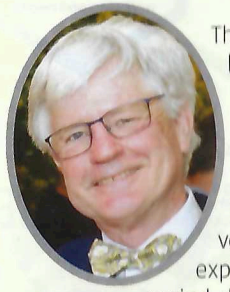
## SICILIAN CONTRASTS



Sicily offers a wide range of interesting wines made from indigenous grape varieties that should be on everyone's list for go-to everyday drinking. Two decades ago this was not the case, with most wines being produced for the mass market, and the whites especially tending to be quite oxidised. However, the local population and visitors to the island always knew where to find interesting, good value quality wines, and with improved wine-growing techniques, especially careful vineyard management, temperature controlled fermentation and good cellaring, the rich diversity of its grapes and terroirs make Sicily a source of intriguing wines, although the best now come with a much higher price tag.

Sicily is blessed not only with hot temperatures, but its mountainous northern coast and hilly interior also encourage cooler night temperatures, with the Mediterranean winds blowing the air up the slopes bringing the rains that are so necessary for successful vine cultivation.



TIM UNWIN

VINES ON THE LOWER SLOPES OF MOUNT ETNA

The geology is dominated by limestone and chalk, which reflect heat and can retain water, and contrast markedly with the dark, mineral-rich volcanic soils around Mount Etna in the north-east and the sandstones in the west. These very different terroirs can be exploited to make wines with greatly varied characteristics. The volcanic soils in the north-east, for example, are ideal for producing robust, tannin-rich reds that often have mineral and savoury flavours, whereas the grapes grown on limestone tend to be lighter, with the whites having fresh acidity that complements their elegant aromas.

Since 2011, there have been two main regulations controlling winemaking in Sicily, the generic Terre Siciliana IGT, and the higher quality, more regulated Sicilia DOC covering the whole island. Do look out for the latter. There are 23 specific DOCs, and one DOCG (Cerasuolo di Vittoria dating from 2005). The most widespread grape varieties for the whites are Catarratto Bianco Comune (25%), Catarratto Bianco Lucido (8%) and Grillo (6%). Nero d'Avola (known locally as Calabrese) dominates the reds with 16% of total surface area. However other important local varieties are Grillo, Inzolia, Fiano and Carricante for the whites, and Nerello Mascalese for the reds. Increasing numbers of originally French and German varieties are also grown, but I would very much encourage you to seek out DOC wines made from the traditional grapes, albeit that many of these are blended which makes it difficult to detect the specific characteristics of each of their constituent varieties.



At the risk of overgeneralising, the red wines made from Nero Mascalese and Nero d'Avola, with their dark, rich, black fruit and aromatic herbal characteristics, especially from the Etna area, and the whites made from Grillo, Fiano and Carricante with flavours of limes and lemons, fresh acidity, and herbal and floral notes are particularly worth looking out for.

Not to be forgotten are the delicious and historic fortified wines from the Marsala DOC in the west of Sicily, which come in dry (<40 g/L residual sugar), medium (41-100 g/L) and sweet (>100 g/L) versions, and range in colour from amber to ruby. The whites are made mostly from Grillo, Inzolia, Catarratto and Damaschino grapes, with the reds from Nero d/Avela, Perricone and Nerello Mascalese. Fortification with distilled grape spirit is used to raise the alcohol levels to between 15 and 20%. Although often used in cooking, as in dry savoury Marsala sauce, or sweet desserts such as tiramisu and zabaione, Marsala is also delicious as an excellent value aperitif, especially when drunk cold on a hot summer day!

### WINES FROM SICILY

(please drink responsibly)

### LOCAL FAVOURITES

☛ **Frappato, Terre Siciliane IGT (Cantine Colomba Bianca, Mazara del Vallo) 2024, 11.5%**. An interesting light red, soft wine made organically from Frappato grapes. Try it slightly cool on a hot day to enjoy its plum and cherry flavours. The 'w/o' on the label indicates a commitment to making it without compromise, and the bottle is made entirely from recycled glass (Laithwaites, £9.99 mixed 12, **reduced to £8.99 if you present a copy of this magazine**).

### SLIGHTLY FURTHER AFIELD

☛ **Cauru, Etna Ross DOC (Torre Mora, Castiglione di Sicilia) 2024, 13%**. Made from Nerello Mascalese and Nerello Cappuccio grapes on the northern slopes of Mount Etna. Quite intense, but also fresh as a result of its acidity, this has aromas of raspberries and violets, with cherry flavours also on the palate, and soft tannins (Majestic, £16.50 mixed 6, **reduced to £15.50 if you present a copy of this magazine**).

☛ **Marsala Superiore DOC (Pellegrino, Marsala) 18%**. Classic sweet style of Marsala, aged for at least 2 years in oak, with delicious aromas of honey and dried figs and a palate that combines these with hints of black cherry, pomegranate and plum (Tesco, £13.25).

☛ **Waitrose Loved and Found Carricante, Sicilia DOC (Alcamo) 2025, 12.5%**. A good introduction to the ancient Carricante grape. Very dry with citrus and herbaceous characteristics; excellent with Sicilian seafood, and will age unusually well (Waitrose, £9.50).

### WORTH GOING FURTHER FOR

☛ **Etna Rosso DOC Contrada Feudo di Mezzo (Planeta, Castiglione di Sicilia) 2024, 13.5%**. Made from Nerello Mascalese and small amounts of Nerello Cappuccio, with partial wood ageing, this complex wine has sour cherry and wild rose characteristics, with fine tannins, and slight peppery spiciness (XtraWine, £19.50).




☛ **Olli Grillo, DOC (Feudo Maccari, Noto) 2024, 13%**. Quite a complex wine with aromas of peaches, almonds and citrus, and a palate that combines these with slight peppery spiciness and minerality (DrinkFinder, £13.49).

*(Wine prices and availability correct at going to press, but are subject to change at short notice)*

☛ **Next issue**: Wines from conflict zones