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The World of Sicilian Wine

The World of Sicilian Wine explores Sicilian wine, from its ancient roots to its modern evolution. This blog is for wine lovers who are discovering Sicily in a genuine search for terroir. Bill Nesto, an expert in Italian wine, and Frances Di Savino, a student of Italian culture, have co-authored the just-published University of California Press book of the same title. This site offers our readers the opportunity to embrace this vibrant wine region in both words and images. Benvinuta!

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2014

Val di Mazara—West Glistens



Alberello Pantesco

As the sun sets on 2014, both Pantelleria and Marsala are glistening. On November 26, 2014 Italy's Minister of Agriculture announced that UNESCO has awarded World Heritage status to the traditional bush-training system for grapevines used on the island of Pantelleria known as *alberello pantesco*. Planted in shallow craters dug in the black volcanic soil and sheltered from the Sahara's winds by lava stone walls, the *alberello* vines of Pantelleria's Zibibbo (Muscat of Alexandria) variety produce the island's golden Moscato di Pantelleria and Passito di Pantelleria wines. This recognition of *alberello pantesco* is the first time that UNESCO has distinguished an agricultural practice as an "Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity". Donnafugata's *Kabir* Moscato di Pantelleria and *Ben Ryé* Passito di Pantelleria are pure expressions of the fruit of this ancient viticulture - and an ideal way to toast the christening of the *alberello pantesco*. We

BOOK TOUR

- February 6, 2014 - 92Y (NYC)
- January 12, 2014 - Milton Library (Milton)
- November 23, 2013 - BLM (Brookline)
- November 20, 2013 - Weston CC (Weston)
- November 1, 2013 - Central Bottle (Cambridge)
- October 11, 2013 - Harvard Club (Boston)
- September 30, 2013 - L'Espalier (Boston)
- September 26, 2013 - Harvard Coop (Cambridge)
- September 20, 2013 - The Wine Bottega (Boston)
- May 23, 2013 - Butcher Block/Stir (Boston)
- May 17, 2013 - 92Y Tribeca (NYC)
- May 7, 2013 - Boston University (Boston)

BLOG ARCHIVE

- ▼ 2014 (7)
 - ▼ December (1)
 - Val di Mazara—West Glistens
 - ▶ June (1)
 - ▶ April (2)
 - ▶ March (1)
 - ▶ January (2)
- ▶ 2013 (28)

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AUTHORS

salute the winegrowers of Pantelleria for preserving and protecting their island's true patrimony.



- [William Nesto](#)
- [Fran Di Savino](#)

On the cusp of the New Year, Marsala has been christened in a different realm - the world of visual design. Pantone has named *Marsala* the “Color of the Year” for 2015. It is a reddish-brown color (#18-1438), evocative of an older and rarer Marsala fortified wine type known as *Marsala Rubino*. Beginning in 1984 the Marsala DOC reinstated this ruby version of Marsala (which was more common in the nineteenth century). A blend of Sicily's native varieties, Pignatello (Perricone), Nero d'Avola and/or Nerello Mascalese, Marsala Rubino is made in three styles - *dolce*, *secco*, and *semiseco*. In introducing Pantone 18-1438, Pantone describes the color as “naturally robust and earthy wine red, Marsala enriches our minds, bodies and souls”. Following this debut of the color *Marsala* to the world, we hope that the winegrowers of Marsala will themselves rediscover the beauty of their authentic Marsala Rubino (and Vergine) wines - and Marsala once more will enrich our minds, bodies and souls.

Happy New Year to Pantelleria, Marsala and to Sicily!

Posted by [Fran Di Savino](#) at 2:30 PM [No comments:](#)

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THURSDAY, JUNE 12, 2014

[Sicilia en Primeur 2014](#)



Sicilia en Primeur is an annual event sponsored by Assovini Sicilia, a dynamic association of Sicilian wine producers who work together to promote their island and wines. The 11th edition of this tasting event took place this year from May 27-29 at the Therasia resort on the island of Vulcano in the Aeolian Archipelago. Thirty-five Sicilian producers presented a sampling of their most recent vintages to a group of journalists from around the world. Beyond the breathtaking backdrop of Vulcano's blue sea and sky, there was a spectrum of flavors and places to experience - coastal Grillo from Marsala, high altitude Catarratto from Valledolmo, vintage Nero d'Avola from Riesi, old-vine Nerello Mascalese from Etna, young-vine Nocera from Faro, and tiny-production Malvasia di Lipari from the nearby island of Salina. More than any words, these wines revealed Sicily's diversity and identity as a *modern* old world wine region which is embracing its native vine varieties and unique growing areas.

We invite you to sample some of the sights and sounds of this exceptional event at the following link: <http://www.cronachedigusto.it/video/13530-sicilia-en-primeur-2014-un-augurio-al-vino-siciliano-.html>

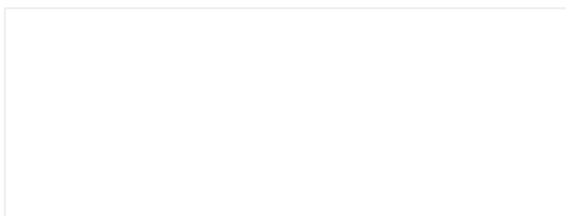
Posted by [Fran Di Savino](#) at 6:48 AM [No comments:](#)

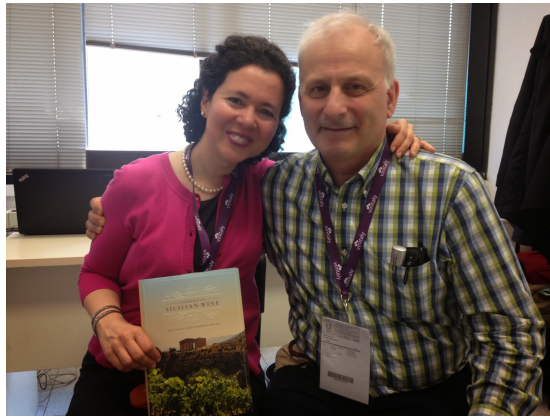
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Labels: [Assovini](#), [Sicilia en Primeur](#)

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 23, 2014

Vinitaly 2014 and Expo Milan 2015





Fran and Bill at Vinitaly 2014 (photo courtesy of Cronache di Gusto)

We recently returned from Vinitaly in Verona. As you enter the fair through VeronaFiere's main gate called *Cangrande*, the *Sicilia Padiglione* (pavilion) is among the first to catch your eye. This four-day wine trade show, the largest in Italy, is open to the public on the first day only. As in recent years, the Sicily pavilion is a magnet for consumers. The Donnafugata, Planeta, Tasca, Cusumano and Settesoli stands, among others, were packed with wine lovers savoring the vibrant flavors of Sicily. In the corner of the pavilion is the "Business Area" where Sicilian wine producers meet with importers, distributors and retailers during the remaining three days. It is also an area where the Region of Sicily sponsors a program of lectures and panel discussions. This year the program included events on individual wine appellations, like the Cerasuolo di Vittoria DOCG in the Val di Noto and the Monreale DOC in the Val di Mazara - West. There were also a series of panels on Sicilian extra-virgin olive oil and the cultural highlights of the Sicilian wine road.

Among the many initiatives supported by the Region of Sicily's then-current Secretary of Agriculture, Dario Cartabellotta at this year's Vinitaly, is the Bio-Mediterranean Cluster at the Expo Milan 2015, the international exposition which will run from May 1 until October 31, 2015. The theme of Expo Milan 2015 is "Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life" and the Bio-Mediterranean Cluster will be a pavilion which showcases the bio-diversity and richness of the Mediterranean's agriculture and foods. Sicily, consistent with its geographic and historic role at the center of the Mediterranean, is slated to lead the Bio-Mediterranean Cluster (including twelve other countries) in this high profile event. Sicily's wine, fruits, vegetables, cheeses, seafood, breads and sweets will all be on delicious display. We hope to see you there!

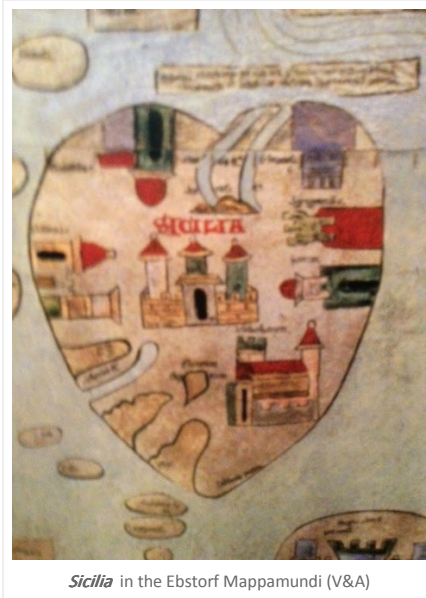
Posted by [Fran Di Savino](#) at 7:12 PM No comments:

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Labels: [Bio-Mediterranean Cluster](#), [Dario Cartabellotta](#), [Expo Milan 2015](#), [Vinitaly](#)

TUESDAY, APRIL 1, 2014

Putting Sicily on the Map



Sicilia in the Ebstorf Mappamundi (V&A)

In the thirteenth century world map known as the *Ebstorf Mappamundi* the island of Sicily was depicted as a plump apple, pomegranate or peach-shaped fruit. While the original of this map was destroyed in World War II, there is a glorious color reproduction of it in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. From the Classical Age through the Middle Ages, Sicily was at the center of European politics and culture. Celebrated for its fertility and coveted for its strategic position in the *Middle Sea* between Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East, Sicily was the very heart of the Mediterranean. This may come as a surprise in our modern era. Since the earliest waves of immigrants who left their island home to find a better life in the New World in the early twentieth century, Sicily languished as a long-forgotten corner of Europe in the public's imagination. In the tradition of its honored poets, playwrights, and storytellers, Sicily's winegrowers are now putting Sicily on the world's cultural map. The vibrant and diverse flavors of Sicilian wine are bringing Sicily to life for a new generation of wine lover - genuinely seeking to understand this place called *Sicilia*.

Last week in London, we were honored and thrilled for our book, *The World of Sicilian Wine*, to win the **2013 André Simon Drink Book Award**:

<http://www.andresimon.co.uk/awards.html>. We hope that in our own small way we have helped to put Sicily on the map. In the words of an esteemed Sicilian winegrower upon learning this news of the André Simon Drink Book Award, *Viva La Sicilia!*

Posted by [Fran Di Savino](#) at 11:30 AM No comments:

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Labels: [Andre Simon](#), [Ebstorf Mappamundi](#)

FRIDAY, MARCH 7, 2014

Sestini's Sicily



On the walk leading from Florence's Piazza della Signoria, past the Uffizi Gallery, and to the Ponte Vecchio you could understandably stroll by this fortress-like building bearing the name *Accademia Dei Georgofili* (Georgofili Academy) without taking notice. This is the headquarters of the venerable Florentine society dedicated to the study and promotion of agricultural science.



In 1812, Domenico Sestini, a native son of the city, delivered a series of lectures to the members of the Georgofili Academy entitled “Recollections of Sicilian Wines”. Sestini had spent three years traveling around the island and studying the state of Sicilian viticulture and enology from 1774 to 1776. Much to the astonishment of his elite audience, Sestini proclaimed that Sicilian wine has been prized since ancient times for its “exquisiteness and richness”. He intended to lecture on seven different subregions, but only got as far as Etna and Vittoria. Apparently, his words fell on disinterested (if not deaf) ears and he never gave the lectures on the five other subregions intended for the Georgofili’s esteemed members.

The texts of Sestini’s first three lectures are undoubtedly locked away in the Georgofili Academy’s historic archives. In 1991, they were published by a Palermo-based publisher, Sellerio editore, in a booklet entitled, *Memorie sui vini siciliani*, the title of Sestini’s original lecture series. While Sestini’s Tuscan contemporaries were not prepared to believe that Sicily’s winegrowers were capable of teaching northern Italians something about growing grapes and making wine, today two centuries later wine experts and consumers are passionately discovering Sicily as one of Italy’s most fascinating wine regions. We honor Domenico Sestini for having the courage of his convictions. *Bravo!*

Posted by [Fran Di Savino](#) at 8:14 PM [No comments:](#)

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Labels: [Domenico Sestini](#), [Georgofili Academy](#)

FRIDAY, JANUARY 24, 2014

Golden Pairing



The Tenuta Gorghi Tondi estate from Mazara del Vallo in Western Sicily produces a dessert wine (*passito*) called *Grillo D'Oro* (Golden Grillo). It is made from dried *Grillo* grapes which have been graced by *muffa nobile* (noble rot or botrytis). Bill and I had the pleasure of enjoying a bottle of the 2010 Grillo D'Oro with family and friends over the holidays. With aromas of dried apricots, figs, dates, candied orange peel and honey, this dessert wine evokes the fruits which have filled the market gardens of Palermo since the tenth century. In the mouth, it is velvety sweet, with an acidity that balances the sweet dried fruits and gives the wine freshness. It was the highlight of our dessert table, a perfect pairing with both the fig-filled Christmas cookies from Sicily called *buccellati* (laced with walnuts, pistachios, almonds, oranges and spices) and the buttery Christmas bread from Verona called *Pandoro* (golden bread). This wine would also pair well with milder veined cheeses (like a sweet gorgonzola), roasted nuts and dried fruits for dessert. *Squisito!*



Posted by [Fran Di Savino](#) at 3:25 PM [No comments:](#)

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Labels: [Botrytis](#), [Buccellati](#), [Gorghi Tondi](#), [Grillo](#), [Pandoro](#)

TUESDAY, JANUARY 7, 2014

Sicilian School



From the Sicilian court of King Frederick II in the early 13th century there emerged a Romantic poetry written in the vernacular language and in a new poetic form - the sonnet. Frederick II was himself a learned man of science and poetry. This group of poets and their work, known as the *Sicilian School*, gave Sicily a literary identity that would survive for future generations of Sicilian poets, playwrights, and patriots. Their literary invention also was the foundation for the earliest proto-Italian vernacular poetry of Dante and his *Divine Comedy*. In his sonnet “*A l’aire claro ò vista ploggia dare*” (I have seen a clear sky give rain) Giacomo da Lentini, the most renowned of the Sicilian Romantic poets, could well be describing the stark contradictions that have marked Sicily’s history -- and its ancient culture of wine.

“I have seen a clear sky give rain
and darkness produce light,
and blazing fire become ice,
and cold snow produce heat,
and a sweet thing become bitter
and bitterness transformed to sweetness,
.....”

Karla Mallette, *The Kingdom of Sicily, 1100-1250: A Literary History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 176.

Posted by [Fran Di Savino](#) at 5:38 PM [No comments:](#)

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Labels: [Frederick II](#), [Giacomo da Lentini](#), [Poetry](#), [Sonnet](#)

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 27, 2013

Bonu Natali



Madonna and Child by Antonello da Messina (1473)

Christmas greetings to all. It has been an honor to share *The World of Sicilian Wine* with you this year. We wish you a joyous and peaceful 2014.

To learn about this magnificent painting and its creator, Antonello da Messina, we invite you to explore "The Garden-Vineyard" on Mount Etna in Chapter 14 of our book.

Posted by [Fran Di Savino](#) at 3:31 PM [No comments:](#)

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Labels: [Antonello da Messina](#), [Christmas](#)

MONDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2013

In Search of Nerbo

Giovanni La Fauci has another dream besides making great grappa at his distillery Giovi in Messina. From grapes grown high on Mount Etna, he has started making red wine, endowed with, he says, "*nerbo*". Nerbo, in English, means backbone. I learned from tasting wines with him that red wines with nerbo are high in acidity and have a fine, but firm and lingering, astringency. In early October 2010, Giovanni took Fran and me to a vineyard named Prezzemolo in contrada Pirao above the town of Randazzo. At 870 meters in elevation, Prezzemolo faces north, in a tiny amphitheater, ribbed by rings of black lava terraces. The vines, about 75 years old,

in alberello, all Nerello Mascalese, stood in stone balconies poised to watch the drama of the harvest soon to come.



Giovanni spoke. “See how few grape bunches each vine carries. Some carry two. Some carry three; some, four. I have already cut away and discarded some 500 kilos of grapes. This is about 30% of the final harvest.” This green harvest will allow the grapes to ripen more fully. Giovanni pointed to stone stairways which made the terraces accessible. “The terraces, and particularly those stairs, show the hard work, attention, and care of generations of vine growers. I hunted for this vineyard a long time, *girando* (turning, spinning), *cercando* (looking), and *cercando* (looking some more). I had a good feeling when I saw it. Prezzemolo (meaning parsley in English) grows all over the vineyard. An old farmer told me that it grows only where chemical treatments have not entered the soil. The soil here is pristine. The owner will let me buy this vineyard when I want.”

Turning aside, Fran, Giovanni and I strode up a dirt road. Gigantic cows paraded ahead of us. We walked to another vineyard, higher up at 900 meters in elevation. It was now almost evening. Fog had started to roll in. This vineyard was on flat land surrounded by lava-stone walls.



The vines here, mostly Nerello, were attached to wires. There was also enough Carricante planted

here for Giovanni to make one barrique of white wine. “I came here a week ago with Uncle Francesco and a worker. We cleaned up the foliage. In this vineyard, the vines are stronger than in Prezzemolo. They want to carry more. So we cut away less, some 600 kilos of the 2,400 kilos on the vine. I buy the harvest here too. Wine producers usually pay for grapes in stages, 30% at the harvest and the balance within a year. In order to get what I want, I give the owner a better deal. I reserve the grapes by paying 50% of the price upfront and pay the other 50% when I harvest them. I have an agreement to rent that house over there. (He pointed to a low-lying stone building.) I will begin to vinify my own grapes there. Until now, I have rented space at Valcerasa.”

I tasted the 2010 Giovi Pirao at Vinitaly 2013. It smelled too ripe and was very astringent. In search of nerbo, had Giovanni waited too long to make the harvest? I look forward to tasting future vintages of Pirao. He makes a second Etna Rosso, “Akraton”, from a blend of unidentified vineyards. Akraton is the ancient Greek term for pure (undiluted and unadulterated) wine. The 2010 Giovi “Akraton” Etna Rosso, now tastes that way: pure, delicious, fresh and lively.



Posted by [William Nesto](#) at 4:28 PM No comments:

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Labels: [Akraton](#), [Etna](#), [Giovanni La Fauci](#), [Giovi](#), [Pirao](#)

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2013

Etna Harvest

Last week as we read about the harvests taking place on Mount Etna, we were reminded of a special *vendemmia* which we shared on Etna in the autumn of 2010. It was late September/early October. One morning we drove to a small vineyard in the *contrada* (hamlet) of Feudo di Mezzo near the towns of Passopisciaro and Castiglione di Sicilia, on the northern slope of the volcano. The day was bright and the morning air, slightly cool. Puffy white clouds hung over the brownish Nebrodi and Peloritani Mountains due north beyond the Alcantara River. The cone of Mount Etna was to the south shrouded in the steam billowing from its summit. We were brought to this small vineyard of ½ hectare (about 1.2 acres) by Salvo Foti and his band of vineyard workers known as *I Vigneri*. Salvo is a well-known Etna winegrower and writer, but we were not there to hear his story. Salvo told us that he brought us there to experience something more important. As he joined his workers in the vineyard, Salvo called to his vineyard manager, Maurizio Pagano, to coordinate the morning's work. All the harvesters were wearing the maroon colored T-shirt bearing the *I Vigneri* logo, the bush-like vine known as *alberello* and the year 1435 - the founding year of a historic guild of vineyard workers from Catania.



Old Nerello Mascalese Alberello Staked Vine

The vineyard was bordered by low stone walls built of dry lava rocks. A row of olive trees and sprawling prickly pear plants known as *fichi di india* lined the left wall of the vineyard. One venerable walnut tree stood guard amidst the vines. Herbs and tall grass covered the vineyard floor. Each single twisted old vine was tied around a wooden stake (as in the Rhone Valley in southern France). Here though, the

dark sandy soil was volcanic in origin. All of the harvesters brandished a *forbice* (cutting shears) in one hand and a cylindrical plastic bucket in the other. The workers bantered in Sicilian with each other as they entered the vineyard and began harvesting the plump conical bunches of Nerello Mascalese. Maurizio would call out a command - much like a caller at a traditional square dance - with the harvesters then lifting their filled buckets atop their shoulders and walking through the vineyard single-file to bring the grape bunches (*grappoli*) to the crates waiting to be filled at the vineyard's edge.



I Vigneri Bringing in the Harvest

In the vineyard we then saw another *I Vigneri* worker who had just arrived. Maurizio greeted him exuberantly, "*Ciao, Federico, come andiamo?*" (Hi Federico, how are you doing?). The two men embraced. We soon learned that Federico had come from Milan that morning. He had purchased this land in 2008, but this year was his first harvest. Maurizio chimed in, "Federico, do you remember when you bought this vineyard - it was drugged and almost dead?" Maurizio explained to us that the prior owner, like so many modern grape growers, had used chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and irrigation to manage his vineyard. Some of the other harvesters came over to describe how they use only traditional and natural methods to care for these vines. Federico, with all the humility and awe of an expectant *papà*, gazed at Maurizio and his men as they tended to these now-healthy vines. Salvo came over to put his arm around Federico, observing how moving it was that they were now harvesting the fruit of a winegrower who had planted and nurtured these vines more than a hundred years ago.

Federico told us that he lived in Milan where he

worked as the sommelier at the Michelin-starred restaurant called *Il Luogo di Aimo e Nadia*. Salvo had telephoned Federico the night before to tell him that his grapes were ready to be harvested the next day. Federico had taken a flight from Milan at 7:00 a.m. to be on Etna in time for the vendemmia. He plucked a plump bunch of the *Nerelli* grapes and savored them as we conversed. Federico told us that he was a custodian of this vineyard and that he would never have bought it without first entrusting it to the care of Salvo Foti and his masterful vineyard workers who know this land and climate. Joining Salvo, Maurizio, and the other harvesters among the vines, Federico picked up a forbice and began to harvest his own grapes.



Federico Graziani and his Nerello Mascalese Grappolo

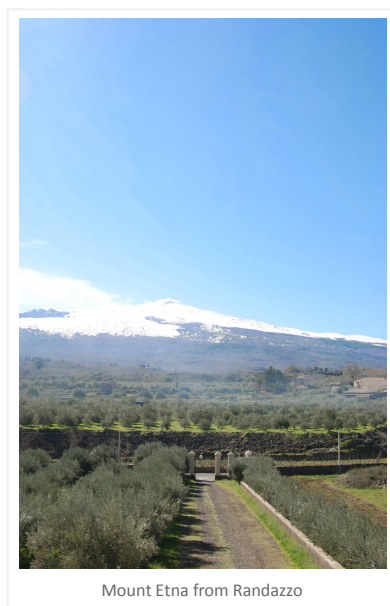
Federico informed us of his plans to work with Salvo to make a wine that he will call *Profumo di Vulcano* (Perfume of the Volcano). He hoped to sell his wine to friends, sommeliers and restaurant owners around the world. The bottle would be the same bottle used for all *I Vigneri* wines, proudly bearing the stem of the historic guild of vineyard workers. According to Federico, the red wines of Mount Etna share the potential of the celebrated *nebbiolo*-based wines of the towns of Barolo and Barbaresco in the Piedmont region of northern Italy.

After the harvest and a celebratory lunch at a trattoria called *San Giorgio e il Drago* (Saint George and the Dragon) in a former monastery in the nearby town of Randazzo, we drove Federico back to his rental car. Federico had lovingly carried two bunches of Nerello Mascalese with him from his vineyard. He gently placed the grappoli in his backpack for the flight back to Milan that afternoon. Federico smiled as he told us how he planned to share his beautiful Sicilian fruit with the husband and wife owners and guests of *Aimo e Nadia* that

evening.

At this year's Vinitaly, there was a horizontal tasting of the red wines of Mount Etna. Sixteen producers presented their *Etna Rosso* wine from the 2010 vintage to a packed hall of wine journalists, buyers, and fellow winemakers from around the globe. It represented the formal coming-of-age of Etna red wine on the world stage. Each *Etna Rosso* was made from the two indigenous red vine varieties of Mount Etna, Nerello Mascalese and Nerello Cappuccio. While we had previously visited almost all of the estates represented on the stage that day, we were there to witness (and taste!) the debut of Federico Graziani's *Profumo di Vulcano*. Federico, who is also a well-respected wine writer in Italy, introduced his wine by expressing his appreciation for the opportunity to be a custodian of this special land. His wine showed the pure ripe expression of a high elevation Nerello Mascalese. One by one, the other fifteen wines each also expressed the elegance and vibrancy of Etna's fruit.

This summer Mount Etna was designated as an UNESCO World Heritage Site. In awarding this designation, UNESCO recognized that Etna's "exceptional volcanic activity has been documented for at least 2,700 years". The culture of wine in Sicily also reaches back at least 2,700 years. From a land which for centuries shipped its wine to mainland Italy (and continental Europe) to be blended anonymously with the wines of the north, the wines of Mount Etna - with the help of Federico Graziani, Salvo Foti, and *I Vigneri* - are beginning to reveal the beauty and complexity of this ancient land.



Mount Etna from Randazzo

Posted by [Fran Di Savino](#) at 5:03 PM [No comments:](#)



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