

Luca Paschina does not look like the stereotypical Italian. He's tall and lanky, sandy-haired, and although extremely energetic, does not talk with his hands, which by the way, is a common misconception about Italians; they don't talk with their hands anymore than anybody else...well, most of them anyway.

A stickler for detail, Luca seems to be doing everything at once. When he's finished taking the perfect picture of a sun-drenched grape cluster, he consults with Vineyard Manager, Fernando Franco about when to apply potassium and calcium to the vineyard. Then, he dashes off at breakneck speed in an ATV to supervise the grape crushing process back at the winery. Then it's a quick zip into the office to answer a billing question, or perhaps field a conference call with Sylvana Zonin about which credenza would look better in the 1804 Inn.

Oh, and by the way, that poster in the tasting room is hanging crooked; straighten it up. And just which one of our reds would go best with the New Zealand venison at the restaurant? And now let's check the sugar level in this tank of fermenting wine...should the temperature be lowered a degree or two to slow it down? And never pass the ball across the mouth of your own goal! Luca is a busy guy.

Born and raised in his native Piemonte, which is Italian for Piedmont, right at the top of Italy's boot, Luca participated in his first vintage in 1975 at the age of 14. He comes from a line of winemakers starting with his grandfather. "My

## Who is this guy, Luca Paschina?



father taught me a lot about winemaking," he says, adding with a laugh, "My uncle was a disaster of a winemaker but he was an amazing grape grower. My father didn't know anything about grape growing but was a great winemaker so I worked with both for six years." It was the perfect education...both in winemaking and grape growing.

Still, when he graduated from high school, Luca went on to a college that

specializes in viticulture and winemaking. By 1989, Luca had earned enough respect to branch out on his own as a consultant. Gianni Zonin, who heads the largest, privately-owned winemaking concern in Italy, hired Luca to check out Barbourville, and make recommendations. Luca flew home with his report and three days later returned to Barbourville to take over the reins.

That was in 1990, and you might say

that's the date that the Barbourville Vineyards Renaissance began. In 1991, Luca met his future wife, Patricia, an American from Maryland "at a wine event in Charlottesville." They now have two sons, age eight and 11 and an infant daughter. Luca has immersed himself in the local community, giving generously of his time and money to area charities. Recently, he lamented that he did not have time to help with parking at the Somerset Steam and Gas Show; so he made up for it by repainting the interior of the local Boy Scout lodge, saying, "It's good to stay in touch with the community because I just believe that it's important."

Soccer is one of Luca's passions. Back in Italy, "I played, not professionally, but I played a lot." Naturally, he was delighted with outcome of the World Cup, and his hometown, Turin hosted the winter Olympics this year. Today Luca co-coaches the Orange United soccer team for boys and girls 13 and under.

Asked what else he does for fun, he will describe himself as "a very passionate fly fisherman and hunter." He sighs dreamily. "The outdoors, it's great in this area." At this time of year, he most enjoys hunting for mushrooms. He takes them back to his modest house, which, by the way, is surrounded by vineyard. He whips up a wild mushroom risotto that he will share with Patricia over a good bottle of wine. "Cooking is my other big thing. I love to cook...almost a hobby," says Luca. He pauses thoughtfully and adds, "simple things, but very meaningful."



Italy has called. They want photographs of the ripening Merlot grapes in the vineyards at Barbourville for the Italian press. They want the photographs, like NOW!

So, Luca Paschina quickly doffs his photographer's hat and zooms off on a four-wheeler to Goodlow Mountain, where, among the rows and rows of green green vines, he sets up a tripod and digital camera. He positions a reflector to make those grape clusters positively glow, and reaches into his pocket for a label of their gold medal-winning premium wine, Octagon. He nestles the label among the ripening deep blue/purple fruit. Click, click goes the camera.

Click, click go the harvesting shears just a few yards way as the crew gathers in the first of the Nebbiolo. It is a busy time for a vineyard...harvest time. Luca really doesn't have time to deal with photo-ops. There are grapes to pick and press, juice to ferment, sugar and acidity levels to test, wine to pump, skins to shovel, tanks to clean, not to mention a whole complex consisting of a tasting room, winery, bottling plant, museum, luxurious inn, gourmet restaurant and 35 employees to manage. It's hectic around here.

Here's a tip. Invest in 2006 vintage Barbourville wine. You'll

"Making wine is very easy," shrugs Luca. "Making very good wine is very difficult."

# "If it can be better..."



Octagon wine, which is a blend of three different red wine grapes, is only made during exceptional vintages. Only seven editions have been made over the past 15 years.

Photo by Phil Audibert

## Good food, good wine...

"The only way to drink wine is with food." Luca makes this pronouncement over a lunch of hand-made tagliatelle with seafood ragu, fresh tomato sauce and parsley followed by grilled roasted elk loin with potato-prosciutto spinach roulade, micro green-fig salad and basil chutney. "At dinner I have my two glasses of wine every night with a nice big full dinner. That's the way to enjoy wine," he says between bites.

It's not just about the wine; it's about the food. And good wine is not for drinking alone, it is for complementing and being complemented by good food. "You don't just eat to live, you live to eat," is Luca's

philosophy.

Good food is also better for you. "The fact that people go home and cook their meal from scratch makes it healthier." And at Palladio, they cook their meals from scratch. "We have been very diligent about producing fine dishes using very simple recipes," explains Luca. "To eat well, you have to invest in the primary ingredients of the finest quality you can find." Sound familiar?

"We don't buy a box of pasta...never in seven years have we pulled pasta from a box. It's all hand cranked every day." In the waiting room of the vineyard office, four bags of herbs (one chive, three varieties of basil) sit on a bench,

waiting to be checked out by Executive Chef, Melissa Close. Their aroma fills the room. They came from Barbourville's own herb garden. Most of the vegetables, greens, meat, poultry, eggs and cheese served at Palladio, come from local artisan growers.

And of course, so does the wine. Locally grown and picked on Goodlow Mountain, the grapes spend the spring and summer drinking in the sunshine from above and the water, minerals, and nutrients from below until they are crushed, fermented, racked, barreled and bottled right here in Barbourville. Now that's from scratch!

...from scratch

Above, Merlot is the principle grape in the award-winning blend that is Octagon, Barbourville's premier wine. Overall, 12 varieties of Vinifera wine grapes are grown at Barbourville, producing 18 different wines. At right, a steady crew of workers, mostly from El Salvador and Mexico, do the hard work of pruning, tending vines and now picking grapes at Barbourville Vineyards. All of them have agricultural worker visas and are housed by Barbourville Vineyards.

Photos by Phil Audibert





be glad you did because it will be remembered as an outstanding year. You see, while we were all suffering through the now standard July and August drought, those grapes were soaking up all that sunshine and heat and converting it into sugar and flavor.

Luca is excited. He has just pulled the plug on the fermentation process for the Pinot Grigio. "Oh, it's very good," he nods knowingly. "The level of quality is very high. We're very happy. It can still change with the reds, but the whites are very good...very, very good."

Even Ernesto's five inches of rain came at the right time and at the right intensity...no erosion, no run off. "We needed rain badly and it came," says Luca thankfully. He points to the carefully tended vines and orderly clusters of luscious grapes. "I mean, look at them. They were very healthy before the rain came. If they had been blemished before the rain came, then there would have been problems."

But they are not blemished; they are perfect, and one of the main reasons for that is Fernando Franco, Barbourville's El Salvadoran-born viticulturist. He's been nurturing these vines for 10 years now, and he's learned a trick or two...the main one being, to be able to adapt to changing conditions.

"It's a very complex thing. There's no one thing that you do this and you'll be successful. Every year is a different challenge," he says as he rattles off commands in Spanish to his steady crew.

Ah, the crew. "These are the people who make it happen," he points to the legal, immigrant workers who toil here every season, February through October, before going home to Mexico and El Salvador. "They already know how to do things and they do it with all the courage in the world. I tell them this is what it takes for the company to be successful. They know how I like the work done, no ifs ands or buts about it."

It's the same with making wine. "Making wine is very easy," shrugs Luca. "Making very good wine is very difficult. You have to be trained; you have to have experience. You have to have collected a few years of seeing different vintages, different styles. For example, if a vintage is a certain way, we use different techniques of fermentation. There are a lot of adjustments that you have to apply in a winery. You have to learn how to understand your soil, your climate, the types of grapes you grow here and adapt to them."

He points to the ripe clusters of grapes that

have been cut and left to rot on the ground. Huh? You say. Left to rot on the ground? "We're taking off the load. Some vines are too heavy," explains Luca, "a lot less grapes will really ripen them (the remainder) strongly."

Fernando Franco explains it this way. "It's the difference of having two children and having 20 children to feed on the same amount of food. They are just like we are. You have to treat them like human beings."

The grapes being picked today will become blush wine that will sell for \$10 a bottle. The grapes they leave on the vine until as late as October will go for \$35 a bottle. "We're aiming to make an amazing wine," explains Luca, "to get there, it requires us to cut down half of the crop." Quality, not quantity...that's where Barbourville Vineyards is at these days.

Barbourville produces 30,000 cases of wine per year from about 150 acres of vines. It could

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produce twice as much wine, but it won't as long as Luca Paschina has anything to say about it. "The goal is not to produce more wine; the goal is to produce better and better quality wine and get more money for it."

And they are. Barbourville's revenues are growing at a steady 10 to 15 percent per year. Ten years ago a bottle of their premier wine sold for \$19. Today it goes for \$40. It may hit \$50. "The future, not just for us but for Virginia, is to produce very high quality wine and be able to demand more money and respect," says Luca, adding that it is pointless to try to produce California wineries.

"People, if they truly appreciate an expensive bottle of wine, they will also treasure it when they open it. They're not going to just pop the cork and get the plastic glasses to drink it; they're going to prepare a nice meal; they're going to use the nice crystal. It's a celebration for them as much as it is for us to sell them this bottle of wine, because there's hard work behind it."

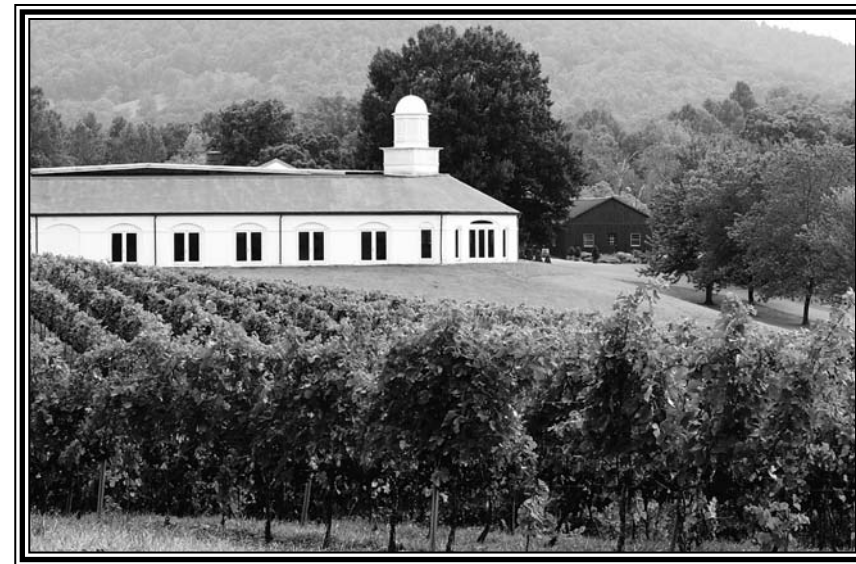
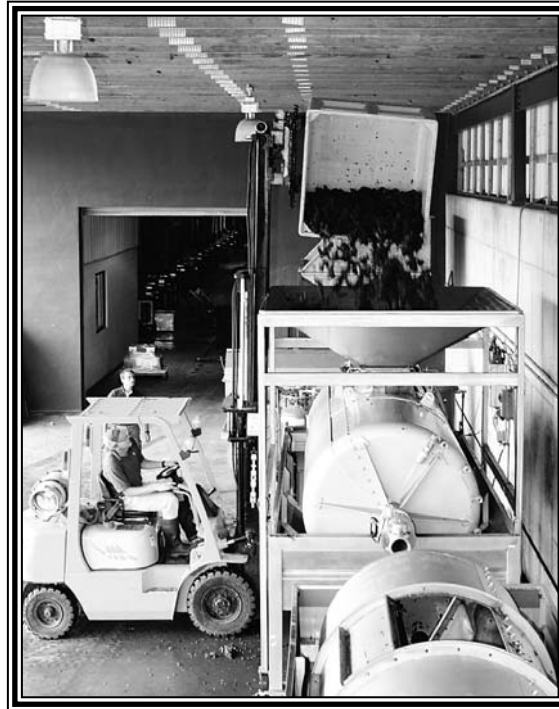
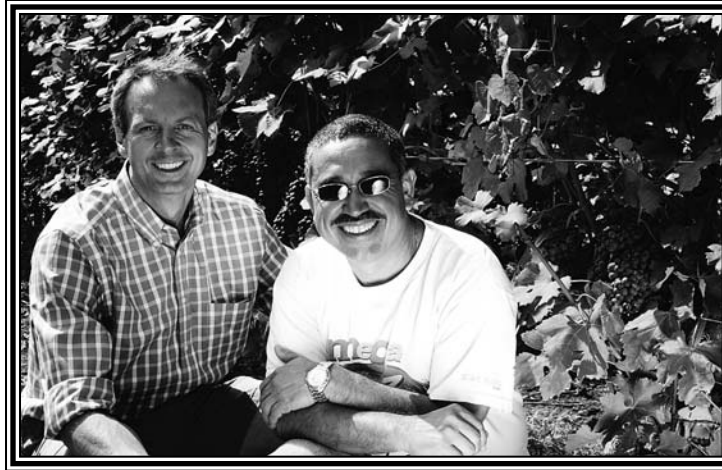
That's a far cry from 30 years ago this past April when ground was first broken on five and a half acres of the 800-acre Barbourville estate just purchased by Gianni Zonin of Italy. Zonin, whose family has been in the winemaking business since 1821, announced he would like to realize Thomas Jefferson's dream to grow Vinifera grapes and make fine wines in Virginia. Not one glass of wine was produced from Jefferson's vines; they all succumbed to phylloxera, a root louse. Since then the threat of that pest has been eliminated. Vinifera can be grown in Virginia; the question was how?

It was tough back then...a process of trial and error. Who knew what these varieties would do in this fertile soil and humid heat? Barbourville was the guinea pig and the pioneer. "We had a lot of success and a lot of failure. The failure came from certain varieties of grapes that are not suitable to this region," says Luca. "For someone starting today, it's a lot easier. The hardest part is over."

Back in 1976, the Zonins also announced they would like local farmers to take up grape growing, and although it did not evolve quite the way they envisioned, they did help trigger a boom in hobby vineyards and winemaking during the 1970s and 1980s. Today, there are 220 vineyards and 104 wineries in Virginia, many of them owing their inspiration and their very existence to Barbourville.

But some of them made mistakes too. "They didn't hire any wine makers," laments Luca. "They read some books, went to a couple of seminars and declared themselves winemakers." And even today he sees small wineries make a common mistake, by not seeking professional help year in and year out. To save \$2,000 this year in consultant's fees, they go back and repeat last year's successful winemaking recipe on their own. Well hello...this is a different vintage.

Fast forward to 1990. Gianni Zonin sends a consultant from Turin named Luca Paschina to Barbourville on a two-month contract to observe and report on what this winery and



**From top: Vineyard manager, Fernando Franco, right, credits Barbourville's healthy vines to teamwork. "We discuss everything and we make it work," he says of his relationship with General Manager and Winemaker, Luca Paschina, left. Middle photo, Rab Perry of Gordonsville carefully tips a crate of freshly picked grapes into the crushing machine as Assistant Winemaker, Francesco Baravalle looks on. Above left, Barbourville Vineyards started out with five and a half acres in cultivation 30 years ago. Now, vines cover almost 150 acres. Annual production is 30,000 cases per year. Above right, Barbourville's Winemaker and General Manager, Luca Paschina takes a break from the fermenting process for some quality time with his son, Peter, 11. Luca's first vintage, was at age 14 when he helped his father in a wine cellar in Italy.**

vineyard could do better. "And a lot of things indeed needed a lot of improvement, from the grape growing especially, to the winemaking techniques and time of picking, all little details that make it possible to make a decent wine into a great wine. And they were willing to follow and listen," recalls Luca.

Luca flew back to Italy with his report. Three days later he was back in Barbourville with a contract. "I really liked the region and the challenge and the professional experience of working with an under-developed winery that has flourished. And I am glad I was part of that success."

And it has been a success, but it took a lot of hard work. The first thing Luca did was go out into the vineyard and work side by side with the crews who were pruning the vines in the dead of winter. "They had not been instructed properly on how to prune the vineyard. You need to be told and shown physically how to prune a vineyard. It was like that for the entire operation...hands-on."

Other changes: time of picking. "When I arrived, we were picking too early...afraid of losing the crop...birds eating the grapes, deer eating the grapes, uncertain weather conditions." In the old days, picking both reds and whites was over by Labor Day. Now, thanks to different trellising techniques, tall deer fences and, believe it or not, bird call recordings that periodically chirp over loud speakers mounted on the air moving propellers, they stretch it into

October. "We're self sufficient," says Luca. "I can manage when I do things, when I fix things. I don't have to quarrel with people when to pick, when not to pick."

And so we have a new and improved Barbourville Vineyards, and it is primarily due to this engaging Italian. "We've been steadily growing every year about 10-15 percent...slowly but steadily, that's the way we like to do it," says Luca in lightly accented idiomatically perfect English. When he first arrived there were six employees. Today there are 35. Since Luca came here, Barbourville has built a new winery and tasting room and just recently unveiled a special room for its premier wine, called Octagon, named after the unique Jefferson-inspired octagonal room at the Barbourville ruins.

They've also developed a grape growing museum, upgraded their tasting room, added a gift shop. Their premier wine is now aged in lightly-toasted 150-year-old French oak from the Gamba cooperage in Italy. And recently, 18 new acres of vines were planted at an investment of \$20,000 per acre. Even though it won't bear fruit its first three years, Luca says, "we know that we can pay our investments, pay our mortgages."

About 10 years ago, Luca came up with the idea to bring in guest gourmet chefs to cater special dinners for longstanding loyal patrons of Barbourville wine. "And it became very successful, so that triggered me to look into doing a restaurant that all year round we could have a celebration of food and wine."

The result is Palladio, a truly outstanding culinary experience where, "we match the food and wines," so that during a dinner, patrons don't have to be locked into buying one bottle of wine for the whole meal; "they can have three courses or four courses and try four different wines."

The next logical step in this progression that good wine leads to good food leads to...quite naturally, good hospitality. Recently Barbourville opened its 1804 Inn, featuring three 1,000 square-foot "luxurious" suites at the renovated-down-to-the-detail manor house. Next door, two more rooms are available in the rustic 18th century Vineyard Cottage, all in the shadow of the historic Barbourville ruins. It's all part of what Luca calls "the treasure we have here...a perfect tourist experience...landscape, food, wine, and history."

And then there are the awards. Too numerous to mention here, let's just say that Luca is

proudest of the Critics Challenge where several wine writers for major newspapers and magazines blind-tasted several hundred wines in California. "We scored in the top 5 percent with the Octagon, which gives us a gold medal, among the most renowned California producers."

That feat, plus favorable reviews from some influential wine critics has turned some heads. Barbourville, in particular and Virginia, as a whole, are now on the wine map. Luca says, "Virginia can indeed make very high quality wines. When I arrived the reputation of Virginia wines was very low." That's changed.

But don't bother telling Californians that. "It is more difficult to convince somebody from California; they think they are the only ones who make good wine," shrugs Luca. "That's normal. It happens all the time. When we go to Italy, same thing... until they taste the wine. They taste the wine and they are speechless." Luca smiles like a Cheshire cat. "Then I get a very good laugh."

Asked about the future, Luca responds, "Just keep doing what we do. Do it right." In late August, Barbourville celebrated its 30th birthday in style. Gianni and Sylvana Zonin flew over. Luminaries such as Patricia Kluge, former Virginia Governor Gerald Baliles even Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, attended the event. It was, of course, a celebration of food and wine.

At the celebration, they unveiled the new Octagon room, a dramatically lit chamber with an octagon on the ceiling and spotlights illuminating massive jeroboams of this blend of mostly Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc. This wine, more than anything else, demonstrates Barbourville's commitment to doing it better. "Blending is like asking a choir master in a maternity ward to select its voices then and there to harmonize consistently throughout their lives," reads a panel on the wall.

Over the past 15 years they have only made seven editions of this wine. If it's a bad vintage year, and they do happen (1996, 2003), they will not make it. "We only produce it when we declare a great vintage," says Luca, "We sanction its release and its quality level has to be high to retain that label."

With a little luck with the weather, and a lot of know-how in the vineyard and the winery, the 2006 Octagon, will be the most spectacular of them all. Another panel on the wall simply says, "if it can be better..."

**"Blending is like asking a choir master in a maternity ward to select its voices then and there to harmonize consistently throughout their lives."**