

SICILIAN WINERY DONNAFUGATA FETES SWEET SUCCESS OF PASSITO

By Josephine McKenna

(ANSA) - Pantelleria, January 2 - One of the best-kept secrets about the leading Sicilian winemaker Donnafugata is the sweet success of its dessert wine, the Ben Rye' passito. The company's Ben Rye', produced on the spectacular island of Pantelleria 100 kms off the south-west coast of Sicily, is the only Italian wine to have won top accolades from all the major Italian wine guides. The company has compared the ratings awarded by all the 2013 wine guides and found that Donnafugata's 2010 Ben Rye' scored the highest, along with Bertani's 2005 Amarone della Valpolicella. Donnafugata says it's a rare event when all the guides agree on a wine of excellence despite the different orientations and rating methods of various teams. According to the company, eight of Italy's most popular guides gave their unanimous approval of the 2010 Ben Rye' Passito di Pantelleria DOP: an extraordinary result, also recorded in 2006. Donnafugata's Ben Rye' is a well-confirmed icon of Italian wine, a winner of many national and international honours over the past 20 years. 'We are delighted for our Ben Rye', which once again succeeds in getting the greatest attention and highest opinions from the best wine critics, for itself and for the island of Pantelleria,' says Antonio Rallo, head of production at Donnafugata. 'It is a worthy result for our Passito di Pantelleria and the extreme viticulture from which it is born'. Wine growing is a challenge on the rugged volcanic island of Pantelleria which lies between Sicily and the north coast of Africa. Terraced plots and dry-stone walls line the hills in order to protect the grapevines from the strong winds that strike the island. The vineyards span 11 districts, known as contrade, on the island and they have different types of soil, altituded, and exposure. It is here that the Zibibbo grapes are cultivated and some of the vines are more than 100 years old. The Khamma winery is an example of the company's commitment to sustainable architecture and despite its simple style only the latest in technologically advanced equipment is used here to cultivate and process the grapes. According to Donnafugata, the Ben Rye' has swept the field in 2013 gaining Tre Bicchieri (three glasses) from Gambero Rosso's Guida ai Vini d'Italia, and Cinque grappoli from Bibenda, a Vino Slow rating from Slow Wine, and a three stars from I Vini di Veronelli. It also gained strong endorsement in several other guides and a rating of 95/100 from Wine Enthusiast's Top 100 Wines of the Year. The company produces 80,000 bottles of the acclaimed

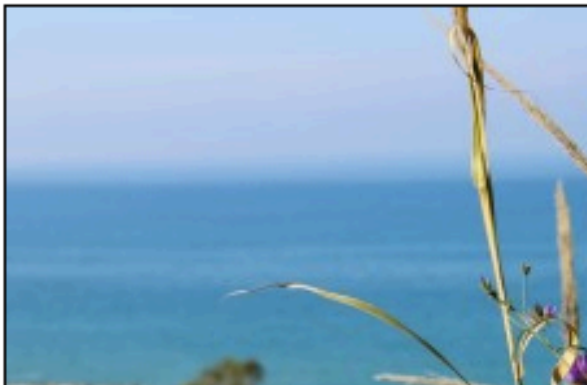
passito a year and more than 70 % is sold in Italy, where it is one of the top selling passito wines. But there is growing interest abroad, particularly from countries including the US, Japan, Switzerland and Russia. Donnafugata, means 'woman in flight' and refers to Queen Maria Carolina, the wife of the Bourbon King Ferdinand IV, who fled Naples in the early 1800s after Napoleon's troops invaded the city. Apparently she sought refuge in the area of Sicily where the winery's vineyards are now found and inspired the company's colourful logo. Donnafugata has several different vineyards across Sicily and its wines are sold around the world. There have been 24 harvests on the island of Pantelleria and the harvest usually begins in mid-August and continues until September. 'Project Pantelleria is an integrated project that marries the production of wine of absolute oenological value with the defence of the natural and cultural heritage of the island's viticulture,' says Jose' Rallo, who is in charge of marketing at Donnafugata.



Donnafugata estate



Pantelleria



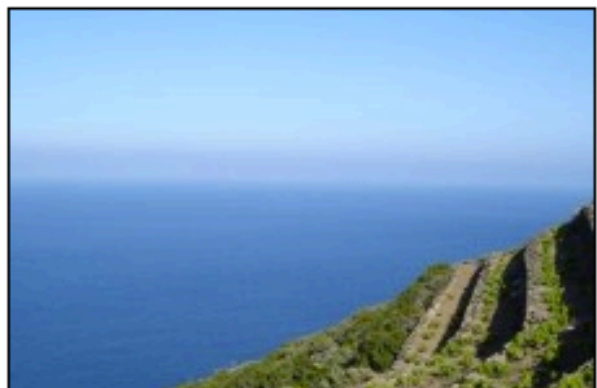
Pantelleria



Rallo family



The cellar at Khamma



Pantelleria