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Zenzero x Donnafugata Wines, St Mary's Place: Wine Dinner

Kathleen Fernandez
August 5, 2017

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Over 160 years ago in one of Europe's oldest vinicultural region, the Rallo family opened a winery in Marsala, Sicily, marking their debut into the wine world. A little over 130 years later, in 1983, fourth generation winemaker Giacomo Rallo and his wife Gariella created Donnafugata – finally christening their family legacy – and gave a name to one of Sicily's finest wineries. Armed with the knowledge of winemaking, a passion that has been passed down for generations, the Rallo family have tirelessly worked to send some of the best wines in Sicily around the world.



The name Donnafugata, which means 'woman in flight', was inspired by the novel *Il Gattopardo* (The Leopard) by Sicilian writer Tomasi di Lampedusa and it pays homage to the history and beauty of the land. It's something that is very clearly represented in the names of the wines which draw inspiration from the works of not only Tomasi di Lampedusa (the white Lighea and red Angheli) but also the Arabic classic, *One Thousand and One Nights*, which inspired the names of two wines, Sherazade and Mille e una Notte.



Just recently, we had the pleasure of sampling some of Donnafugata's top-selling wines at a dinner in

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one of KL's finest Italian establishments, Zenzero. The five-course Italian menu was carefully crafted by Donnafugata's winemaker and Zenzero's chefs to pair with five of Donnafugata's prized wines.

It's all in the label

Elena Bortoletto from the winery in Sicily was on hand to tell us about the wines we were to taste that evening. Elena explained the emphasis Donnafugata places on creating distinct wines of the highest quality and how each name was carefully chosen to represent the flavours of the wine. She also conveyed the pride Donnafugata places on their labels designed by Italian artist Setfano Vitale, which sets them apart from other wines.



We started off with a glass of Anthillia Bianco 2016 which was paired with an amuse bouche of cold angel hair pasta and smoked salmon. The Anthillia is a fresh, fruity wine that paired well with the smoked salmon in the pasta. The pops of savoury salmon roe provided a pleasant brightness to experience.



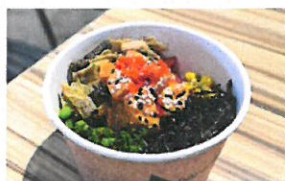
The label on this bottle shows the serene face of a woman with flowing golden hair and the name Anthillia was the name given to the city of Entella in Sicily during Roman times. Anthillia is the first wine conceived at Donnafugata and still remains one of their popular bottles.



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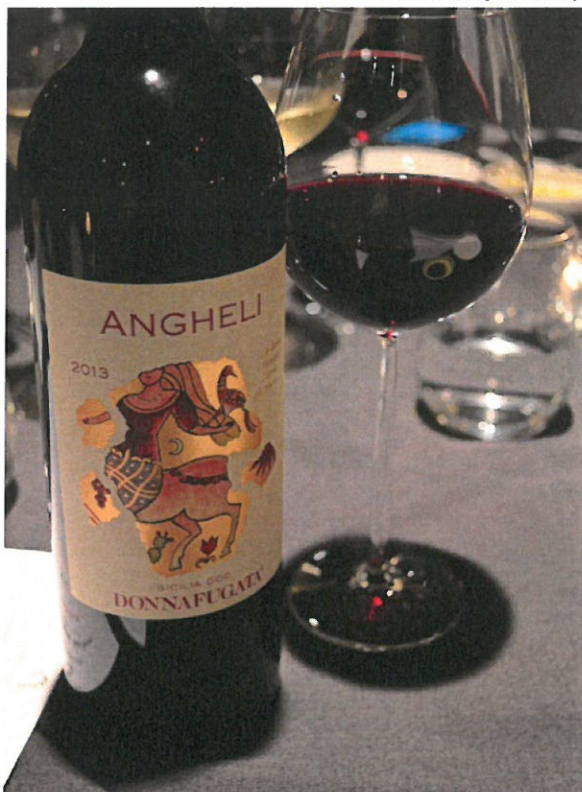
Next up was the starter of yellowfin tuna served two ways: a carpaccio with olive pesto and a tartare served in a semolina nest with crispy potato chips. This was paired with a glass of La Fuga Chardonnay 2015 which has notes of citrus and pineapple and a distinct floral aroma that bolstered the flavours of the raw tuna. The label on La Fuga was invented by Gabriella Anca Rallo, wife of Giacomo Rallo who was inspired by the idea of fleeing and beginning a new life, of constant movement. The label captures that feeling through the image of a woman with her hair flowing behind her, the colours of which convey a sense of movement and connection to nature.



For the entrée, we were served a plate of beetroot risotto with toasted pine nuts and goat cheese. The brightly coloured plate of food piqued everyone's interest the moment it landed on our tables. The earthy beetroot dish was paired with the Angheli Merlot – Cabernet Sauvignon 2013.



The ruby red wine had a strong, dry flavour with notes of plum and hints of spice. On its own, I wouldn't say it's an easy wine to drink, but when paired with the salty, creamy goat cheese, the flavours of the wine seemed to round out a little and cut through the acidity. If all I had was goat cheese and the Angheli, I'd be a happy camper.



The label on the Angheli looks almost like a painting torn to shreds, with image of a woman fleeing on a horse recognisable on the torn pieces which represents the character of Angelica from the poem Orlando Furioso. This plays into the 'woman in flight' theme captured by Donnafugata, each conveying history and tradition but also a sense of delicateness.

The main course was the one we'd all been waiting for. It was a pistachio and almond-coated lamb loin stuffed with foie gras, served with potato au gratin and paired with the star of Donnafugata, the Mille e una Notte 2011 which translates to 'Arabian Nights'.



The dark blue label shows the Santa Margherita Belice Palace where Queen Maria Carolina of Naples and Sicily sought refuge when fleeing Naples. The sky is also dotted with stars to represent the night full of promises in Arabian Nights, which is apt considering that Mille e una Notte is the star of Donnafugata's collection.



The wine itself is dry, with fruity notes coating the palate upon the first sip, which makes sense when paired with the strong flavours of the tender lamb and rich foie gras. The strong flavours of the food did not mellow the wine out in any way, which provided a nice contrast to the richness of the dish.

To round everything off, we switched back to a white wine, this time a Moscato. The Kabir had a hint of sweetness, but not overly so. It's what's I, a wine noob, would describe as an easy drinking wine. The team at Zenzero decided to pair this semi-sweet wine with a Canoli stuffed with ricotta and a luscious vanilla bean ice cream. The almost savoury ricotta helped keep the pairing from being too sweet.



The Kabir's label is the only one of the night that didn't have a woman on it. Instead, it showed an island with the sun shining in the back and palm trees swaying in the wind with the waves flowing below, evoking the power of nature: probably a nod to Mother Earth and the importance that she plays in viniculture.

The entire night was a thoroughly pleasant affair, with Elena regaling us with tales about the different grapes that Donnafugata cultivates and the creative process behind each label, which is an apparent source of pride for the brand.

Wine and music

In fact, Donnafugata is constantly working with other agencies and groups in support of the arts such as

the Iomasi di Lampedusa literary award. They've also contributed to the archaeological excavation works at Rocca di Entella – ancient city of Anthillia – near their Contessa Entellina vineyards and the restoration of the famous 'Madonna with Child' from the 15th Century in the 'Pepoli' Museum in Trapani. It's nice to know that the brand is taking a genuine interest in preserving history and culture as much as it can, especially in Sicily.



If you're also a music aficionado, you will like the fact that Jose Rallo (daughter of Giacomo) and her husband Vincenzo Favara started the Donnafugata Music & Wine project in 2002 that pairs wine and music, specifically jazz and Brazilian music.

Coming back to the dinner, the wine was excellent, and kudos to the team at Zenzero for the beautiful pairings they came up with. The food was top notch and the company was most pleasant. Many thanks to Zenzero for hosting us and to Elena for the eloquent insight on Donnafugata wines.

Location & Details

Address: A-0-9, Ground Floor, St Mary Place, No. 1, Jalan Tengah, 50450 Kuala Lumpur

Hours: Mon – Sun: 11:00 am – 1:00 am

Tel: +603 2022 3883

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