

# CONTI SERTOLI SALIS

The family of Conti Sertoli Salis comes from the region of Valtellina in Lombardy, north of Milan. Valtellina is a long and wide valley on the Swiss border which runs from east to west, following the course of the Adda River.

Some years ago - 1989 - Cesare Sertoli Salis decided to give new life to an ancient tradition, namely to produce and sell the wines that were made in the cellars of their Palazzo of Tirano. (Between 1600 and 1700, the Salis family owned almost a third of the land of the Valtellina, and since 1665, they have been providing their wines produced in their own cellars to the Swiss and Valtellinese nobility.)

They also restored a magnificent palazzo, the largest in all of Valtellina which will open to the public in the Spring of 2007. The historic cellar were restructured and were implemented old enological techniques which had been forgotten, but which are minutely documented in a text dating back to 1834, entitled "Introduction to Valtellinese Flora" by Giuseppe Filippo Massara. In this book, it is also said that the maceration of bunches of whole grapes precedes the alcoholic fermentation.

Claudio Introini, the enologist who set up the enological foundations of Conti Sertoli Salis, retired in 2006 and now Vittorio Fiore and Barbara Tamburini are at the helm of wine making.

In a new modern winery close by the antique (1569) aging cellars of the Palazzo Salis in Tirano, CSS vinifies the grapes to produce wines typical of Valtellina. These cellars are the last stop of a demanding process - very demanding, due to the topography of the region, which is ringed with imposing mountains. Anybody who visits will be impressed by these majestic peaks, which rise to an elevation of 13,300 feet and which protect the valley on three sides - the North, the East and the South - from the cold winds of the North and the East.

Here you can admire the wonderful terraced vineyards, perhaps unique in the world, which literally climb up the north side of the Valtellina, and which therefore have a southern exposure. Another unusual feature of this area is the layout of the rows: on each terraced plot, they are planted in the direction of maximum incline. [This set up is called in Italian "*ritocchino*."] This allows the vines to benefit from the best possible conditions, receiving the most light and warmth from the sun.

Vines can grow at a height of 2300 to 2600 feet above sea level, although the ideal height ranges between 1150-1480 feet. The slopes here are so steep that sometimes the grapes must be transported down into the valley in baskets on men's backs, or by monorails. Given such conditions, the cultivation of these vines must be done completely by hand, and consequently is very expensive. Just a quick information: a ton of grapes cost in Valtellina \$2,500, while in Chianti Classico is \$910 [2006 harvest.]

It must be stressed that the yield per acre is extremely low. In such rocky soil, the vines literally have to sink their roots into the rock itself, as in the case of the vineyards of Baruffini, where production is approximately 375 gallons per acre; or in the case of Balzarro, with its sandy-pebbly soil, where they produce 480 gallons per acre. In terms of comparison, you will note that in Piedmont (Barolo), the yield is between 530 and 590 gallons per acre; in Chianti, 640 gallons per acre, and in Bordeaux, 590 gallons per acre.

Cesare Sertoli Salis, the founder of the winery, passed away on February 21, 2005. He was the "*ambassador*" of the Valtellina wines all over the world. He was succeeded by his brother Francesco and by his sister in law Paola.



**On the left, the label of the flagship wine of CSS winery: named after the room where in the past centuries this wine was vinified during the winter.**

**On the right, Francesco and Paola Sertoli Salis**

