



HIS OWN DRUMMER

ANDREA FRANCHETTI HAS LONG PRODUCED SOME OF TUSCANY'S BEST REDS. NOW HE'S ALSO A LEADER ON SICILY'S MOUNT ETNA

BY ROBERT CAMUTO • PHOTOGRAPHS BY MOLCHEN PHOTO

Andrea Franchetti drove to Tuscany in the winter of 1990 for a little downtime in the country.

Then 41, he'd spent most of the booming 1980s as a wine importer in New York and as the owner of a short-lived restaurant in Rome. His idea was to spend some weeks alone—apart from his wife and two young sons—at the centuries-old ruin of a stone farmhouse he'd bought a decade earlier in a remote part of the pastoral Val d'Orcia, near the border with Umbria.

But something unexpected happened after he arrived. "I went crazy for the place—I was mesmerized," he says on a spring morning, looking out over rippling hills covered with grain fields and oak forests stretching to the region's towering landmark, the extinct volcano Monte Amiata. "I didn't want to go back to Rome," he adds. "So I decided to make wine."

Now 67, Franchetti is one of Italy's most iconoclastic modern wine success stories. With no formal training, agricultural background or wine consultants, he has developed his Tenuta di Trinoro to offer some of Italy's most notable Cabernet Franc. The estate has produced more

than two dozen wines earning 90 points or higher on *Wine Spectator's* 100-point scale. His most recent releases include the 2014 vintage of the estate's namesake bottling (94 points, \$210). The blend, based on Cabernet Franc and Merlot, ranks as one of the best Tuscan reds from the problematic 2014 vintage, as do two 95-point wines from the estate, both made solely from Cabernet Franc: Toscana Campo di Camagi (\$110) and Toscana Campo di Tenaglia (\$100). His Toscana Le Cupole 2014 (93 points), also dominated by Merlot and Cabernet Franc, is the most accessible pricewise, at \$27, and saw 4,600 cases made, by far his highest-production offering.

"He is an artist ... like a character from a novel or another planet," says his friend Jean-Luc Thunevin, the renegade St.-Emilion winemaker. "He doesn't care about competition or what others think—he's in his own world."

In the summer of 2000, Franchetti took a vacation to Sicily, fell in love with Mount Etna and bought an old winery there. In the years that followed, he became a leader of Etna's wine renaissance. His Passopisciaro winery has released 24 wines from the local grape Nerello Mascalese that scored 90-plus points, as well the inky cult wine Franchetti, dominated by Petit Verdot.

"Without Andrea, the Etna story would be very different, I think," says Alessio Planeta, chief winemaker of Planeta, a leader in Italian wine. "He quickly saw Etna as a fine-wine region. He thought big. He had a vision to the high end without compromise and without fear."

Franchetti is an eccentric, descended from one of the rare Jewish families accepted into the ranks of the Italian aristocracy, having been granted a hereditary barony in the 19th century. He looks like a country gentleman from another time, stomping through his vineyards in dusty English brogues, with a mop of light hair above thick-rimmed eyeglasses that frame pale blue eyes.

From the start, Franchetti has preferred dense, ripe wines, though in recent years, he has cut down the use of new oak *barriques* and overripe grapes. He is meticulous about the timing of his harvests for optimal ripeness, and he is candid about balancing high-pH wines by adding tartaric acid. At a time when many of his peers tout gentler, noninterventionist winemaking, Franchetti takes the opposite approach: an intensive schedule of extraction during fermentation (at least two daily pump-overs along with cap submersion), and using commercial yeasts, after his early experiments with wild yeasts led to a series of stuck fermentations.

His approach to wine production is intensely personal, and purists have criticized him for importing foreign cultivars over local grapes. Franchetti's answer to critics has always been, "Why can't I make the wine I want to make?" He works organically in his vineyards and times his harvests and winery work to the

RECENT RELEASES FROM FRANCHETTI

PASSOPISCIARO

SCORE	WINE	PRICE
92	Passopisciaro Terre Siciliane Contrada G 2013	\$57
92	Passopisciaro Terre Siciliane Franchetti 2013	\$149
91	Passopisciaro Terre Siciliane Contrada C 2013	\$54
91	Passopisciaro Terre Siciliane Contrada P 2013	\$68
90	Passopisciaro Terre Siciliane Contrada S 2013	\$55
90	Passopisciaro Terre Siciliane Passorosso 2013	\$41

TENUTA DI TRINORO

SCORE	WINE	PRICE
95	Tenuta di Trinoro Toscana Campo di Camagi 2014	\$110
95	Tenuta di Trinoro Toscana Campo di Tenaglia 2014	\$100
94	Tenuta di Trinoro Toscana 2014	\$210
94	Tenuta di Trinoro Toscana Campo di Magnacosta 2014	\$120
93	Tenuta di Trinoro Toscana Le Cupole 2014	\$27
91	Tenuta di Trinoro Toscana Palazzi 2014	\$190

phases of the moon. But he is quick to point out, "I'm not particularly green-minded or ideological—I just don't like chemicals."

Another quirk: He doesn't drink. After what he says were years of partying to excess while consuming some of the world's best wines, Franchetti slowed his consumption and completely stopped more than a decade ago. "I stopped drinking wine as I started making wine," he says, explaining that he made the change to gain a clearer head for winemaking. "You know, chefs barely eat," he deadpans.

Franchetti was born in New York in 1949. His mother, an American heiress of South Carolina's Milliken textile fortune, wanted to have her child in an American hospital.

He grew up an art-world insider in the Rome of the 1960s. One uncle was an influential contemporary gallerist; another was the famed expatriated American painter Cy Twombly.



When Andrea Franchetti bought the land for Tenuta di Trinoro in the early 1980s, this part of Tuscany's Val d'Orcia, which lies near the Umbrian border, was largely wild and overgrown. Today, Trinoro accounts for almost 55 vineyard acres in the region.

Wine Spectator

Though his family connections and wealth ensured him an elite education, Franchetti quit school in the Italian equivalent of 11th grade. He cycled and hitchhiked to Afghanistan, wrote some magazine articles and played bit parts in low-budget Italian noir films. But for the most part, he says, "I played around until I was 32."

By the early 1980s, says Franchetti, he was intoxicated from overindulgence in drinking and drugs. "I decided I needed to put on a tie and work," he says, "so I went to America." Before he left for New York, Franchetti sold a Twombly painting given to him by his uncle in order to buy the ruins of a house and more than 100 acres of land that would become Trinoro. Then he forgot about it for a decade.

After six years importing northern Italian wines in Manhattan, he married his Italian girlfriend from the 1970s and returned to Rome.



A worker at Franchetti's Sicilian estate, Passopisciaro, prunes vines in the winter, when they're dormant. The cuttings are burned to keep spores and pests from surviving, as well as to reduce waste.

From the beginning, Franchetti's wine inspiration at Trinoro faced big hurdles. In his corner of the Val d'Orcia, there had been no viticulture for decades; most of the area's hills were used by shepherds for grazing. "It was a viper's nest," he says. "It was all abandoned."

To make matters worse, Franchetti had no experience in agriculture. "I didn't know anything in the world about plants," says Franchetti. "I thought [agriculture] was the most boring thing in the world."

He had no interest in Tuscany's dominant native red grape, Sangiovese. He loved the wines of Bordeaux and traveled there to learn all he could. He was inspired by Cabernet Franc-dominated wines, such as the 1990 vintage of St.-Emilion château Cheval-Blanc's second wine, Le Petit Cheval.

"It gave me a fantastic idea of what Franc would be in a wine," says Franchetti. "Cabernet Sauvignon is an international taste—the universe of Cabernet Franc is earthier and more elegant at the same time."

At Trinoro, he and a pair of workers using pickaxes and a backhoe excavator dug into the soils to find those best-suited for vineyards. Most of it was local blue clay that was so compact it wouldn't support vines. So he scouted the lower hillside slopes and stream banks of his property for soils with mineral-rich alluvial deposits. "When you found stones, it was encouraging," he remembers. "When there was some sand and silt, it was even better."

Franchetti planted 85 percent Cabernet Franc, followed by Merlot, Petit Verdot and Cabernet Sauvignon—a formula he's stuck with over the years as he's nearly quintupled the estate's size to almost 500 acres, about 55 of which are under vine.

In the mid-1990s, a new wave of European boutique winemaking was taking hold, and Franchetti befriended a pair of other maverick vintners: Thunevin of the then-upstart Château Valandraud and Peter Sisseck of Spain's now-iconic Dominio de Pingus. The three regularly shared their thoughts on winemaking and on a common ideal: If you were careful in what you did and you limited your production, you could do as well as Lafite and the other top growths.

Trinoro's first commercial release was 1997, but its first-ever vintage was 1995, when Franchetti used young vines to produce Le Cupole, which became the estate's second wine, now accounting

for more than two-thirds of Trinoro's nearly 6,700 cases a year.

By 1997, Franchetti and his vines were ready for a small-production "supercult wine." Slashing vineyard yields and using his ripest fruit, Franchetti produced 875 cases of his debut signature blend, the Tenuta di Trinoro Toscana (93 points), inspired by the new style of St.-Emilion wines that were fetching top prices. Thunevin sold his first several vintages as futures in Bordeaux. That same year, Franchetti also blended his best Merlot with Cabernet Franc to make the first vintage of his Toscana Palazzi (92 points).

From the start, the rarity and style of the wines made them a hit—the first vintage of Tenuta di Trinoro quickly sold out, primarily in France and Great Britain. And by the 2000 vintage, when Franchetti took over distribution back in Tuscany, Italians were eager to buy the wines as well.

This success not only meant Franchetti could invest in Trinoro, it gave him the cash and winemaking confidence to look elsewhere. He also went deeper into the study of his vines as they developed with age. After a decade of winemaking, he began noticing stark vineyard-to-vineyard differences in the ripeness and flavors of his Cabernet Franc: "With time, the soils win out."

With the 2011 vintage came a 133-case single-vineyard Cabernet Franc called Campo di Magnacosta, from the vineyard that produces his lightest red wines. With the 2014 vintage, released this year, there are two more Cabernet Francs: Campo di Tenaglia and Campo di Camagi—the latter representing the darkest, most concentrated version.

But the flagship remains Tenuta di Trinoro Toscana, a blend that changes according to Franchetti's inspiration. The 2012 vintage was dominated by Cabernet Sauvignon, the 2013 by Cabernet Franc, and the 2014 by equal parts Cabernet Franc and Merlot. "In one year, you will have Cabernet Francs from the three vineyards; another year, you'll have phenomenal Cabernet Sauvignon," Franchetti explains. "You build with the best you have."

Franchetti's winemaking in Trinoro's utilitarian, hangarlike cellar is constantly evolving. Since 2007, he says, he has reduced aging time in Bordeaux *barriques* for all his wines from 18 months to six months. "It was too much wood," he says. "For me, it's been a

slow separation from what I learned in Bordeaux.”

Two years ago, Franchetti was thinking about the future and succession. His four children, ages 16 to 40, have yet to show an interest in the wine business.

So Franchetti partnered with his younger cousin Carlo Franchetti, 47, a former London banker who bought a house and land about 10 miles south of Trinoro in San Casciano dei Bagni. There, Carlo found about an acre of relatively high-altitude Pinot Noir vineyards and has planted more, releasing his first Sancaba bottling with the 2013 vintage, numbering about 100 cases.

The Franchettis have pooled their properties into a company called Vini Franchetti, in which Carlo is both minority partner and presumed successor, with his own distinct tastes but a shared sense of style.

“Andrea likes big, rich-fruit wines, and I like lean, elegant wines,” he says. “New blood brings new ideas, and we continue to experiment with wood types, barrel sizes, aging times, etcetera, but that is just technical stuff that means nothing without the right sensibility to guide it.”

When Franchetti went to Sicily 16 years ago, he says, he visited the north face of active volcano Mount Etna, where he saw black lava soils at high elevations that were not being used to their potential. Trinoro was already a financial success, and that gave him the confidence and cash to think about making wine beyond Tuscany.

“They were selling wines that were still fizzing in the bottle,” recalls Franchetti, who was taken by Etna and by the impressive position of an abandoned winery he found above the town of Passopisciaro. “I met the owner, and he told me a price,” Franchetti says. “I offered five times less. He said OK. He was happy to get rid of it.”

Franchetti produced his first vintage, 2001, the following year from rented Nerello Mascalese vineyards. From the start, he has been one of the latest harvesters on Etna, with some of the highest vineyards, at over 3,200 feet.

But Franchetti admits he long misunderstood Nerello Mascalese, Etna’s dominant red cultivar, which typically produces a pale wine with vibrant acidity.

“It took years for me to understand how to make that wine,” Franchetti says. “At first, I went the wrong way, trying to extract color and body from the grape. But Nerello is not made with extraction and skins, it’s made with this tight, pale juice.”

He confesses that for his first vintage, he secretly broke Sicilian wine rules by adding one *barrique* of “the best magic Merlot I ever made at Trinoro,” also from the 2001 vintage, to his Sicilian wine, which is classified as IGT Sicilia—meaning the wine was supposed to be made from only Sicilian grapes. Franchetti’s Merlot addition was about one-eighth of the blend in that year’s 200-case production. “I couldn’t face Nerello wine, so unsumptuous,” he explains today.

But by 2005, Franchetti says, he understood Nerello. That year’s Passopisciaro (which, as of the 2013 vintage, has been renamed Passorosso) earned 88 points from *Wine Spectator*. With the 2008 vintage, he released a series of four single-vineyard bottlings, and



Andrea’s younger cousin and presumed successor, Carlo Franchetti (left), part-owner of Vini Franchetti, balances Andrea’s taste for assertive, full-bodied wines with a preference for austerity.

in 2011 added a fifth. Now, with about 75 acres under cultivation, he produces about 6,700 cases per year from Etna.

Not content with only making good wines from native grapes, he sought to do something distinctive. And when he planted vineyards on abandoned terraces near his winery, he picked a couple of late-ripening foreigners—Petit Verdot, which had fallen out of favor in Bordeaux, and Cesanese d’Affile, from the Rome province. Since 2005, he has used the Petit Verdot, usually with some percentage of Cesanese, for his dark, brooding Etna flagship, Franchetti. Priced at \$149, the 2013 vintage scored 92 points.

Despite much-improved viticulture and quality in the bottle, Franchetti believes Etna wines are still far from their potential. “I think in 20 years, there will be a grand Nerello,” he says. “It takes time to make good wines. Everyone who came there is still new. It’s just beginning.”

Franchetti sees the Val d’Orcia and Etna as two sides of a coin—the first representing nature’s bounty and the other a lavic “underworld.” He has chosen to make wine in both places because of their beauty. “It’s a poetic experience,” he says. “If it was just making wine and selling it, and the recognition, I would never do this.” □