

SPADAFORA WINERY

*Encountering the authenticity of
Francesco Spadafora's places and wines*

We travel along a road through fields, olive groves and vineyards in a landscape of unspoiled nature devoid of groups of houses. Our destination is the Dei Principi di Spadafora winery in an isolated rural hamlet in Virzi near Monreale, a few kilometres from Palermo.

Francesco Spadafora's smile and daughter Enrica's warm handshake turn into welcoming kisses and hugs. The setting sun warms the colours all around and the 90-hectare vineyard surrounding the building is emotionally striking.

I have known Francesco for about twenty years, Enrica less as she joined the company in 2019, but I had never been to this ancient place where time seems to stand still and I find myself lost in thought, gazing at the horizon, while Pippo, the family dog, licks my hand. Meanwhile, the farmer prince tells the story that I never tire of hearing, enlivened each time with new anecdotes and touches of irony that reveal proper detachment from life's ups and downs. He is a wise man, then, you might ask. I believe that wisdom and madness coexist within him. But before focusing on this enlightened, consistent and honest man, I would like to go back to Sicily's aristocratic splendour. The Spadafora family has been part of the nobility since 1230 (with certificates to prove it), and has survived principalities, duchies, marquisates and baronies, occupying prominent positions in the Kingdom of Sicily and several European states. Let's come now to our blue-blooded winemaker. His father worked the land, selling grapes to cooperative wineries while delegating the Mussomeli estate, a family property where wheat was grown, to his son. In 1988, his father, Don Pietro, passed away and Francesco came to Virzi to cultivate the vineyards. By chance, after planting experimental fields, the Regional Institute of Vines and Oil (IRVO), was looking for a winery to merge the grapes under the coordination of Professor Attilio Scienza, a viticulture luminary (and not only), and Giacomo Tachis (one of Italy's most famous oenologists). In 1990, Francesco rented part of the winery to IRVO (for ten years) and found himself rubbing shoulders with some of the greats, who would later become his

"university." Indeed, although he initially entrusted in an oenologist, he soon took over everything himself, from the vineyards to the cellar. The first label, named after his father Don Pietro, was released in 1993 on Tachis' suggestion. It was the first "Sicilian Bordeaux blend": Nero d'Avola, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot.



Photo Alessandra Piubello

Francesco makes decisive and unconventional choices. Totally devoted to organic farming (vineyard and cellar are both certified), he keeps yields very low, choosing only the best from his highly fragmented vineyards. He only produces 120,000 bottles when, without his self-imposed limits, he could produce as many as 500,000. All his wines undergo spontaneous fermentation with indigenous yeasts, sulphites are lower than the established organic standards, pumps are not used for remontage, and there is no irrigation or fertilization. Old vines (most dating back to the 1990s) grow in sandy, silty-clay soil at an altitude of 220 to 400 meters with a providential day-night temperature range of about 10-15 degrees. And while the days, 30 years ago, when Francesco slept in the cellar are long gone, he still lives opposite, keeping a watchful eye. Enrica has renovated the tenant farmers' houses to make them truly welcoming. She is in charge of hospitality while Francesco takes care of the cooking. He truly surprises me with his pairings: six memorable wines and six equally exemplary creations. The food enhances the wine and vice versa. Despite having travelled extensively, I have never found such well-balanced combinations. The wines are a true expression of the territory, unfiltered, authentic and engaging to drink. They are full of character and respectful, just like the person who produces them.

Alessandra Piubello



Don Pietro 2020

Contrada Virzi, Monreale, Palermo
(40% Nero d'Avola, 30% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Merlot - Organic)

The winery's first label, produced in 1993. The nose is deep, rich and polyphonic. The substance is copious and well-balanced with fine tannins, surprising freshness and classy elegance.

Score : 16/20 (92)

Il cuGino 2024

Contrada Virzi, Monreale, Palermo
(Grillo 100% - Organic)

The latest addition to the range. The intense bouquet with hints of aromatic herbs and citrus fruits, is a prelude to a slender, sapid texture with joyful and tempting drinkability.

Score : 14.75+/20 (89)

