

Passopisciario: Producer profile

Tuscan superstar Andrea Franchetti has been making wine in Etna since 2000...



James Button
September 6, 2020



The Passopisciario Winery is located in the Contrada Guardiola vineyard, at around 1,000 metres above sea level. Credit: vinifranchetti.com

Andrea Franchetti's Tuscan winery, Tenuta di Trinoro, helped to bring the Val d'Orcia into the spotlight in the late 1990s. And since the very early 2000s, Franchetti has been making an impact on Sicily with his Passopisciario project.

At the time, Sicily still had plenty of work to do to reach its current viticultural high point – in fact, Franchetti was a key figure in establishing Etna as a new fine wine region. When Franchetti arrived in 2000, he set up in an old farm building and began restoring abandoned vineyard terraces on the north side of Mount Etna.

Today, he farms 26ha of vines, all on the north flank of Mount Etna. 20ha are planted to Nerello Mascalese in the contradas of Rampante, Sciaranuova, Guardiola, Porcaria, and Chiappemacine, while 4ha are planted with Chardonnay and 2ha with Petit Verdot.

From these vineyards, Passopisciario produces nine wines, including six contrada wines. It's similar to a cru concept of sub-regional differences in the wines, which Franchetti is attributed with bringing to Sicily. Like at Tenuta di Trinoro, Franchetti follows his successful formula of high-density plantings (12,000 vines per hectare) and strict selections.



Passopisciaro's Sciaranuova vineyard is located at 850m above sea level, on lava formed in the 1600s.

Le Contrade dell'Etna is an annual wine festival founded by Franchetti in 2007 to celebrate the myriad of sub-regions on the mountain. As each eruption leaves a different mineral profile in its solidified lava fields and can break into different layers of underlying rock, each area has a different signature – although they are actually defined by feudal property borders. Franchetti began bottling his separate contradas in 2008.

Passopisciaro's contradas:

Contrada Chiappemacine

The estate's lowest contrada, at 550m above sea level. Passopisciaro owns 1.2ha of this vineyard, which is situated on a bed of limestone and a thin layer of lava.

Contrada Porcaria

1.5ha are farmed by the estate here, at 650m above sea level on a splintered layer of lava.

Contrada Guardiola

On the edge of the 1947 lava flow, this vineyard rises from 800 to 1,000m above sea level. The estate's winery sits in the middle of the contrada, and it owns 2.3ha of vines with an average age of over 100 years.

Contrada Sciaranuova

Located on lava flows from the 1600s at 850m above sea level, Passopisciaro owns 1ha of Sciaranuova.

Contrada Rampante

The estate's highest vines are in Contrada Rampante, where it owns 1.7ha. Located at 1,000m above sea level on sandy lava soils, the altitude means it is often the last site to ripen, allowing the grapes to benefit from a long growing season. Vines here are over 100 years old.

Contrada Passochianche

A 0.5ha cru located at 900m above sea level planted to 18-year-old Chardonnay, producing a new bottling with the 2018 vintage.

Passopisciario, Passorosso, Etna, Sicily, Italy, 2016



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Tasted by **Susan Hulme MW**
Part of **Passopisciario: Producer profile**



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.

Drinking Window 2019 - 2026

Passopisciario, Passorosso, Etna, Sicily, Italy, 2017



PANEL

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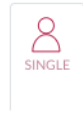
Tasted by **James Button** (at Windsor, 20 Aug 2020)
Part of **Passopisciario: Producer profile**



Old bush-vine Nerello Mascalese blended from several crus on the north side of Etna at various altitudes. The nose of sweet strawberry and fragrant cherry and raspberry is joined by some black and white pepper. There's great concentration in the mouth, with a rich texture to the soft tannins, and tangy red fruits accompany vivid, gum-tingling acidity to ensure not a single degree of the 14.5% alcohol seems out of place. The long finish displays some dark chocolate, tobacco and wood notes.

Drinking Window 2020 - 2026

Passopisciaro, Contrada G, Terre Siciliane, Sicily, 2017



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Tasted by **Aldo Fiordelli** (at SloWine Guide Book 2020 tasting, Montecatini, Italy, 12 Oct 2019)

Part of **Passopisciaro: Producer profile**



The G in the name stands for Guardiola, which is one of the highest vineyards of the estate on Mount Etna, and the source of this wine. Andrea Franchetti arrived in 2000 as one of the first producers to rediscover old vines of Nerello Mascalese, with an average age of 100 years. 'The heatwaves that hit the mainland of Italy also came to Etna,' Franchetti said of the 2017 vintage. 'The grapes ripened steadily and gradually during late summer and into autumn. The advanced maturation in the grapes meant that the harvest began more than a week earlier than usual and all at once, from 20 to 29 October.' This wine is both full of intensity and structure. Mediterranean and elegant on the nose, its thyme, violet and strawberry scents lead to a powerful and extracted palate with precise tannins and an incredible potential to age.

Drinking Window 2021 - 2050

Passopisciaro, Contrada G, Terre Siciliane, Sicily, 2014



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Tasted by **James Button** (at Windsor, 20 Aug 2020)

Part of **Passopisciaro: Producer profile**



The Contrada Guardiola is situated between 800 and 1,000 metres, on the edge of the solidified lava flow from the 1947 eruption. This wine is made from bush-vine Nerello Mascalese aged between 70 and 100 years. Scents of spicy cedar and exotic spices meld with damp earth and black hedgerow fruits. At 15.5% you'd expect something a lot clumsier and heavy than this is - instead, a beautiful vein of acidity carefully balances the intense yet elegant cherry and red berry palate. It's an airy expression with plenty of space for the exotic spice, black pepper and forest floor nuances, with a twist of white pepper and herbs on the long finish.

Drinking Window 2020 - 2030

Passopisciaro, Contrada R, Terre Siciliane, Sicily 2017



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Tasted by **Stephen Brook**
Part of **Passopisciaro: Producer profile**



Andrea Franchetti has been seeking out very old vineyards on Etna since the early 2000s. In the past his wines could be too burly, and though he still likes to pick late and very ripe, they are better balanced. Rampante (the 'R' on the label) is a site at 1,000m with 50-year-old vines. The raspberry-scented nose is rich and flamboyant, thrilling. It's full-bodied, powerful and dense, with bold tannins, and it has structure rather than heat or extraction.

Drinking Window 2019 - 2028

Passopisciaro, Contrada R, Terre Siciliane, Sicily, 2014



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Tasted by **James Button** (at Windsor, 20 Aug 2020)
Part of **Passopisciaro: Producer profile**



Contrada Rampante is the estate's highest cru at 1,000 metres above sea level on the north side of Mount Etna, where it farms 1.4ha of very old bush-vine Nerello Mascalese. It's often the last cru to be picked at harvest. A dusty, faintly exotically spiced nose with autumnal berries leads into a searingly fresh mouthful of textured red and black berries. There's a delicious juicy, ripe strawberry and raspberry streak running through this, with black cherry, herbs, damp earth, dark chocolate and black pepper waiting in the wings. The long finish brings out the exotic wood spice notes and a touch of liquorice and mint. It's not as concentrated as Contrada G, which is surely down to the elevated altitude.

Drinking Window 2020 - 2028