

Battelage at the Bottom of Lake Iseo



© Azienda Agricola Valle Camonica | The placing of Cru Storico in Lake Iseo
Without a cellar of his own, Alex Belingheri has resorted to sinking hundreds of bottles of fizz in a lake. A first, he says.

By Rose Sneyd | Posted Thursday, 21-Jun-2012

Last Saturday, four metal chests containing 1,550 bottles and 30 magnums of [méthode traditionnelle](#) were hauled from the bottom of Lake Iseo in eastern [Lombardy](#). The bottles of sparkling wine, produced by Azienda Agricola Valle Camonica, had been resting there, in their makeshift cellar, since July 2011.

Alex Belingheri, owner of the estate, tasted some of the wine that day and declared it "interesting."

The idea to use the lake as a cellar was conceived, in part, from necessity: Belingheri did not have access to a suitable underground one. His vines are planted at 800 meters above sea level in Val Camonica and, from a convent on the property, you can see Lake Iseo. "The lake, therefore, naturally came to mind," he says.

The wine was sunk to a depth of 35 meters with the help of a team of divers and a barge fitted out with a winch and forklifts.

The guinea pig in the experiment is Belingheri's first-ever sparkling wine, a 2010 vintage. He reports that the wine will be his take on a blanc de noirs – a Champagne usually made from the black grape varieties [pinot noir](#) and [pinot meunier](#). Belingheri's grapes are local, indigenous varieties, which have been grown in Val Camonica "forever." The DNA of some of these is currently being studied. "The plants are very old ones," Belingheri says, "up to 150 years of age," hence his chosen name for the wine – "Cru Storico" [Historic Cru].

Cellaring the wine at the bottom of the lake accrues several benefits, Belingheri says. Firstly, there is complete darkness. Secondly, the temperature is constant and very low (5-6 degrees Celsius; 41-43 degrees Fahrenheit). Nowhere else in the world is sparkling cellared at such a low temperature, according to Belingheri. (Usually it occurs at 8-10 degrees Celsius; 46-50 degrees Fahrenheit.) However, he believes the wine "can be conserved in this condition for a long time – up to 10 years." Thirdly, the water current gently rotates the bottles, agitating the dead yeast cells (known as lees): natural battelage. Finally, the difference in pressure – 4 bars (58 p.s.i.) at this depth, 5-6 bars (72-87 p.s.i.) in the bottle – may affect the consistency of the bubbles



© Azienda Agricola Valle Camonica | Alex Belingheri lakeside, with the retrieved bottles

Belingheri tasted the wine on Saturday in the company of workers, friends and family. "I would say that it seems interesting," he says. "Above all, I think that the bubbles are very fine; I noticed that. It also has lovely, accentuated bready aromas."

[Disgorgement](#), during which the wine's lees are removed from the bottle necks, has not yet taken place and Belingheri is considering how to finish the wine. He is unsure whether it will become a brut, or a brut natural (without any [dosage](#)). The final transformation will take place at a cellar in [Franciacorta](#), and Cru Storico should be ready to drink by November.

Belingheri hopes in the future to involve universities to collaborate on a study of his novel concept.