



## EXIT LAUGHING

*By Ian D'Agata*

*Anyone who knows the wonderful world of wine also knows it's populated by a large number of whacky, downright hilarious characters and that funny, bittersweet, head-shaking and downright nonsensical events happen all the time. As I travel to wineries all the time and am roughly on the road 240 days of the year, I have come across many "magic moments" that I wish to share with you all. Hopefully, you'll have as good a time with them as I did, and you'll gain some insight into what makes this vinous world tick.*

*Please note that in order to protect the not-so innocent, and prevent easy recognition of the parties involved, I have modified some of the grape varieties and have avoided using names.*

- I was having a long leisurely meal with a three very good friends, and as the wines flowed freely, I was left wondering who'd actually decide to drive afterwards. "No problem" said one of my friends "I'm fitter than I've been, so I can show you all what I'm about!" And so we finished up our glasses and concentrated on our strudel, but noticing that there were still copious amounts of LH Zind Humbrecht Pinot Gris still to be had, decided to stick around the table a little longer. No fools we, and so on the evening went. We made it back to the car an hour after our last drink, and plenty of coffee as well. Trouble was, that though perfectly lucid, my friend would have needed to stay sitting around for at least another hour more. So when we drove through a small, absolutely deserted village at fifteen kilometers over the speed limit, it wasn't so much surprising, as it was scary, to have us flagged down by the policeman. With visions of having to blow into hideous little cylinders and balloons dancing in front of my friend's eyes, the policeman walks over and asks: "Hey, do you guys have a cell phone that works? My battery just went dead and I have to call my wife now or she'll kill me later when I get home". The poor guy was sweating far more than my friend had been, worrying of what would happen when he'd finally blow into the devilish little gizmo. Thank God for wives.
- A very rainy year is the subject of discussion with a media darling Piedmontese wine producer who can do no harm in some US wine publications. The producer is going on (and on) about the maniacal care he takes in pruning, natural fertilizers, green harvests etc...etc...and then concludes: "...still, with all that work I did, I just couldn't get the grapes up to the standards I wanted. So while driving home one day I just dumped all my grapes from that vintage into a ditch and just didn't make any wine from that vineyard".

Yeah, like that's true.

- I follow a wine producer in the cellar after having finished the interview. We walk around and look at the cellar facilities, one shiny oak barrel after another. After the umpteenth row

of barrels, I ask when we can start tasting the wines. “Oh no” he replies “we can’t taste the wines. My winemaker isn’t here today”.

HUH?

- At a recent conference on viticultural pests:  
From the audience: “I am sorry, I can’t read those numbers you’ve got written on your slide. What does it say there just before in grams/L?”  
Speaker: “You mean here, immediately below the big title of the slide?”  
From the same person in the audience: “What title?”

- At another conference on Verdicchio, I heard this telling exchange:

Winemaker (or so he declared himself to be): “...I just wish to point out that not all of our native grape varieties are so great after all”.

Speaker: “Well, maybe so, but I was talking about great wines made with sangiovese and nebbiolo and aglianico”

Winemaker: “ No, no, sangiovese is a lousy grape variety”

All-right, since shooting people in public is not allowed in most countries I can think of, someone, PLEASE get him a bottle of Fontalloro by Felsina, Cepparello by Isole e Olena or Brunello di Montalcino by Poggio di Sotto.

Not to be outdone, heard at the same conference, by another supposed expert: “Nero d’Avola is a native Tuscan grape variety”. (Not true in the least!!! At best, there are records of it being found in very isolated pockets of Tuscany and even then, first planted only about fifty years ago)

With similar bozos, you thought the press had trouble understanding and knowing Italian wines.