

Antonio Galloni - Vinous.com

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Donnafugata

http://www.vinous.com/wines?sort%5Bdirection%5D=asc&sort%5Bname%5D=id&wine_filter%5Barticle_id%5D=1541&wine_filter%5Bproducer_id%5D=1120&producer=true

Owner Giacomo Rallo passed away this year, but his wife Gabriella and children José and Antonio continue his work with passion, flair and competence. Simply put, Donnafugata is one of Italy's, not just Sicily's, best wine estates, admirable for the uncanny ability to turn out outstanding yet inexpensive wines that are very easy to find (in Italy, at least). At the same time, the estate's more expensive top wines, such as the Nero d'Avola Mille e Una Notte and the Passito di Pantelleria Ben Ryé, rank with the best in their respective categories. This year's lineup of new vintages is especially strong.

Mille e Una Notte 2011 - Sicilia Igt 95

Purple-ruby. Captivating floral aromas of plum, black currant, star anise, cocoa and cinnamon; this is a great deal more floral and perfumed than the 2010. Smooth, lush and round; a fresh, juicy quality contributes to the impression of early personality and precise flavors of dark berries and cocoa. Offers a delightful combination of texture and focus. Finishes broad and long, displaying ripe, very polished tannins and repeating violet nuances. This is one of the best young Mille e Una Notte wines I have memory of. A blend of mainly Nero d'Avola with small additions of Syrah and Petit Verdot. Drinking window: 2019 – 2029.

Ben Ryé 2014 - Passito di Pantelleria Doc 93+

Bright amber-gold. Penetrating aromas of aromatic spices and tropical fruit, complicated by honey and peach nectar. Saline and brightly acid, showing lovely lift to the rich, sweet flavors of spicy stone fruit, mango and grilled plantain. Long, rich and ripe but also very precise, showcasing lovely balance; I would have never guessed this has 199 g/L of residual sugar (the 7.9 g/L total acidity helped fool me). Strikes me as a much more freshly and lightly styled wine than some past vintages of Ben Ryé, but each will have its fans. Drinking window: 2016 – 2025.

Lighea 2015 - Zibibbo Sicilia Doc 91+

Pale straw. Lovely aromatic notes of lychee, white pepper, cinnamon and white flowers. Bright but richly textured, showing sneaky concentration and lovely balance to the tropical fruit and floral flavors. Finishes very long and clean, showing an enticingly spicy sweet and sour component. Knockout wine. Today, Lighea is one of Donnafugata's best wines, yet it has had a long and checkered history: it was originally made with Müller-Thurgau, then it was turned into a Zibibbo, Inzolia, and Cataratto Comune blend, and finally, since the 2009 vintage, it has been 100 percent Zibibbo. Donnafugata decided to go 100 percent Zibibbo once it planted Moscato di Alessandria on Pantelleria at higher altitudes (400 meters above sea level), in a much cooler microclimate ideal for making fresher, vibrant dry wines. Drinking window: 2016 – 2018.

Tancredi 2012 - Terre Siciliane Igt 91

Good full ruby. Deep, reticent, almost austere aromas and flavors of spicy dark plum, currant leaf, underbrush, coffee and graphite. Multilayered and complex; polished tannins provide backbone to the rich fruit. This still-brooding wine finishes long, displaying outstanding inner-mouth perfume. Strikes me as by far the best, most polished young Tancredi in memory; this is a wine in which rustic notes of hot-climate

Cabernet Sauvignon almost always used to dominate. An almost 50/50 blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Nero d'Avola, plus small amounts of Tannat and other grapes. Drinking window: 2018 – 2023.

Kabir 2015 - Moscato di Pantelleria Doc 91+

Bright pale gold. High-toned peach, pineapple and sweet spice aromas. Super-ripe and sweet, showing a late-harvest quality, but as glyceric as this is, there's also terrific lift and acidity to the candied pineapple and ripe stone fruit flavors. The creamy finish is broad and very long. This is a dessert in itself but will match well with anything involving blue cheese or bottarga. Drinking window: 2016 – 2018.

Sherazade 2015 - Nero d'Avola Sicilia Doc 91

Bright red. Blue fruit and sweet spices on the explosively fruity nose. Then fresh, bright and juicy, offering red berry, red cherry and mineral flavors lifted by a bright violet kick. Finishes long and vibrant with a whiplash of fresh dark berries and noteworthy youthful tannic bite. Relatively low fermentation temperatures (79°F/26°C) help express the fruity nature of Nero d'Avola. Full of early appeal, this is a gorgeous wine for the money. Drinking window: 2016 – 2018.

Anthilia 2015 - Sicilia Doc 90+

Pale straw. Intense melon, lemon and pear on the bright, very fruity nose. Then more ripe orchard fruit in the mouth, along with hints of custard cream and a saline bent. Lively, harmonious acidity on the long, juicy, and surprisingly spicy finish. Anthilia is always a great buy, but this 2015 is a knockout effort. Anthilia is the name in Latin of a mountain located behind the winery (the Italian name of which is Entella). Mainly Cataratto varieties and other local grapes. Drinking window: 2016 – 2017.

SurSur 2015 - Grillo Sicilia Doc 90

Pale straw. Passion fruit and herbal nuances, plus a strong white peach element on the very fragrant, almost aromatic nose: this reminded me a little of Zibibbo (Muscat of Alexandria). Fresh and saline in the mouth, showing sneaky concentration to the apple, fresh citrus and herb flavors. Long and clean, this is a lovely wine that strikes me as much more interesting than any SurSur made before it (though I'm not wild about this vintage's Zibibbo-like note). This is a relatively new wine for Donnafugata: the first vintage of SurSur was 2012. The estate currently rents the vineyard from which this wine is made, but it has moved to plant new Grillo vineyards and will soon switch to estate fruit. Antonio Rallo believes that Grillo has lots of potential, "like a Pinot Grigio but with a Sicilian minerality." Sursur is the Arabic name for Grillo. Drinking window: 2016 – 2017.

Sedàra 2014 - Sicilia Doc 88

Bright ruby. Perfumed aromas of blueberry, violet and spicy underbrush. Then more blueberry in the mouth, complicated by coffee and spicy cocoa nuances to the dense but lively mouthfeel. Finishes long but slightly tough, offering rising chewy tannins. This exuberantly fruity, rich wine will benefit from another year in the bottle. Mainly Nero d'Avola, plus small percentages of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Syrah. Drinking window: 2017 – 2019.

Chiarandà 2013 – Chardonnay Contessa Entellina Doc 87

Bright golden-tinged straw. Lactic aromas of milk and creamy stone fruit. Better and fresher in the mouth, offering well-delineated peach and nectarine flavors. Medium-long and ripe on the soft finish. This wine used to be called Chiarandà del Merlo (until the 2001 vintage), but salespeople and importers complained that customers were getting confused by the word "Merlo," which seemingly caused them to think the wine was a red. 100 percent Chardonnay. Drinking window: 2016 – 2017.

By Ian D'Agata