



“Wine helps the world to understand us”

Sicily has been producing wine for almost 4,000 years – but it’s never been as varied or interesting as it is today. We meet some of those pushing the boundaries

Words: Mandi Keighran • Photography: Alessandra Spairani

In 1983, Sicilian teacher Gabriella Anca Rallo's father passed away, leaving her a beautiful property near Contessa Entellina. The property in the small *comune* of just over 2,000 inhabitants

located in the Valle del Belice, 80km from the island's capital, Palermo, had once been a vineyard, but the 1968 Belice earthquake had devastated the buildings and it was left to ruin.

Rallo was 39 and had been teaching English literature her whole working life, but her husband's family owned a large winery that produced Marsala. The famous, often fortified, wine had been produced in the city of the same name since the 1700s, but it had dropped out of fashion and sales were falling.

"I wanted to change that," says Rallo. "So, I decided we would make high-quality 'table' wines. I left everything I knew behind to rebuild the vineyard and learn how to grow good grapes to make great wines." Rallo called the new winery Donnafugata – "woman in flight" – in reference to Queen Maria Carolina, who fled Naples in the early 1800s on the arrival of Napoleon's troops, seeking refuge in Contessa Entellina.

Shortly afterwards, in the nearby region of Trapani, Vinzia Novara and her husband Salvatore »



"This is a hard land to tame, and if you understand it, you accept it as it is – that's the elegance of Sicilian wine"



Regions Contessa Entellina and Pantelleria
Hectares 270 at Contessa Entellina & 68 on Pantelleria
Annual production 2.1 million bottles
Our wine pick Limited edition Ben Ryé 2008, a sweet wine made with Zibibbo grapes from the island of Pantelleria

GABRIELLA ANCA RALLO / **DONNAFUGATA**

"I was a pioneer," says 74-year-old Gabriella Anca Rallo of founding Donnafugata with her husband Giacomo in 1983. After inheriting a run-down vineyard from her father, Rallo – a teacher of 20 years – decided to transform her husband's family's historic Marsala winery into one of Sicily's leading producers of high quality wine.

"I rebuilt the vineyards and my husband stayed in Marsala to make wine," says Rallo. "No women had done this before and people were surprised."

Now Donnafugata produces 18 wines with a variety of international and native grapes, including Ansonica, which is used to make Vigna di Gabri, an elegant white wine that's dedicated to Rallo.

Sustainability is integral to the winery's ethos, and in 2008 they introduced a night harvest, which negates the need for cooling the grapes and resulted in a 70 per cent energy saving.

The couple's daughter, José, and son, Antonio, now also work in the winery. Since her husband passed away earlier this year, Rallo has returned to work. "My husband and I had a great partnership," she says. "We were married for 53 years, and I'm so happy that we built this winery together."

donnafugata.it