



ETNA DAYS, EMOTIONS ON THE SLOPES OF THE VOLCANO

By Alessandra Piubello

Rising to over 3,300 meters, Mount Etna is a majestic and powerful presence. The volcano commands attention, captivating all who behold it with its vital force (it is the second most active volcano in Europe), and leaves a lasting impression on all who contemplate it. This giant, which breathes and creates rings of smoke, is a world apart from the island of Sicily, in the south of Italy, boasting an impressive variety of soils, slopes, altitudes, and microclimates. The different lava flows shape the landscape, which ranges in color from dark brown to black.

Humans have transformed the volcanic environment into a unique agricultural landscape, making the most of a rugged and wild soil, unwilling to bend to their will. Be amazed by the living sculptures: centuries-old, twisted, and unique mother vines, cultivated in goblet style, or even ungrafted in some plots. In the steeper areas, vineyards have been cultivated since antiquity on characteristic terraces bordered by dry-stone walls of lava, which make this volcanic landscape unique. Dotted with "palmenti" (traditional stone buildings with a multi-tiered structure for pressing grapes by gravity, a historical and cultural heritage), it lies in one of the most beautiful and naturally fascinating areas of Sicily.

Returning to Mount Etna is always a magical experience: for the fourth edi-

tion of Etna Days, we had the opportunity to witness what is now known as the "Etna phenomenon." In the shadow of the volcano, over the past ten years, the vineyard area has increased by 80% (now totaling 1,400 hectares, 60% of which are organic), wine production has quadrupled (to around 5.5 million bottles), wine tourism has become a new high-end attraction, with two-thirds of visitors coming from abroad, and national and international wine critics are paying close attention to Etna wines. Young people are very much involved, whether they are continuing the family tradition, starting from scratch, or returning, after various experiences, to the "muntagna," as the locals call the volcano.

The Etna renaissance began only 25 years ago: a young appellation, considering the time required for wine production, and expanding not so much in terms of quantity as in quality. On Etna, there's a race for quality that compels everyone to maintain a high standard. The Consortium has blocked the planting of new vineyards, ruling out the extension of the DOC to Mille. The transition from DOC to AOC will still take some time, but it's possible that we'll have the long-awaited change as early as the 2026 harvest. Among the proposed changes to the regulations are the addition of Carricante Spumantizzato and an increase in the number of contrade (currently 133). Contrade are historical sub-zones delimited by particular volcanic formations that define their geological identity: each contrada, depending on the different volcanic eruptions that have occurred over the centuries, has a unique soil and a specific microclimate, which gives rise to wines specific to this particular "locus loci".

Of the 450 wineries in the Etna region, 230 of which are members of the consortium, most are small and medium-sized enterprises that must continually demonstrate their ability to maintain their winemaking vision by partnering with producers who have become internationally renowned. The event organized by the Etna Consortium allowed us to taste approximately 340 labels from 91 participating wineries in a dedicated tasting room, served by experienced sommeliers. The producers then awaited us in another room

for a self-guided tasting.

We thus discovered the indigenous grape varieties of Mount Etna: primarily Carricante and Minnella for the whites, and Nerello Mascalese and Nerello Cappuccio for the rosés and reds. The tastings revealed a marked improvement in the whites, thanks to a grape variety like Carricante, acidic and flavorful, which produces wines with great aging potential. The reds, depending on the vintage, displayed a distinctive profile, linked to the different slopes that make up Mount Etna (north, east, southeast, and southwest). We observed a group of winemakers capable of telling a vibrant winemaking story, full of character and a lively tension on the palate.

The tasting

In accordance with the editorial project, the selection focused solely on producers working in organic agriculture. Based on the tastings carried out (approximately 200), Etna has confirmed itself as one of the great Italian wine-growing regions.

Terra Costantino Etna Bianco Superiore Doc Contrada Praino 2023

From the young vines of a two-hectare vineyard located at 650 meters altitude in Milo, the only place suitable for producing superior white wine in all of Etna, this wine, with its aromas of medicinal herbs, reveals a beautiful acidic tension and a flavorful verticality. Vinification in stainless steel tanks and the use of pure Carricante grapes highlight the varietal identity, which will age beautifully.

Dino Costantino bought his first vineyards in 1970, but it was with the arrival of his son Fabio that he began bottling in 2013. Terra Costantino has been certified organic on its 12 hectares since 2000.

Girolamo Russo Etna Bianco Doc Feudo 2023

The first vintage produced for this grape variety from a 2-hectare vineyard located at approximately 650 meters above sea level in the Feudo district of

Randazzo. The aromas are delicate and elegant, the palate is taut and flavorful, with good volume and a dynamic progression. The finish is very long and radiant, inviting further tasting.

Giuseppe Russo has been running the family business since 2005, with his own deep sensitivity which he also transmits to his wines.

Bosco Etna Rosato Doc Outfit 2022

A rosé made exclusively from the Nerello Mascalese grape, with floral and fruity notes. It seduces with its precision, the finesse of its details, and its savoriness that borders on salinity. It is full-bodied and well-defined, revealing all its vitality with evolving facets on the palate.

Sofia Ponzini has been taking care of her 16-hectare estate since 2010, with great passion and courage.

Family Statella Etna rosso Doc Pignatuni Vecchie Vigne 2021

The old vines, some predating the phylloxera epidemic, are cultivated in the goblet style and are located in Contrada Pignatuni, in the municipality of Randazzo. Calogero Statella has succeeded in capturing the soul of the volcano and its inner dynamism, giving birth to a wine that rewards us with a palate bursting with energy, with a well-balanced and vibrant structure.

Etna winemaker Calogero Statella worked for other Etna producers before founding his own two-hectare estate with his wife Rita in 2016.

Valcerasa di Alice Bonaccorsi Etna Rosso Doc Crucimonaci 2019

Bam! Emotion grips you: the intense, fruity aromas lead you to discover a heavenly liquid. Each layer of complexity and substance becomes lightness, a predisposition to joy. A wine of moving poetry, from the Croce Monaci vineyard in Randazzo, barely one hectare of vines around 90 years old, at an altitude of 800 meters.

Alice Bonaccorsi was the first woman to produce wine on Mount Etna in

1997, with the mission of capturing the essence of the volcano in her bottles. Nine hectares of shrub-trained vines extend across ancient small terraces with typical dry-stone walls.