

## **Passopisciario**

The brainchild of Andrea Franchetti, the talent behind the Tenuta di Trinoro in Tuscany, Passopisciario is one of Etna's leading lights. Franchetti deserves credit for having shone the light, along with Benanti, on this unique, world-class wine production zone. He owns six vineyards, each in a specific Etna *contrada*, with very old vines planted between 550 and 1,000 meters above sea level. However, as the majority of the vineyards are located immediately outside of the Etna production zone, Passopisciario's wines are now labeled with only the initial of each *contrada* and as Terre Siciliane rather than Etna.

Another change here has been the modification of the Passopisciario wine's name: as that is also the name of the town where the estate is located, it cannot be used to name a wine, and thus beginning with the 2013 vintage Passopisciario's wine will be named Passorosso. All these nomenclature issues aside, the wines from Passopisciario remain among the very best of Etna, and in the end that's what matters to wine lovers everywhere. If I have one quibble with this estate, it's stems from Franchetti's constant desire to experiment: I would not have planted Petit Verdot or Cesanese d'Affile on Etna. This is not entirely his fault, of course, as Italian legislators who lacked vision also allowed this to happen.

### **Grape/Blend**

Petit Verdot, Cesanese

### **Release price**

\$150.00

# vinous

90<sub>pts</sub>

# vinous

92<sub>pts</sub>

## Passopisciaro 2013 Passorosso (Formerly Passopisciaro)

Passopisciaro, Terre Siciliane, Sicily

Red wine from Italy

Drinking window: 2017 - 2024

Bright red. Pungent aromas of red berries, violet and fresh herbs. Fresh and crisp in the mouth, with dominant flavors of sour red cherry and red berries. Finishes very long, with a lacy mineral overlay but slightly tough tannins. A lovely wine in a higher-acid, more austere style than most from Passopisciaro.

Ian D'Agata. Tasting date: October 2015

© 2015 Vinous Media

## Passopisciaro 2013 Franchetti

Passopisciaro, Terre Siciliane, Sicily

Red wine from Italy

Drinking window: 2017 - 2027

(15.5% alcohol): Inky ruby. Superripe aromas and flavors of black cherry syrup, red cherry jam, chocolate and minerals. Spicy, peppery tannins and bright acidity provide plenty of backbone to this opulent, ultra-suave wine, which tastes like it was made with air-dried grapes. Extremely long on the finish, closing with a strong note of sweet pipe tobacco and a hint of volcanic ash. In fact, the smoky note was so evident that I couldn't help thinking that this is what it must be like to drink a cigar.

Ian D'Agata. Tasting date: October 2015

© 2015 Vinous Media

# vinous

91<sub>pts</sub>

# vinous

89<sub>pts</sub>

## Passopisciaro 2013 Contrada C

Passopisciaro, Terre Siciliane, Sicily

Red wine from Italy

Drinking window: 2017 - 2025

Bright red. Crisp red berries and a pungent floral note on the nose. Then rich and round in the mouth, with nicely delineated, almost sweet red fruit and floral flavors dominating. This medium-bodied wine finishes tangy, focused and long. Contrada C stands for Chiappemacine, a vineyard area located at an altitude of 550 meters, featuring sandy and volcanic soils and planted to 80-year-old vines.

Ian D'Agata. Tasting date: October 2015

© 2015 Vinous Media

## Passopisciaro 2013 Contrada G

Passopisciaro, Terre Siciliane, Sicily

Red wine from Italy

Drinking window: 2017 - 2024

Bright red. Spicy minerals and underbrush complicate red berries and almond paste on the nose and rather fleshy palate. Finishes peppery and long, with slightly gritty tannins and a trace of alcoholic heat. Contrada G stands for Guardiola, one of the more historically famous crus of Etna, located between 800 and 1,000 meters above sea level. Owner Andrea Franchetti makes this wine from roughly 80-year-old vines located in the bottom part of the contrada, right above the Santo Spirito cru.

Ian D'Agata. Tasting date: October 2015

© 2015 Vinous Media

---

vinous

94<sub>pts</sub> vinous

91<sub>pts</sub>

**Passopisciaro 2013 Contrada S**

Passopisciaro, Terre Siciliane, Sicily

Red wine from Italy

Drinking window: 2017 - 2027

Dark red. Deep, rich aromas of red cherry, licorice, fennel and minerals; this seems more concentrated than the Contrada R but less refined. Then richer and smoother on the palate, with ripe but fresh red cherry and raspberry flavors complicated by minerals and fresh herbs. The finish is long, smooth and very precise. Contrada S stands for Sciaranuova, a vineyard area located between 850 and 900 meters above sea level where the grapes are exposed to sun almost all day long.

Ian D'Agata. Tasting date: October 2015

© 2015 Vinous Media

**Passopisciaro 2013 Contrada P**

Passopisciaro, Terre Siciliane, Sicily

Red wine from Italy

Drinking window: 2017 - 2025

Dark red. Subdued aromas of red berries, cherry, marzipan and sweet herbs. Then richer and riper on the palate than the nose suggests, displaying sweet red fruit, licorice and stone flavors. At once plump and juicy, this wine displays impressive delicacy on the rather long, high-acid finish. Contrada P stands for Porcaria, a cru located at 600 to 700 meters; Franchetti's roughly 80-year-old vines face north.

Ian D'Agata. Tasting date: October 2015

© 2015 Vinous Media

---

vinous

93<sub>pts</sub>

**Passopisciaro 2013 Contrada R**

Passopisciaro, Terre Siciliane, Sicily

Red wine from Italy

Drinking window: 2017 - 2026

Bright red. Vibrant raspberry and licorice aromas are complicated by a delicate stony nuance. Fresh and sweet in the mouth, with savory red berry and mineral flavors carrying through a long aftertaste. This lovely wine is very true both to Nerello Mascalese and to Etna. Contrada R stands for Rampante, one of the highest crus of Etna at 1,000 meters, where the volcanic soil has become very fine and almost sandy over the millenia. The wines are almost always very pure, high in acidity and refined. Rampante is also one of the latest crus to be harvested on Etna.

Ian D'Agata. Tasting date: October 2015

© 2015 Vinous Media

---

**Passopisciaro 2013 Guardiola****Passopisciaro, Terre Siciliane, Sicily****White wine from Italy****Drinking window: 2016 - 2023**

Bright, pale yellow. Intense, very pure aromas of tangerine, green pineapple and flinty minerals, complicated by hints of macadamia and banana. Then steely, focused and energetic, with lively, harmonious acidity lifting and extending the ripe orchard fruit, lemon and mineral flavors on the long saliva-inducing back end. This wine was made by picking grapes in 22 different passes between September 6 and 30, which tells you a lot about how difficult it is for grapes to ripen properly in the cold, mountainous Guardiola area, situated roughly 1,000 meters above sea level. I'm not at all a fan of planting Chardonnay on Etna, a place where Carricante and Minnella Bianca, the main local native white varieties, have adapted spectacularly well over the centuries. (Honestly now, Italian legislators need to do their work better: do you ever hear anyone saying that Cabernet Sauvignon or Riesling ought to be planted in Musigny or Montrachet?) That said, it's only fair to recognize that the 2013 Guardiola Bianco will age very well and that it's a spectacular wine, especially in light of how disappointing most Italian Chardonnays are. Andrea Franchetti, who has long been famous for his Tenuta di Trinoro reds, is an immensely talented man.

**Ian D'Agata. Tasting date: October 2015**

---

Printed by, and for the sole use of . All rights reserved © 2015 Vinous Media

### Sicily: The Challenge of Turning Great Potential Into Great Wines

At about 25,700 square kilometers (17,100 miles), Sicily is the largest island in the Mediterranean Sea, a veritable country in its own right and blessed with ideal winemaking conditions, such as myriad exposures, altitudes, soils and grape varieties, plenty of sunlight and low rainfall. Not surprisingly, Sicily produces a lot of wine: about 12% of all Italian wine (including roughly 9% of Italy's reds and 10% of Italy's *rosati*). More precisely, the island accounts for roughly five million hectoliters of wine per year from what is Italy's largest regional vineyard area—about 103,000 hectares, of which close to 90% are located in western Sicily. To put that in perspective, Sicily alone produces more wine than all of New Zealand or Greece.

Sicily boasts 24 different appellations; one of them, Cerasuolo di Vittoria, is a Denominazione d'Origine Controllata e Garantita (DOCG) while the other 23 are Denominazione d'Origine Controllata (DOC). Many of the latter are virtually unknown even to Italians (for example, Riesi, Sambuca di Sicilia, Sciacca) and a few may ring bells (Alcamo, Contea Sclafani, Contessa Entellina, Etna, Faro), but only a handful are actually well known (Etna, Malvasia di Lipari, Marsala, Moscato di Noto, Moscato and Passito di Pantelleria). Encouragingly, the percentage of DOC and DOCG wines is increasing. Less than 5% in the mid-1980s, these wines now account for 18% of the island's total wine production.



*A view towards Etna and the sea from nearby vineyards*

#### The Good and the Bad in Sicilian Wine

There is much to like about Sicily's wines. For example, prices are generally not high, even for famous, high-quality reds and exciting dry and sweet whites. The island is also home to many native grapes whose considerable quality potential has only recently become clear. It's not surprising that the likes of Nero d'Avola and Nerello Mascalese have rightly gained fans the world over. Carricante, a white grape, is now rightly viewed as one of Italy's three or four best native

potential of other cultivars such as the Catarrattos, Perricone and Grillo has not yet been fully tapped, so it is likely that there are many new and exciting wines to come from Sicily in the near future.

Moreover, a young generation of talented and passionate producers is bent on making quality wines—and not the plonk that was once routinely used as a blending agent for anemic reds made in more famous parts of Italy and other well-known wine-producing countries. And strangely enough, many different regional Sicilian governments also did fine jobs over the years in looking out for the island's agriculture, for example by allocating considerable funding for the Istituto Regionale del Vino e dell'Olio (IRVO), although that situation may change, unfortunately. Long a model in scientific research, the institute has worked with some of Italy's greatest wine minds (among others, Giacomo Tachis and Attilio Scienza) and it has helped in matters like developing new clones and identifying ideal production methodologies.

Etna has been the single most exciting development in Italian wine in the last decade, with Etna Rosso becoming Italy's single hottest red wine. Unsurprisingly, the Etna DOC has grown at an impressive rate in recent years, reaching a production of 22,000 hectoliters of wine, and land under vine of roughly 650 hectares, compared to only 442 in 2007.

Other Sicilian wines have improved dramatically over the last decade. For example, an ever-increasing number of dedicated producers are now making truly outstanding Passito di Pantelleria and Malvasia di Lipari, the latter wine is now being made on the island of Vulcano as well, which was not the case just a few years ago. And a good argument can be made that Nero d'Avolas have also never been better, especially now that the grape is being blended less and less frequently with international varieties like Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah. In other words, Nero d'Avola is being allowed to shine like never before.



*Barbavecchi's Quota 1000 vines, positioned on the northeastern slopes of Etna a thousand meters above sea level*

Clearly, the Sicilian wine scene has problems too. For example, most of Sicily's dry white wines are well made but rather simple and not especially ageworthy (Carricante excluded). And while local native grapes are all the rage now, with producers both big and small producing wines from once-forgotten native cultivars, there remain large plantings of Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Merlot

---

grapes were mostly planted in the 1980s when many producers hoped to cash in on wines that would be easily understood by international consumers. Unfortunately, the last thing the world needs is yet more Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon wines, especially when these are quite often neither cheap nor especially good—despite some ridiculous awards and high scores from Italian wine critics over the years.

Even worse, despite some cool-climate pockets (such as Etna, where a number of producers are trying their hand at Pinot Noir), the majority of Sicily is just too hot for the likes of Merlot and Sauvignon Blanc, and the likelihood of ever producing truly world-class wines in Sicily from such varieties is next to nil. The problem is that those vines have now been planted but the need to start uprooting or regrafting isn't as obvious to all as it ought to be. In fact, although matters have improved greatly over the last ten years, Sicily still produces too many red wines that are big, chocolatey, low in acidity and high in alcohol. These wines might please some international palates, but modern wine lovers are increasingly turning away from such obvious caricatures. In fact, climate change has led many quality-minded Sicilian estates looking to make perfumed and less alcoholic wines to begin searching for different grape sources for their top wines. For example, the famous Duca di Salaparuta estate started making its Duca Enrico wine from Nero d'Avola grapes grown in different vineyards than the historic ones at the beginning of the new century; the new sites were located at higher altitudes and cooler microclimates than those that had been used up until then.

Of the island's new international arrivals, at least Syrah is giving signs of having potential. Alas, the same cannot be said for another Rhône variety, Viognier. Misguided EU funding didn't help matters: meant to spur a rationalization of local agriculture, it led instead to the uprooting of thousands of hectares of low-yielding, difficult-to-cultivate but often high-quality, very old vines that had the potential, if properly tended, to make great wines. Consequently, many of Sicily's wines are now being made from relatively young vines, but admittedly planted in a more rational manner and, hopefully, from disease-free vines. Last but not least, there are persistent rumors that pressure is high on local politicians to expand the production areas of currently hot wines, such as Etna Rosso. Clearly, Sicilian lawmakers must resist the temptation to turn Etna into another mega-wine production area, as true site specificity can't be maintained over, say, 1,500 hectares. That said, the vineyards of Passopisciaro, one of Etna's greatest estates, are just outside the current DOC production area (because they sit at a higher elevation than the limit of the appellation), and yet that estate's wines are some of Etna's greatest (though they are technically wines from the Terre Siciliane appellation), so perhaps a small strategic enlargement of the production area may not be such a bad thing after all.



*A young Carricante vineyard on Etna*

### Recent Vintages

Given the island's size, it is hard to make general statements about vintage conditions. What happens weather-wise in Pachino in the island's southeastern corner, for example, is likely to be very different from what growers have to face on Etna, and producers in Marsala in the western half of the island are also likely to face different weather patterns.

For the most part, 2014 is an outstanding vintage in Sicily. In fact, 2014 is one of the very best years for Sicilian wines in memory. The growing season moved along regularly and uneventfully, with no excessive temperatures, heatwaves, rain activity (for example, from October 1, 2013 to August 2014 roughly 621mm of rain fell in the Contessa Entellina area, or slightly below the 656mm annual average of the previous decade; on Pantelleria, rainfall was also slightly below the previous decade's average) or scirocco winds that are both dry and hot and tend to air-dry grapes directly on the vine. Furthermore, there were noteworthy diurnal temperature variations that helped the 2014s retain freshness. The vintage was also outstanding on the Etna, where graceful, ageworthy wines were made. The Etna 2014s showcase an uncanny combination of structure and fragrance that will make them fascinating to follow.



*The vineyards of Spadafora*

The 2013 vintage was also quite good in Sicily, with timely rainfall, mild temperatures and noteworthy diurnal temperature variations. A slightly windy start to the season disrupted flowering and lowered yields naturally. In central and south-eastern sections of the island, frequent mid-summer rain activity was a cause of concern for many growers, but for the most part white and red wines are fresh and lively, not dilute. Wines are less intensely colored than those of the previous vintages such as 2012 and 2011, and are characterized by greater freshness and precision, but less successful efforts are marked by overly herbaceous notes. This is especially true of Etna, where I find the vintage is not up to what many have cracked it up to be, with many wines marred by green streaks. By contrast, on Pantelleria it rained slightly more than in other parts of Sicily, especially when compared to 2011 and 2012, two of the driest years on record, but grapes ripened slowly and fully. The Zibibbo wines are especially perfumed.

Two thousand twelve was a hot year, with a warm drier than usual summer (for example, 470 mm of rainfall vs the 660 mm yearly average in central Sicily) and with very little disease pressure. In fact, due to quickly ripening grapes, even Etna saw a much earlier harvest (it occurred roughly two weeks earlier than usual); but despite growers pulling the trigger early, 2012 Sicilian wines tend to be highish in alcohol and not especially vibrant.

The 2011s are relatively high in alcohol; the whites will need to be drunk up quickly, while the gritty tannins of many reds do not bode well for especially memorable wines. Save for Etna, and to a lesser degree Pantelleria, the 2011 vintage will not be remembered as particularly good. Throughout most of Sicily, spring was rainy and characterized by strong attacks of downy and powdery mildew, while the summer was hot and very dry, with the high temperatures that kicked in during the second half of August. Though wines may be fleshy and showy, for the most part they are aromatically compressed, lack complexity and ageworthiness. On Etna, summer was less marked by the strong heat, while autumn's moderate temperatures and essentially rain-free days allowed for long hang time. For this reason, 2011 is viewed as an outstanding year for Etna wines, that are generally more graceful and fresh than the wines of other great Etna vintages (such as 2006 and 2014), all of which tend to be more massive. Pantelleria also enjoyed a good vintage in 2011, with many ripe, luscious Passitos.



Visualizza questa pagina in: [Italiano](#)

**Traduci**

Disattiva per: [Inglese](#)

Opzioni ▼

---

There is no doubt that Sicily has all it takes to make world-class wines. And although not every wine currently made is a world-beater, there are many positive signs. This is especially true now that Sicily's producers, for the most part, are finally no longer blending international varieties into their Nero d'Avola, Catarratto and Carricante wines. These distinctive native grapes can now shine as never before.

I tasted all of the wines in this article in October and November in Sicily or in Rome.

### **You Might Also Enjoy**

Campania: Made in Italy, Ian D'Agata, Sep 2015

New Releases from the Marche: Something for Everyone, Ian D'Agata, Jul 2015

Italy: Odds and Ends, Antonio Galloni, Jul 2015

Friuli: It Is What It Is, Antonio Galloni, Jun 2015

Alto Adige: A Pause for Thought, Antonio Galloni, May 2015

The Wines of Abruzzo and Molise, Ian D'Agata, May 2015

Exploring Roero, Antonio Galloni, May 2015

--Ian D'Agata