

Movia

Dobrovo, Slovenia

HAPPY GRAPES MAKE THE DIFFERENCE FOR THE ICONOCLASTIC ALEŠ KRISTANČIČ.

Movia

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Meeting Aleš Kristančič of Movia for the first time, I am full of anticipation as we sit down for lunch in early May in the picturesque town of Dobrovo, Slovenia.

Movia's 2006 Sauvignon Blanc is opened for starters. Natural-yeast fermentation and Biodynamic viticulture make this wine entirely different from the Collio Sauvignons produced right over the hill in Italy. The smile on my face is as big as that of the exuberant waiter serving us. Lunch is superb: local, organic greens; fresh cheese; and wild-boar sausage, a specialty of the region.

"Happy cows," says Kristančič as he lights a cigarette, "made the milk for this cheese. Only happy boars made these sausages. This Sauvignon Blanc, my Sauvignon, is R-rated, for adults

only! Wild, natural yeast from the pips, lots of happiness going on here!" No wine is stripped or manipulated under Kristančič's watch. "That's all our bodies should digest—happy thoughts, happy themes, and happy yeasts for our wines," he continues. "Happy yeasts are active yeasts, reproducing in the fields, making love, being free, and making happy grapes." He offers a toast: "Man discovered water for the body and wine for the soul." We lift our glasses.

The second bottle is Movia's 2001 Puro Rosé sparkling wine, made of 100% Pinot Nero.



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Photo courtesy of Movia

WINERY SPOTLIGHT



Movia winery (left) and vineyards (above) in Dobrovo, Slovenia.

"This is my newest model, XZY72Z!" he jokes. "Let the happy yeasts live, love, and be free in this bottle right up until consumption time." He dips the neck under ice water and uses his latest invention, a long, black underwater cork remover, to disgorge the bottle, releasing the fallen yeasts and creating a cloud in the water. What's left in the bottle is brilliant. What a show this would put on in a restaurant! I make a note to order the wine upon my return.

The third wine is the 2005 Veliko Belo, a field blend of white varietals. Under the Kristančič philosophy, the grapes are not merely co-fermented, but must coexist happily in the vineyard. In fact, he says he would love to see everything that goes into a wine listed on the label, including grapes, soil types, and yeasts: "Then we can see who makes the natural and healthy wines for our soul."

Next, we open his 2007 Lunar, a 100% Ribolla from 65-year-old vines. Three of the 100 barrels from the last vintage of Lunar were disposed of as "vinegar." That's just the price you pay, according to Kristančič, who believes that most winemakers play it too safe and only the best push the envelope.

He instructs me on how to perform a special decanting method for his Lunar wines, one he says "all sommeliers should learn." Using a wall sconce for illumination, he starts with the light source above the bottle and then watches the shoulder of the bottle rather than the neck. "This ensures pure viewing of the flow from the bottle, through the wine," he explains. He stops when the thicker liquid enters the neck. "There is so much life in this bottle without any added sulfites," says Kristančič. "My Ribollas can last over 20-plus years." We test his hypothesis with





Kristančič demonstrating the underwater Puro opening technique (top left) and taking a barrel sample (top right); Movia vines (above).



a 1966 Ribolla—still vibrant, with the mature personality of a well-aged Burgundy. The wine’s most surprising aspect is its level of fresh acidity.

Kristančič never filters his wines—another reason why they have such intense aromatics, complex flavor profiles, and plush textures. “I go to nightclubs now and then all over the world,” he says. “Filters are like those big, stupid bodyguards, with earpieces, crossing their arms and selecting people to enter to have a fun, happy time or not. The best clubs and places to go out are ones that allow free people to enter, enjoy themselves, and have a good, happy time. Those are my wines—a true representation of this area.” In addition, Kristančič never irrigates, sometimes losing 40-60% of young vineyards in a dry year. But he wouldn’t have it any other way, because under the Biodynamic doctrine, only the best vines remain to move forward.

Kristančič’s organic philosophy was originally established by his grandfather, Anton. The vineyards were planted as early as 1700, and Movia has been an independent winery since 1820, when the Kristančič family purchased the estate. The family now owns 37 acres, 7 of which are a stone’s throw away in neighboring Italy. In fact, many of the region’s vineyards, based primarily on calcareous marl soils, overlap the Italian border. The vast majority of the Goriška Brda region was awarded to Slovenia (then part of the former Yugoslavia) after World War II.

I am asked to follow Kristančič into a black-lit room deep within his cellars. My mind journeys back to the psychedelic ’60s as we’re met by an Andy Warhol-style display of plastic cups in the shape of flower blossoms, glowing across the back wall. He shows me the active fermentation with natural yeasts through the top of his custom-designed oak barriques. “Bacteria is great, a necessary part of life for all foods and our bodies to build a healthy system, and the same for my wines,” he says. The wines are hand-picked and hand-destemmed, and the clusters are pressed by the natural weight of the grapes during barrel fermentation. This method produces only a 22-23% ratio of must to grape weight, compared to around 70% for the average pressing. The wines are racked off the lees by gravitational flow from the barrels, according to the cycles of the moon, and bottled six to eight months later. I am told that it’s the first full moon of Easter. “All the bad things fall down to hell,” says Kristančič, “and whatever wants to be wine goes up to heaven, to be bottled.”

Photos courtesy of Movia

OUTSTANDING RECENT RELEASES

Puro Brut Rosé 2001 \$40

A Pinot Nero with a cider-apple nose and notes of fresh-baked brioche and white flowers. The palate delivers peach and apricot fruit, and the finish is bright and, yes, pure.

Sauvignon Blanc 2006 \$32

12.5% alcohol. Golden-straw in color, with an aromatic, fresh nose of wild-Italian mint and elderflower and an acidic backbone. Mineral notes shine through, and a balancing richness leads to a clean finish.

Veliko Belo 2005 \$37

70% Ribolla, 20% Pinot Sivi (Grigio), 10% Sauvignon Blanc. With a nose of candied fruit and acacia flowers, this full-bodied white features almond and hazelnut notes, mixed with lemon chiffon to round out a long finish.

Lunar 2007 \$43

A cloudy wine with a deep-golden color, this 100% Ribolla has beautiful aromas of orange blossoms and slate. A soft, velvety mouthfeel reveals dried apricot and roasted nuts, leading to a long, mineral finish.

Prices are estimated retail.



Lunar barrel fermentation (top).



I'm a bit freaked out by this room, but I know I have to ask him about moon phases and cow horns. "If you put an electric fence around horses," Kristančič explains, "perhaps one will test the fence and die. No other horse will follow, and after some time, you can just turn off the electricity. But with cows, they will never touch the electric fence. Furthermore, within an hour of turning off the electricity, the cows will break through the fence and be free." Why? "Horns are receptors of energy, microwaves," he says. Kristančič adds manure, chamomile, and quartz to the horns and buries them during the prescribed cycle of the moon, then uses them to fertilize the vineyard, allowing a powerful component of natural elements to enter the vines.

The happy grapes come up again, but this time Kristančič says they are wearing sunglasses and smoking Marlboro cigarettes. It all becomes clear as he unravels the full story: When he was a child in the 1970s, when Slovenia was part of Yugoslavia, his father, Mirko, once stayed out all night, only to return around noon the next day wearing sunglasses and smoking a Marlboro. Just before that, Marlboro had introduced

a hugely successful worldwide advertising campaign based on its now-familiar, rugged cowboy riding through the wide, open spaces. The message struck deep across the Eastern Bloc countries: Marlboro equals freedom.

Although Marshal Josip Broz Tito loved the red package, which reinforced his "red star" emblem, the whole freedom thing didn't sit so well. Both the cigarettes and the television ads were immediately banned in Yugoslavia. The resulting rage for these cigarettes made them one of the most valuable commodities in the world at the time. "Anyone who could acquire a pack of Marlboros and successfully get them across the border from Italy without losing them to the customs agent was the coolest guy in the bar," Kristančič recalls. "Everyone wanted to hang out with the 'Marlboro man' for the evening." We conclude with some more "happy cheese" as Kristančič puts on his sunglasses and lights up a Marlboro. 🍷

