

# Wine Spectator

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## An Italian Vineyard Feels the Flames

Plus, El Bulli's wine cellar hits the auction block, and covert wine thieves lift \$200,000 worth of Italian vino

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- The summer of 2012 has brought record heat waves around the world, with fires igniting pretty much wherever flammable things exist. Colorado is burning, and now there's fire on the mountain in Sicily, where Etna's mountainside vineyards are feeling heat. Southern Wine & Spirits (SWS), the largest wine distributor in the United States, has come to the aid of Coloradoans, after a grassroots fund-raising drive from two SWS Colorado branch employees caught the attention of SWS corporate headquarters in Miami. Whatever the Colorado donors raised, Southern's Charitable Foundation has matched. The money, through Red Cross, will aid those in the state who have lost their homes and possessions to the fires. The Southern Colorado team has thus far raised \$7,700.

The hot climes and vigorous sirocco winds in Sicily have helped fan the flames on Mt. Etna. Shepherds traditionally set fire to the mountainside to fertilize the soil, an unfortunate practice, as the shepherds often lose control of their handiwork. Even at high elevations, temperatures are reaching the high 90s, and in recent days, the village of Guardiola has been feeling the heat, with flames licking up nearly to the cellar of Passopisciaro, a prestige winery run by Tuscan producer Tenuta di Trinoro. Their Chardonnay vineyards, at an altitude of 3,300 feet, were not fireproof either: Passopisciaro estimates 20 percent of the 2012 Chardonnay crop has been lost to the damage. Since Mt. Etna is erupting pretty much all the time, it seems to Unfiltered a questionable location to set up an immobile business, but equally questionable that some volcano-dwellers feel the need to set even more fires.

- Unfiltered was saddened when Spanish chef **Ferran Adrià** decided to close one of the world's most exclusive restaurants, El Bulli, this year (at least, before we had a chance to eat there). While Adrià's world-renowned inventive cuisine is no longer on the menu, the wines that El Bulli partner and beverage director **Juli Soler** collected to pair with Adrià's cuisine will soon be up for grabs. Sotheby's will be auctioning off the 10,000-bottle cellar, which includes more than 1,600 different labels, including 1999 Domaine de la Romanée-Conti Romanée-Conti that was originally priced at \$6,600. The date of the sale has not yet been announced.

- Last year, Unfiltered lamented a summer that was chock-full of wine crime, and unfortunately for those most recently victimized, the warm-weather theft trend continues. Last week, nearly 29,000 bottles of wine, valued at nearly \$200,000, were stolen from Cantele, a winery in Italy's Puglia region. According to winery owner **Paolo Cantele**, who answered Unfiltered's questions via translator and consultant **Jeremy Parzen**, the heist was carried out by a well-organized group of about a dozen thieves wearing masks and gloves, whose movements were caught on the winery's video camera system. "They knew what they were looking for, and cherry-picked the best bottles," said Cantele. The winery makes about 2 million bottles per year, and while Cantele said that the theft will not hinder their ability to fulfill orders, he wrote on the winery's website that "the 2009 Amativo is totally gone. There is no legitimate channel through which wine shops, distributors or restaurants can procure a bottle." Cantele told Unfiltered that the Carabinieri (Italian police) in nearby Guagnano were swift and helpful when he reported the theft, but because they left no trace beyond the video footage, he doubts the thieves will be caught, at least not before off-loading the bottles to an unscrupulous distributor in Italy or elsewhere in Europe. "Generally, thieves in the area will steal bulk wine because it's easy to repackage and sell. I've never seen a theft of bottles," said Cantele, whose own stolen bottles, which had been labeled for sale in Europe, were unfortunately not insured, a policy that he and his colleagues may well re-examine in the coming months.



Glyn Thomas/Age Fotostock

*Mt. Etna erupts in Italy while the mountain's shepherds have set fire to their own pastures, threatening a Chardonnay vineyard.*

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