

FOOD & WINE

The 15 Best Wines from Sicily's Mount Etna to Buy Right Now

Known for their minerality and high acidity, these Sicilian wines are becoming more popular in the U.S. Here are some outstanding bottles from Mount Etna to look for.

By **Brian Freedman**

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Antonio Rallo, owner and winemaker of Donnafugata, agreed, noting that, "The wines of the single districts in Italian called *contrade* represent Etna's Crus. They recall the cru

concept of other prestigious areas such as Barolo or Burgundy, producing unique expressions, differing in composition of soil and microclimatic factors. The producer enhances the district's peculiarities through specific viticultural and enological choices."

Rallo said that, despite the often significant differences between the various slopes, lava flows, elevations, and *contrade* of Mount Etna, the wines tend to share a certain recognizable character. "All Etna wines are generally characterized by marked minerality and high acidity, which is on one hand [the] result of soils and climate, but also part of the main characteristics of the grape profiles of the indigenous Nerello Mascalese and Carricante."

No wonder the wines of Mount Etna have become so popular: They are deeply tied to their place of origin, express it in particularly delicious ways, and tend to be exceptionally food-friendly. Below are 15 bottles, both red and white, that I strongly recommend, listed alphabetically. And while I typically try to not double up on producers, so many of them craft wines from various terroirs on Mount Etna that it seemed to make sense to do so here.

2018 Alberelli di Giodo Nerello Mascalese Sicilia (\$70)

Gunflint and scorched earth aromas resolve in cured black olives that follow through to the palate, which is marked by black cherries, dried figs, and plum pits, as well as black-peppercorn spice and a touch of subtle lavender and thyme on the finish. A hint of bresaola peeks through, too. There is serious grip to the medium-grained tannins, all of it pulsed through with acidity. Drink now and for the next decade-plus.

2017 Cusumano "Alta Mora" Etna Rosso DOC (\$26)

Silky in texture, with a pure beam of cherries flashed through with gunflint and a touch of floral cracked peppercorns. This is a great deal of wine for \$26, and will drink well for the next five years or more.

2014 Cusumano "Alta Mora" Feudo di Mezzo Etna Rosso DOC (\$55)

This is just transporting as soon as you pour it, with deep aromas of dried flowers, dried orange peels, Moroccan spices, Chinese 5-spice powder, and savory minerality. The first sip sings with balance and energy, more of those Moroccan spices, toasted fennel seeds,

star anise, cherries and cherry pits, and oyster shell minerality ringing through the finish. Tar and flower notes remind me of the greats of Piedmont in a sense. It's mature, but has plenty of time left to go.

2018 Donnafugata "Sul Vulcano" Etna Bianco DOC (\$40)

Floral notes lift distinct flavors of preserved lemons, white licorice, and saline minerality that rings through the lemon-pith-flashed finish. As an aperitif or at the table, this is a winner.



2017 Donnafugata "Fragore" Contrada Montelaguardia Etna Rosso DOC (\$85)

Mineral-streaked cranberry aromas are pulled through with hot rocks and cracked peppercorns, and precede a palate of immense energy and balance, with a distinct slate and balsamic savoriness rounded out by wild cherries and cranberries. There is a subtle lift of violets and star anise that develops, too. Enjoy through 2031, and likely beyond.

2017 Duca di Salaparuta "Lavico" Nerello Mascalese Terre Siciliane IGT (\$20)

Even though this is labeled as Terre Siciliane DOC, it's grown in the Alcantara Valley at between 600 and 800 meters above sea level. The Etna slopes have lent this wine a crunchy, almost saline mineral character that finds an excellent counterpoint in the sweeter cherry and wild strawberry notes that are themselves cut through with cherry pit and spice flavors. The finish vibrates on the tongue with an almost briny sense to the clove spice.

2018 Monteleone Etna Rosso DOC (\$35)

Aromas of mineral-seamed cranberries and plum pits precede a silky, energetic palate spiced with dried thyme and oregano, and a beam of red cherries and cranberries whose minerality comes off as almost salty. It's all joined by suggestions of cracked green peppercorns and red tea. So lively with blood-orange acidity. This easily has a decade of life ahead of it.

2017 Planeta "Eruzione 1614" Nerello Mascalese Sicilia DOC (\$38)

Aromas of Amarena cherries, candied violets, and smoky mineral in the slate and gunflint vein. On the palate, this is generous and more extracted, with assertive yet ripe tannins framing flavors of black cherries, cloves, a touch of peppercorn-rubbed cured meat, and a finish that dances between mineral and honey. Exceptional wine.

2019 Tenuta di Fessina "Erse" Etna Bianco DOC (\$25)

Crafted from Carricante, with 10% Minnella, this is a distinctly salty wine, with Marcona almonds and oyster-shell brininess alongside lemon pith, sun-warmed hay, and hawthorn notes. Fabulously food-friendly, especially with herb-focused dishes like pesto.

2015 Tenuta di Fessina "Il Musmeci" Etna Rosso DOC Riserva (\$50)

The interplay of meaty and marrow-like flavors here alongside fistfuls of cherries, eucalyptus, menthol, floral peppercorns, and allspice is a high-wire act of balance and complexity. Hot-slate minerality and a subtle sense of salinity mark the finish, which is also flecked with dried flowers, toasted fennel seeds, and bresaola.

2019 Tenuta Tascante "Buonora" Etna Bianco DOC (\$21)

So savory, with oyster shells, lemon juice and pith, and a touch of melon and white strawberries. Electrifying acidity, yet impeccably balanced.

2018 Tenuta Tascante "Ghiaia Nera" Etna Rosso DOC (\$21)

This Nerello Mascalese is crafted from the estate's younger vines—the name means 'black gravel,' and is a reference to the soils in which the vines grow. It has a distinctly nutty aroma, but the palate is all coiled energy and mouthwatering acidity, with tart cherries joined by crunchy mineral and spice, as well as a hit of flowers on the finish. Bursting with character and elegance.

2018 Tornatore Etna Bianco DOC (\$33)

Floral aromatics follow through to the palate, which is honeyed and generous with Meyer lemons, yellow apples and yellow plums, and caramel, all resolving in a drying and mineral finish.

2018 Vini Franchetti Contrada C Terre Siciliane IGT (\$90)

Very stony on the nose, with spice and gunflint joining blood oranges and cranberries, all preceding a palate of presence and savoriness, with almost saline flavors of scorched earth, hot slate, cranberries, cherry pits, and bone broth. This will evolve through 2032 and beyond.

2018 Vini Franchetti Contrada R Terre Siciliane IGT (\$90)

Cherry pits and dried strawberries on the nose are all found within a framework of deep minerality, and lead to a palate of concentration and depth, with fabulously balanced acidity and a core of salinity. It's anchored by a distinctly meaty character—like bresaola and prime rib-blood—yet made generous with blood oranges and spice. A whiff of rose water rises on the finish. Drink this now or savor for the next 15 years.

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