



Written by
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Etna and other Sicilians



Amid the doom and gloom surrounding Italy's 2014 grape harvest, there is one wine region where growers are extremely pleased with their 2014 vintage - Etna in eastern Sicily, whose small districts, named after important wine villages, are called *contrade*. Some of those bottled as single-contrada expressions by Passopisciaro, the Etna estate belonging to Andrea Franchetti of Tuscany's Tenuta di Trinoro, are mapped here. Etna's harvest is generally late October so many of the grapes were still on the vine when I visited the island last month (see [Sicily and the south - a selection](#)).

I'll be writing about recent developments in this extraordinary corner of the wine world on Saturday but am publishing below notes on all the Sicilian wines I have come across recently. They include a complete set of very enthusiastic reviews of the forthcoming single-contrada 2012 wines from Passopisciaro, a vertical of the wines of Pietradolce (whose bottles were ridiculously heavy up to 2007 but then suddenly fell into sensible line), and a collection of some

wines from all over Sicily of which the owners of the Corvo brand, Duca di Salaparuta, now a sister company to Amaretto di Saronno, are especially proud.

Like practically every Sicilian wine company of any size, they have recently invested in Etna and what came with their well-placed vineyard is a beautiful old *palmento*, one of the traditional stone wineries described by Walter in *Etna's endangered yeasts*. It was here that they showed this range of wines from several other estates. I was intrigued by their decision to plant Pinot Noir on Etna (and they are not the only ones). Apparently the great Tuscan consultant Giacomo Tachis had advised it, but it does seem a strange choice to me when Pinot is so delicate, Etna so intrusive, and Nerello such an obvious and well-adapted choice as grape variety. I asked the agronomist which clones of Pinot they had planted but he couldn't remember.

It is a sobering thought that, for all its current ultra-fashionable state, Etna wine constitutes only about 1% of all Sicilian production. A good 70% of it is red but there are some really interesting whites, and I was sufficiently taken by one pink to make a *wine of the week*.

Etna vintages have been very well-behaved recently with the odd years being cooler and the even years being warmer than usual.

Please note that I have been a bit cautious with suggested drinking windows as I have relatively little experience of really mature Etna wines (although I Vigneri's 2002 was still in good shape in 2014).

Tasting notes are grouped by producers listed in alphabetical order.

BONAVITA

- *Bonavita 2012 Faro* Messina. Heady nose. Light and transparent and very dry on the end but with great personality. Grainy finish with some heat but no excess. Massively expressive. 14% Drink 2014-2019
£24.95 Berry Bros & Rudd 17

DUCA DI SALAPARUTA

UK importer Mondial Wine

- *Duca di Salaparuta, Risignolo Kados Grillo 2013 IGT Terre Siciliane* *Inland Marsala terrain with a bit of height, 250-300 m. Picked by hand mid to end August. Free-run juice fermented for three days in stainless, then into new barriques to finish fermentation, then aged for about 40 days, then into concrete.*
Greenish gold. Very refreshing green-fruit aromas. But a bit sweet (low acid?) on the mid palate. Good punchy aroma and then a little soft in the middle. A bit of added acid on the end. 13% Drink 2014-2015
15.5
- *Duca di Salaparuta, Suor Marche Passo delle Mule Nero d'Avola 2012 IGT Terre Siciliane* *Grown in the south of Sicily near Butera. Some vines are 20 years old, usually used for Duca Enrico, and most of these vines were planted in 2002 at about 300 m. Picked mid September. Skin contact for 10 days and then 10 months in barriques, some new.*
Bright crimson. Very fresh, clean nose though a tad volatile. Lots of acidity – none added – 6-7 g/l naturally. 3.3 to 3.4 pH. Notes of oak on the finish. Very bright fruit but not much depth or

grunt on the mid palate. 13.5% Drink 2015-2018

15.5

- Duca di Salaparuta, Vajasindi Làvico Nerello Mascalese 2010 IGT Sicilia *Very smart packaging. Planted at about 600 m below the palmento (old winery) and mainly 10 years old but supplemented by some 20 year old vines. Can't be sold as an Etna wine because it is made outside the region. Short maceration - five days - to control the grape tannins. Aged for 12 months in five-year-old barriques.*

Subtle ruby colour. Has aged quite a bit. Light nose. Rather timid, tired fruit in the middle. 13.5% Drink 2012-2015

€15 RRP 15.5

- Duca di Salaparuta, Vajasindi Nawari Pinot Nero 2010 IGT Sicilia *Planted 2003 at about 800 m. Picked at the beginning of September. Destemmed and maceration for six to eight days. Aged for 12 months in new French François Frères barriques.*

Bright ruby colour remarkably like that of the Nerello Mascalese. The nose is light and not immediately obviously Pinot. Lightly earthy nose. Pretty tart finish. Not heavy but without much varietal character. Hint of Etna's imprint on the mid palate. I don't really understand why they have planted Pinot here! The merest suggestion of violets. Very tart finish. 13% Drink 2015-2018

€30 RRP 15

- Duca di Salaparuta, Vajasindi Nawari Pinot Nero 2011 IGT Sicilia *Cooler vintage. Quite a dark ruby for a Pinot. Again, difficult to discern the Pinot. Lots of acidity - both grape and soil seem to emphasise acidity. Rather brutal, without the soft sweet fruit of Pinot. Awkward and skinny.* 13% Drink 2016-2018

14.5

- Duca di Salaparuta, Suor Marchese Triskèle Nero d'Avola/Merlot 2010 IGT Sicilia *Estate totals 120 ha. Equal blend of Nero d'Avola and Merlot at about 300 m near Butera made since 1998. Vinified separately, blended and then almost a year in barriques.*

Firm crimson. Rich, ripe, friendly sweet fruit. The blend works pretty well! 13.5% Drink 2015-2018

€15 RRP 16

GRACI

- Graci, Contrada da Arcuria 2012 Etna *Carricante. Bags of character. Creamy, honeyed nose but I suspect this is a bit young at the moment to justify its price tag. Relatively soft. Lots tucked in there.* 13% Drink 2017-2024

£29.95 Berry Bros & Rudd 16

- Graci, Contrada da Arcuria 2012 Etna *Bright crimson. Really interesting scent with grainy undertow and fabulous personality. Absolutely pure Etna expression.* 14.5% Drink 2015-2024

£29.95 Berry Bros & Rudd 17

ARIANNA OCCHIPINTI

- Arianna Occhipinti, Il Frappato 2012 IGT Sicilia *Pale crimson. Juicy and sincere though a little sour. Light and fresh - and a bit expensive.* 14.5% Drink 2015-2019

£24.95 Berry Bros & Rudd 16

- Arianna Occhipinti, Grotte Alte 2010 Cerasuolo di Vittoria *Transparent and fresh. Lightweight and savoury. Good structure.* 13% Drink 2013-2018

£39.95 Berry Bros & Rudd 16

- Arianna Occhipinti, Siccagno Nero d'Avola 2011 IGT Sicilia Hamster cages on the nose. Rather sour fruit. Very much an insider's wine. 13% Drink 2015-2020
£25.95 Berry Bros & Rudd 15.5

PASSOPISCIARO

UK importer Corney & Barrow

- Passopisciario, Rosato 2013 Etna Nerello Mascalese. Pale salmon. Perfumed and substantial with masses of character. A real wine! 12.5% Drink 2014-2015
£16.95 Berry Bros & Rudd 16.5
- Passopisciario 2012 IGT Terre Siciliane Very pale crimson. Heady nose of macerated griotte cherries. A hint of orange peel. A warm, pretty alcoholic undertow. Then lots of refreshing acidity and the grainy textural finish of a fine Etna wine. Bone dry and very refreshing though not to be attempted without food. This suggests it could be enjoyed with firm fish. Bring on the Catania market fish restaurant, please! Uncompromisingly true to its origins. Not for neophytes. Quite open on the nose. 15.5% Drink 2014-2020
17
- Passopisciario, Rampante 2012 IGT Terre Siciliane *An ancient cru at 1,000 m that they claim produces one of the most aromatic wines because of the sandy character the lava has acquired. They own 1.4 ha.*
Mid ruby. Very heady indeed. Quite a sumptuous high-toned nose. Dried herbs, quite a rich spread of fruit and veg on the palate. Extremely racy and refined despite the alcohol (of which one is not really aware). Nervy – sort of how you would imagine a Saar version of an Etna wine. Wonderful energy. 15.5% Drink 2015-2025
£155 per case of 6 ib Corney & Barrow 18
- Passopisciario, Guardiola 2012 IGT Terre Siciliane *An old domain between 800 m and 1,000 m that was threatened by the 1947 eruption apparently. Passopisciario buys the fruit from a lower parcel and says that it produces 'complex wines with rich flavours, typically of marzipan, orange and crying red fruit' (sic).*
Mid crimson; bluer than the Rampante bottling. Very sumptuous on the nose with more apparent body. Substantial wine with real bite. Very confident. Almost mainstream! Gorgeous balance and lots of finely etched fruit followed by sculpted refined lightly grainy texture and masses of acidity. Long and so vibrant! 15.5% Drink 2014-2024
£205 per case of 6 ib Corney & Barrow 18
- Passopisciario, Sciaranuova 2012 IGT Terre Siciliane *At 850 m on relatively new lava that has been transformed into thick gravel. They own 1 ha and claim the wine tastes of fermented hay.*
Mid crimson. Quite open and charming on the nose. Lots of rumbustious fruit and richness. Then a very dry, relatively tart finish. Lots of stony elements here. Still a little too gawky to lap up. Needs to integrate a bit more. 15.5% Drink 2016-2025
£195 per case of 6 ib Corney & Barrow 17
- Passopisciario, Porcaria 2012 IGT Terre Siciliane *Large old domain at 650 m that makes robust wines from particularly friable lava. They own 1.5 ha.*
Mid to deep ruby. Quite a vegy, savoury appetising nose that seems to have already evolved a bit of complexity. Round, rich, flattering palate entry with real substance. The fruit dominates the soil graininess here until right to the end of the palate. Very slightly brutal and burly compared with some of the higher-land bottlings. 15% Drink 2014-2023
£225 per case of 6 ib Corney & Barrow 16.5

- *Passopisciaro, Chiappemacine 2012 IGT Terre Siciliane* Small domain at 550 m that makes full-bodied wines on one of the lowest reaches of lava on a limestone base. They own 1.2 ha. Mid crimson. Open even if not one of the most intense, nor complex, noses of this single-contrada collection. Full-on bright red-fruit flavours but much less stoniness than some. Open and friendly at first and then it's pretty drying, sucky-stony character on the finish. Not the most haunting or complete. A bit too drying on the finish. Demanding! It may just be too young. 15.5% Drink 2016-2023
£170 per case of 6 ib Corney & Barrow 16.5

PIETRADOLCE

UK importer Armit, US importer Neil Empson

- *Pietradolce, Archineri 2007 Etna* 3,500 bottles made. In this particular wine there were new tonneaux but they rarely buy new. Dark blackish ruby. Sweet nose and just a hint of malted chocolate. With a hint of rose petals and slightly dried fruit on the finish. Very slight decay after a while too. Fresh, slightly humid year (like 2009). Lots of richness on the front palate and then that dry 'volcanic' chewy quality. Long and throat warming. 14.5% Drink 2010-2018
16.5
- *Pietradolce, Archineri 2008 Etna* Much bluer and more crimson than the 2007. Same treatment. Warmer, drier year (although not as dry as 2012). Sweet polished nose. Much fruitier and richer start and then there's the dry grainy finish. A little in your face – almost brûlée. But masses of pleasure. Kick of freshness on the finish, More confident than the 2007. 14.5% Drink 2012-2020
17
- *Pietradolce, Archineri 2009 Etna* Magnum. Back to a humid, fresh vintage but drier than 2007. Harvest was late, end of October. Dark crimson with a ruby rim. Almost bruised, rhubarby nose, very rich and intense. Something a bit animal, less obviously fruity than the two earlier vintages. Pretty demanding and youthful without the voluptuousness of the 2008 and 2007. Dry finish. Quite severe for the moment but then it is in magnum... 14.5% Drink 2016-2025
16.5
- *Pietradolce, Archineri 2010 Etna* Mid ruby. Possibly a bit paler than some older vintages. A warm vintage again, though cooler than 2008. Real interest and complexity on the nose, but it is so dry it definitely needs food. Hint of spice and orange peel. Very sophisticated. But pretty dry on the end! 14% Drink 2016-2025
17.5
- *Pietradolce, Archineri 2011 Etna* A relatively cool, damp year. Mid ruby. There is great sweetness and lightness and transparency. Compelling and a little gamey. Chewy finish and very youthful but it was great with fresh mozzarella. Muscular. Very lava led. 14.5% Drink 2014-2023
£167.94 per case of 6 Armit 17.5
- *Pietradolce, Archineri 2012 Etna* Warmest year. Luscious and opulent. Some rose character again, definitely floral. Sweet and much less geological than most. A little open and gamey. In your face! 15% Drink 2016-2026
16.5
- *Pietradolce, Vigna Barbagalli 2010 Etna* Labour is four people from local village. Dark ruby. Very rich indeed. Massive spread and hugely opulent. Very grand cru burgundy. So concentrated. A certain wildness. Spice. Fresh and exciting. Long and reverberant. Quite unlike the norm and very Etna but great intensity and balance. 14.5% Drink 2017-2030

18

- Pietradolce, Vigna Barbagalli 2011 Etna Mid ruby. Luscious and beguiling but not quite as complex as the 2010. Lovely ripeness with a fresh finish. Long. Precise and pretty fresh and concentrated. 14.5% Drink 2016-2026
17.5+

PORTA DEL VENTO

- Porta del Vento Perricone 2012 Sicilia Very slightly rank and then loose fruited. A tad stewed. Easy peasy but not very ambitious. 13% Drink 2013-2015
£14.95 Berry Bros & Rudd 15.5

RIGORIA

- Rigoria, Terra delle Sirene Nero d'Avola 2007 Sicilia From Siracusa. Bright ruby. Autumn leaves and lots of fresh fruit. Some complexity and a compliment to Nero d'Avola's potential to age. Dry minerally finish. 14% Drink 2012-2018
£21.50 Berry Bros & Rudd 17

VALDIBELLA

- Valdibella, Ariddu Grillo 2012 Sicilia Camporeale. Mid gold. Not much nose. Rather hot and solid and chewy. 13.5% Drink 2013-2015
£11.95 Berry Bros & Rudd 15
- Valdibella, Kerasos Nero d'Avola 2012 Sicilia A bit big and gamey. Soft. 14.5% Drink 2014-2017
£12.50 Berry Bros & Rudd 15.5

I VIGNERI

UK importer Les Caves de Pyrène, US importer Louis Dressner

- I Vigneri, Vinudilice Rosato Brut Spumante NV Italy *Rosé made from a mix of grapes including Garnacha, and Grecanico grown in the far north at 1,300 m, that they pick in November. Metodo Classico and made at his winery in Milo.*
Great oomph but also great balance and zest. Chapeau! Great mouthful. Drink 2014-2016
16.5
- I Vigneri, Vigna di Milo Superiore 2013 Etna 100% Carricante. He used to make Benanti's Pietramarina. Very floral nose and very youthful but with good acidity. Spreads across the palate. Lots of acidity. 12% Drink 2016-2026
16
- I Vigneri, Vinujancu 2011 IGT Sicilia Deep gold. Throbbing with tension and mountain herbs and broom on the nose. Really quite youthful, almost severe thanks to its high acidity. I suppose this is youthful, low-yielding Carricante with a long life ahead of it. This needs food! Lots of extract, flavour and character though not much alcohol. Very aromatic in a tightly focused way with a hint of lemon peel. Uncompromising. I'd age it a bit... 12% Drink 2016-2024
£29 Roberts and Henry Fine Wines, Whisk Hampers, Exel Wines, Buon Vino 17+
- I Vigneri, Palmento 2013 Italy *Illegal wine! Makes it to give to his 30 vineyard workers.*

Like essence of health. Quite rich with firm lively Etna footprint on the end. Great stuff!
Reminds me of wine made in a garage by Italian families around London. Drink 2013-2015
16.5

- I Vigneri, Vinupetra 2011 Etna Ruby and with a hint of reduction but with lots of personality. Drink 2007-2016

17

- I Vigneri, 1435 2012 IGT Terre Siciliane Transparent ruby. Deceptively super-fruity on the nose and then the Etna lava kicks in on the palate with its earthy tang. Just chock full of local character and hard work here. I don't know what the assemblage is but would not be at all surprised to find there was a fair bit of Alicante as well as Nerello in here. Big and bold and already hugely enjoyable. This is craftsmanship in a bottle. Very fine, refined finish. Fantastic refreshment value. 14% Drink 2014-2024

£25.50 L'Art Du Vin, Hedonism Drinks, Kensington Wine Rooms 17.5