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—Uncorked and Cultivated

an Australian wine consultancy founded by Master of Wine Peter Scudamore-Smith

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Tour of Sicily 12-Donnafugata



Donnafugata's Estates-western Sicily

There was great anticipation in visiting Marsala.

First is the wonderful producer of the near-forgotten wine of the same name.

Then the exotic expectation of the street and beach scenes-more African like with the stark, square buildings, whiteness, both from chalky soils and white beaches, roadsides and salt piles, a startling place which connotes heat and dryness (great for fortified wine too).

Then there is the book-The Leopard which directs me to the notional remains of past Sicilian noble times in the 1890s at the wine properties of [Donnafugata](#) penned by Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa.

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A cherub who eats nero d'avola!!

The Rallo family from Donnafugata were responsible for rejuvenation of the slowing marsala trade to super table wines from 1983, now with a 150 years of traditional experience, and maintaining a top vineyard (260 ha) at Contessa Entellina, 60 km south of Palermo.

So it was great to enter Donnafugata's big barrel room to taste across all their wine styles; with even the wines from their island of Pantelleria- 100 year-old Khamma contrada (vineyard) sites there for dessert time.



While you drink these wines ahead, buy the pair of dvds [Donnafugata Music and Wine Live](#) -it should make the enjoyment even better.

Donnafugata's white wines smelt carefully-made. They are modern, attractive form for New World drinkers yet reminding us that the variety is native, and therefore largely unique to Sicily.

What a great place to be! And of course the labels are happy. That improves the drinking because of the positive expectations. Heey.

I tried **Vigna di Gabi DOP 1998, 2006 and 2011**; a lovely line of the native ansonica (presented as inzolia elsewhere in Sicily); **88**, pale green as I expect it to be, tropical yeast, fresh flowers too, endearing, tasting unwooded where it looks the best (ten percent had three months oak).

This is terrific white, gluggable; the 2006 now honied (**89**) and 1998 (**90**) even more honied, nice, tight old wine.

Two terrific and fresh native white IGPs were **Anthilia 2011** (catarratto and ansonica, **90**); and **Polena 2011** (catarratto viognier **88**); the latter crossing alsoover with a chewy French variety.

However these natives just don't "do it" when blended with chardonnay as the result is a gharish, chewy, over-coloured range of wines. Best leave chardonnay to the cool sites like Etna DOC where the racy, minerally tastes that I had were just divine-not fatness there!

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That's advice from a consummate maker of "new style" minerality-derived chardonnays. Colour must be pale straw, not iridescent green-gold.



Polena 2011- catarratto and viognier

Then there is the most anticipated moment of tasting Sicily's most favoured red grape-nero d'avola. It comes in many great forms, all enjoyable and it is intriguing to witness the polarisation of style that is developing.

Donnafugata are unashamedly modern, and outfit their neros with tiny tipples of oak aging in French barrels.

I just loved **Sherazade 2011 IGP (88)**; the anthesis of wood-aged wines; this is an entry-level drink, all cherry-juice fruit and fresh, ripe berries, lowish alcohol, all stainless steel-aged for brief life drinking.

The serious nero was **Sedara 2010 IGP (91)**; just an appealing wine, smells sweet, tastes savoury-an ideal outcome; a racy wine, not too alcohol hot, not too oaky either.

Then there is the single vineyard wine from Contessa Entellina: **Mille e una Notte 2010 IGP (94)**; heavenly, cherry-red, rich, oak-sweet, intense, extremely interesting, just engaging on the palate with its "New World" oak weight, still uncoiling, so it has another decade of drinking. One emphatic nero.

Also tasted were 1999 (**92**) and 2003 (**86**); the latter too oaky for my preferences.



Mille e una Notte-single vineyard
nero d'avola

The next highlight of visiting was to walk below the tasting room to the cavernous barrel room to taste barrel samples. Just for fun.

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The single site neros (Miccina, Mazzaporro), shiraz (Casale Bianco), cabernets, tannat (Predicatore) and petit verdot (Pandofina) from the 2011 harvest, bottled much later, show excellent promise to stir my sensory imagination.

More important than tasting was hearing the resident soloist, Jose Rallo, the owner's daughter serenade her guests with her romantic songs-deep under the ground in a starlight barrel cellar. Goose bump stuff.

Donnafugata say they are a jazz-paced winery blending rules and creativity, feelings and technique. Now that is very sensitive-very Sicilian.

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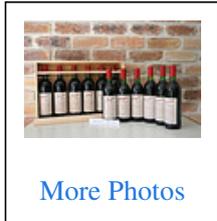
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