

# New oil & old wine

**Stephen Pritchard** visited Castello Monte Vibiano near his holiday home in Umbria to find out about the latest innovations in olive oil making at this centuries-old estate...

**T**here's an old Umbrian saying that says for a perfect meal you need new olive oil and old wine. Laying hands on a venerable *rosso* isn't that difficult, but new olive oil... well, that's a bit trickier. Even the finest oil can lose its edge after lingering too long in the bottle, so how do you capture and preserve that fresh-as-

Vibi family first settled in the area, but the 21st century has brought a new technique to olive oil production that at first sounds close to heresy: freezing.

Out on the 40 hectares of olive groves, 12,000 leccino, dolce, morello and frantoio varieties sleep their dreamless sleep in the drowsy heat of a cloudless day. Some of these trees are centuries old. They

*Monte Vibiano bottles only the first pressing, making all its oils 'extra virgin' quality*

the-day-it-was-pressed taste? And so my search for the freshest of that precious green-gold nectar began...

## MOVING WITH THE TIMES

A drive into the gentle, lush and golden landscape south of Perugia offers an entirely modern solution – but with its roots set firmly in an ancient institution. Farming on the Castello Monte Vibiano estate has gone on for thousands of years, an unbroken tradition that began when the noble Etruscan

were planted when Perugino was learning his craft from Piero della Francesca; when Brunelleschi was building his dome in Florence. Each autumn, they have offered their bitter harvest into generations of hands gnarled by the sun and the rain. Now, new hands hurry the crop straight into a state-of-the-art press to be crushed, bottled and frozen all in one day.

Sacrilege? Certainly not, says 80-year-old Andrea Fasola Bologna, head of the family at

Monte Vibiano. Settling into a comfortable chair in the welcome shade of a huge umbrella, he tells me how it all began. "I was persuaded by my son Lorenzo to keep a bottle of new oil in the fridge, to see if we could capture that new taste every day," he says.

## A FROSTY RECEPTION

The idea took flight, and freezing seemed the next logical step – but not in large quantities; Monte Vibiano bottles only the first pressing, making all its oils 'extra virgin' quality. Now here's the clever bit: freezing a large bottle of oil is impractical, so Monte Vibiano produces 10ml individual bottles, each enough for one person to use on a dish, and easy to defrost before use.

It's all part of the estate's quest to be innovative and, crucially, to be a leader in environmental ideas. Last February, Monte Vibiano became Italy's first carbon-neutral winery, fulfilling ISO 14064, the global benchmark for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Lorenzo Fasola Bologna, now chief



*The imposing castello, longtime home to the Fasola Bologna family*



*Ripe for picking – centuries-old olive trees on the estate*



*Drizzle on crisp bruschetta – a simple way to sample the luscious oil*



*Electric buggies offer tours of the olive groves and estate*



*A worker reaches on high for the olives*



*Views across the peerless Umbrian countryside*



*Chief executive Lorenzo Fasola Bologna is involved in every aspect of production*



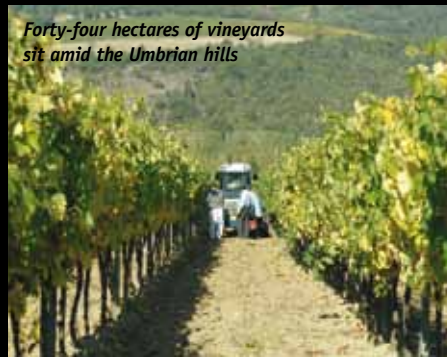
Olive picking is one process that is done the old-fashioned way



Witness all that happens on the estate from the castle



The estate produces over 200,000 bottles of wine a year



Forty-four hectares of vineyards sit amid the Umbrian hills



Lorenzo Fasola Bologna talks about the work at the estate



Hand-picking the olives ensures no damage to the trees



The curious are encouraged to visit Castello Monte Vibiano and take eco-tours

The eco-tour takes you to the heart of the estate, through the vineyards and olive groves



## A FINE VINTAGE

The estate vines produce 6,000 bottles of a crisp, white wine, and about 200,000 bottles of fine red wine...

- **MV or Villa Monte Vibiano** (80% Sangiovese and 20% other varieties), a robust accompaniment to everyday pasta and cheese at €4.50 a bottle.
- A more sophisticated **Monvi 2006** (Sangiovese 70%, Merlot 15%, Cabernet Sauvignon 15%) at €7.50 a bottle.
- The rich, round **2006 vintage L'Andrea** (Sangiovese 50%, Sagrantino 15%, Merlot 15%, Cabernet Sauvignon 15%, Syrah 5%), a really noble wine. A 27-litre bottle of L'Andrea was auctioned for charity in London in 2010 and sold for €70,000 – the most ever paid for single bottle of Italian wine.

## LIQUID GOLD

Centuries-old traditions and modern technology bring you unique flavours...

- A box of 12 10ml bottles of olive oil, all individual portions, retails from €9.20. Flavoured oils and gift boxes are also available.

To find out more about Monte Vibiano visit [www.montevibiano.it](http://www.montevibiano.it)

## CONTACTS

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executive, is the mastermind behind his company's achievement. Under his leadership, electric vehicles were introduced, solar panels fitted to generate power and the roofs of the winery and other buildings coated with a special white paint that deflects solar radiation and reduces the need for air conditioning. The roof paint – which alone has cut carbon emissions by 25 tonnes – was the brainchild of Professor Franco

in order to balance the plants' rain intake. To avoid deploying insecticides a special device uses female hormones to ensnare males. "It's the same the whole world over," chuckles Andrea.

Visitors who take the free tour of the estate aboard the electric vehicles can taste all these products in the Green Wine Bar, opened last June and designed by Maryam Shams, wife of Lorenzo. It stands next to the winery, opened in

*Monte Vibiano produces 10ml bottles, each enough for one person and easy to defrost*

Cotana, head of Italy's National Centre for Biomass Research at Perugia University, and a close associate of the project from day one.

Computer servers have been reduced to lower power consumption, and the 70 staff are encouraged to walk or cycle to work to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions – electric bikes are provided. Tractors run on bio-diesel, and more than 20 hectares of land have been given over to flowers to encourage bees to pollinate the crops.

## TAKE A TOUR

You can experience all this for yourself by touring the estate on one of ten silent electric vehicles, powered from a special solar plant that slowly rotates throughout the day like a giant sunflower. These vehicles carry visitors up into the olive groves so they can see at first hand how Monte Vibiano goes about its olive oil production and learn about the wine that has given the estate a worldwide reputation.

Passing from the olive groves you arrive amid the 44 hectares of beautiful vineyards, which sit in a timeless landscape of gentle hills studded with little towns ringed by tall cypress trees. Wine has been produced on these slopes for centuries (a stone wall bordering one vineyard dates back to Roman times) and today the vines are part of Monte Vibiano's drive to be as green as possible. Grass is planted between every second row with the first left as bare earth

2003, which houses 36 stainless-steel tanks, computer controlled to maintain the correct temperature throughout the winemaking process, and 200 French oak barrels to age the wine.

Towering over everything stands the *castello*, an ancient edifice that is home to the Fasola Bologna family. Over lunch in a cool loggia overlooking the extensive gardens, Andrea talks of his love of trees, which he inherited from his forebears who planted 400 hectares of forest on the estate.

"During the war, the government tried to requisition our timber. But my grandfather loved the trees so much, he preferred to buy the equivalent wood for the government rather than cut them down. I have planted more than 10,000 trees to continue his legacy," says Andrea.

We sip our cool *bianco* as his memory slips back to that grim year, 1944. "German troops arrived one day and ordered us all upstairs," he says. "We heard them going through the house, helping themselves to our food and wine. We feared for our lives but the next morning they climbed into their trucks and sped off. Then I heard a tank approaching and, thinking it was more Germans, I thought I would placate them by going out into the courtyard with some wine, but out of the tank sprang a Canadian officer. The Allies had arrived! And then our beautiful work could begin again." ■