

by Lorenzo Ruggeri



ZURICH AND WARSAW, THE LAST TWO STOPS



The last two stops on the Gambero Rosso World Tour: from an historic market like Zurich to an expanding city like the Polish capital where the path is eased by minimal taxation, a favorable exchange and growing GNP.

Not just vodka. The Warsaw pact with Italian wine

Zurich

Zurich is a well-consolidated stop on our tour, thanks to numbers. Like Italy, Switzerland consumes almost 40 liters per year per person, with spending, on average, among the highest in Europe. Data from the first 7 months of 2015 (from ISTAT, the National Institute for Statistics) tell us that Switzerland is number four in the world among countries importing Italian wine, with a growth in value of 5.7%. Italian wine accounts for 36% of their wine imports, slightly ahead of France (34%). The event confirmed some key points. The Swiss pay careful attention to and have deep knowledge of neighboring Piedmont. A major group of consumers look for rich, structured reds, with Amarone leading, and interest in Puglia high. Wineries producing mainly whites have more difficulty, but this is also where the opportunities lie, especially for wines from distant places. "I am looking for certified organic wineries to enlarge my portfolio. Interest in these wines is growing here, and there are excellent possibilities for profit. The market is ready for new ideas," commented **Jan Kux** from Persovino.

Warsaw

From Zurich, probably Europe's most expensive city – a 10-minute taxi ride costs the equivalent of 40 euros – we moved on to the Polish capital. After a flight of two hours, without changing latitude, we reached a city that in 1944 was almost entirely razed to the ground after the population revolted against the Nazis. The lack of support from the Russian Army, motionless on the other bank of the Vistula River, is still a lively subject of debate among histo-





rians. Today Warsaw is a remarkably clean and orderly, rapidly growing city. Building sites are everywhere. Numbers don't tell the whole story, but the Polish GNP has grown more than 70% over the last ten years. Some economist predict that between 2025 and 2030, Poland's GNP will equal Italy's. Thanks to a more favorable exchange, here, a 40-minute taxi ride cost 9 euros. Everywhere we found people speaking excellent English. Over the last few years, the number of wine shops and wine bars has doubled. We wandered around the aisles of Star Wines, Mielyznski and Alewino. The latter is one of the best bistros and wine bars we've seen anywhere in recent years. The food is exquisite and the wine list features carefully chosen small producers. The atmosphere is relaxed and fun, attracting the city's most devoted wine lovers.

In Warsaw too, Italy means mostly red wine and a lot of prosecco – metodo classico has not made a dent. One figure is striking: very contained mark-

ups. Taxation on alcohol is a relatively mild 23%. Sometimes we saw Italian bottles on the shelves at lower prices than we are used to seeing at home. Sommeliers and wine bar owners, almost always in their early 30s, do notable tasting research. We found this attentiveness during our event as well. We didn't expect to see such a flow of people or such a sophisticated level of participation. In the seminar we conducted with Ewa Wielezyska, deputy editor-in-chief of Wino Magazine (our partner for the event), questions were pertinent, sharp and curious. The seminar, scheduled to last 90 minutes, went over three hours, because a public of trade operators and bloggers were deeply interested in Italy, its wines, and especially, its indigenous varieties. The day after the event we were in Piccola Italia, a chain of shops specialized in Italian products, where they stocked 300 types of cheeses and cured meats as well as many wine labels. "Italian producers are finally beginning to understand what the opportunities are on the Polish marketplace. I certainly can't hope to sell only top products, so in this market, the quality/price rapport is even more important," commented wine shop owner **Andrzej Sajniak**. Wine consumption in Poland is growing at about 10% annually. His son **Wojciech** added, "Drinking spirits is not as fashionable among the young. Drinking wine, especially considering the social relations it brings with it, is on the way up. My generation asks for wine, and wants to talk about it."

Not only wine bars, but all eating places in Warsaw are flourishing. Good food is truly affordable. We'll close with a locale that opened only three months ago on Plac Teatralny. It offers a menu of 300 vodkas, and two different vodkas are recommended for each dish. The pairings are perfect and the food, especially the herring, excellent. One detail struck us: the table next to ours was drinking wine.

