

WINE

Heady date with Gaja

Iconic winemaker Angelo Gaja talks about the organic revolution in wines. BY NK YONG

An evening spent at a wine dinner with Angelo Gaja is a rare luxury. At 75 years of age, Angelo continues to stride around the vineyards of Piedmont and Tuscany like a giant, setting the pace, breaking the rules, pushing the boundaries wherever he plants vines and altogether enjoying himself hugely. This wine dinner two evenings ago was exhilarating. I have known Angelo since 1985, and he has not changed.

The occasion was a Gaja Wine Dinner at Osteria Art restaurant. Angelo had not set foot in Singapore for at least two decades. (Normally it is his daughter Alessia who does the flag-flying visits.) The invitation to this Gaja Wine Dinner was like a royal command. Disobey at your peril!

Angelo was in his usual form, excited and speaking rapidly, devoting the introductory half-hour to the hottest subject in viticulture today: natural (organic) farming – something close to, but not 100 per cent biodynamic. The central goal of organic farming is to return the vineyard to its natural state, before Man cut down the trees and uprooted the plants and planted rows of vines.

In the vineyards, the spaces between the vine rows are planted with barley or other "forest floor" plants normally found in the forest. No pesticides, no chemical fertilisers are used.

As he explained, showing a most instructive slide of red earthworms crawling around the vineyard floor, exemplifying what is central to this practice: the return of the vineyard land and environment to their previous natural state and condition, which included not only the forest plants but the organisms normally to be found in the soil, such as earthworms and bacteria.

These two are crucial to the health of the vines. This is organic farming, one part of "biodynamic" farming. (I have seen in other vineyards such as



Angelo Gaja (left) strides around the vineyards of Piedmont and Tuscany (right) like a giant, pushing boundaries wherever he plants vines. PHOTOS: BLOOMBERG, NK YONG



Vega Sicilia.) It was very educational and most enlightening. Angelo joined his father's company in Piedmont in 1961 (he was 21 then), after completing his oenological studies. It was he who introduced "single vineyard" wines, labelling them with the names of the "single vineyards" where they came from, thus Barbaresco Costa Russi, Barbaresco Sori Tildin, et al.

This was revolution, totally going against traditional practice. (The time-honoured practice is to blend the fruit from different vineyard sites, and label the wines simply "Barbaresco" or "Barolo" as the case may be.) But this did not bother Angelo.

He continued his practice with the wines he made in Bolgheri and Montalcino (Tuscany). Thus Ca Marcanda (50 per cent Merlot, 40 per cent Cabernet Sauvignon, 10 per cent Bolgheri) for instance.

In 1996, Angelo made the dramatic (and now historic) move of declassifying his three DOCG Barbarescos – Costa Russi, Sori Tildin, and San Lorenzo – leaving only straight Barbaresco DOCG.

It shook the wine world. Not Angelo. This historic move did not dent either the popularity or image of his wines. He took this step in order to free his single vineyard wines from what he considered restrictions in the DOCG regulations.

This move did not impact the reputation nor the demand for his single-vineyard Barbarescos! Angelo is Angelo, period!

CaMarcanda, Bolgheri

Cabernet Sauvignon 50 per cent, Merlot 40 per cent, Cabernet Franc 10 per cent. Medium-hued dark reddish brown, opaque. Light fruity fresh aroma in which the Cabernet Sauvignon dominated.

Similarly on the palate, very Cabernet in taste and colours, medium-bodied, well balanced, a pleasant medium length finish.

A very pleasant wine, made at Angelo's very big winery in Bolgheri, in close proximity to San Guido's Sassicaia winery. Built rather like a fortress, and most of it underground, covered over with turf and plants, including very old olive trees which were transplanted over. A modern

"state-of-the-art" mind-boggling winery!

Barbaresco 2001, DO77CG

This is the only Angelo Barbaresco which remains conformed to DOCG regulations, hence the DOCG. Deep red, very youthful aroma of very fresh and sweet ripe fruit. Light mouth-feel on the palate, but very dense, full of very ripe fruit; soft light tannins, medium length finish. Still very youthful for its age. A lovely wine.

Barbaresco Sori Tildin 1999

Darkest colour of the three single-vineyard Barbarescos. Lovely perfume; very ripe fruit on the palate, coffee and chocolate, suggestion of blackcurrant too. Very great length, leaving a lingering memory of very ripe fruit.

Barbaresco San Lorenzo 1999

Very dark red, a shade lighter than the Sori Tildin. Softer and sweeter ripe fruit aroma, also distinctly lighter in texture and consistency than the Sori Tildin, very good concentration,

sweetest of the three single-vineyard Barbarescos.

Barbaresco Costa Russi

Lightest hued of the three. A medium brownish dark-red, bouquet similar to the other two, but lightest in intensity. Very good ripeness, black coffee, touch of chocolate, ripe tannins, medium intensity, but good concentration of fruit. Despite the age, still not fully developed.

A most fascinating and instructive tasting, featuring Angelo's most famous wines. The three single-vineyard Barbarescos made in a more current and somewhat internationalised style as opposed to the traditional, showed beautifully.

Notwithstanding the 16-year age, very youthful, with the Costa Russi not fully developed, also the most feminine.

They are certainly not old-style Barbarescos, setting the pace for not only the traditional-styled Barbarescos but other non-traditional Barbarescos.

Freed of DOCG regulations, Angelo's single-vineyard Barbares-

cos contain 5 per cent Barbera, vintified 12 months in barriques, followed by 12 months in large oak casks. They are classified Langhe Nebbiolo DOC.

The comparison of these three non-DOC Barbarescos with the traditionally made Barolo, DOCG, was fascinating. One thing stood out. The traditional Barbaresco was distinctly the most dense of the four. Whether you prefer the modern to the traditional or vice versa is a matter of taste.

While I personally prefer the traditional, I enjoyed all the other three, the non-traditional ones. But, I would not like to be given ONE choice only!

I have known Angelo since 1985, visiting his winery in Barbaresco bi-annually for the next two decades, much less since I professionally retired end of 2007. White-haired now, he has not changed one iota.

In personality and manner, still bursting with energy and vitality, full of enthusiasm. Most engaging, most infectious. It's a joy to visit with him at his winery in Barbaresco. Thank you Angelo.

ARTS

Delicate balance of painting and sculpture

By Cheah Ui-Hoon
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THERE are artists who prefer to work alone, and then there are those who find inspiration working with other artists. Singapore-based Australian artist Belinda Fox belongs to the latter group, and her latest collaboration with Jason Lim is a matchmade pairing of painting and ceramics.

For Lim, collaborations are rare in his ceramics creations as he sees that process as one that is sacred and private. "I am beginning to open my door a little to people whom I consider to have something to share," he explains. This is the artists' second collaboration after a sold-out show at the Sydney Contemporary Art Fair in September. Fox, 40, came up with the theme and idea, *Balancing the World*. Both artists discussed the concept where their works will take on a series of precarious forms like balancing acts.

"Jason responds to my work, and this time, I would also respond to his with the painting I do on his ceramics as well as on the wall after the installation is completed," explains Fox about the collaboration.

Balancing the World is inspired by her time in Singapore and travels to Vietnam and Myanmar, focused on the loss of tradition and the exploitation of the natural environment in the name of human progress. In today's world, humanity swings between the amazing and the awful, and hope and doubt.

"There are environmental pressures, refugees, terrorism...," lists Fox. "So when you're trying to be a 'global' and 'good' human being in everyday life, it's like walking this tightrope," she explains.

She's also incorporated Singapore-relevant topics for her painting, such as native birds, and the haze issue, while using Chinese ink, a medium she loves. For Lim, this series is different from his usual abstract creations in terms of scale and use of glazes and firing techniques. "I had created wider surfaces for Belinda to make bolder drawings and for me to apply and experiment with a different range of glazes."

Fox came to Singapore just over three years ago after her husband was posted here for work, and she saw it as an amazing opportunity for her as an artist. "With



After a sold-out show at the Sydney Contemporary Art Fair in September, Singapore-based Australian artist Belinda Fox (above, right) and ceramicist Jason Lim have created a series of precarious forms which are like balancing acts in their exhibition *Balancing the World*. (Above left and below) Sculptures and paintings that focus on the loss of tradition and the exploitation of the natural environment in the name of human progress. PHOTOS: CHAN HAMPE GALLERIES



the exposure and inspiration, I've gained so much from being here," she adds.

Trained as a printmaker, Fox had previously collaborated with an Australian ceramicist, but had been keen to work with a Singapore artist, when she discovered Lim's work and approached him. "I was quite surprised he said yes, to be frank,



but we do have a very strong link in our ideas and aesthetics," she says. Adds Lim: "I'd like to believe that our input into the works balances and complements one another."

Collaborations like these are incredibly challenging and interesting, and the artists develop great trust in each other, she ex-

plains. "It becomes a very intimate experience but superchallenging as every artist has different ideas and ways of working," Fox says, adding that she and Lim worked through their differences in creative and constructive ways to create a strong body of work.

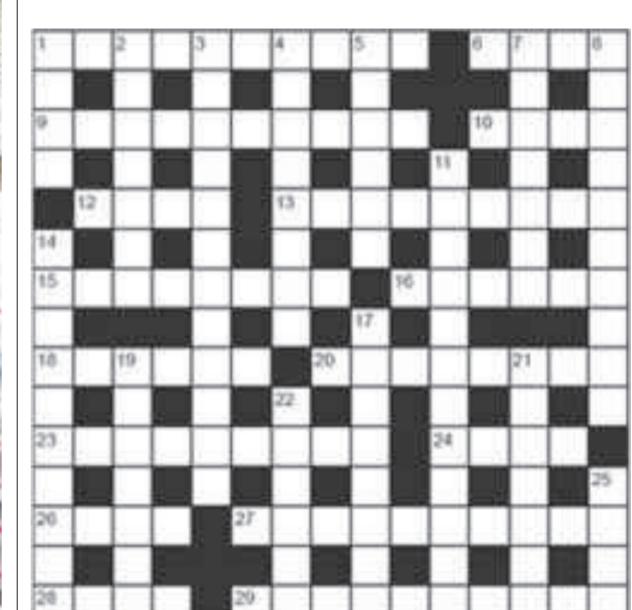
A collaboration signals that the artists are willing to reach out beyond their own worlds, Fox feels. "It's not just about me but what another artist has brought to the table."

Fox has done 10 paintings, and what's new is that she will paint on the walls as well after Lim has installed his ceramics. Using her signature wet motif, the drawings will tie the works together so the entire space becomes an installation. Besides the individual paintings for sale, Lim's ceramics will be sold in collections rather than individual pieces.

Flush from the success of the Sydney show, Fox is quite confident going into this show, which is being held during one of the most important periods of Singapore's art calendar as it's in conjunction with Art Stage Singapore. "The launching pad was Sydney, so now I feel that our works will make more of a statement," she concludes.

Balancing the World runs from Jan 15 to Feb 14, 2016, at Chan Hampe Galleries, located at Raffles Hotel Arcade #01-21, 328 North Bridge Road. The exhibition is from Tuesday to Sunday, 11am-7pm. Admission is free. For enquiries, please call 6338-1962

CRYPTIC CROSSWORD



Across

1 Half a day with university intellectual is of great importance (10)

4 Potential filer is irritating, taking son for first of trips (8)

5 Grow old and cold in New York office (6)

7 Loving a party, make a call (7)

8 Replacements for spring on belt sent up (5,5)

11 Boastful Avon girl is worried, with proof of debts (12)

14 Face alcohol before breakfast? (10)

17 Do nothing, say, to protect a good name (8)

19 Gold relic designed for chamber (7)

21 A row about the Spanish studio (7)

22 House accommodating a bad-tempered woman (6)

25 Place causing a bit of travel sickness on the way back? (4)

enterprises supporting millions (12)

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YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

Across: 1 Catapult, 5 Armada, 10 Sweeping changes, 11 Abalone, 12 Overrun, 13 Brighton, 15 Smash, 18 Asset, 20 Carapace, 23 Offbeat, 25 Propose, 26 Weather forecast, 27 Rotate, 28 Hear hear.

Down: 1 Handle roughly 1000 gold lines initially (4)

2 Facilities offered by politicians after volcanic outpouring? (10)

28 Always strict, dismissing outsiders (4)

29 Authorities encourage rapid increase in electricity used (5,5)

3 Down

1 Handle roughly 1000 gold lines initially (4)

2 A trial, oddly, after profit rises and falls (7)

3 Give a false account of various

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