

Winemaker Daniela Rocca is intent on continuing her late father's legacy

Rebecca Lynne Tan

As a child, Daniela Rocca had been told time and time again that winemaking was a job for men, not women.

Her grandfather Albino Rocca, 89, founder of the eponymous wine estate in Barbaresco, in Italy's northern region of Piedmont, was a traditionalist and had drilled those thoughts into her. The 23-ha vineyard had once belonged to her great grandfather, Giacomo Rocca.

So, with her grandfather's words deeply rooted in her mind, Ms Rocca, 41, despite her love for wines, vines and the harvest, went into commercial banking instead.

But her career path changed when her father Angelo, who had taken over the running of the winery from his father in 1986, called a family meeting four years ago.

Unlike her grandfather, her father did not hold such patriarchal views. He had called the meeting to formally ask her and younger sister Monica, a lawyer, 38, to join the family winery full time.

Their youngest sister Paola, 30, an oenologist, and her husband Carlo Castellengo were already involved in the winery at the time. Their mother is a housewife.

The eldest Ms Rocca was elated with her father's request.

She tells Life!: "It (to work at the winery) was my dream. This is the job that I have always wanted to do, and I knew I had the passion for it."

She started working full time at the winery three years ago. Her younger sister started a year earlier, and the three sisters have never been closer, Ms Rocca says. They became even more so when their 64-year-old father died in a plane crash last month. He was piloting his own light aircraft when it crashed into a field, not far from the Piedmont city of Alessandria. The reason for the accident is not known.

His plane was a common sight over the Barbaresco hills.

Ms Rocca says: "The whole family is still in shock, but business must go on."

She is here to honour her father's commitment to participate in the inaugural wine festival Vintner's Tour, which is being held at Capella Singapore from today till Sunday.



ST PHOTO: DESMOND LIM

Call of the vine

Albino Rocca is known for wines such as its Barbarescos, Ronchi, Ovello Vigna Loreto and Vigneto Brich Ronchi Riserva. The wines are some of the most acclaimed in the denomination.

She says: "With his loss, we have a big responsibility to live up to his ideas, his commitment, his wines."

Before her father took over the estate, the winery did not produce much wine - it had mostly sold its grapes to other wineries in the area.

The estate grows seven grape varieties - three white varieties, such as moscato and cortese, and four red varieties, including nebbiolo and dolcetto. The oldest vines in the estate are 70 years old.

Mr Rocca was responsible for changing the philosophy of Albino Rocca in the 1980s, Ms Rocca says.

Her father's legacy includes the prudent selection of grapes from the estate's vineyards - the winery only produces wines from estate-grown grapes and the use of modern and traditional technology - both stainless steel tanks and large oak barrels are used during fermentation and ageing processes.

She says: "We try to maintain a balance between new and old."

The grapes are harvested by hand and the family shuns the use of chemicals and pesticides. The winery also engages in sustainable farming practices such as the use of compost as fertiliser.

Her family estate's unique terroir and micro-climate make their wines elegant, she says. The nebbiolo vines, for example, grow in clayey, limestone-rich soil which gives the wine good structure and minerality, she adds.

Ms Rocca helped out at the vineyard and winery even while working at the bank and has been exposed to all parts of the winemaking process and viticulture aspects, from pruning the vines to picking the fruit and making the wine. Her fiancé Alessandro Boido owns Ca d'Gal, a Moscato house in Santo Stefano Belbo.

These days, her grandfather has had a change of heart. No longer is he anti-women in winemaking and is happy to see all three of his granddaughters work together.

She says: "My father spoke only Italian, but he travelled a lot and he always found a way to communicate his passion for his wines. We want to continue what he has done and to always preserve the terroir."

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Ms Daniela Rocca (left) on carrying out the legacy of her father Angelo Rocca (below) who died in a plane crash last month



PHOTO: ALBINO ROCCA

Book it

VINTNER'S TOUR 2012

What: Albino Rocca wines will be showcased at The Big Four Charity Wine Dinner which also includes wines and wine-makers from regions such as Tuscany, Friuli and Veneto
Where: Il Lido, Sentosa Golf Club, 27 Bukit Manis Road
When: Tomorrow, 7.30pm
Admission: \$158 a person
Info: Call Il Lido on 6866-1977. Albino Rocca wines will also be showcased at The Sunday Wine Extravaganza Brunch at The Knolls, at Capella Singapore. Go to www.ewineasia.com



Curves are us

Here is one more way you can be Keeping Up With The Kardashians: Wear their clothes.

Kourtney, Kim and Khloe Kardashian, the sisters from the hit E! Entertainment reality television series, have launched a fashion collection for high-street chain Dorothy Perkins. And their designs have arrived in Singapore.

We catch up at the launch in London with Kourtney and Kim, who tell Urban why their apparel cater for curvy women and why they are grateful for fame.

Plus, we give you the lowdown on the new collection - sorry, Kollection - and pick three items you should buy.

Don't celebrate Thanksgiving? That's not stopping us from indulging in some shopping on Black Friday today. At least seven Singapore-based e-tailers, including Actually, Fabriek and Zalora.sg, are offering Black Friday deals for the first time. We list the best buys to be found.

Black Friday is the day after the American Thanksgiving holiday, which falls on the fourth Thursday of November. It is often described as the busiest shopping day of the year, and the start of the Christmas retail season.

Elsewhere in your guide to looking good: We speak to Francois Nars, founder and creative director of Nars cosmetics, on launching his make-up line in Singapore recently.

Find out what he likes about working backstage at fashion shows and why he wants to work with designer Sarah Burton of Alexander McQueen.

For these stories and more, grab a copy of Urban, out with The Straits Times every Friday.