

REVOLUTION

IF WE WANT THINGS TO STAY AS THEY ARE, EVERYTHING WILL HAVE TO CHANGE

BY ROBERT CALVERT

Things are changing in Sicily.

If you are familiar with Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's wondrous novel, *The Leopard*, or the movie it inspired, you may recall what Tancredi Falconeri said to his uncle, Don Fabrizio Corbera.

The novel commences in the spring of 1860, shortly after

Giuseppe Garibaldi and 1,089 associates landed in Marsala. Garibaldi's goal was to conquer the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, ruled by the Bourbons in Naples, so that Sicily could be annexed by the Kingdom of Sardinia, and eventually become part of the Kingdom of Italy, ruled by Victor Emmanuel II.

Tancredi has decided to throw in with the Garibaldini. En route to join the red-shirted rebels in Corleone, he stops at his uncle's palace. Don Fabrizio is dismayed to learn that the young gentleman would associate with such ruffians. "You're crazy, my son! Go off to join those people! They're all

mafiosi and swindlers," he says. "A Falconeri must be with us, for the King."

Tancredi responds, with a twinkle in his eye: "For the King, certainly, but for which King? Unless we take a hand



Photograph courtesy of thatsarte.com

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Photograph courtesy of Cusumano

1. Cusumano's Ficuzza vineyard in winter.
2. Lunch at Cusumano: agrodolce.
3. Cappella Palatina in the Palazzo Reale in Palermo, built by the Normans but incorporating Byzantine elements.



Photograph courtesy Gina Samarotto (ginasamarotto.com)



Photograph courtesy of Assovini



Photograph courtesy of Assovini

TASTING NOTES



Planeta Chardonnay Sicilia Menfi DOC 2014

Region: Menfi

Description: Golden yellow with green glints. Rich, intense aroma of peach, golden apple, white figs, vanilla cream and meringue with overtones of hazelnut and honey. Fruit flavors are balanced by acidity and rich mineral character.

Pairing: Ravioli with fish and lemon sauce, handmade pasta with truffles, grilled meats.



Cusumano Insolia Terre Siciliane IGT 2012

Region: Sicily

Description: Light straw color. Aromas of pineapple and citrus peel with soft floral accents. Offers refreshing flavors of apples and pears. Hints of citrus zest linger.

Pairing: Grilled fish or chicken finished with olive oil and herbs.



Donnafugata SurSur Grillo Sicilia DOC 2015

Region: Sicily

Description: Brilliant straw yellow. Fragrances of white-fleshed fruit, especially peach, combined with intriguing scents of wild flowers and cut grass. The palate is soft and fragrant and offers a perfect harmony between aroma and taste.

Pairing: Seafood appetizers, vegetarian first courses and roast fish.



Photograph courtesy of Planeta



Photograph courtesy of Planeta



Photograph courtesy of Donnafugata; Anna Pakula

now, they'll foist a republic on us. If we want things to stay as they are, everything will have to change."

The superficiality of change on the ancient island becomes a theme of Lampedusa's great work.

Notwithstanding Lampedusa's political fatalism, in the world of wine there really has been change in Sicily—a revolution, in fact.

Three Visionaries

Sicily is a great place to grow wine. Enological fecundity has been a mixed blessing for the island, though. *The Oxford Companion to Wine* reports that "concentration on quantity over quality" led to overproduction, declining prices and poor sales. This was unsustainable,

and as a famed economist once said, "If something cannot go on forever, it will stop." It did stop, thanks to Sicily's wine revolutionaries.

Giacomo Rallo and his wife, Gabriella Anca, founded the Donnafugata Winery (donna-fugata.it) in 1983.

The name Donnafugata—literally, woman on the run—refers to a Queen of Naples who in the Napoleonic period fled Naples for Sicily, where she found refuge in the town of Santa Margherita di Bèlice, southwest of Palermo. Lampedusa set part of *The Leopard* there, calling the area Donnafugata.

Diego Planeta was head of Cantine Settesoli (cantineset.esoli.it), a Sicilian wine cooperative. During decades at

the helm, Planeta encouraged his members to modernize. "I understood that enology had to change," he told an interviewer. "We couldn't just keep on crushing grapes with our feet."

In the 1990s, Planeta decided to start a family wine business. Working with Alessio, Francesca and Santi Planeta, he founded the Planeta company (planeta.it), which now owns vineyards in multiple locations around Sicily. Planeta has pioneered in enotourism, establishing luxurious resorts near several of its wineries.

Writers love to describe **Lucio Tasca d'Almerita** as "the last of the Sicilian leopards." His family owns an estate in the heart of Palermo (villatasca.com) and Regaleali (tascadalmerita.it), a wine business they have oper-

4. The pool at Planeta's La Foresteria Estate near Menfi.

5. Vineyards at Donnafugata's Contessa Entellina estate.

6. Breakfast at La Foresteria.

ated since the 1830s.

Tasca told a journalist, "In the 1970s we only sold generic wine in barrels, then my father decided to bottle it and export quality wine." In the 1980s the company began producing Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon and Pinot Noir. Today Regaleali is devoting attention to native varieties. "We are developing the native varietals now to create a legacy for our children," he says.

In 1998, these warriors for quality—Rallo, Planeta and Tasca—founded Assovini Sicilia (assovinisicilia.it), which created

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the new Sicilian DOC system. Look for "Sicilia DOC" (winesof sicily.com) on labels of Sicilian wines. Wines released since 2012 also may display regional names—Erice, Etna, Menfi, for example.

What about the "native varieties" Lucio Tasca mentioned? There are many. Two white varieties that stand out are Grillo and Insolia.

Grillo is used to make Marsala, a fortified wine.

Wine writer Elisabetta Tosi says varietal Grillo is quintessentially Sicilian, with "the color of the midday sun, the fragrance of cedars and Mediterranean herbs, the flavor of red citrus and of yellow tropical fruit."

Like Grillo, Insolia (sometimes spelled Inzolia) is a white grape that traditionally has been used to produce Marsala. Insolia typically offers "aromas of flowers, understated fruit aromas and flavors featuring nuts and herbs, a soft acidity, finesse and elegance, well-balanced alcohol and a soft, mineral finish."

Three Sicilian Whites

The color of golden straw under the afternoon sun, **Planeta Chardonnay Sicilia Menfi DOC 2014** (\$42) offers delicate fragrances of honey, vanilla and honeysuckle that hint of suave flavors to follow—peaches, pears, oak, hazelnuts and citrus rind. Alessio Planeta says that this elegant Chardonnay was the first wine Planeta released in quantity. It is something of a flagship for the firm.

Like Elisabetta Tosi, I am excited about Grillo. On my all-too-brief Sicilian sojourn, I had opportunities to taste several Grillos. All were absolutely delightful.

Donnafugata SurSur Grillo



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Photo by Holger Obenaus

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Sicilia DOC 2015 (\$20) is the color of pale straw. Its bouquet evokes images of citrus rind and minerals. Bright and refreshing, with twinkly acidity, SurSur offers up crisp citrus flavors—Meyer lemons and grapefruit—perched on a foundation of subtle minerality.

Grillo means cricket in Italian. SurSur means cricket in the classical Arabic language that was spoken in Sicily during the Arab occupation. SurSur's label depicts Gabriella Anca as a girl, "running barefoot through the flowers and fresh grass, following the singing of crickets that sounds sweet to her ears, like a thousand 'SurSur.'"

Cusumano Winery is run by Diego and Alberto Cusumano and their father. Cusumano has a very modern facility near the town of Partinico. Its Insolia grapes come from the firm's largest vineyard, located in Ficuzza, near Corleone.

Cusumano Insolia Terre Siciliane IGT 2012 (\$32) is a deep straw color, almost amber. Its bouquet of peaches, flowers and caramel heralds flavors of pear, peach and apple laced with lemon rind and a whisper of Fino Sherry.

Conclusion

Through nearly three millennia, Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Normans, Arabs, Spaniards, Italians and even Albanians have called Sicily home, drawn there by clement weather, fertile soil and intense natural beauty.

If you have an opportunity to visit the ancient island, seize it. Failing that, drink as much Sicilian DOC wine as you can. ♣

Robert Calvert drinks and writes in Chicago. Questions or comments? Email Robert: RBCalvert@att.net.



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