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The Magic Of Mount Etna Expressed Through Donnafugata Wines

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Visiting Mount Etna

Mount Etna is Europe's largest volcano. It is also an active volcano, so grape growing on this mountain just doesn't seem fathomable, yet grapes have been cultivated on Etna for centuries. Mount Etna is an extreme terroir, with its high elevation, steep slopes, volcanic soils, unpredictable weather, and lava flows from a multitude of volcanic eruptions. Etna is a truly a magical place, and *Donnafugata is producing incredible wines that capture the magic of this majestic volcano.*

Having recently visited Moun Etna, it is apparent that mountain viticulture on Europe's highest active volcano is a challenge. The volcano is in a constant state of activity. There was an eruption, a few weeks before my visit. Due to its history and recent volcanic activities, Mount Etna was added to the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites. It is a region that every wine lover needs to explore first hand to fully comprehend the marvels of mother nature.



Visiting Mount Etna

Every decade or so, there have been major eruptions on Etna, with each eruption, comes intrigue; attracting some of Italy's best winemakers to explore and make wines on Etna. Etna is a hotbed(literally) for new winemakers.

Giacomo Rallo had always dreamt of growing on Etna, it is demanding terroir and not easy, so they were cautious to invest in Etna. [Donnafugata](#) recently acquired vineyards on Etna in 2016 and they are committed to preserving and promoting unique territories like that of Mount Etna. On the slopes of Etna, Donnafugata has 18 hectares of vineyards which are all located within the Etna DOC. Here they cultivate two main varieties that show their best expressions on Etna – ***Carricante and Nerello Mascalese***.

With the Donnafugata team and invited press, we toured Etna Mountain for a few days. We spent time in the cellars, the vineyards, the contradas and simply hiking the majestic volcano. As we walked on the moon-like lava rocks, we saw smoke rising from the volcano. I was in sheer awe of the magnitude of the mountain and quickly realized Mount Etna is not to be conquered as she is the conqueror, she is the goddess. So the best way for us to conquer her majestic presence was to drink the fruits of her nectar. We shared a bottle of Donnafugata Sul Vulcano Etna Rosso DOC 2014.

On the label designed by Stefano Vitale, a goddess-volcano stands out. Its intense colors, reds, yellows, iridescent blacks, are those of the highest active volcano in Europe. An ancient, powerful and feminine deity: "The Mountain" as Etna is called by the locals. "Sul Vulcano" is a declaration of love for a pure wine, fragrant and elegant, that lets you breathe the energy of this unique place located in the center of the Mediterranean. So if you cannot visit Mount Etna, grab a bottle of Sul Vulcano and experience the magic of Etna in a glass.



Contradas

The walks through the terraced contradas were very revealing. Contradas are like the crus of Burgundy and Barolo. Locals have demarcated vineyards over generations, to mark soils, lava flows, various weather patterns and differentiating viticultural practices.

Visiting the contradas was paramount to understanding the differences and nuances of the land and the volcanic activity of the mountain. The top vineyards are located on the north side of the mountain where Donnafugata's vineyards are located. The northern side of the mountain is ideal for viticulture, a little contradictory because there is slightly less sun on the northside, but this contradiction gives you surprises in the wine. The Donnafugata vineyards span 5 different districts: in **Randazzo**, at an altitude of 750 meters, in the districts of Montelaguardia, Campo Re, Calderara a Allegracore, and also in **Passopisciaro** in Contrada Marchesa.



Contrada La Marchese

Walking through the contradas, it is apparent that the soil is full of volcanic minerals that make for ideal grape growing. The various contradas have different lava flows from different explosions over time, giving the wines individual characteristics and flavors. Soils on the mountain change every few feet, as you have different lava flows and soils from various eruptions. The various eruptions over the centuries deposit different lava. Some eruption have more minerals and some more gas. The last major eruption on Etna was in 1983.

The high elevation of Etna DOC, allows for a nice diurnal range in temperatures from day to night, providing for a welcoming climate for grape growing. There was a beautiful soft ocean breeze coming in from the Mediterranean that comes along with sunny days. Again I liken the contradas to the Crus of Burgundy or Barolo, as the temperature, winds, soils, and lava flows change even with a few feet.

The Grapes of Etna

Carricante is an autochthonous ancient white grape variety cultivated on the slopes of Etna. The variety is marked by its high acidity and abundant yields. It has an elegant nose, with fresh notes of white fruit, aromatic herbs, flint, and citrus. Refined, pure and lively, it is a wine with marked mineral freshness on the palate, with high acidity and a pleasantly savory finish. Carricante has good structure, longevity, and is complex yet soft.



Nerello Mascalese is a black grape variety. The unique terroir of the volcano delivers the best expression of this prestigious grape variety, producing wines of great elegance and class. Nerello Mascalese has a deep ruby red hue. The nose is marked by scents of red fruit, sour black cherries, florals, spicy tobacco, herbs, and mineral notes. The palate expresses lively acidity and marked minerality that evokes the magic of volcanic terroir.



Sciare

The volcanic eruptions on Etna produce Sciare, which are accumulations of lava, that through a long chemical-physical process gives rise to the sandy soils on the soils of the volcano. Each lava flow that took place in different periods determines a specific composition of terrain, this imprint makes the micro-terroir of the contradas unique.

Donnafugata Etna Wines

Sul Vulcano 2018 Etna Rosato is the new rosé Donnafugata fascinates with its remarkable fragrance that expresses the typical characteristics of Etna and Nerello Mascalese. Light pink in color, Sul Vulcano Rosato presents delicate floral scents (wisteria) accompanied by pleasant fruity notes of plum and pink grapefruit. It stands out for its freshness and refined minerality.



Sul Vulcano Etna Bianco 2017 is a small production wine that offers great elegance. It has a straw yellow color with golden reflections; on the nose, presents a refined bouquet of white flowers combined with delicate citrus and vegetable scents, followed by mineral notes of flint. On the palate it is enveloping, fresh and sapid, characterized by a marked minerality and persistence; a wine that unfolds great elegance and complexity.



Sul Vulcano 2016 Etna Rosso DOC offers an elegant bouquet with notes of wild berries (strawberry and red currant) and flowery scents, along with delicate spicy nuances of cinnamon and nutmeg. The perfect harmony between aroma and taste, with good freshness and harmonious tannins. A long, balanced finish.



Fragore 2016 is a refined iconic wine that epitomizes elegance. Coming from the Cru Contrada Montelaguardia, the lava flow of this contrada dates back to 1614. The Fragore is the finest expression of Nerello Mascalese. The name Fragore itself means the sound of the mountain, almost like a boom.

It presents an ample and profound bouquet featuring spices (sweet tobacco and nutmeg), floral notes (violet) and wild berries merging with mineral (flint stone) and balsamic notes. On the palate, it reveals extraordinary complexity and elegance characterized by outstanding minerality and important tannins. Remarkable long finish.



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