

Let me get some confusion out of the way about the two Bertani names of Italy's Veneto region. The Bertani family founded its first winery in the 17th century and, by 1857, under Giovan and Gaetano Bertani, established the estate as among the region's finest producers of traditional Valpolicella, Soave and Bardolino, beginning exports in the 1860s.

The company was responsible for the first "Ripasso Secco" Valpolicella, a drier, fuller-bodied wine, and in 1959 produced its first Amarone, under the name Gaetano Bertani, who also created a top-of-the-line project from grapes grown in the highly regarded Tenuta Santa Maria property in the Illasi Valley, which they had acquired in the 1850s.



*Giovanni Bertani (left) with brother Guglielmo (center) and father Gaetano (far right)*

Then, in 2011, the Bertani Winery was split with the exit of two brothers, Giovanni and Guglielmo, who took with them the Tenuta Santa Maria estate, with their father, Gaetano, continuing as enologist overseeing the vineyards. Sadly, the historic Bertani company was bought in 2012 by the Angelini Group, a Roman Pharmaceutical Company with no connection to the Bertani family. Not surprisingly, the new company's website, while providing a long history of the estate, does not mention the split of current ownership.

So, the tradition of the original family winery is being carried on by the current generation, Gaetano and his sons. I met Giovanni Bertani last week for dinner at Cardoncello DiVino in New York and learned straightaway that in upholding tradition the company is in no way eschewing its strides in modern viticulture. Indeed, global climate changes are causing wineries throughout Europe to re-think a balance that will preserve the old character of their wines while saving them from being affected by the climate heating up.

"We've had to move some of our vineyards to higher elevations because of the heat," said Bertani, who looks quite a bit like an Italian Ed Sheeran. "We're now picking the grapes in September, when it used to be in October. We have to work hard and fast to see if we can even make our wines the way they were in the 1930s. It was not just a different era of wine technology, but the terroir is being affected now to a degree we cannot yet measure."

Foremost, the problem of too much heat is that it matures the grapes earlier, so the grapes get fat on sugar that turns into high alcohol. Also, no one knows if a temperature change of even half a degree might alter or kill the microbes that have lived in the soil for millennia.

So whatever fans of Bertani feared when the split happened six years ago has not only occurred but the break has allowed the current generation of Bertanis to keep their traditions and their style while improving the health of their vineyards and taking on global warming.