

# Cricket WINE

by Robert Calvert

Wine experts all over Italy have been studying the country's many indigenous grape varieties.

Sicily has been a leader in this effort. Scientists have visited old, out-of-the-way vineyards around the island, taking samples of vines and analyzing their DNA. (This clarifies whether grapes known by diverse names and grown in diverse regions are actually the same varieties.) Researchers are cultivating intriguing specimens in test vineyards near Marsala and Comiso. The goal is to establish which varieties of grape are hardiest and make the tastiest wine — and to reintroduce minor varieties that slipped from memory despite having survived the phylloxera epidemic that devastated European vineyards in the late 19th century.

One of the most interesting and flavorful grapes studied thus far is Grillo, sometimes also called Riddu or Ariddu. Cultivated originally and principally in the province of Trapani, Grillo now is grown in much of western Sicily. It is descended from Catarratto and Zibibbo (the Sicilian name for a type of Moscato), and it seems to have been around since about 1873. Grillo is one of several varieties used to produce Marsala. Now Grillo is coming into its own on its own as a varietal wine. It's about time.

Wine expert Elisabetta Tosi writes that Grillo is quintessentially Sicilian, with “the color of the mid-day sun, the fragrance of cedars and Mediterranean herbs, the flavor of red citrus and of yellow tropical fruit. ...” Tosi is a big fan of Grillo.

Grillo wines can be difficult to find in the U.S. even today, but they are available. Ask the manager at your favorite wine shop to find a bottle for you if you don't see one on the shelf.

Donnafugata SurSur Grillo Sicilia DOC 2017 (\$21) is the color of pale

straw. Its refreshing fragrances of citrus, particularly grapefruit, are augmented by aromas of grapefruit rind and pebbles fresh from a burbling stream. SurSur's flavor is as citrusy as its bouquet, comprising elements of grapefruit rind, grapefruit, and lemon. After your bottle has been open for a while you may identify fleeting hazelnut flavors. We tasted



the 2015 vintage of this wine a few years ago. Our description of the 2015 was substantially the same as our description of this newer release — except that we mentioned “twinkly acidity” and Meyer lemons.

What's in a name? As you probably know, Grillo means cricket in Italian. (I have no idea why the grape is called cricket, and nobody I asked could tell me.) SurSur means cricket in the classical Arabic language that was spoken in Sicily during the Arab occupation (from about 900 until about 1090). SurSur's label depicts a young girl “running barefoot through the flowers and fresh grass, following the singing of crickets that sounds sweet to her ears, like a thousand ‘SurSur ...’.”



If you are a student of Italian literature, you likely are intrigued by the name of the winery that produces SurSur — Donnafugata. Yes, the winery's name is a reference to the area where Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa set part of his novel, “The Leopard.”

Donnafugata means “woman in flight,” and the name refers to an actual woman in flight, Queen Maria Carolina of Naples, who fled Naples for Sicily in 1798 to avoid being captured by French invaders. (French revolutionaries had been unkind to her sister, the late Marie Antoinette.) Maria Carolina found refuge in a palace in the town of Santa Margherita di Belice, southwest of Palermo. Members of the Rallo family, proprietors of Donnafugata winery, own vineyards not far from Santa Margherita di Belice — in the area where the Albanians live. In fact, some of the grapes used to make the SurSur we tasted grew on the Contessa Entellina estate.



## Donnafugata SurSur Grillo 2017

### REGION:

Sicilia DOC Grillo

### DESCRIPTION:

Brilliant straw yellow; fresh bouquet with notes of tropical fruit and wildflowers; soft with fresh, fruity notes.

### PAIRING:

Seafood appetizers, vegetarian first courses, and roast fish.