

# Sicily

After centuries of stagnation, the Mediterranean's biggest and most historically fascinating island is now Italy's most vital and improved wine region. Sicily retains the visible remnants of more civilizations more obviously than anywhere else in the world of wine - from the near-intact Greek temple of Agrigento to the Roman mosaics of Piazza Amerina, the Crusader castles and Moorish churches of Palermo to the Baroque splendour of Noto and Ragusa, and, most recently, the giant EU wine factories that appeared in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This is Sicily, as rich and varied culturally as it is viticulturally - with so many different terroirs and terrains that one might even suggest it should be regarded as a continent rather than a mere island. The southeastern tip is further south than Tunis. Sicily can be very hot, its grapes, especially in the interior, regularly warmed to hailing point by winds from Africa. Irrigation is a necessity for

a good half of Sicilian vineyards, especially for the sea of trellised vines around Alcanusi. Indeed, so dry is the climate that the vines need little spraying, making these areas close to ideal for organic viticulture. But the landscape can be greener usually snow-capped for much of the year. Geography is a constant but the political complexity of the island's wine industry has recently been anything but. In the mid-1990s Sicily competed only with Puglia for the title of Italy's most productive wine region, but now even the Veneto churns out much more, and the island has definitively, and sensibly in view of 21st-century economics, opted for quality over quantity and focused on its own vine heritage rather than more anodyne imports.

The indigenous grape that made Sicily's vinous reputation abroad is Nero d'Avola (Avola in the extreme southeast with its own cru, DOC Etna), making rich, brightly fruited reds, notably around Agrigento near the south-central coast, and in the far west, too. This popular grape

has now been planted all over the island. Another native grape, Frappato, entwines Nero d'Avola in the blend for **Cerasuolo di Vittoria**, the island's only DOCG, and is itself increasingly appreciated for its freshness, vigour, and delicately fruity appeal for early drinking.

Of potentially even more interest, however, is Nerello Mascalese, traditionally grown up to 3,300ft (1,000m) on the slopes of Mount Etna, where more and more ambitious vine-growers are braving the volcano's portentous rumblings and very real eruptions. Etna, with its rich mix of different altitudes and exposures and densely planted centenarian vines sprouting from soils magnet for terroir-conscious wine producers in much the same way that Burgundy is. Vine holdings are similarly parcellated. Some see it as a new Côte d'Or. The local guru, Salvo Foti, who gained credit for re-igniting Etna's wine reputation while working with the long-established Benanti family, bottles (for I Vigneri) several separate wines from ancient vines on the eastern slopes of Etna. Committed new investors

### MAJOR DOCGS AND DOCS

The oft-conquered island of Sicily is well used to conflict. Today, in the field of wine, the battle is between west and east. Nero d'Avola versus Cerasuolo and Nerello Mascalese. Recently, the east seems to have been winning, but we all dream of a revival of Marsala's fortunes.

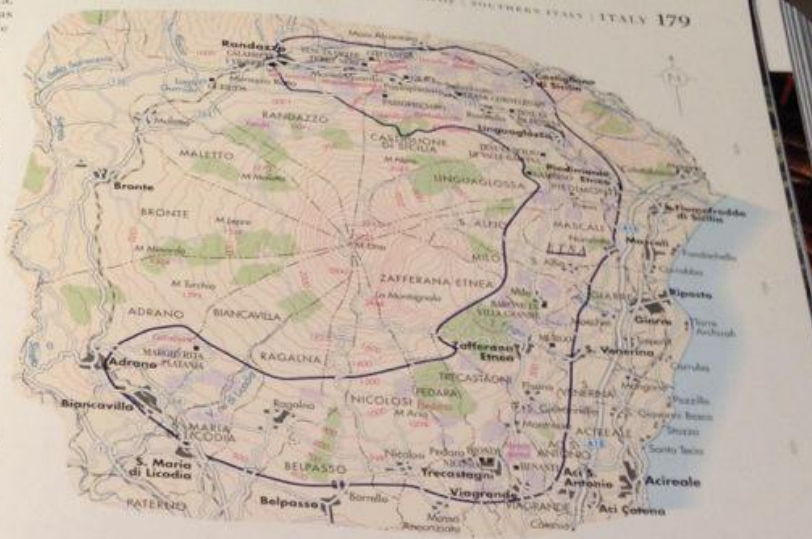


Handwritten note: P.d.V. 44 40 P. de Sin

...over the island. Another...  
 ...of Vittoria, the island's...  
 ...and delicately fruited...  
 ...interest, however...  
 ...ditionally grown up to...  
 ...tentious vine growers...  
 ...na, with its rich soil...  
 ...posures and densely...  
 ...growing from soils...  
 ...has become a...  
 ...of wine producers...  
 ...burgundy is...  
 ...flated. Some see...  
 ...social guru. Salvo...  
 ...igniting Etna's...  
 ...t with the long...  
 ...s (for I Vigneri)...  
 ...nt vines on the...  
 ...new investors

...include Furiato and Tosa d'Almerita...  
 ...Corte was the first serious...  
 ...of the modern era, and US wine...  
 ...De Gatta, Andrea Franchetti...  
 ...Toscano (he uses no sulphur)...  
 ...from Belgium...  
 ...Frank Cornelissen from Belgium...  
 ...with other softer results, Nerello...  
 ...also grown on Etna and blended...  
 ...Yet another Sicilian...  
 ...is blended with both in the...  
 ..."lighthouse" was...  
 ..."lighthouse" on the...  
 ...Salvatore Geraci, an...  
 ...overlooking the Strait...  
 ...of Etna, the best...  
 ...precision and a level of...  
 ...show precision and a level of...  
 ...surprising as far south.

**Sicily's white and fortified wines**  
 ...white equivalent it is found in wines...  
 ...Curricante grape on Etna. The...  
 ...Pietramarina) showed (in their...  
 ...mature impressively for...  
 ...Cafarotta can mature impressively for...  
 ...Cafarotta is very different...  
 ...white grape of the west. The...  
 ...white grape of the west. The...  
 ...winemakers occasionally...  
 ...to fashion interesting wines from it...  
 ...Inzolia (the...  
 ...Grillo, a vital ingredient...  
 ...of Sicily's classic fortified wine, grown...  
 ...around Trapani, in...  
 ...Marsala is a very distant cousin...  
 ...invented by British settlers in Naples...  
 ...Marsala seemed...  
 ...found only in...  
 ...though, in...  
 ...largely Grillo, wines of De Bartoli...  
 ...unfortified and...  
 ...usually strong...  
 ...that put Sicily...  
 ...made...  
 ...the same for...  
 ...Syracusa -...  
 ...environments...  
 ...of the island...  
 ...of Alexandria...  
 ...of Lipari and the...  
 ...of Palermo. One of...  
 ...scented elixirs is made...  
 ...Sicily is less dominated...  
 ...oenologists who...  
 ...cellars...  
 ...important...  
 ...independent...  
 ...home-grown.



- Provincia boundary
- Comune boundary
- Etna DOC**
- MURGO Notable producer
- NICOLOSI** Comune
- Gianfrida** Contrada
- Vineyards
- Woods
- 500 Contour interval 100 metres

**ETNA'S CONTRADE**

The only wine map in the world posing as a spider's web? This has to be one of the most exciting fine wine zones, and not just because it lies on an active volcano. Etna's parishes, or communes, are subdivided into contrade.



Pietramarina is acknowledged as Etna's finest white wine, and Etna Bianco Superiore may be made only in the commune of Mito. Vinupetra is made by I Vigneri, a small consortium of growers advised by Etna's celebrated oenologist Salvo Foti.