



**Written by**

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## Sicily and the south - a selection



Yet more Italy today. Nick and I have just returned from a long weekend in eastern Sicily, where vine growers, unusually for Italy this year, reported a wonderful vintage in 2014. Most of the grapes on nearby Mount Etna had just been picked and the weather was still stunning – temperatures in the high twenties Celsius and virtually uninterrupted sunshine. (Yes, it was very welcome to two Londoners.) I had the pleasure of revisiting Etna for the first time since 2008 and could hardly believe how popular it has become with wine producers from all over Sicily. I will be reporting in more detail.

I had been asked to present a tasting of wines from the south of Italy and islands as part of the third edition of a weekend of food and wine events called Taormina Gourmet organised by Italian wine blogger of Fabrizio Carrera of Cronache di Gusto. Fabrizio accordingly sent me a long list of almost 60 wines to choose from, which resulted in a near hernia on the part of our DSL courier, and my nearly falling asleep at the dinner table immediately after tasting the bulk of them.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Sicily dominated the wine selection but there were some notable omissions such as the wines of two of my favourite Sicilian producers Planeta and Passopisciaro, but I suppose Fabrizio's choices were dictated to a considerable extent by those producers who co-operated with his event. The result was a range rather dominated by bigger producers. As instructed, I came up with my 15 favourites of those he sent – and then he suggested a further

two. The result was a pretty unwieldy tasting of 17 wines for more than 50 tasters. This presented a considerable organisational challenge for the brigade of black-blazered sommeliers, most of them with tastevins clanking on their badged chests. But the crowd were unbelievably polite – not least because, to my shame, I presented the tasting in my native language rather than in Italian.

Below are my notes on all the wines I tasted before going to Sicily, presented by region and then alphabetically by producer (sur)name. As you will see, I very much favoured wines made from local grape varieties and was not usually a big fan of wines too heavily marked by French barriques. This part of the world has so many distinctive wines and vines to share with the world – not to mention an extraordinary range of terrains – that it seems a shame to smother them with vinificatory make-up.

## SICILY

- [Baglio di Pianetto, Ginolfo Viognier 2011 IGT Sicilia](#) The back label discloses that this was made from 'Viogneur' (sic). Lightly soapy nose with only a light suggestion of Viognier. Some very attractive honeysuckle notes on the palate and some real raciness. A hint of bitterness on the end. Not a great wine but a correct varietal expression - although I think it is coming to the end of its life. A bit of heat on the end. 14.5% Drink 2012-2014  
15.5
- [Baglio di Pianetto, Cembali Nero d'Avola 2007 IGT Sicilia](#) Made near Noto in the south east of the island. An antique! Still very intense crimson. Lots of meat on the nose, plus a bit of veg. Pungent with tension and excitement. Very juicy and rich on the palate. Lots of smouldering expression here. Lots of fun and development - though I do wonder why it has not yet been sold. 14.5% Drink 2011-2018  
16.5
- [Ciro Biondi, S Nicolo 2012 Etna](#) Very pale crimson. Very edgy wine hovers on the divide between seriously nervy and exciting and a bit too wacky. In fact I think this bottle may have a hit of TCA. Tough and lacking fruit. Almost wonderful. 13.5% Drink 2014-2017  
15.5
- [Cusumano, Sàgana Nero d'Avola 2011 IGT Sicilia](#) Dark brilliant crimson. Very rich and flattering on the nose. But a bit hot and goaty on the palate and with a marked animal note. Certainly not shy! Rather gaudy. 15% Drink 2014-2017  
15.5
- [Cusumano, Moscato dello Zucco 2009 IGT Sicilia](#) Ridiculously heavy bottle but lovely lively stuff with completeness, 13% Drink 2014-2014  
Bibendum/Cru 16.5
- [De Bartoli, Grappoli del Grillo 2011 IGT Sicilia](#) Deep gold. I wonder why this is still around? Lightly stinky nose with some reductive notes. Lots of green flavours and real excitement. It's halfway to his dry Marsala... Transparent and seriously interesting. Very unusual wine that has lots of astringency but also lots of character. I still think it could have been released a bit earlier. 13.5% Drink 2012-2016  
16.5
- [De Bartoli, Superiore 1987 Marsala](#) Pale tawny with real layers. Dense and intense and very nervy. Long and refreshing with a dry nutty finish. Sort of palest treacle. Lovely stuff. Long. 19% Drink 2005-2030  
18
- [Dei Principi di Spadafora, Les Jeux sont faits Syrah 2013 Sicilia](#) From Monreale near Palermo.

Dark crimson. Pretty ripe and sweet with interesting stony undertow. Appetising spicy chew sucky stony quality on the end. Interesting! Though it almost tastes more French than Italian. Desperately needs food because of the charcoal-like finish.14% Drink 2015-2018

16

- [Dei Principi di Spadafora Nero d'Avola 2010 IGT Sicilia](#) Bright crimson. Very savoury nose with the fruit, not oak, dominant. Super charming without too much alcohol in evidence. Bright cherry fruit with real freshness and a note of lightly bitter griottes cherries. 14% Drink 2013-2018  
16.5
- [Duca di Salaparuta, Duca Enrico 2009 IGP Sicilia](#) Nero d'Avola. Bright ruby. Heady. Roast grapes! Good freshness on the end though. For those who really want to taste heat - before the clean finish. Warmth in a bottle but nothing heavy. Serious stuff!14% Drink 2013-2020  
16.5
- [Fessina, Il Musmeci Nerello Mascalese 2010 Etna](#) Pale ruby red. Mildly scented and off dry. Rather low key. Good freshness but not that earthy. Light and quite delicate. Lots of chew.13.5% Drink 2014-2017  
16
- [Feudi del Pisciotto, L'Eterno Pinot Nero 2011 IGT Sicilia](#) I must say the idea of a Sicilian Pinot Noir is intriguing, to say the least. This is named after a statue in Palermo whose restoration was funded by the sale of wines with labels designed and signed by nine fashion designers (this sounds wonderfully Italian). Well I never! This does indeed smell like Pinot Noir! Rather meaty and sweet. Not the most delicate Pinot Noir and the oak starts to dominate it on the palate but it's certainly really unusual... Good effort if a bit chunky and sweet.12.5% Drink 2014-2016  
15.5
- [Feudi del Pisciotto Frappato 2011 IGT Sicilia](#) This label has been signed by fashion designer 'Carolina Marenga for Kisa' if my reading of handwriting is correct. Very pretty label indeed. Meaty on the nose like the Pinot Nero - in fact I think both are a little too much informed by the cooper rather than the vineyard. Rather drying tannins on the end. But certainly a bit of fun. Someone has a strong visual sense here.13.5% Drink 2015-2019  
16
- [Feudo Arancio, Dalila 2013 IGT Terre Siciliane](#) Grillo and Viognier matured in French oak barrels. Light Viognier nose - more in savoury Viognier mode than the air-freshener type. Great presence in the mouth. Good well-balanced blend in which the Viognier is apparent but there is particularly good structure too. A successful wine for early drinking.13% Drink 2014-2015  
16
- [Feudo Arancio, Cantodoro 2011 IGT Terre Siciliane](#) There is Cabernet Sauvignon in here - most unusual in Sicily! - adding structure to Nero d'Avola. Dark bright crimson. Sweet and charming on the nose. Very friendly and pleasant even if not desperately Sicilian. Tastes as though the influence of an internationally minded consultant oenologist was quite strong here. Well put together but not that distinctive.13.5% Drink 2014-2019  
16
- [Feudo Maccari, Saia Nero d'Avola 2012 IGT Sicilia](#) Another wine made in the Noto area in the south of the island. Dark very bright crimson. Liquorice and density. Attention-grabbing. This smells much older than two years old, oddly. Dry tannins on the end. I should imagine yields were very low - perhaps slightly too low? Very dried fruit character.14.5% Drink 2015-2020  
16.5
- [Feudo Maccari Nero d'Avola 2013 IGT Sicilia](#) Light, simple-looking crimson. Straight fruity character. A tad simple on the palate as well as the nose. Bitter sweet.13% Drink 2015-2017  
15.5

- [Firriato, Gaudensius Spumante Metodo Classico Brut NV Italy](#) Pale straw. Very refreshing nose. Clean and brisk without too much excess of fruit. Lightly soapy nose and then a bit hard on the palate. Fast fade. But fairly refreshing, Drink 2014-2015  
15
- [Fondo Antico, Parlante Grillo 2013 Sicilia](#) Mid to deep greeny gold. Light, fresh nose. Mildly leafy. Lots of acidity and slight fizz. A bit chewy on the end. But this should probably open up a little. There's quite a structure to this. 12.5% Drink 2014-2015  
15.5
- [Fondo Antico, Memorie 2010 IGT Sicilia](#) Pale rose red. Most unusual - a four-year-old pink wine that is not from López Heredia! It certainly still has guts but not quite enough freshness. 12.5% Drink 2012-2014  
15.5
- [Gulfi, Nero Maccarj 2009 IGT Sicilia](#) Organic wine. Bright crimson. Stewed damson compote. Very alive. Dry bitter finish with lots of vibrant fruit. But definitely not a beginner's wine. Lots of edge to this. 14.5% Drink 2014-2020  
16.5
- [Gulfi 2013 Cerasuolo di Vittoria](#) Unusually for Sicily, we're tasting a DOCG here. Very dark purplish crimson. This wine looks the most youthful of this entire collection. Edgy and fluid. Bitter cherry fruit though not (yet?) that expressive. Fine tannins very evident on the finish. Something energetic to get your teeth into. 13% Drink 2017-2022  
16+
- [G Milazzo, Maria Costanza 2013 Sicilia](#) This comes in such a dark bottle, I thought it was a red. Edgy, leafy nose - well balanced and intriguing. Organic. Tight and fresh and really zesty with a floral note as well as the leaf and the greenness. Lime on the finish and just a little spritz. Impressive, makes a strong impression. 13% Drink 2014-2016  
16.5
- [G Milazzo, Terre della Baronía 2013 Sicilia](#) Pale rose pink. Certified organic. Struck match nose - rather exciting really! But a bit simple on the palate. Marked (added?) acidity. Dry finish but mainly just tart. 12.5% Drink 2014-2015  
15
- [G Milazzo, Terre della Baronía Spumante Metodo Classico NV Italy](#) Disgorged in 2014. Deep gold. The nose is a little heavy. Some astringency and a slightly metallic note on the end. Rather hard-pressed fruit. Sour finish. Drink 2014-2015  
14.5
- [Palari, Rosso del Soprano 2010 IGT Sicilia](#) Notably low alcohol! Mid to pale crimson. Really interesting liquorice and tar on the nose and wonderful delicacy. This was the first wine I was tempted to drink rather than sip! Animal and mineral combo much more than just fruit. Tastes as though rocks had been macerated in this wine. 13% Drink 2014-2018  
17
- [Palari 2009 Faro](#) Naughty heavy bottle. Mid bright cherry red. Deep and racy with lots of sweetness. Lots of acidity and chew but not as graceful as the Rosso del Soprano. Still lots of grainy tannins but attractively transparent. Needs more time. At the moment it's a tad aggressive. 13% Drink 2015-2020  
16.5
- [Carlo Pellegrino, NES 2012 Passito di Pantelleria](#) Clear 50cl bottle. Extremely sweet. Molten rum essence. Not the purest but massively sweet. Dentists' and doctors' nightmare! 14.5% Drink 2014-2014  
16
- [Pellegrino, Ambra Superiore Riserva 1998 Marsala](#) Very pale orange. Quite severely rancio nose but a little soft on the palate. Good but not great. Transparent and nervy though.

Fermented macerated sultanas. Just very slightly stewed.18% Drink 2012-2022

16.5

- Pietradolce, Archineri 2013 Etna This is apparently made from pre-phylloxera Carricante vines planted at 850 m on the eastern slopes of Etna. It is unexpectedly reticent on the nose - perhaps too young? (Punishing me for my complaints than some of the other Sicilian whites are too old.) Apple skins and lots of admirable acidity but difficult to read at this point in its life. There is substance and structure here but not that much flavour yet. Needs time, I suspect.13% Drink 2016-2020

16+

- Pietradolce, Archineri 2012 Etna 40- to 80-year-old Nerello Mascalese grown at 850 m on the northern slopes of Mount Etna. Unusual potency. Very pale ruby. Masses of flavour and excitement. Rose petals and tar macerated together. (Barolo's southern cousin?) Earthy finish. Transparent and somehow not heavy. Very exciting. This doesn't taste nearly as potent as the label claims. But all that graininess on the end demands food. Very nervy. 15% Drink 2014-2024

17

- Riofavara, Sciavè Nero d'Avola 2011 Etna Bright crimson. Sweet and evolved with some suggestion of rosy fruit and off dry appeal. Dry finish and lots of charm without being unappetising. Lots of very fine tannins on the end.14.5% Drink 2014-2020

16

- Girolamo Russo, San Lorenzo 2012 Etna Light ruby. Easy and transparent. Arguably a little heavy on the lava but certainly recognisably Etna. How do we square this with the notion that soil does not have a direct effect on the taste of wine?! Too much for me. Too chewy. Where's the fruit?! 14.5% Drink 2016-2020

15.5

- Marco Sferlazzo, Porta del Vento Catarratto 2013 IGT Terre Siciliane Mid gold and pretty neutral, if very clean, on the nose. Mid weight and competent but rather aggressive acidity (surely added) and pretty basic and workmanlike.12.5% Drink 2014-2014

15

- Marco Sferlazzo, Porta del Vento, Maquè Perricone 2012 IGT Terre Siciliane Mid crimson. Easy, open nose with lots of strawberry, evolved fruit on the nose. Clean and fresh but not that deep and rich. Quite racy but a bit too tarry on the end. Fresh and friendly but not that serious.13% Drink 2014-2016

15.5

- Tasca d'Almerita, Vigna San Francesco Chardonnay 2012 Contea di Sclafani A bit ordinary on the nose. Good texture and mouthfeel on the palate but it tastes a little basic on the nose. Also a tad too sweet.13.5% Drink 2013-2014

15.5

- Tasca d'Almerita, Regeleali Rosso del Conte 2010 Contea di Sclafani Dark crimson. Sweet and rich on the nose though with layers of yeast extract. Still very youthful and both tense and intense. very ambitious with notes of balsam. Bone dry and very different from most of the Sicilian wines tasted in this collection. Very firm and fine.13.5% Drink 2018-2028

17+

- I Vigneri, Vinupetra 2002 IGT Sicilia How amazing to come across a 12-year-old wine in commercial circulation! Bright if transparent crimson. Not that much sign of age. Sweet and rich - very heady and sumptuous. Glorious layers of both fruit and minerals with a very fresh finish. Still extremely vigorous. Glorious combo of dustiness and ripe fruit and delicacy. Racy rose-petal finish and sucky stones. I can't think of anywhere else in the world that is making wine like this.14.5% Drink 2010-2022

18

- [Alessandro Viola Grillo 2013 IGT Terre Siciliane](#) Organic wine. Deep gold. A vegy, almost green leafy edge gives this wine energy. Really quite fine and interesting with depth and some excitement. Lightly sherbety but with great structure too. This might even last longer than I'm predicting.12.5% Drink 2014-2015

16

## SARDINIA

- [Giuseppe Sedilesu, Riserva 2010 Cannonau di Sardegna](#) Mid crimson. Very sweet but with rather a winning rose petal freshness too. Very Grenache really with sweetness then dustiness and a certain medicinal quality. Good stuff! Energy.15.5% Drink 2014-2019

17

- [Giuseppe Sedilesu, Ballu Tundu Riserva 2010 Cannonau di Sardegna](#) The old-vine version. Crimson. Rather richer, denser and more complete than the regular Riserva 2010 from this address. Hint of coffee grounds on the end. But rose petals on the way there. Difficult to choose between these two bottlings..Dramatic! Just the right side of animal.15.5% Drink 2016-2022

17

## PUGLIA

- [Candido, Tenuta Marini Fiano 2013 Salice Salentino](#) Heady and a bit tarty - obviously Fiano Minutolo. With some astringency on the finish. Rather ordinary.12.5% Drink 2014-2015

15

- [Candido, Duca d'Aragona 2008 IGT Salento](#) Mid to pale ruby. Lightly sweet and with some velvety texture but not quite enough freshness. Heady and a bit pungent. Too sweet! And it fades a bit on the finish.14% Drink 2011-2016

1

- [Tormaresca, Torcicoda Primitivo 2012 IGT Salento](#) Bright ruby. Very heady and ripe with warmed red berry flavours. Very sweet start on the palate and some slightly coarse oak notes. A bit of coconut (some American oak?) and rather coarse.14.5% Drink 2015-2018

15

- [Tormaresca, Bocca di Lupo Aglianico 2008 Castel del Monte](#) Still quite a firm crimson - looks if anything more youthful than the 2012 Primitivo from the same stable. Real complexity on the nose. Some sweet dustiness on the front and some very dry fruit character on the back palate. Did these vines see any water at all?! Lovely nose but the palate is not comfortable even at six years old. I suspect this will always taste a bit too dried out. Shame.14.5% Drink 2012-2018

15.5

- [Vallone 2010 IGT Salento](#) Vintage is very modestly shown in small letters on the back label. Mid crimson. Well balanced rich fruit plus savoury yeast extract. A bit rusty nails and a bit of hole in the middle. Salty finish. I don't really get this wine, I'm afraid. Could well be my fault.14.5% Drink 2012-2016

16

## CALABRIA

- ['A Vita 2010 Cirò](#) Pale ruby, as is the way of all Gaglioppo. Aged rim. Heady, warm nose and

rather dried fruit character on the palate. Chewy stuff! I've had more sumptuous, fruitier Ciròs but this is certainly true and distinctive. 13.5% Drink 2014-2020  
16

## CAMPANIA

- **Feudi di San Gregorio, Pietracalda 2013 Fiano di Avellino** Honeyed nose seems sweeter than some earlier vintages - although you couldn't fault this producer's very smart packaging. Then there's an admirable green streak of Campanian Fiano. Excellent laurel leaf finish. Then the honey comes back. So it's a succulent, medicinal herb sandwich encased in a rather sweet bread - challah perhaps? (Brioche would suggest more age.) Lots of interest! Very clean and well made with some real structure. Lots to chew on. Serious stuff. No hurry to drink. 13% Drink 2014-2017  
16.5
- **Feudi di San Gregorio, Piano di Montevergine Riserva 2009 Taurasi** Single-vineyard wine aged for 18 months in oak. Mid crimson. Already some age at the rim. Some very slightly too obvious sweet oak on the nose. Mellow palate without great intensity. Nice mellow balance and marked acidity with an edge of tarmacadam but it seems just a little timid. I feel as though some of the excitement may have been filtered out, or perhaps it was a little more insistent when younger? Well mannered but I'm not sure I want manners from a wine grown in the hills of southern Italy. 14.5% Drink 2012-2014  
16
- **Guido Marsella 2011 Fiano di Avellino** Deep flavoured and intriguing. Rather nutty and if anything a bit short of acidity. Very 'sincere' but a little phenolic on the finish. I feel I should reward this wine for being so obviously artisanal but I'm not sure the balance will ever be perfect. I'd have liked a bit more youthful freshness but I think it would have been too chewy any earlier. 13.5% Drink 2013-2015  
16
- **Pietracupa 2012 Greco di Tufo** Real but acceptable astringency. Smoky and leafy nose with impressive energy. A coiled spring but not much charm yet. A bit like fermented lemon cough sweets. 13.5% Drink 2015-2018  
16
- **Quintodecimo, Exultet 2013 Fiano di Avellino** Naughty heavy bottle. Pale straw. Good tension on the nose. Lots of breadth and interest although again - like the Marsella wine - there is not an abundance of acidity. Nor any shortage of tannin. Big and bold. 14% Drink 2013-2015  
15.5

## LAZIO

- **Gelso della Valchetta, Liliun Chardonnay 2013 IGT Lazio** Fresh and well balanced with a certain floral quality and some leesy character. Pear fruit flavours, Well made though not exactly distinctive. Good mouthfeel and follow through. 13% Drink 2014-2015  
16