



Sicilian wines - Classic and Avant-Garde together

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The Webster dictionary defines the word classic “ as serving as a standard of excellence or historically memorable”. In contrast, avant garde can be defined as “ group of people who develop new and often very surprising ideas in art, literature, etc. .”

In every major Italian region wine region, the classic coexist peacefully with the progressive. Nowhere in Italy, we see this phenomenon better than in the Sicilian wine industry

Sicily grows more grapes than anywhere in Italy. For generations, it was preoccupied with quantity over quality. The change of direction occurred some 20 years ago when a handful of producers began experimenting with smaller yields and more artisanal winemaking methods. The pioneers of change included producers such as Planeta, Tasca d’Almerita, Cusumano, Marco de Bartoli and Donnafugata. Other trendsetting producers include COS, Occhipinti and Cornelissen.



The most famous wine name of Sicily is Donnafugata. They have been part of the Rallo family since 1983. In their historic cellars dating back to 1851 with the Contessa Entellina vineyards in the heart of western Sicily, the name, which means 'woman in flight' goes back to Queen Maria Carolina of Bourbon escaping from Napoleon to where the winery’s vineyards now stand. It was Sicilian author Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa in his novel ‘Il Gattopardo’, who gave the name of Donnafugata to the country estates. Responsible for 17 exceptional varieties unique for the soil, climate and elevations they grow at, the vineyard claims a noted and award-winning repertoire. Many years ago, my introduction to Sicilian wine was with Donnafugata.

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Antonio is the son of Giacomo Rallo, founder of the winery

Panoram Italia recently had a chance to encounter Antonio Rallo, chairman and winemaker of Donnafugata and taste the portfolio of wines available in Quebec. Antonio is the son of Giacomo Rallo, founder of the winery. With Jose her sister, they are the new face of the winery.

We had a chance to taste three vintages of the flagship wine of Donnafugata, Mille e Una Notte (2011, 2008 and 1995). The wine is primarily Nero d'Avola (about 90%) with a small percentage of other local red varieties. Produced from low yielding vines in the Contessa Entellina zone, this is one of the mythical wines of Sicily.

Another famous wine produced by Donnafugata is the remarkable sweet wine known as Ben Ryé. Produced entirely from Zibibbo grapes (Moscato d'Alessandria), the vineyards are located on the tiny island of Pantelleria, south of Sicily. As this island is close to Africa (less than 70 miles), the conditions are quite hot, necessitating the vines being planted in the albarello method. These small trees reach only a few meters off the ground, as they need protection from the scorching sun. We also had a chance to taste three vintages (2014, 2011 and 2008).

A selection of wines from Donnafugata

Donnafugata Anthilia 2015. SAQ # 10542137. \$17.45

Very floral with nuances of Jasmine and white peonies. In addition some lemon oil with blanched almond and bright white orchard fruit. Refreshing acidity. Fruity with mineral and hay undertones. Round and wavy texture. Lovely citric finale bringing to mind orange. Pairing nicely with seafood pasta.

Donnafugata Tancredi 2012. SAQ # 10542129. \$32.50

Blueberry, cassis with black cherry jam. Licorice and confit violet. In addition, balsamic notes such as eucalyptus and rosemary. Ripe black fruits with macerated fine herbs. Generous finale with a stewed prune aftertaste. Would be phenomenal with roasted lamb and rosemary potatoes.

Donnafugata Mille e una Notte 2011. SAQ # 10223460. \$79.50

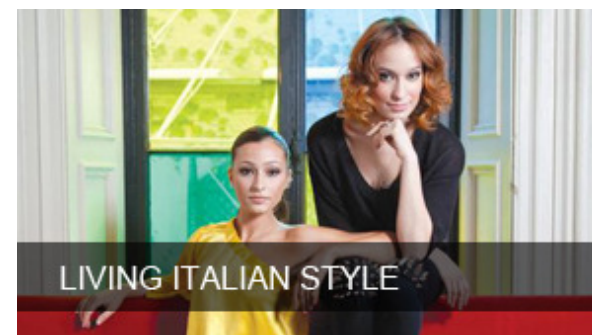
Woody with cassis jam, rose water and green peppercorns. Structured, racy and elegant. Lovely cocoa and fig flavors with very fine tannins. Still a baby. For the long term 10-20 years. Pair it with a charcoal grilled T-Bone steak.

Donnafugata Ben Ryé 2011 (2014 available at the SAQ # 11301482. \$33.50)

Complex nose. Toasted hazelnuts with dry coconut flakes and smoked pumpkin seeds. On the mouth, powerful and luscious. Flavors bring to mind dry figs, dates and sultana raisins. An exotic finale bringing to mind tamarind fruit. A dessert by itself.



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