

TOGETHER AS A TEAM FOR... WINE-MAKING!

To enhance their offer, expand into new markets and be more competitive, Lombardini, a long-standing company situated in the Reggio Emilia area, has recently invested in a new, modern monoblock bottling system by Gai, the bottling machine specialist.

In Novellara, a town in the middle of the Reggio lowlands, the Lombardini family has been well-known for more than a century since, thanks to the business activities undertaken by its successive generations, it has contributed towards making the history of the town and has always done this by playing a leading role. Way back at the beginning of the Twentieth century, the family built Novellara's first cinema and then opened a bar under the portico in the town centre. They went on to install the first filling station in the entire area, which faced the square. This was followed by inauguration of the first wholesale distribution facility for heavy oils and fuels. Not content, the family then went on to establish a wine-making business initially for the purpose of supplying the family bar and its customers. Throughout the decades, this activity has been optimized and enhanced with the intention of producing high quality wines typical of the area. A goal that has been achieved to the full. In the original location where it was founded almost a century ago, between Modena, Reggio Emilia, Parma and Mantua, Cantine Lombardini is still producing sparkling and spumante wines that are not only enjoyed in Italy alone, but are also successfully exported abroad.

Selectors of quality grapes

Lombardini stands out on the shelves of retail outlets and wine bars for its flagship product: // *Campanone*, a dry Lambrusco Reggiano Doc wine in a tall, slim container patented by the enterprise several years ago. Of the 6,000 hectolitres of wine bottled a year and the 800,000 bottles filled, about 95% are Lambrusco wines and 85% of these possess the DOC (or PDO) designation being obtained by blending high quality selected grapes from the native vine varieties of a handful of suppliers in the area. Of this 85%, half the bottled wine is Campanone, i.e. more than one third of the entire production. Four generations of wine producers have

succeeded each other in the historic facility of Novellara: from grandfather Angelo, forefather and founder of the wine-making enterprise, to grandson Marco, now assisted by his daughters Chiara, sales manager, Cecilia, sommelier responsible for quality control and laboratory technician, and Virginia, responsible for the marketing and business aspects. It is Marco who ensures that the quality of the wines remains at a constant level: sole director, oenologist and responsible for the wine cellar and bottling processes, he is the one who chooses the finest raw materials each year, so as to maintain and improve the quality of the wine produced.

Italy's most popular Reggiano DOC wine

«Our wine-making enterprise was established in 1925,» explains Marco Lombardini «thanks to the initiative of my grandfather, who ran several businesses. But it was only from 1978 that we began to devote more attention to wine production which, from that moment onwards, began to grow until we were able to reach our present-day goal: now, in the year of our 90th anniversary, red Campanone is Italy's best-selling Reggiano DOC wine according to IRI. For me, this is an enormous satisfaction. I have always been attracted to this world. Even before I completed my studies, I used to visit the wine cellar whenever I could and worked on the bottling line. It was a passion that grew automatically and I had no doubts about what I wanted to do with my life. Now, everything that happens in the enterprise has to be approved by me. I select our suppliers' best vines, analyze their characteristics, blend and treat the products according to a method I've experimented throughout the years knowing that, during the fermentation stage, it encourages the processes that make our wines unique».

So we decided on a monoblock...

The wine-making process takes place in two vitally important steps, i.e. refermentation in autoclaves and bottling. To increase both productivity and its presence on the markets, Lombardini recently decided to purchase a new Gai monoblock bottling machine and seven new refermentation autoclaves. Important investments, repaid by the work currently performed in the wine-cellar and by the hourly production rate achieved thanks to the new bottling machine. «Since we were unable to compete with the prices of the low-medium quality products of certain competitors,» explains Chiara Lombardini, «we resolved a couple of years ago that it was time to offer our customers something more. The moment we decided to purchase the new bottling monoblock, we had a meeting with representatives from Gai, which had patented its innovative electro-pneumatic filling valve a few months before. At the beginning of August 2013, our father visited the company to examine their products and was impressed by the professionalism and, most especially, by the personal way of doing business he experienced in Gai, certainly one of their strong points compared to other enterprises. Since Gai is a family business, like ours, where family values and traditions predominate we were very much at home in the hospitable atmosphere we found there. We met again and grew confident.

So much so, during the SIMEI Trade Fair of that year when Gai won the competition for new technologies thanks to the patent for their electro-pneumatic filling valve, we signed the contract for a 3031RE HP monoblock.»

The record for bottling perfection

This contract was also important for Gai, since it was the first time that their monoblock was to be tried out for bottling sparkling wines. «The machine had been designed as soon as Gai realised that sparkling wines were becoming popular worldwide and that their consumption was increasing at an exponential rate» continues Chiara. «Among these wines, Lambrusco and Prosecco are currently best-sellers as to number of bottles. For us, it was an honour to be able to give a company like Gai the chance to test their first bottling monoblock of this type right in the middle of the Lambrusco area, heart of the production zone of the world's most popular wine. We admire their way of working: everything in Gai is certified and self-produced by machine tools, from the tiniest screw to the most important components. We've become friends thanks to the confidential relationship we've established and can now affirm that this machine we so strongly desired has allowed us to stand out from our competitors and to achieve a revolutionary record as to performance, hygiene and bottling perfection».

Long life and customized sterilization

After listening to Marco, it's easy to understand how use of the monoblock changed the way of working in the enterprise. «Thanks to the new bottling machine and thanks to the use of inert nitrogen, which is injected into the bottle before the cork is applied and is produced by a generator we purchased at the same time as the monoblock, the wine no longer comes into contact with the air and the oxidation process does not take place. This ensures optimal conditions for wine preservation and maintains the characteristics of the products since previously, they could only be kept for a few months without oxidizing and can now be kept for almost a year. 3031RE HP has many other strong points. It's remarkably fast and allows us to increase our production capacity: we currently produce 2,000 bottles per hour but could increase to 3,000 if we desire. Another fundamental aspect is that the system becomes perfectly sanitized thanks to the automatic sterilization process. This is a very important feature since we also present our wines abroad. Thanks to this system and HACCP we are already fit for BRC and IFS certification. Having a single bottling tube is also important, as is computerized storage of our bottle formats: Gai recorded all our bottles in the system. This means that by informing the software which type of bottles we'll be using each day, the machine is able to automatically adapt so as to fill them. In short, we really don't have to check on the bottling line very often: a remarkable change for the better. Previously, almost every operation had to be performed by hand so it also saves us a lot of time».

After-sales and remote management

The after-sales service provided has also fully satisfied Lombardini. «When you visit Gai for the first time,» explains Marco, «the impression you get is that of a sound and fully organized company. But Gai has also proved to be extremely effective when it comes to after-sales service, provided both on-site and by remote management via computer.

To date, they have dealt with our problems either in the remote mode or by explaining to our employees what they have to do, thus preventing plant standstills and wasted work hours while waiting for a visit from their technicians.

I'd like to add that we're also extremely satisfied with the way the machine has been styled: the rinser, filler and corker are elegantly arranged in line. They're protected by transparent glass, so you can monitor the three processing steps. We fell in love with this machine although, to be honest, I waited until the first bottling run before I heaved a sigh of relief. When I saw that no froth was produced in the bottles during the process, I began to understand how amazing the monoblock system actually is.

Credit goes to Chiara for this innovation. She was the one who decided to take this step, with great courage and decision!».

Humility is fine, but you need ambition

Chiara smiles. «I know that if you don't take risks, you'll never achieve anything more than you already have. To grow, you need to move forward, take a chance, make investments. We've just renovated the wine store and we intend to create a wine tasting area where the old cinema was once situated, so that customers can be received in our production facility. There are actually two values on which our business has been founded: work with the right degree of humility, sufficient to encourage us to always do better and with enough ambition to achieve a new goal. We believe that these are the building blocks upon which a company can develop. 2014 was a year of important and acknowledged success for our products: we received the *Menzione d'Eccellenza* award in the 2015 AIS Wine Guide for *Il Campanone* and the gold medal at the "Vini Rosati d'Italia" National Wine Competition in Puglia, thanks to our *Rosato del Campanone*, which we hope will become as popular as the red version and *Campanone Bianco*. After the monoblock trials and tests, which took place last summer, we obtained the results we desired: the analyses proved that oxidation in the wine was notably less and the product we bottled in July and shipped to Kazakhstan still possesses the same organoleptic properties».

Towards new markets

It's natural to ask what the enterprising wine-making company plans for the future. «In future, we'd like to enjoy the same success in other markets as we have in Italy» concludes the sales manager. «To do this, we will certainly increase our output and, thanks to our bottling line, produce longer-lasting products able to provide importers with optimal guarantees even when the wine is exported in large quantities. The more we produce the more we'll recoup our costs, and this will help us to propose more competitive prices.

However, we're certain that our *Campanone*, which has gradually become more well-known than our actual name, will also convey us abroad since its marketing potential is very high and has allowed us, over the past few years, to maintain and increase our sales in all the channels in which we are present, from the Hotel and Catering Industry to major multiples. At the present time, to carry on the business created by our father, our grandfather and our family is the greatest satisfaction of all for my sisters and me, besides the fact of being able, even though we all have children, to be protagonists in an industry that, until a short while ago, was a male

preserve. Working alongside our father as we attain the goals and satisfaction that are the crowning achievement of life-long commitment, is our greatest reward.

All this encourages us to go to work each day armed with enthusiasm. In actual fact it's the same enthusiasm with which we face our everyday life, when we're not at work, because we feel part of a family project to which we give a major contribution and support. We aim to raise our children in the same way, teach them the family values, the importance of tradition and the heritage that is handed down to us. Together we are stronger. We can really say that now for sure!»