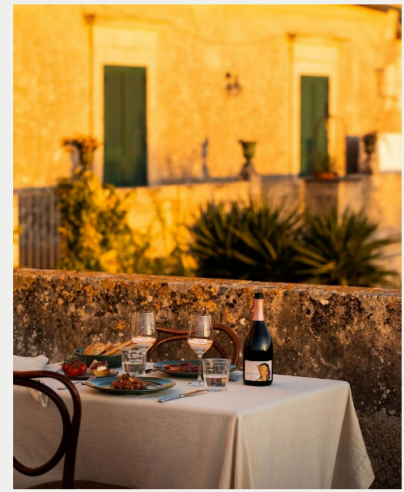


(Entertaining)

The Best Sicilian Wines To Buy & Drink Right Now

by NICOLE KLIEST
July 10, 2023

It's not just Nero d'Avola, friends.



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Unlike anywhere else in Italy, or rather, anywhere else in the world, Sicily is a landscape that's long been a symbol of bounty and biodiversity. It flaunts everything from windswept cliffs and turquoise beaches to craggy mountains and an active volcano. One such abundance Sicily is revered for is the **wine grape**, with approximately 70 varieties considered native to the island. "Being in the real middle of the Mediterranean and having the possibility of working with a true puzzle of terroirs — with soils from the poor black volcanic ash to the super white fine calcareous powders — this is real luxury in winemaking. This is the magic," **Planeta** winemaker Patricia Toth tells TZR.

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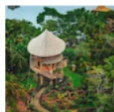


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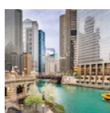


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By Angela Melero



Trying to make sense of how grapes can grow in these drastic environments might be puzzling to those not in wine. Emanuele Corsale of **Donnafugata** points to differences in both climate and soil types when asked why several different types of wines can be made here. "In the western part of the region, the climate is **Mediterranean** with hot summers and warm winters but in the eastern part, in areas like Mt. Etna, the climate is continental," Corsale explains. There's also Pantelleria off the coast. "It's a wild and volcanic island between Sicily and Africa with a climate that is characterized by mild winters with little rain, and even more so the strong Scirocco winds." Because of these harsh conditions, winemakers have to protect the grapes. "The vines are cultivated on very low *alberellos* (small terraces), bordered by drystone walls made with lava stones." This area has even been granted Unesco World Heritage status.



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Planeta

While a trip to Sicily is the best way to get a lay of the winemaking land, diving into the region's wines at home is a fine alternative. But where to begin? "Sicily is a wine continent, as we like to call it," Corsale says. As such, there are several varieties you can choose to sip, but here's a primer on the best ones to begin with.

Nero D'Avola

The Nero D'Avola black grape variety is native to western Sicily and is perhaps the most famous of the entire island (certainly the most recognized around the world). "This grape can be used for fresh and light wines as well as full body reds wines like our iconic Mille e Una Notte," Corsale says. You can expect aromas like plums and black cherries from this indigenous grape.

Grillo

Sicily's most popular white grape variety is Grillo. "Historically, it's been principally planted in the province of Trapani but in recent years is spreading into other parts of the island for the production of dry white wines," Corsale says. If you haven't taste it yet, one can expect a medley of aromas. "Grillo offers a fresh bouquet with captivating notes of white-fleshed fruit combined with scents of wildflowers and mint. The fruity notes resurface on the palate with pleasant freshness and smoothness," Corsale adds.

Nerello Mascalese

The principle grape variety of Mount Etna, Nerello Mascalese is an ancient variety also famous in Sicily. "It's a black grape variety that grows in high density but with low yields, the wines produced are elegant and one-of-a-kind," Corsale says. "The volcanic soil brings to life the variety's most prestigious versions under the name Etna DOC." Common tasting notes include lush red fruit flavors and dried herbs.



Image by Marie LaFauci/Moment/Getty Images

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Carricante

“The whites are way more fresh and bright than people might expect,” Toth says of white varieties grown on the island. Carricante is one such grape, and is “characterized by minerality and freshness with some salty notes,” Corsale adds. “It [makes] white wines suitable for long aging in the bottle.”

Frappato

A red that Toth describes as “playful”: Frappato brings a fresh burst of red berries to the table. It tends to produce light bodied wines and can even be served with a slight chill. Toth points to Cerasuolo di Vittoria (a DOCG in Sicily that blends Nero d’Avola and Frappato) as an excellent wine to drink on its own on a warm summer day.

Lesser-Known

If you’ve got a handle on the main varieties of Sicily, you might be curious what winemakers and experts in the region suggest sipping beyond the staples. “My answer to this could be very long. But definitely you should form a friendship with Grecanico,” Toth says, adding that sparkling Carricante is also on the rise. “I really enjoy the growing curiosity and knowledge around this. Great potential, in my opinion.”

Fortified styles should also be on your radar. “They are representing an incredible heritage in the history of winemaking, but today only a few people learn them and enjoy them: Some of these fortified wines are really like a story closed in a bottle,” Toth says. Of course there’s Marsala, perhaps the best known style. But Corsale points to Ben Ryé as another Sicilian fortified to try, which is made using a special technique called *Passito*. “The name *Passito* comes from the Italian word *appassimento*, which translates to ‘withering.’ The drying process concentrates the sugars in the grapes, leading to wines with higher alcohol content and sweeter flavor,” Corsale says.

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Food Pairings

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The only thing better than Sicilian wine is Sicilian wine paired with food. And with summer in full swing, warm temperatures are at top of mind. “In very hot Sicilian summers we recommend fresh and light wines such as Lighea, which is one of our wines produced in Pantelleria, a 100% Zibibbo perfect with all types of oily fish, baked pasta in white sauce, and fried fish,” Corsale says. She also points to rosé, suggesting it with aperitifs, raw fish, vegetarian dishes, and delicate meats.



*Iniziativa valida dall'11 al 20 luglio 2023. Operazione sottocosto. 1.200 pezzi disponibili in tutta Italia su modelli Virtuo selezionati. Vedi Termini e Condizioni.



Donnafugata

Planeta Cerasuolo di Vittoria

\$28

A wine that Toth points to as the perfect style to drink on its own or pair with food, it's 60% Nero d'Avola and 40% Frappato, meaning there's a strong balance between freshness and complexity. Enjoy notes of red and wild fruits, mulberry, and pomegranate. There's also spice notes like sandalwood, coriander, and Sichuan pepper.

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Donnafugata x Dolce&Gabbana Rosa

\$45

"This is a blend of Nerello Mascalese and Nocera and has a pleasant fragrance, minerality and finesse. It surprises with remarkable persistence."

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Colosi Grillo

\$17

This lovely Grillo is a pale straw yellow color and the aromas are well-suited for summer (think golden apple and tropical fruit).

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Bonavita

Faro

\$40



One of Toth's recommendations, Bonavita in the Faro DOC is a small family-run estate in the northeastern corner of Sicily. This blend of Nerello Mascalese and Nerello Capuccio has notes of bramble, wild berries, forest floor, and dried cranberries.

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 Noleggio a Lungo Termine Arval
Arval 

Feudo Montoni

Catarratto Vigna del Masso

\$22

If you're eager to try a lesser-known Sicilian grape, try Catarratto. This wine comes from a single-vineyard plot with old vines and has aromas of florals, minerality, and fresh herbs. It's also certified organic and less than \$20!

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