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Donnafugata Wines from Sicily Hit All the Right Notes by Wanda Mann



Wine in her glass and a song in her heart - José Rallo of Sicilian winery Donnafugata.

When you sit down to share a glass of wine with José Rallo of Donnafugata, prepare to be serenaded and swept away on a sultry Sicilian adventure. José's parents founded Donnafugata in 1983 from the family's historic cellars and today she travels the world as the winery's communications manager. A talented vocalist, José has melded her passions for wine & music together and has hosted and performed at Donnafugata Music & Wine events at prestigious venues - including the legendary Blue Note in New York City. Donnafugata produces quintessentially Sicilian wines

using sustainable methods. The family strongly believes that "from the vine to the bottle, there is no quality without sustainability." I found their wines very expressive and multi-faceted with an appealing easy elegance.



*The Rallo family of Donnafugata - Antonio, Giacomo, Gabriella, and José.
(image courtesy of Donnafugata, Anna Pakula)*

I had the chance to hear José's lovely singing voice and taste her family's acclaimed wines over a cozy lunch in New York City at Black Barn restaurant. Donnafugata's wines are truly a family affair - her brother Antonio is the winemaker and their parents Gabriella and Giacomo are still actively involved. In fact, Gabriella designs or inspires the design of Donnafugata's distinctive artistic labels and was one of the first women to be a major player in the Sicilian wine industry. The name Donnafugata refers to an Italian novel where a queen found refuge in the part of Sicily where the company's vineyards are located today - she was the "donna in fuga", the woman in flight.



As you sip a glass of Donnafugata SurSur Grillo 2014 (\$21), close your eyes and imagine José happily singing the Bossa Nova classic The Girl from Ipanema. She described it as the perfect song to pair with this aromatic and fresh white wine. A great sip for the spring and summer season, SurSur has luscious flavors of peach, plum, and tropical fruits with a touch of wild flowers. A great alternative to Pinot Grigio, it pairs nicely with seafood and vegetables. The name SurSur comes from Arabic - it means cricket and also refers to the sound that these insects make.



José described Tancredi 2011 (\$40) as an affordable luxury and a wine that displays Mediterranean elegance. A blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Nero d'Avola, Tannat and other varieties, Tancredi has appealing flavors of blackberries with a racy dash of spice and balsamic notes. Suggested pairings include lamb, roasts, and porcini mushrooms.

Described as their most important red wine, Donnafugata Mille e Una Notte 2010 (\$90), is a majestic blend of Sicily's signature grape Nero d'Avola with Petit Verdot and Syrah. A wine that tells a story, its name is inspired by the literary masterpiece, The Thousand and One Nights. José's father Giacomo collaborated with the legendary winemaker Giacomo Tachis to produce the first vintage of Mille e Una Notte in 1995 and it now appears on wine lists at many fine restaurants. A bold wine but not overpowering, I loved its luscious flavors of red plums and juicy cherries that are balanced by pretty peppery notes and chocolate. It has a beautiful

long finish - this is a vino that you want to savor. Uncork this wine and let it breathe a bit before serving it with succulent meat dishes. The label was designed by José's mother, Gabriella.



Let's end on a sweet note with a lovely sip of Ben Ryé Passito di Pantelleria 2013 DOC (\$45). Produced on Pantelleria, a volcanic island located between Sicily and Africa, it is a naturally sweet wine made from the Zibibbo (Moscato d'Alessandria) grape. Made using the traditional apassimento process to dry the grapes to concentrate the sugars and flavors, Ben Ryé is not overwhelmingly sweet but a balanced symphony of flavors - apricot, honey, candied citrus peel, a touch of herbal notes, and a vibrant acidity. It pairs beautifully with foie gras, blue or aged cheeses, and dark chocolate. The color of the sun, sip this while listening to some soothing music and feel transported. The name Ben

Ryé comes from "the Arabic term the son of the wind because the wind sweeps constantly around the grape clusters on Pantelleria."

If you're planning a trip to Sicily, Donnafugata welcomes visitors for tours and tastings. And, if you're lucky, perhaps José Rallo will serenade you!



*The Donnafugata Estate in Contessa Entellina.
(image courtesy of Donnafugata, Anna Pakula)*