



Decanter Premium: [Join](#) | [Log in](#)

- [Susan Hulme MW](#)
- January 1, 2019

Sicily is finding its rightful place in the Italian wine scene with its discovery and rediscovery of native varieties and distinctive sites. The island's wines are now as captivating as the island's beautiful scenery, believes Susan Hulme MW...

[Sicily](#) has long bewitched me with its distinctive colours, sights and smells. The island first cast its spell over me 30 years ago and I vividly remember a visit to the small town of Noto one evening: in the glow of a blood-orange setting sun, widows in black formed stark silhouettes against a brilliant white baroque church. Sicily is a magical place, whether it is the snowcapped, smoking Mount Etna against a forget-me-not blue sky, the warm smell of lemon groves at night or the air rich with the sound of cicadas.

Scroll down for Susan Hulme MW's top 20 wines from Sicily

Sicilian wines have not always captured the island's magic. Heavy, full-flavoured wines were often used to bolster wines from other parts of Italy and consumers showed little desire to discover the wealth of the island's native grape varieties. While forward-thinking producers like Planeta adopted international varieties, there was still resistance to the island's indigenous varieties. Francesca Planeta remembers the polite response in the 1990s when she poured her Sicilian wines: 'That's fine, but where is your Chardonnay?' The quality and success of a handful of these wines, however, opened the door to a rich and varied world of intriguing indigenous varieties grown in distinctive locations. The current fascination with Sicily's ancient varieties (close to 50 have been identified) bodes well for the future. White grapes such as Catarratto, Carricante and Grillo, and black varieties – Frappato, Nero d'Avola, Nerello Mascalese, Nerello Cappuccio – have captured the imagination of producers and wine lovers. Etna is redefining the image of Sicilian wines, with vines grown at higher altitude on the slopes of the volcano, producing wines that have a distinctive, cool-climate edge. The best Nerello Mascalese and Nerello Cappuccio wines from Etna have a Burgundian elegance and even a Nebbiolo-like quality. Meanwhile, Contea di Sclafani DOC is producing some of Italy's most exciting Nero d'Avola, and Faro, a tiny viticultural area in the hills around Messina, is causing quite a stir.

The island's search for distinctive terroir continues: one of the most exciting wines of 2018, Cuvée Suzanne, hails from recently planted vineyards in a little-known area near Augusta, where Peter Vinding-Diers has produced a beautifully concentrated yet fresh Syrah. Winemakers are experimenting with old vines and field blends, farming biodynamically and using low-intervention winemaking to maximise the expression of their terroir.

Discovery and rediscovery is at the dynamic heart of Sicilian wines. Sicily has always had a powerful identity, but the island's unique, enthralling qualities are now beginning to extend to its wines.

Susan Hulme MW is a wine writer, judge and consultant who has lived in Italy and now travels regularly between her home in England and all the main wine regions of Italy. A Master of Wine since 2005, she won the Bollinger Medal for excellence in tasting in the MW exam.



Passopisciaro, Etna, Passorosso, Sicily, Italy, 2016

Andrea Franchetti's wines helped put Etna on the map. So charming and appealing already, it has delicate and pretty raspberry, cream and gentle spice. Burgundian delicacy and lacy style. I love the juicy, vibrant fruit.