

The world's best wine magazine

Decanter

Italy 2019



Your guide to what's new
and exciting in Italian wine

Discover Sicily: 20 great buys

Sicily is finding its rightful place in the Italian wine scene with its discovery and rediscovery of native varieties and distinctive sites. The island's wines are now as captivating as the island's beautiful scenery, believes Susan Hulme MW

SICILY HAS LONG bewitched me with its distinctive colours, sights and smells. The island first cast its spell over me 30 years ago and I vividly remember a visit to the small town of Noto one evening: in the glow of a blood-orange setting sun, widows in black formed stark silhouettes against a brilliant white baroque church. Sicily is a magical place, whether it is the snowcapped, smoking Mount Etna against a forget-me-not blue sky, the warm smell of lemon groves at night or the air rich with the sound of cicadas.

Sicilian wines have not always captured the island's magic. Heavy, full-flavoured wines were often used to bolster wines from other parts of Italy and consumers showed little desire to discover the wealth of the island's native grape varieties. While forward-thinking producers like Planeta adopted international varieties, there was still resistance to the island's indigenous varieties. Francesca Planeta remembers the polite response in the 1990s when she poured her Sicilian wines: 'That's fine, but where is your Chardonnay?'

The quality and success of a handful of these wines, however, opened the door to a rich and varied world of intriguing indigenous varieties grown in distinctive locations.

The current fascination with Sicily's ancient varieties (close to 50 have been identified) bodes well for the future. White grapes such as

Susan Hulme MW is a wine writer, judge and consultant who has lived in Italy and now travels regularly between her home in England and all the main wine regions of Italy. A Master of Wine since 2005, she won the Bollinger Medal for excellence in tasting in the MW exam

'The current fascination with Sicily's ancient varieties bodes well for the future'

Catarratto, Carricante and Grillo, and black varieties – Frappato, Nero d'Avola, Nerello Mascalese, Nerello Cappuccio – have captured the imagination of producers and wine lovers.

Etna is redefining the image of Sicilian wines, with vines grown at higher altitude on the slopes of the volcano, producing wines that have a distinctive, cool-climate edge. The best Nerello Mascalese and Nerello Cappuccio wines from Etna have a Burgundian elegance and even a Nebbiolo-like quality. Meanwhile, Contea di Sclafani DOC is producing some of Italy's most exciting Nero d'Avola, and Faro, a tiny viticultural area in the hills around Messina, is causing quite a stir.

The island's search for distinctive terroir continues: one of the most exciting wines of 2018, Cuvée Suzanne, hails from recently planted vineyards in a little-known area near Augusta, where Peter Vinding-Diers has produced a beautifully concentrated yet fresh Syrah. Winemakers are experimenting with old vines and field blends, farming biodynamically and using low-intervention winemaking to maximise the expression of their terroir.

Discovery and rediscovery is at the dynamic heart of Sicilian wines. Sicily has always had a powerful identity, but the island's unique, enthralling qualities are now beginning to extend to its wines.

Marabino, Rosso di Contrada Don Paolo, Terre Siciliane 2016 90

N/A UK www.marabino.it

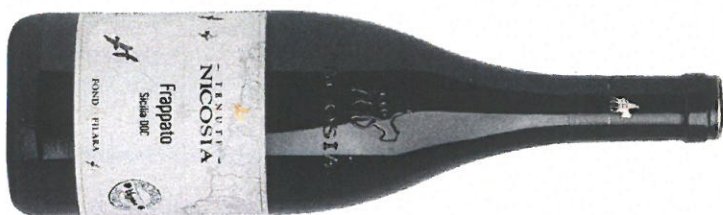
From vines grown in Val di Noto – one of the hottest, sunniest parts of Sicily – this manages to keep some pretty, floral aromas alongside its big, bold flavours. Full-bodied, rich, exuberant fruit with a black-olive bitter note. Powerful without being heavy. **Drink** 2019-2025 **Alc** 15%



Tenute Nicosia, Fondo Filara Frappato 2017 90

£9.95 The Wine Society

A very pretty wine made from the delightful Frappato variety. Fresh, fragrant with typical Frappato strawberry aromas and flavours, fine chalky tannins and bright acidity. So enjoyable and easy to drink. Biodynamic. **Drink** 2019-2021 **Alc** 12.5%



Valle dell'Acate, Il Moro 2013 90

N/A UK www.valledellacate.com

Valle dell'Acate is well known for producing Cerasuolo di Vittoria, Sicily's only DOCG wine, but this Nero d'Avola is soft, round and juicy with fine, silty tannins and bitter plum-skin notes that offer a contrast to the richness and warmth.

Drink 2019-2024 **Alc** 13.5%



Donnafugata, Ben Ryé, Passito di Pantelleria 2015 95

£29.55-£39.99/37.5cl AG Wines, Carruthers & Kent, Exel, Hedonism, Liberty Wines, Noel Young, The Wine Reserve, Valvona & Crolla

Intensely sweet but complex wine from sun-dried grapes on Pantelleria island, about 100km southwest of Sicily. Barley sugar, spice, baked apple, apricot, wild herbs. Super-silky and voluptuous texture, completed by a fresh finish and contrasting bitter-orange flavours. Superb! **Drink** 2019-2028 **Alc** 14.5%



Marco De Bartoli, Vecchio Samperi, Marsala 2016 97

£ 47.60-£56.50 Exel, Les Caves de Pyrene

Marsala does not get much better than this. It shows why Marsala was once so famous: complex aromas and flavours of toffee, caramel, coffee, dried apricot and sea salt. It starts off sweet but finishes dry, tangy and super-fresh with a long, savoury finish. **Drink** 2019-2030 **Alc** 16.5% **D**

