

The world's best wine magazine

Decanter

ITALY 2014

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

- **Fantastic Italian wine buys**
- **What's new in the regions**
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Beyond Etna

Sicily is more than Etna and more than big reds, says Ian D'Agata. He joins *Decanter's* tasting team to pick out 39 of the island's best outside this DOC from a line-up of 107 wines – all for drinking now



THE VOLCANIC SOILS of Sicily's Etna volcano have become Italy's single hottest wine production area of the past 10 years – an almost overnight success story with dozens of great site-specific wines and new producers surfacing. However, Etna's success has risked sending the island's other great wines into undeserved oblivion.

In fact, Sicily is one of the most exciting places to be in Italian wine today. A plethora of good-to-great native grape varieties (Nero d'Avola, Perricone, Nocera, Frappato, Moscato di Alessandria, Cataratto, Inzolia and Grillo), many favourable and diverse microclimates, extremely varied soils and wine styles (from fresh whites to structured reds, world-class sweet wines and Marsala) and both established and up-and-coming wine estates are ingredients of a successful recipe. Many of Sicily's wines are also relatively inexpensive, another positive. And over the past two decades Sicily's various regional governments have invested with rare acumen in viticulture and research, with world-class luminaries studying both ancient local varieties and new biotypes. It all adds up to a potential for even greater wines.

This tasting confirms the wealth of great Sicilian wines beyond Etna. And they're more than just big reds. Yes, two medium- to full-bodied reds were the highest scorers (18/20 points), but were joined on the podium by a sweet wine. A white wine and a light red were just 0.25 points behind. In fact, the top 20 wines include four whites and three sweet wines, or 35% of the total.

This tasting also showed that successful wines are being made by emerging stars such as Ottovento and Centonze, as well as Sicily's best known producers, including Donnafugata, Gulfi, Rapitalà, Planeta, Tasca d'Almerita,

Cusumano and Duca di Salaparuta. So wine lovers have a wide range of choices, though unless you know who is truly up-and-coming, sticking to proven names may be prudent.

Italy's 'next big thing' in wine is set to be Frappato, a native grape that exudes pungent floral and sour cherry aromas and flavours that are hard to forget. Great on its own, it is also one of the two grapes (with Nero d'Avola) used to make Cerasuolo di Vittoria, a fresh and fruity wine that's all the rage in Italy (three Cerasuolo di Vittoria wines and two Frappatos made it into this selection).

Nero d'Avola dominated our results, just as it dominates the island's viticulture (Nero d'Avola is Sicily's main red grape; Nerello Mascalese, most commonly associated with the wines of Etna, prevails in the region's north-eastern corner). Encouragingly, superstar estate Gulfi (two of the top four wines here) has been garnering attention for vineyard-specific Nero d'Avola: until now Sicilian estates have preferred to bottle generic Nero d'Avola or reserve wines. However good those may be, though, Sicily is a continent in itself, and differences in terroir and wine expression should go far beyond a mere variety or all-encompassing regional denomination.

White wines made with Grillo, Cataratto, Moscato di Alessandria and Inzolia can be delicious, though most don't age well: there were lovely wines here made from the first three of those grapes. Last but not least, Sicily has always been associated with stellar sweet wines and Marsala: though there are still too many poor renditions of each (some Passito di Pantelleria wines lack acidity and are cloying). But when done right they are amazing and will have everyone leaving the dinner table happy.

Finally, and interestingly, only two of the top 20 wines recommended on these pages are blends containing international varieties. That's a clear message to Sicilian producers who are willing to listen.

'Italy's "next big thing" in wine is set to be Frappato, exuding sour cherry aromas and flavours that are hard to forget'

Ian D'Agata is a co-Regional Chair for Italy at the DWWA and was named Italy's Best Wine Journalist 2012 by the Comitato Grandi Cru d'Italia

D'Agata's top 39 wines to enjoy now



Ottoventi, Bianco, Terre Siciliane 2012

17.75/20 (92/100)

£14.75 H2Vin, Terra Wines

Floral, fruity and with a distinctive flavour profile. Very perfumed and long with tropical fruit, banana, camphor and a hint of mint. Great length and weight.

Alcohol 13%



Curatolo Arini, Zibibbo, Sicilia 2012

17.5 (91)

£17.99 Liberty Wines, Scarlet Wines

Highly aromatic. Lovely sense of purity and a brilliant citrus character with lemons, oranges, plus pineapple and grapes. Has real character and personality, with a slightly rustic note at the back. Perfect with shellfish.

Alc 12.5%



Fazio, Aegades, Grillo, Erice 2012

16.75 (89)

£9.14 Vinissimo

Mint, lemon zest, sage and balsamic aromas along with stewed yellow plums. Bright and refreshing, finishing long and peppery, with hints of chlorophyll. Alc 13%



Tasca d'Almerita, Leone d'Almerita, Terre Siciliane 2012

16.75 (89)
 £15.25-£17.49 AG Wines, Harrods, Nifeislife, Noel Young, Vino & Vino, Winedirect
 A very successful, warm, ripe blend. A good, easy-drinking white – uncomplicated and straightforward – although perhaps lacking a bit of Sicilian pedigree. Alc 13%



Tasca d'Almerita, Cavallo delle Fate, Grillo, Sicilia 2012

16.5 (88)
 £17.49 Berkmann
 A powerful, broad white. Fresh, with some archetypal salty earth tones, and an equal balance between the fresh citrus and herb notes. Alc 12.5%



Baglio del Cristo di Campobello, Lalùci, Grillo, Sicilia 2012

16.25 (87)
 £25 Top Selection
 Balanced fresh, lively, minty and mineral. Very good palate with passion fruit and lime. Very good indeed. Alc 13%



Hoopoe, Pinot Grigio-Catarratto, Terre Siciliane 2012

16.25 (87)
 £8-£10 Cheers Wine Merchants, Harvest EB, Valhalla's Goat, Vintage Roots
 Fresh and vibrant apple notes. High acidity and attractive lemony fruit. An easy, fun wine which starts sweet then turns attractively bitter and shows some resin notes. Alc 13%



Mandarossa, Santannella, Terre Siciliane 2012

16.25 (87)
 £16.50 Carruthers & Kent, Exel Wines, Great Western Wine, Harper Wells, Hedonism, Secret Cellar, Wooden Wine Box Co
 Fine, flavoursome wine. Lovely nose with ripe apricot tones and some minerality. Crisp and enjoyable, with peachy fruit on the palate continuing the stone fruit theme of the nose. Alc 13.5%



Gulfi, Cerasuolo di Vittoria 2012

18 (93)
 £15.99-£18.99 Davis Bell McCraith, James Nicholson
 Aromatic with notes of violet petals and quinine. Deep, rich and sweet black fruit flavours that last and last, buoyed by the vibrant, balancing acidity. Good intensity of fruit and great length. Alc 13%



Gulfi, Nero Baronj, Sicilia 2008

18 (93)
 £24.99 Cambridge Wine Merchants, Carruthers & Kent, Davis Bell McCraith, Fine & Rare Wines, The Fine Wine Co
 Vibrant on the palate with violet, rosehip and plum flavours and great length. Strong, powerful tannins balance perfect, pristine fruit and refreshing acidity. A highbrow Nero d'Avola, with great potential. Alc 14%



Feudo di Santa Tresa, Frappato, Sicilia 2012

17.5 (92)
 £10.75 Vintage Roots
 Fine rendition of true Frappato. Floral with delicately aromatic red berries and herbs. Long and crisp on the finish with the signature Frappato saline nuance. Lean tannins, but will be excellent with food. Great stuff. Alc 12.5%



Centonze, Cerasuolo di Vittoria 2010

17.5 (91)
 £16.50 Vini Italiani
 Leafy redcurrant, cherry and cranberry aromas and flavours. Crisp and bright with lots of freshness and vibrancy. Frappato perfume and Nero d'Avola body. Finishes long, floral and salty. Alc 13.5%



Cusumano, Sàgana, Sicilia 2011

17.5 (91)
 £26.90 Eurowines
 Premium red made to age, with very well-integrated oak. Fruit flavours are ripe and concentrated, with compact tannins and macerated cherry flavours. Broad but fresh, with a lovely long finish. Archetypal Nero d'Avola. Alc 15%



Donnafugata, Mille e una Notte, Contessa Entellina 2008

17.5 (91)
 £51.99-£61.99 AG Wines, Liberty Wines
 Deep, pure, refined chalky and graphite notes. Youthful, long, bright and chewy. Serious wine with very typical Nero d'Avola aromas and flavours that last and last. Alc 13%



Marabino, Archimede, Eoro Pachino Riserva 2010

17.5 (91)
 £28.99 The Cheese & Wine Co
 Deep, full aromas of red cherry, herbs, sweet liquorice and cocoa. Then a concentrated, bright and suave palate, with rich, deep, supple flavours similar to the aromas. Very long, with vibrant acidity; great stuff. Alc 14% ➤



Gulfi, Nerojbleo, Sicilia 2009 16.5 (88)

£16.99–£17.99 Cambridge Wine Merchants, Carruthers & Kent, Davis Bell McCraith, James Nicholson, Sheridan Coopers

Some real interest here: great fruit character and floral notes, plus orange skin and wood bark. Sweet, rounded, cherry and red berry fruit palate with an appealing touch of meat extract. Holding up better than others of its age. Alc 14%



Cantine Colomba Bianca, Monte Nobile, Nero d'Avola, Terre Siciliane 2012 16.25 (87)

£5.99 Guy Anderson Wines

Deep and profound aromas of red fruit, earth, flint and herbs. Then smooth and long on the palate with high acidity, elegant fruit and vibrancy. Has a fresh feel, with good complexity. Alc 14%



Cantine Colosi, Nero d'Avola, Terre Siciliane 2012 16.25 (87)

£12.40 Winehound

Full aromas and fleshy, mouth-coating flavours of ripe red cherry, vanilla, sweet chocolate and spices. Perhaps a little too sweet and simple, though it's very well made. Good density of black fruit on the finish. Alc 14%



Feudo di Santa Tresa, Classico, Cerasuolo di Vittoria 2011 16.25 (87)

£9.99 Cambridge Wine Merchants, SH Jones, Spen Valley Wines, Tesco Wine by the Case

Bright, crunchy cranberry and red fruits. Has some appealing freshness despite the smoky notes, while also display a saline nuance among the breezy red fruits. Alc 13.5%



Feudo Principi di Butera, Nero d'Avola, Sicilia 2011 16.25 (87)

£18.95 Zonin

Nice raspberry nose with additional aromas of liquorice, coffee and cocoa. Brisk and fresh with very appealing red fruits and fine structure. Slightly austere now but pure and very long. Alc 13.5%



Hoopoe, Nero d'Avola, Terre Siciliane 2012

16.25 (87)

£8–£10 Cheers Wine Merchants, Harvest E8, Valhalla's Goat, Vintage Roots

Herbal, earthy tones on the nose along with lots of smoky red cherry fruit. Similar flavours on the palate with lively acidity lifting the flavours and extending them on the finish. Long, with notes of fresh rosemary. Alc 14%



Mazzei, Zisola, Sicilia 2011 16.25 (87)

£18.99 Anglia Wine Merchants, Chester Beer & Wine, Farthinghoe Fine Wines, Grape and Grain, New Forest Wines, Petersham Cellars, The Cave, Winedirect

Bright, fresh and easygoing, with vibrant acidity lifting the black fruit. Spicy aromas and flavours of good red fruit with mouth-coating but polished tannins. Alc 14%



Donnafugata, Ben Ryé, Passito di Pantelleria 2011 18 (93)

£30.75–£36.99 (375ml) AG Wines, Harrods, Planet of the Grapes, Reserve Wines, Selfridges, SH Jones

A perfect sweet wine. Smooth and rich with sweet 'n' sour apricot flavours that really linger. Alc 14.5%



Donnafugata, Kabir, Moscato di Pantelleria 2012 17.25 (90+)

£27.75–£32.99 AG Wines, Liberty Wines, The Fine Wine Co

A fine rendition of Moscato di Pantelleria. Lovely, floral, salty, and mineral, with fresh tangerine, and nectarine aromas and flavours. Perfect with shellfish and buffalo mozzarella. Alc 11.5%



Abraxas, Passito di Pantelleria 2008 16.5 (88)

£37 (500ml) Vini Italiani

Lovely raisin and fig nuances that are typical of this grape. This is a little less cloying than some, with an attractively bitter finish. Alc 14.5%



Vito Curatolo Arini, Marsala Superiore Riserva NV 18 (93)

£15.99 Askewine, Bennetts Fine Wines, Cambridge Wine Merchants, Connolly's Wine, The Fine Wine Company, Highbury Vintners, Park + Bridge, Peckhams, Philglas & Swiggot, WoodWinters

Fresh, bright and long, this is an outstanding, well-made Marsala. Way above the average in this driest style of the wine. Alc 18%



Vito Curatolo Arini, Marsala Superiore Dolce NV 17 (91)

£13.99 Aitken Wines, Corks Out, Peckhams, Richard Granger Wines, South Downs Cellars, Whole Foods Market, Wine Man, The Wine Reserve, Wright Wine Co

An excellent sweet Marsala. Long, with slightly caramelised fruits but the bright acidity keeps this light and lively on the palate. Alc 18% **D**