



**IT'S AN ABSOLUTE HOT BED OF ACTIVITY.  
LITERALLY!**

**VINEYARDS, ESTABLISHED ON THE SIDE OF AN ACTIVE  
VOLCANO.**

**ARE THEY SERIOUS?**

**YES, THEY ARE.**

**WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?**

## **MOUNT ETNA**

...on the mediterranean island of SICILIA.

It's the biggest **LIVE VOLCANO** in EUROPE, standing at **+3300 metres** tall and it's growing.

So too is the **HUGE** interest in the exceptionally fine wines that ETNA's courageous and talented winemakers are fearlessly crafting with every new vintage.

**How lucky we are that a recent chance meeting with great friend, Alex Burge ([TENUTA CAPPELLINA](#), Toscana) brought us to discover [PASSOPISCIARO](#).**

**PASSOPISCIARO** is one of the most dynamic wine producers on Mount Etna, known locally as 'à muntagna'. Our encounter happened late on the final afternoon of **VINITALY2016**. While most around us were busily winding down and switching off, we were unwittingly about to be wound up and switched on... big time!

In grape speak, let's set the stage. We're talking **NERELLO MASCALESE**. It's a red grape native to northeast Sicily, the province of Catania and most particularly, the northern slopes around **MOUNT ETNA**. As has been the case for many of Italy's lesser known native red varieties, the potential of these lightly bloomed, thin-skinned grapes has been 'rumbling under' for the past 10 years or so. Yet with each vintage release, **the sense of expectation continues to mount.**



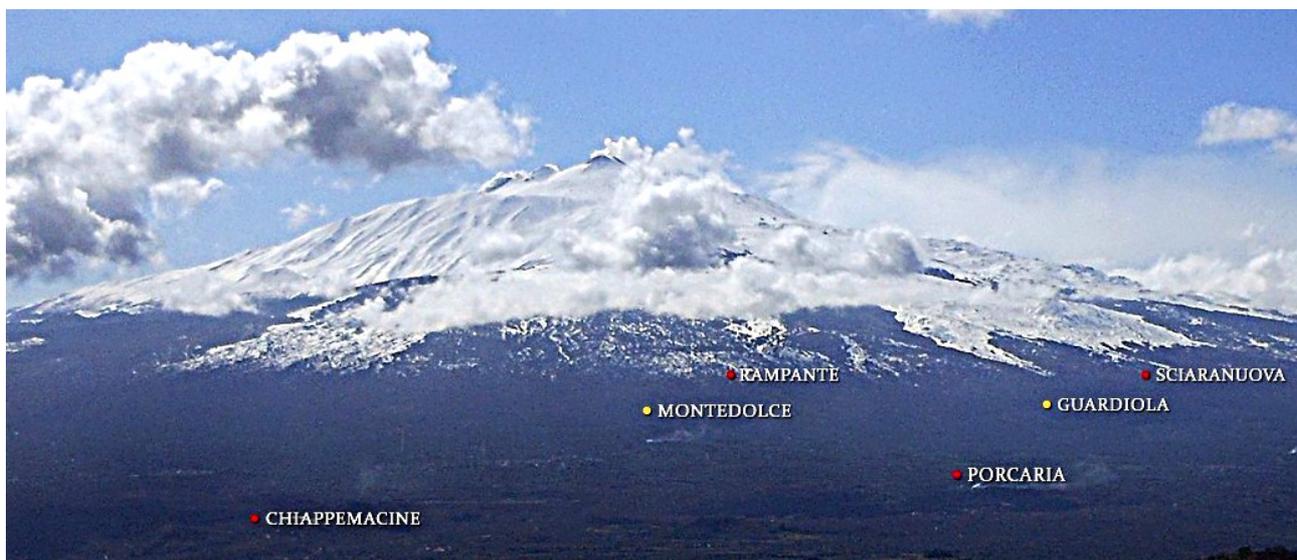
For **NERELLO MASCALESE** we've got the feeling things have just about reached the point of actual eruption.

You see, at that moment on that day, standing before us was **The COMPLETE 'UNRELEASED' 2014 CONTRADE SELECTION** from **PASSOPISCIARO**.

**A FULL FLIGHT HORIZONTAL** – 5 individual 'cask' samples, featuring 5 unique 100% Nerello Mascalese single cru wines, produced with the fruits of 5 different vineyard parcels (a.k.a. Contrade), located at 5 different altitudes around the foot of **ONE GIANT VOLCANO**. At moments like this you double take...is it a dream? Nope, this is happening for real.

We say at the foot of the mountain but to be precise, in metres, these 5 contrade/vineyards are located between 550 to 1000 metres above sea level. To add still further '**jus to the cru**', these precious parcels are all 80-100 years old, with 2 of them, **Guardiola** and **Rampante**, already more than 100 years old. Yes people, we are talking extreme territory here.

What great fortune to also have **Letizia Patanè, Export Manager, Passopisciaro/Vini Franchetti** sit in with us. As someone born and bred in the shadow of ETNA, her expert local knowledge and passion were essential ingredients in this volcanic rock n' roll tasting.





## The 5 Passopisciaro contrade/cru are – **CHIAPPEMACINE, PORCARIA, GUARDIOLA, SCIARANUOVA and RAMPANTE.**

- **CHIAPPEMACINE – C:** The 1.3 hectare vineyard is located on Etna’s north facing slope 550 metres above sea level. The 80 year old vines are planted with a density of 8,000 alberello (bush trained) plants per hectare.
- **PORCARIA – P:** The 1.5 hectare contrade known as Porcaria is set 650 metres above sea level and planted with 80 year old Nerello Mascalese bush trained ‘alberello’ vines. Density is 8,000 vines per hectare.
- **GUARDIOLA – G:** One of the 2 century old vineyards, the Guardiola contrade is the largest at 2.3 hectares. It is 850 metres above sea level and planted with the same density 8,000 plants per hectare. Here the yields are low at approximately 13 quintals per hectare.
- **SCIARANUOVA – S:** The smallest of the 5 contrade, Sciaranuova is an 80 year old vineyard measuring 1 hectare in size with a planting density of 8,000 vines. Located at 850 metres above sea level.
- **RAMPANTE – R:** At 1,000 metres above sea level, Rampante is the highest of the 5 Passopisciaro contrade. It’s also the second of the winery’s 100 year old vineyards covering 1.7 hectares with a planting density of 8,000 vines per hectare. Yields are approx 16 quintals per hectare.

### **As you can see, each contrada is quite modest in size.**

**SCIARANUOVA** the smallest at 1 hectare and **GUARDIOLA** the largest at 2.3 hectares. Planting density is high with 8,000 vines per hectare all trained to ‘alberello’ (small bush form). What is outstanding is that all 5 contrade are dedicated Centers of **NERELLO MASCALESE** Excellence, focused on discovering the essence of this variety.

Interestingly, it’s worth mentioning that Passopisciaro’s ‘purezza’ approach is somewhat removed from more local tradition where **NERELLO MASCALESE** is blended with fellow native Sicilian red, **NERELLO CAPPUCCIO**. Due to Nerello Mascalese’s relatively thin skin / antocyanin content, its mono-varietal wines are often seen to lack colour. So Nerello Cappuccio is added to enhance that perceived deficiency. Of course there’s no harm in that and blended wines have their place. It’s just that blending makes it difficult to learn the true identity of a site specific grape like Nerello Mascalese. Indeed one would argue in the same way for Nerello Cappuccio, but that’s for another day.



**At this moment, let's pause to reflect again on where we were.**

We were in Verona at Vinitaly, Pavilion 8 on stand with Passopisciaro. Right. But then we were simultaneously on the slopes of ETNA.

You see there's no other way to describe what happened. Andrea Franchetti's stunning 2014 vintage quite simply transported us there. We are talking about **100% Nerello Mascalese instilled with the power of bilocation!** Truly amazing.

### **A BRIEF CASK SAMPLE SUMMARY:**

The 2014 Passopisciaro Contrade Selection are already exceptional wines. Not yet bottled, all 5 reds are ripe for the picking. **Fresh, Rich with Tannic and Mineral vibrancy, Structural Balance, Elegance and Difference.** Yes, there are differences. Recognisable from Contrada to Contrada. **They clearly appear to be reflecting the identity and uniqueness of their individual Cru.**

As one climbs the mountain, at **Chiappemacine** as yet perhaps still a little austere in youth but its evolving; **Porcaria** is robust with potent elegance just like the **Guardiola** with its mouth coating tannins and pronounced minerality. Higher still **Sciaranuova** is displaying richer colour tones and more pronounced fruit composition, while the super fresh attack and firm tannins of **Rampante** will in time deliver electrifying style. It really does seem as though something unique and dynamic is happening at each site.

**We have never tasted NERELLO MASCALESE quite like it.** Dare we say it, even as cask samples, these wines are taking one step further, mirroring as they already do **the elegance of Burgundy and the majesty of Barolo.**

Literally gobsmacked :)

**Most would see 'danger and mayhem' in the midst of 'the lava and ash'.**

Only a visionary could have foreseen the oenological poetry that such a volatile location could ascribe to its wines. **Franchetti is one such visionary.**

**How ironic it is** therefore, that for all he has done to stimulate ETNA's renaissance, his own Contrade Selection must continue to be labelled IGP Terre Siciliane. Based on technicalities, **his cru lie outside the current Etna DOC zone.**



It's not for the want of trying. Even the bottle labels cannot carry the name of the cru, merely the initial of each contrada – C, P, G, S, R.

**Hampered by intransigence and inflexibility. What poetic injustice!**



You can see the hallmarks of an epic tale, one which hopefully some day we'll be able to recount in full. But for now, we'd like to part with these thoughts. **Andrea Franchetti is a man who took it upon himself to literally move a mountain. To change peoples perceptions**, not just of NERELLO MASCALESE and ETNA but also about SICILY as a home where quality wine making can flourish.

**We have never met Andrea.** And as such, we would not wish to give the impression of knowing him or understanding his artistry. But we can say this, hand on heart, in the presence of Passopisciaro's Contrade Selection, **his pure creative genius connected with us and us with it.**

His work is visionary and his 5 contrade are veritable **theatres of dreams**. If previously we had only ever seen the 'CRESCENT' of Nerello Mascalese's potential, following this privileged encounter with Franchetti's art, it's possible to say we've just seen the **'WHOLE OF THE MOON'**.



**Soon to be bottled, the official release of VINTAGE'14 is expected toward the end of 2016.**

No doubt Andrea Franchetti's Passopisciaro 2014 Contrade Selection will be lauded and acclaimed far, far, far from ETNA's smoking craters.

But, you know something, even more than all the acclaim, **these CONTRADE are gonna be LOVED...** all the way **TO THE MOON AND BACK.**

Could there be any other greater prize than that? Chapeau to Andrea, Letizia & all at PASSOPISCIARO...**like a comet, keep blazing your trail !**

#SOUNDSLIKEWINE #ESSENTIALISTENING

**THE WATERBOYS - 'THE WHOLE OF MOON'**

(Vintage 1985 – Song, Music & Lyrics written by Mike Scott)



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**"PASSOPISCIARO... TO THE MOON AND BACK"** COMPOSED BY BEN LITTLE.

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