

# food and wine pairings: SICILY





# *The Sicilian Table*

A trip to the Mediterranean island yields delicious local fare and the wines to drink with it.

BY ROGER MORRIS



OPPOSITE: Donnafugata winemaker Antonino Santoro and co-owner Josè Rallo at Contessa Entellina vineyards; ABOVE: Dried grapes destined for Donnafugata's Ben Ryé naturally sweet wine.

**F**rom the air, the salt flats along the coastal plain between Trapani and Marsala on Sicily's western edge look like rows of painted squares in a gigantic watercolor kit, with delicate pastel hues of oranges and pinks, grays and greens, and splashes of dazzling white.

From the ground, the canal-side path between these saline pans that leads from the shore is interlaced with mounds of white salt, taller than I am when I walk among them. A large, ancient windmill stands a hundred yards away, its huge blades tethered like the props of a commuter aircraft ready

for deplaning. Even at night, tourists and locals spill over from a local seaside rock bar to walk among the white mounds of this massive outdoor salt factory.

But the salt flats are only one of the many panoramas of Sicily and its foods, including melon fields between the airport in Palermo and my destination, Marsala. Other striking vistas include the farmers' market in Marsala, with countless baskets of fresh tomatoes, baskets of live snails, wine grapes being harvested in the vast valley around Contessa Entellina, acres of trailing caper vines growing on the rocks and

boulders on a remote hilltop overlooking the sea on the island of Pantelleria, the boats at the docks with day's catch, and grapes laid out on dozens of screens, becoming raisins in the sun to make the naturally sweet passito wines.

As a visitor to Donnafugata, the winery that makes some of Sicily's best table wines, I was able to visit all these venues, plus sample native Sicilian dishes in the restaurants of Marsala and Pantelleria, as well as from street vendors.

Here are some of the wines I discovered along with food pairings recommended by the vintner.



ABOVE: Couscous with prawns; OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Salt collection at Trapani; fresh fish selection; historic *porta* at Marsala.







## PANELLE

Believed to be Arabic in origin, *panelle* are chick pea fritters cut into squares. They are often sold as street snacks or served as an appetizer.

Serve with *Donnafugata Anthilia 2014*, a white wine made from the native *Catarratto* grape.

MAKES ABOUT 24

- 6 1/4 cups water
- 1 teaspoon coarse sea salt
- 1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus more to coat pan and skillet
- 1 pound chickpea flour, plus more if needed

1. Oil a large sheet pan; set aside.
2. In a large saucepan over medium heat, combine water and salt. Gradually whisk in chickpea flour until smooth.
3. Whisk constantly as mixture slowly heats. It will thicken and eventually steam, but does not need to boil. Cook and keep whisking for about 15 to 20 minutes, scrap-

ing the bottom and sides of the pan frequently, until mixture is stiff and pulls away from sides of the pan as you stir.

4. Turn the batter onto oiled sheet pan; spread mixture quickly into an even layer with a spatula before it cools and sets. Wet spatula with water, and smooth top of batter. Let cool for an hour or longer, until completely firm.
5. Cut pieces with a sharp knife in whatever size or shape you like.
6. Fry *panelle*. Pour enough extra-virgin olive oil into a heavy skillet to cover the bottom and set over medium heat. When oil is hot, place the *panelle* in the pan, leaving plenty of space between them. Fry *panelle* 3 minutes, until underside is crisp and golden; flip over and brown second side, about 2 minutes more.
7. Drain *panelle* on paper towels; serve warm.

## BUSIATE ALLA TRAPANESE CON ARAGOSTA

(*Busiate with Lobster*)

This is one of those glorious Italian recipes



for which exact amounts are not required. Judge by the number of people being served and your own preferred proportions for each ingredient. *Busiate* is a large, twisted pasta made from Sicilian durum wheat. If you can't find it, use *penne*.

Serve with *Donnafugata SurSur Grillo 2014*

- Fresh tomatoes (preferably Roma)
- Fresh basil
- Garlic, crushed
- Crushed almonds
- Pecorino Romano cheese, grated
- Extra-virgin olive oil
- Salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- Lobster, boiled and chopped into pieces
- Busiate* pasta (or *penne*)

1. Heat a large pot of water to boiling.
2. In a large skillet over medium heat, add oil, garlic, basil and almonds.
3. Cut an "X" in the tip end of each tomato. Drop tomatoes in boiling water for 1 minute. Remove from water; peel from the "X," cut and crush them. Keep water boiling.
4. Add tomatoes to ingredients in skillet, heating thoroughly.



5. Add lobster, removing the meat from some pieces. Salt and pepper to taste.
6. Generously salt the boiling water and cook pasta until al dente. Drain and add to sauce; stir to combine and serve immediately.

## SOFT-BOILED EGGS AND BOTTARGA

*Bottarga is the salty, dried, compressed eggs of tuna that can either be sliced or grated for serving. It usually comes vacuum packed. It is often served on pasta or potatoes, or with eggs as an appetizer.*

**Serve with Donnafugata Lighea Zibibbo 2014**

SERVES 1

- 1 large fresh egg per person
- 2 teaspoon of grated or one thin slice of bottarga per person

1. In a medium saucepan, bring water to a boil. Soft boil the eggs, turning off heat when water returns to a boil.
2. Serve in egg cups with the top cut off and

grated bottarga on the side.

3. Spoon the bottarga onto the soft egg as it is eaten.

## COUSCOUS WITH PRAWNS

*Couscous is popular in western Sicily and can be hand-made by gradually hand mixing water and semolina until you get the consistency of grains desired, then steaming the grain and allowing it to dry. Alternatively, you can buy and prepare a package of Moroccan couscous.*

**Serve with Donnafugata Chiaranda Chardonnay 2011**

Serves 4

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 cloves crushed garlic
- 4 cups fish or vegetable stock
- 1 16-oz can stewed tomatoes
- 1 small bunch parsley, chopped
- 16 whole prawns, shelled
- 4 cups cooked couscous

1. In a large skillet on medium heat, sauté garlic briefly in olive oil (do not let it brown); add tomatoes, parsley, stock and prawns. Simmer until liquid is slightly reduced, about 15 minutes.
2. Fluff couscous and place in large serving bowl. Top with prawns and sauce.

## EGGPLANT PARMIGIANA

**Serve with Donnafugata Sedàra 2013, made mainly from Nero d'Avola, Sicily's primary red indigenous grape.**

SERVES 4 AS A MAIN COURSE

- 3 large eggplants
- Sea salt
- Olive oil
- 1 yellow onion, peeled and finely chopped
- Dried oregano
- 2½ pounds fresh tomatoes (preferably Roma) or large can of peeled tomatoes
- Fresh basil leaves
- 1½ cups Parmigiano Reggiano cheese, freshly grated

1. Remove stalk and top and bottom inch from each eggplant. Slice into ¼-inch rounds. Place in colander and sprinkle with salt. Set aside.
2. In a large skillet on medium heat, add 3 tablespoons olive oil. Add onion and dried oregano; cook for 10 minutes, until the onion is soft.
3. Add tomatoes to onion and oregano. Give the mixture a good stir, then put a lid on the pan and simmer slowly for 15 minutes. Season with salt, pepper and basil to taste.
4. Rinse off eggplant to remove salt, pat dry with towel.
5. In a very large skillet, heat ¼ cup olive oil. Pan fry eggplant rounds.
6. Preheat oven to 375°F.
7. In a medium non-reactive baking dish, place a thin layer of tomato sauce, then a thin scattering of cheese, followed by a single layer of eggplant. Repeat these layers until all ingredients are used, finishing with sauce and cheese.
8. Bake for 30 minutes until golden, crisp and bubbly. Let rest for 20 minutes before cutting into squares for serving.

