

VNY PROUD

E Food

Donnafugata: the Right Wine by a Reassuring Sicilian Family

Finding grace in my toughest times

*New York State of Wine**by Cathrine Todd*

Gabriella e José, Donnafugata (Foto Pakula, tratta dal sito www.donnafugata.it)

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When you don't have a family, you either look at those who have a dependable, warm one with toxic jealousy in your heart or you open your heart and allow someone else's devoted, personal tribe to fill your heart with everything that is good in life. I have chosen to do the latter. And one family that I greatly admire is the winemaking family of Donnafugata in Sicily

Grateful for the Gift of Great Sicilian Wines

Family is complicated for everyone, in one way or another – those complications differ for each person. Sometimes it is the typical, “I love you but I want to strangle you” sort of family, where people need their space from each other yet they are there when it counts. Sometimes, though, it is deeper and darker than that... such as my biological family. I have written about this before, and certainly those of you who follow me on social media may have seen that I was recently given a reminder of that dark past. My blood, both parents and a biological sibling, are people who use other people for money so they could abuse alcohol and drugs. In the past, anytime I would hear from them, it was always because they wanted something, which often times equated to money... I soon realized their “emergencies” were lies to take advantage of compassionate people. I was lucky that they had little to do with me as a child. It was the kindness of people who were not my blood that taught me how to live a loving, healthy life filled with joy and generosity.

Choices We Make

When you don't have a family, such as I, you either look at those who have a dependable, warm one with toxic jealousy in your heart or you open your heart and allow someone else's devoted, personal tribe to fill your heart with everything

amily that I greatly admire is the winemaking family



José Rallo, Donnafugata (Ph. Pilotto, www.donnafugata.it)

Donnafugata

Although I certainly enjoy Donnafugata wines on my own, I was sent some samples as a wine writer not that long ago. It was great to taste (**again**) these wines because I have had a rough week. Recently, I was forced to revisit some ugly things about my own family. I was feeling down, my light was diminished, my stomach unsettled and I could feel physical pain in my heart. And so I opened some of the Donnafugata samples, slowly sipped a few of the wines and just closed my eyes. I remembered my lunch with one of the family owner's José Rallo, along with three other women writers. We spent the day talking about our own journeys as José talked about her own parents Gabriella and Giacomo and how they always believed in her no matter what she wanted to do. After working in the world beyond Sicily having come back to work for her family, her father was completely open to her more experienced ideas to reach a wider audience when it came to their wines.



Antonio Rallo (Left) and his family (Ph. Gambina, www.donnafugata.it)

Grace under Pressure

A few months after that lunch, José's father passed away and I could not help but think how devastating it was for her and her family. Then, shortly after her father's passing, I had gotten into a conversation with a marketing woman who worked in the wine industry, in the Veneto region of Italy – quite a far distance from Sicily, Donnafugata's home. We talked about the death of Giacomo Rallo, and how so many people from around the world came to his funeral because he was such a special, kind person.



Harvest of Contessa Entellina, Donnafugata (Ph. Gambina, www.donnafugata.it)

This marketing woman even had her own tale about a mix up with placing Giacomo on the wrong bus during an important wine event – he did not show up at the dinner where his wines were being served but was taken to dinner at the wrong location. She apologized profusely to him after the big mistake, and she said he simply smiled and said he still had a wonderful time and he enjoyed getting to know new people without the pressures of talking about his own wines.

It can be difficult to have no real family of your own when you are a child or young adult. You cannot help but try to grasp onto any sort of mentor or adult figure who is an ideal example of living a life to bring joy to others. There are many people I can point to, whether they knew it or not, who were those examples that I desperately needed... and more recently, it has been José and her incredible family. Donnafugata is the reason why the right wines, with the most reassuring stories, have been a big part in guiding me towards finding grace in my toughest times... and I am grateful for that gift.



Antonio Rallo, Donnafugata (Ph. Gambina, www.donnafugata.it)

Cathrine's Recommendations

The below three special occasion wines I was sent as samples from the winery, but the everyday and fantasy wine were tasted separately on different occasions.

Everyday Drinking Wine (less than \$15)

2015 Donnafugata Anthilia, Sicilia DOC (\$13): Majority Catarratto. This wine is one of my go-to summer wines when I want a refreshing white wine. Grapefruit and peach flesh with hints of rosemary that goes perfectly with seafood.

Special Occasion Wine (from \$15 to \$50)

2016 Donnafugata Sur Sur, Sicilia DOC (\$20): 100% Grillo. Fresh cut flowers with green mango and lime blossom, with a richer body and longer finish than the Anthilia.

2016 Donnafugata Lighea, Sicilia DOC (\$20): 100% Zibibbo (Muscat of Alexandria). These Zibibbo vines are grown on low head-trained bush vines, "vite ad alberello", that is inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List as a 'creative and

sustainable practice’. White lily, with touch of spice and juicy nectarine, with a sustained, smoky mineral finish and a noticeably textured body.

2015 Donnafugata Sedàra, Sicilia DOC (\$16): Majority Nero d’Avola. A light red with character that has bright black cherry flavors with a touch of cinnamon spice and sweet tobacco. Perfect with pizza!

Fantasy Wine (over \$50)

2013 Donnafugata Ben Ryé, Passito di Pantelleria, Passito di Pantelleria DOC (\$45 for half bottle): 100% Zibibbo (Muscat of Alexandria). Pantelleria is a volcanic island between Sicily and Africa and the vines used for this wine are more than 100 years old. This wine has an exquisite golden color and flavors of green figs, dried Turkish apricots and broken volcanic rock. The lush body has a long, expressive finish.



Cathrine Todd
New York State of Wine

After growing up in the colorful city of New Orleans, I moved to Manhattan, in New York City, in 1993. I earned the Diploma from the Wine & Spirits Education Trust (WSET), based in London,... [\[More\]](#)

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