." The depth you find in Il Sasso's wines is from intimately knowing these terraced limestone vineyards. Each plant and row will have different sun expositions and different sun needs depending on the variety, and Stefano aims not merely 'to pick early for fresh wines,' but to pick the right vines, exposed differently, at the right time.

### Amarone as Amore

And, without the drum roll, Il Sasso's Amarone. We don't know if it's because there are cool looking ceramic eggs used instead of barriques, or if it's the spontaneous fermentation, or the terraced limestone vineyards, or some Amarone whispers Stefano is doing here, but we've fallen head over heels with Il Sasso's Amarone (and we are Amarone haters!). With its spine-tingling acidity and impasto style fruit, it could mark a new style for the whole of Valpolicella looking to make Amarone wines that have more poise, and match better with the food on the table.



<sup>1</sup> The local *calcarenite gialla* (It.), or, yellow limestone.

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When we talk about an impasto style fruit, it's important to underline that Il Sasso does this with a dry or secco Amarone, in other words, under 2gr/l of residual sugar<sup>4</sup>. To have an Amarone that is secco, and fulfills the three Amarone DOC mandated 'taste' requirements of "full-bodied (pieno), plush (vellutato), and giving warmth (caldo)," is incredibly difficult without having exquisite grapes, dried and vinified exquisitely. Limited bottles but each one and vintage has a story to tell. Here are a few notes on current vintages:

Il Sasso Amarone della Valpolicella 2020

The Svelte Vintage. Stefano describes it as "...one of the most svelte (*snello*) vintages we had so far! Very timid color, very vertical, strong nose, high acidity, but thin and elegant, so even lighter than 2019 perhaps." There's a three-dimensional depth here that goes on for days.

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**REGION:** Veneto **GROWING AREA:** Valpolicella Classico

**FARMING:** organic certified (ICEA # E1967)

**VINEYARD ALTITUDE:** 300 m / 980 ft

**SOILS:** yellow limestone, rich in seashell fossils and white stones

**VARIETIES:** 50% Corvina, 40% Corvinone, 10% Rondinella

**VINE AGE:** 13 years old **VINE TRAINING:** guyot

**HARVEST DATE:** beginning of September

**YEASTS:** native (spontaneous fermentation) **FERMENTATION & ÉLEVAGE:** manual harvest of selected grapes which are let to dry naturally for up to 4 months. Then, fermentation starts with a pied de cuve; grapes co-ferment in big cement tanks for 1 month. 75% of the grapes are destemmed and 25% is whole cluster. Temperature under 25°C. When the fermentation is finished, the must macerate in cement for 2 months and then soft pressing. Élevage for 2 years in ceramic barrels of 400 ml. Additional élevage for 6 months in the bottle. No filtration and gravity natural decant

**SULPHUR:** 30 mg/L total SO<sub>2</sub> added at bottling **ALCOHOL:** 15.5% **ANNUAL PRODUCTION:** 166 cases