



## Ancient island treasures

**R**evisiting the topic of Sicilian wines is always a delicious summertime pleasure. The island in the Mediterranean Sea and home to Europe's highest active volcano, Mount Etna (pictured above), at 3,350 meters is now making some of Italy's most affordable premium wines.

### Italy's oldest winemaking

Settled as early as 8000 BC by tribes from the Iberian Peninsula, the first archeological evidence of winemaking in Sicily dates back about 3,500 years ago when Phoenician traders brought vines to the island. Recently, some historians and vine DNA specialists have been suggesting that vine cultivation and crude winemaking may well predate the earliest Phoenician settlements in Sicily. In any case, Sicily was the first region in what is modern day Italy to make wine. Homer's epic work, "The Odyssey" prominently mentioned the



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virtues of Sicilian wines. Through the centuries as the island was occupied by a number of different peoples, kingdoms and countries, Sicily developed a unique and diversified food and wine culture.

### Established icons

The quality and recognition of Sicilian wines have risen dramatically over the past few decades. Two producers who have helped bring Sicilian wines to the world's attention are Donnafugata and Planeta. The former is a family-owned winery making wines for more than 150 years. I recently tasted new vintages of three of their wines. All exhibited the balance and typicity that has helped make Donnafugata one of Italy's most respected producers. The 2009 Anthilia Sicilia (IGT) is a fresh and elegant white wine made of local varieties. The two reds were equally impressive. The 2009 Sedara Sicilia (IGT) is a medium body wine with a sexy combination of fruit and spice, while the 2007 Tancredi Contessa Entellina (DOC) is a deeply colored wine with excellent complexity and length.

Planeta is another huge name in Sicilian winemaking with five boutique wineries and 390 hectares of vineyards in different parts of Sicily. Run by Alessio, Francesca and Santi Planeta, Planeta is one of Italy's most dynamic producers making a wide range of wines from local and international varieties. Their Chardonnay is perhaps the best white wine from Sicily while their Santa Cecilia Nero d'Avolo red beautifully showcases the potential of Sicily's most important red wine grape. The

Planeta Merlot is a top example of an international varietal red wine from Sicily.

Referring to Fittiratio as an icon is admittedly a push as the winery was only established in 1985 in the Trapani countryside. The energetic and talented husband-wife team of Salvatore and Vinzia di Gaetano behind Fittiratio have won numerous awards for their wines and been placed in the elite of Sicilian winemaking. The Fittiratio Alavilla Nero d'Avolo and Cabernet Sauvignon red is a harmonious wine with character.

### Rising stars

Some of Italy's brightest new winemaking stars come from Mount Etna located on the east coast of Sicily. Though wines have been made in the shadow of Europe's tallest active volcano for thousands of years, only recently have they received world attention for their quality and distinction.

The sloping valleys below Mount Etna feature fertile volcanic soil and plentiful sun that nurture vines and olive trees. Traditionally, the wines of this area tended to be rough and rustic and only favored by the local population.

Now modern winemaking techniques and equipment are used to mitigate the ravaging heat and scorching sun. The result is charismatic wines that are prized by connoisseurs around the world. The unique terroir and little-known indigenous varieties provide wine connoisseurs with high-quality, palate-stimulating wines that are still remarkably affordable. I highly recommend the producers Cantina Pattra, Benanti Winery and Tenuta Terre.

### Sicilian dishes

The island of Sicily is blessed with many of Italy's best ingredients used to make some of the world's most beloved Italian dishes, so there's sure to be a Sicilian dish and wine to seduce your palate.

In addition to the island's famous wild rabbit dish, visitors to Sicily will find some of the freshest and most delicious vegetables and seafood in all of Italy. The flavorful sausages and cheeses of Sicily also deserve mention. I would be remiss if I didn't mention the devilishly delicious desserts of Sicily. The combination of Sicilian sweet wines and desserts is truly one of the gourmet world's most hedonistic experiences. But, alas, this must be a topic for another day and another column.



**Flavorful Sicily sausages**

### *Cantina Pattra Etna Riserva Rosso DOC, 2009*

**Region:** Etna, Sicily, Italy  
**Variety:** Nerello Mascalese, Nerello Cappuccio  
**Aging Method/Potential:** Light oak aging/ enjoy now or within 5 years  
**Importer/Price:** Hub Logistics (Shanghai)/400 yuan (US\$61.89)



**Sweetness:** ★★★★★  
**Body:** ★★★★★  
**Serving & food pairing:** Allow 30-plus minutes breathing and serve at 18 degrees Celsius; match with hearty meat and cheese dishes, also great with Cantonese-style roast goose.

“a unique and special wine from ancient grapes grown in volcanic soil, the wine features a dark ruby red color, lively red and dark fruit nose with herbaceous notes and weighty blackberry and plum flavors with hints of spice”

### *Planeta Chardonnay Sicilia IGT, 2008*

**Region:** Sicily, Italy  
**Variety:** 100 percent Chardonnay  
**Aging Method/Potential:** Fermented and aged in oak/beautiful now and can be enjoyed over the next 3-5 years  
**Importer/Price:** EWM/663 yuan



**Sweetness:** ★★★★★  
**Body:** ★★★★★  
**Serving & food pairing:** Serve at 8-10 degrees Celsius and allow 5 minutes in the glass to develop; great with elegant seafood dishes including Shanghai deep-fried yellow fish.

“award-winning, elegant and sophisticated white wine with bright gold color, intense peaches, figs and pear aromas and plenty of succulent ripe yellow fruit flavors with pleasing sensations of minerals and a long smooth finish”

### *Donnafugata Tancredi DOC, 2007*

**Region:** Sicily, Italy  
**Variety:** 70 percent Nero d'Avolo, 30 percent Cabernet Sauvignon  
**Aging Method/Potential:** 14 months in French Oak/approachable now and will be lovely for over a decade  
**Importer/Price:** ASC/483 yuan



**Sweetness:** ★★★★★  
**Body:** ★★★★★  
**Serving & food pairing:** Allow 40-plus minutes breathing; serve 16-18 degrees Celsius; great with hearty Korean or Chinese-style barbecue meats

“consistently one of Sicily's top reds, the wine has a deep ruby red color with garnet hints, cherry, tobacco and balsamic aromas and concentrated black fruit and cocoa flavors and a long, smooth tannic finish”