



WINE FOOD TRAVELS LIFESTYLE

## Donnafugata – Changing The Landscape Of Sicilian Wines

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Donnafugata Wines – Rallo Family

In recent years the interest and excitement for Sicilian wines have been on the rise. That wasn't always the case as Sicily has had a history of producing bulk wines. Over the last 30 years, the landscape has changed dramatically, winemakers have emphasized unique sites and terroir that has resulted in a dramatic shift in the wines that are produced today. In recent years, winemakers have shifted their focus to producing high-quality wines, placing emphasis on terroir and cultivating more indigenous grape varieties. The Rallo family of **Donnafugata** wines is at the forefront of this change, bringing positive and impressionable change to the region. ***Their passion has changed the perception of Sicilian wines around the globe.***

Winemaking in Sicily dates back to 1500 BC when the Greeks settled in Sicily, but it was not until recent history that Sicily made its mark on the wine map. In 1773, John Woodhouse began producing one of Sicily's most beloved products, Marsala wine. Sicily continued to produce bulk wine and its reputation in the wine world was gravely impacted. That landscape has changed, thanks to visionaries like Gabriella & Giacomo Rallo.

Gabriella and Giacomo Rallo realized the enormous potential of Sicilian wines and the demand for local autochthonous grape varieties. They also had a passion for preserving and promoting unique terroirs of Sicily. The Rallo family has helped change the image and quality of Sicilian wines. With an elevated quality of wines, a focus on unique terroirs, and emphasis on autochthonous grape varieties, the Rallo's have helped attract a new generation of winemakers in Sicily. These winemakers are lifting the quality of wines coming from Sicily. ***Today Donnafugata is crafting some of the finest wines from Sicily. These are magical wines that are garnering wide acclaim and praise.***



## History of Background of Donnafugata Wines

The history of **Donnafugata** starts in Marsala with Giacomo and Gabriella Rallo. The Rallo family had been producing Marsala wine since 1851. In 1990, Giacomo and Gabriella decided to change the family focus to high-quality table wines. They created an artistic label and a new style of Sicilian wines. Gabriella had inherited vineyards in Contessa Entellina (western Sicily). These vineyards were exceptional terroir for grape growing. In 1987 they made Vigna de Gabri, a Cru wine that was a passion project for Gabriella. It was a Cru made from the ancient grape variety Ansonica.

In subsequent years the family built a winery near their vineyards in Contessa Entellina. Marsala remained their headquarters for refining and bottling. They first produced three wines under Donnafugata (White, Red, Rose), because at the time, Sicily's name and reputation were not established and Sicily was not known for quality wines. Slowly they introduced international grapes, like Chardonnay, because Insolia and Ansonica were not recognized outside of Sicily.

The passion of the Rallo family led them to expand and buy vineyards in Vittoria, on the island of Pantelleria, and the rugged slopes of Mount Etna. In 1990, brother and sister José and Antonio joined Giacomo and Gabriella in producing Sicilian wines of elegance and finesse. I had the opportunity to spend a few days with Antonio and José. It was widely apparent that the passion of their parents (Gabriella & Giacomo) has been passed down to the next generation, whose vision and dedication remain – **to elevated the wines of Sicily.**



Donnafugata Wines – José and Antonio Rallo

## Donnafugata Name And Labels

Gabriella Rallo wanted her wines to have more personality and character than the other wines that were being sold on the market. She had the vision to call their company Donnafugata. A name that means "donna in fuga" (woman in flight) and refers to the story of a queen who found refuge in the part

name for Sicilian wines and significant for the history and future of Sicilian wines. ***For Gabriella, the name Donnafugata was symbolic of breaking with the past and creating something new, while elevating the quality of Sicilian winemaking.***

Many interpret the meaning of Donnafugata to be more personal and symbolic to Gabriella Rallo. Gabriella was an english teacher. She decided to quit because she wanted to be an active part of the vineyards and winemaking. Gabriella had a green thumb and spent a lot of time in the vineyards. Having traveled the world, she was introduced to incredible wines, which made it very natural for her to lead the men in the vineyards and fields. This was quite unusual for Sicily at the time, to have a woman in the fields, leading men. Donnafugata is Gabriella Rallo, the fleeing woman, symbolizing Gabriella fleeing from traditional work, and putting the pants on to work in the fields to produce Sicily's finest wines.

Gabriella was a pioneer and a brave woman who had an artistic vision for Donnafugata. She took inspiration from art, music, wine, and literature to create names and labels for Donnafugata wines. For example, Sedara is the family name in the book *The Leopard* and Tancredi is the nephew of the Prince in the book. Tancredi was an aristocrat with revolutionary ideas, hence the wine Tancredi is a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon with Nero d'Avola (a revolutionary blend for Sicilian wines at the time). The wine is elegant and aristocratic like Tancredi, but also strong and masculine. Gabriella's symbolic names for her wines resonated with wine lovers. The labels are works of art designed by Stefano Vitale, who is an exceptional artist that captures the personality of each wine.

## What Sicily Has To Offer – Expressed Through Donnafugata Wines

During my visit with Donnafugata, we toured Mount Etna and Pantelleria, experiencing first hand the diversity of landscapes, climates, grapes, and terroir. Donnafugata cultivates its vineyards in many unique, diverse, heroic and extreme terroirs. The focus is on producing the best grapes possible.

In Contessa Entellina they cultivate the autochthonous grapes, Ansonica, Catarratto, Grillo, Nero d'Avola as well as international varieties. Zibibbo reigns King on Pantelleria with Carricante and Nerello Mascalese on Etna. They cultivate Frapatto and Nero d'Avola in Vittoria. The DOC's span Sicily: Contessa Entellina, Pantelleria, Etna, and Frapatto di Vittoria. They also represent wines from the only DOCG in Sicily, Cerasuolo di Vittoria.

The following tasting was a sampling of what Sicily has to offer as expressed through the passions and dedication of Donnafugata wines.

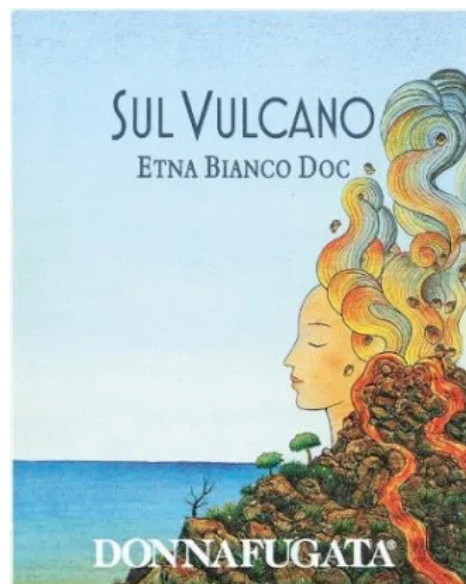


**SurSur Grillo 2018** is 100% Grillo from Contessa Entellina on the west coast of the island. Grillo is indigenous to Sicily and is a crossing between Zibibbo (from Pantelleria) and Catarratto, which is also indigenous to Sicily. Grillo is made in various styles throughout Sicily. SurSur is made in stainless steel, so the wine is light, fresh, fruity and savory. It is elegant and clean with fresh grassy notes. SurSur is Arab for cricket, like the variety name, Grillo also means cricket, hence the cricket on the label.

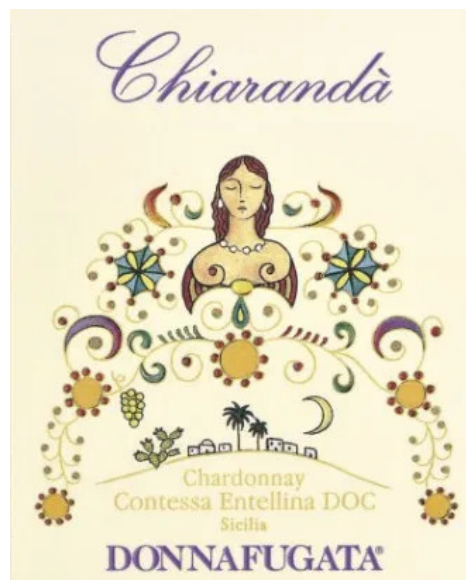




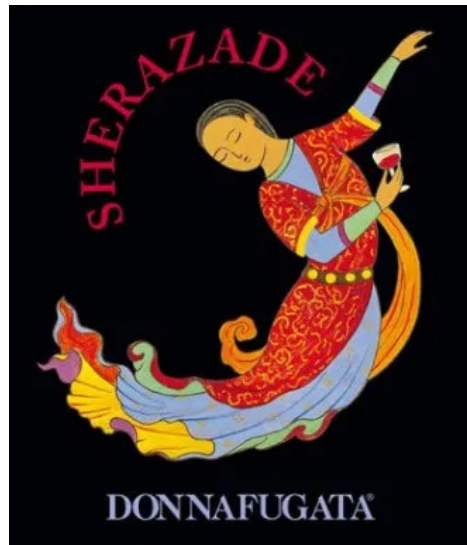
***Sul Volcano Etna Bianco 2017*** comes from the eastern side of the island on the north-facing side of Etna. It is made with an indigenous ancient white grape, Carricante. This wine is manually harvested with a careful selection that is aged partially in tanks and partly in French oak for 10 months and then spends 9 months in bottle. It is an elegant wine that is complex with white floral aromatics. Exuding elegance and minerality, the wine is fresh and savory. There is a remarkable minerality that is distinct to Etna.



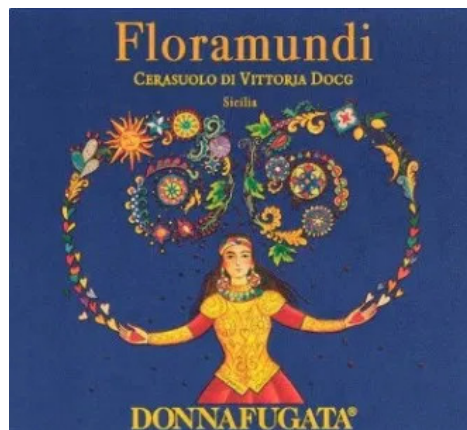
***Chiarandà 2016*** is a Chardonnay made on the southwest side of the island from Contessa Entellina DOC. The Chardonnay comes from clay soils that give the wine structure and power but also nice elegance and bright acidity. The wine is clean and elegant with herbs, spice, and hazelnuts. It has a beautifully long mineral finish with a savory quality. The Chiarandà has nice aging potential.



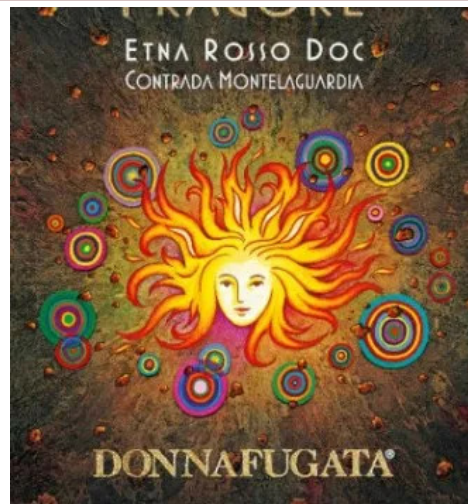
Arabian Nights. The label is intensely Mediterranean in lust Donnafugata style.



**Floramundi 2017** is from Cerasuolo di Vittoria, the first and oldest DOCG in Sicily. It is a grape from two indigenous varieties, Nero d'Avola and Frapatto. Nero d'Avola is famous all over Sicily but Frapatto is from the southern part of Sicily in Vittoria. The wine is friendly, fruity and drinkable, yet had a nice complexity. The Nero d'Avola gives the wine structure while the Frapatto gives the wine elegance. There is prominent red fruit and cherry on the front, followed by green pepper, cinnamon, and sweet white flowers. This wine is ideally served slightly chilled. The Floramundi is made with traditional grapes of Sicily but in a very modern style.



**Fragore Etna 2016** is produced on the eastern coast of Sicily from Nerello Mascalese. The wine is distinct compared to the other Sicilian wines we tasted during this tasting. This wine has extraordinary complexity due to the volcanic soils on which the grapes are grown. The sulfur in the soils give the wines a distinct style. This is a cru made solely from Contrada Montelaguardia and 2016 is the first vintage of these wines. The wine is elegant with soft tannins. It is savory, elegant, and full of intense minerality. There is nice structure and complexity. Notes of orange zest and spice linger on the palate. Fragore can be aged and will show beautifully for the next 5-7 years.



**Mille e una Notte 2015** is a wine that Giacomo Rallo wanted to be the flagship wine for not just Sicily, but all of Italy. The wine was designed to be the benchmark of all Nero d'Avola from Sicily. Giacomo wanted this wine to be an ambassador for quality Sicilian wines. It is a complex wine that will change every time you try. The wine has intense notes of sour cherries, dark plum, and chocolate. It is rich, complex, and ever-changing in the glass. The style is a focus on elegance and bright acidity. It is not just a powerful wine that fills your mouth, but there is a lot of finesse and complexity. The name Mille e una Notte is influenced by the Arabs, a dedication to the cross-culture of Sicily.



**Ben Ryé 2010** is a refined Passito made with 100% Zibibbo from the island of Pantelleria. We tasted this wine over dinner, immediately following our formal sit down master tasting. This wine rounded out the portfolio of Donnafugata wines. Ben Ryé is one of the greatest and most beloved sweet wine of the world, loved by Sommeliers and wine lovers from around the globe. The 2010 has a deep amber hue, showing signs of the 10 years spent in the bottle. On the nose, there is an intense and brilliant bouquet of apricot, pear, orange and spicy notes which continue onto the palate with beautiful freshness and intense fruit. There is a wonderful long seductive finish.



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