



DONNAFUGATA

PRESS RELEASE

A five-star 2008 vintage

Satisfaction at Donnafugata: it was a felicitous Sicilian vintage giving life to wines that will be the finest expressions of this territory.

Thanks to **normal weather conditions** and **very scrupulous vineyard tending**, at Donnafugata the 2008 grape harvest was excellent, giving it healthy, perfectly ripe grapes that will become wines with great harmony and elegance.

Particularly 2008 was a somewhat drier year: from October 1, 2007 to September 30, 2008, **rainfall** amounted to 20 inches versus an average of 25.5 inches in the past six years in western Sicily (data collected at the S.I.A.S. weather station at Contessa Entellina: www.sias.regione.sicilia.it).

Temperatures were a bit higher than the seasonal norm but without exceptional peaks and with remarkable differences between day and night that kept the vineyards from experiencing stress. Altogether it was a very balanced year featuring gradual and constant ripening of the different grape varieties.

Meticulous vineyard tending, from **winter pruning** to pre-harvest **thinning** enabled the vines to achieve an optimal vegetation-production equilibrium. And highly important in obtaining quality were the efforts made to monitor grape ripening and to choose the **ideal time for picking** each variety in Donnafugata's various vineyards.

From the standpoint of vine health, except for some very circumscribed cases of grape leafhopper the year was problem-free; the harvested grapes were generally very healthy and reached aromatic and phenolic maturity with a lower amount of sugar than usually. Meaning that the 2008 wines will generally have lower **alcohol content** than the average for recent years.

Here the most significant moments of the 2008 vintage in the period from April to September at the Donnafugata estate at Contessa Entellina. **April-May:** mild temperatures at first slowed down the usual timing of shooting and blossoming. Rainfalls were below the seasonal average and a bit ahead in time (May) when the vines needed more water anyway.

June-July: a slight delay in the ripening process was quickly recouped thanks to fine weather conditions. In June the vines were trimmed to foster new leaf growth during the last stages of grape ripening. In July the grapes were in the darkening stage and towards the end of the month the vines were thinned, especially the black grape varieties that this year proved more productive. The reduction of output per vine will lead to wines that are aromatically more complex thanks to perfect phenol maturation in the grapes.

August: the first part of the month was fairly hot, but only occasionally above 95°F and the difference between highs and lows was of about 61°F and often more than 68°F. These climatic conditions enabled the plants to continue in their photosynthesis and complete the ripening stage of the early-ripening grapes



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(Chardonnay, Viognier and Merlot), while helping the later-ripening varieties to continue to mature.

The night of August 6 was the start of harvesting the Chardonnay, the grape that ripens earliest. At the Contessa Entellina estate this marked the tenth anniversary of the **nighttime harvest**, a technical decision making it possible to optimally preserve grape aromas during their transport from vineyard to cellar, thanks to cooler nocturnal temperatures.

It rained in the latter part of August (nearly 2 inches) and this, combined with cooler temperatures, kept the vines from suffering water deprivation and allowed them to continue ripening.

September: in early September average temperatures rose, permitting the later-ripening varieties (including Nero d'Avola and Ansonica) to fully mature. On September 26 the harvest concluded with the late red grapes and some portions of Cataratto.

The outcome was excellent on **Pantelleria**, too, where Donnafugata has vineyards in 11 different areas of the island, mostly terraced and fine examples of heroic viticulture. Here the harvest began on August 17 and continued until September 20, according to grape ripeness in the various areas. In fact, while the island is relatively small, Pantelleria has viticultural contexts that differ in terms of altitude, exposure, soil, vineyard age (some are over a hundred years old) and microclimate, so a multiplicity of factors are involved in the outstanding complexity found in the wines.

In general, big differences in temperature between day and night helped enhance the wealth of aromas in the **Zibibbo** grapes whose vines are grown in a low bush-form on volcanic soil and protected by drywalls. The grapes were dried in the traditional way, in the sun and wind, for about three weeks. When the optimal level of dehydration was reached the dried grapes were added to the fermenting must – from non-dried grapes – to produce Ben Ryé Passito.

The 2008 harvest can definitely be given the **5-star rating** that this territory so well deserves.

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