



RASSEGNA STAMPA

2009

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Elvio Cigno Anas-cëtta 2007 and 2004

Shellfish in the Langhe



Continuing my thread on rare Piedmontese grapes, I opened a pair of interesting whites from this red-wine region.

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Historically Piedmont has always produced white wine, and names such as Gavi, Arneis and Moscato d'Asti enjoy some international notoriety. However, in the Langhe, Piedmont's central and most famous wine-producing zone, red wines such as Barolo and Barbaresco are so successful that very few producers are willing to waste vineyard land on white grapes. When they do, it's the export-oriented Chardonnay that usually takes the upper hand.



The town of Novello seen from the Corno winery balcony.

One town within the limits of DOCG Barolo has a white speciality, though. **Novello**, located at the south-western outskirts of the appellation, has grown the **Nascetta** grape variety for at least a century. Until 15 years ago, it was on the verge of extinction, with less than 10 hectares left. Fortunately, two estates decide to give it a chance. [Le Strette](#)'s Anascetta is made partly from 60-year-old vines and only sees stainless steel; the 2007 is a deeply coloured, very mineral, almost salty wine. Distinctive and delicious. There are only 2,000 bottles and the wine costs a mere 8€ in Piedmont.

A more ambitious version of the grape is made by the Novello estate





of [Elvio Cigno](#), which also produces some of my favourite Barolo (Ravera and Vigna Elena). Called Anas-cëtta for trademark reasons (in fact, this is the most accurate transliteration of the grape's dialectal name), it comes from two contrasting vineyards and the grapes are picked in September. Fermented 30% in used oak, it sees no malolactic fermentation to preserve the wine's freshness. **Valter Fissore** of the Cigno winery is a great believer in the potential of Nascetta, and has gradually increased the production to the current 15,000 bottles. Apparently, other estates are following in his trail: the variety has been planted by Ettore Germano, Fontanafredda, and Sartirano. It can be hoped that Nascetta will survive.

Cigno's **Langhe Anas-cëtta 2007** is an excellent wine. Less coloured than in previous vintages, it shows very good control of winemaking. We get the typical bouquet of the variety: unfruity (a bit of apple perhaps), mineral, saline, almost maritime, there is also a whiff of oniony reduction, and citrus. Quite crisp, structured and powerful, completely oak-free, it is a very assertive wine with an engaging minerality and a core of juicy, crystalline green fruit. It is clearly hinting at the sea, and Valter says recent ampelographic studies have indicated a genetic relationship between Nascetta and **Vermentino**. Now wonder it screams for oysters or other shellfish.

Valter Fissore says his wine can age quite well, and judging by the structure of the 2007, I can agree. So I was delighted to spot a bottle of the **2004** at the excellent [Enoteca Divinis](#) in Bologna. Slightly yellow-coloured, this wine proved to be anything but mature. Not a very intense or distinctive nose, with a bit of apple and minerality, mild honey, and a ghost of varnished oak in the background. Medium structure, some length. The most surprising thing is how unevolved this is, staying fresh and mineral, but it





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hasn't built much complexity or breadth. Perhaps I expected more. But I think the 2006 and 2007 are far superior, and I will put some bottles in the cellar to taste in a few years' time. By then I might have the largest vertical collection of Nascetta in the world!



Old and new in the cellar of Elvio Cognito.

