

Jill Norman understands the meaning of Donnafugata

### A flight to consistency and quality

Our last visit was to Donnafugata, where we were welcomed by Josè Rallo and her colleagues Marta Gaspari and Alessia Panzeca. The Rallo family has been making wine in Sicily for 150 years, and in the 1980s started the new Donnafugata winery from its handsome old winery in Marsala. The name Donnafugata, meaning woman in flight, refers to Queen Maria Carolina of Naples who fled at Napoleon's approach. She stayed at Santa Margarita Belice Palace, made famous in Lampedusa's *The Leopard* as Donnafugata, the Prince of Salina's estate. The company's vineyards at Contessa Entellina are on this land, south of Marsala.

On 260 ha of predominantly clay soils at altitudes of 200-600m Ansonica, Catarratto, Grecanico, Chardonnay and Viognier are grown for white wines, Nero d'Avola, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Syrah for reds. White varieties are harvested at night, the grapes cooled and pressed and the must goes to Marsala for vinification. The reds are vinified at the Contessa Entellina winery, where most of the energy used is solar.

Donnafugata's third winery is on Pantelleria, where Zibibbo (Muscat of Alexandria) is grown on 68 ha of fertile, volcanic soils. The bush vines are planted in basins on small terraced plots so that the wind conditions for each plot can be taken into account for growth and harvesting. The first grapes, picked mid-August, are dried on racks in the sun and wind for 3-4 weeks. The grapes from the second harvest in September are pressed and the destalked dried grapes added in stages during fermentation, which continues until the end of November, when the wine is aged in tank and then bottle.

Donnafugata's wide range of wines is impressively consistent in quality, and many offer good value for money. Our tasting started with Anthilia 2008 (Ansonica and Catarratto), a light refreshing wine with floral and stone fruit notes, and Polena 2008 (Catarratto and Viognier), well-balanced with mineral and floral tones, and crisp acidity. La Fuga 2008, an unoaked Chardonnay, has aromas of



## CWW in Sicily

pineapple and mineral, good concentration, depth and length. My favourite white wine was Vigna di Gabri 2008, predominantly made from Ansonica, with its orange-blossom nose, complex, flinty, salty palate and lingering finish.

The first red was the lively Sherazade 2008 (Nero d'Avola and Syrah) with fruity, balsamic notes and light tannins. Angheli 2006 (Merlot and Nero d'Avola) has cherry and berry aromas with notes of liquorice and chocolate, and a supple, full-bodied palate. Tancredi 2006 (Nero d'Avola and Cabernet) is well-structured with flavours of liquorice, blackberries and chocolate, and minty notes from the Cabernet. Mille e una Notte 2006 (predominantly Nero d'Avola) is an elegant, complex wine with balsamic and violet notes, hints of tobacco and a long, satisfying palate. Ben Ryé 2007, the *passito* wine, has an intense apricot aroma, and a honeyed palate of dried fruits and herbs. It is rich, layered and long.

The less expensive wines are IGT Sicilia, the others Contessa Entellina DOC, and for the sweet wines Pantelleria DOC. The names of the wines follow the literary name of the

house, with characters and references from *The Leopard* and other works.

Music also plays an important role at Donnafugata, as Josè Rallo is an accomplished jazz singer. We were treated to a delightful rendering of her song, *An older man is like an elegant wine*, as we tasted Mille e una Notte, for which it was composed. It was a memorable end to our trip to Sicily.



**This is the link to the full tasting notes on the CWW website:**

[http://www.winewriters.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=23&Itemid=40](http://www.winewriters.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=23&Itemid=40)

*Top: Evocative labelling on Donnafugata bottles; right, the winery and the vineyards; left, the Mille et una Notte barrel cellar. Photos © Herbert Lehmann/Cephas.*

