

# ETNA, MAGNETIC ATTRACTION

**E**tna, at more than 3,300 metres high, is a majestic and powerful presence. The second most active volcano in Europe, it turns heads, attracting the eyes with its vital force, fixing itself forever in the mind of every observer. This giant that huffs, puffs and creates smoke rings is a world apart on the island of Sicily in southern Italy, with an impressive variety of soils, slopes, altitudes and microclimates. Multiple lava flows have determined the physiognomy of the terrain which ranges from dark brown to black, all formed by the crumbling of diverse types of lava of differing ages, as well as eruptive materials such as lapilli, ash and sand. Their composition can result in soils with a very fine texture or with plentiful skeleton and abundant "ripiddu" (pumice with a very high draining capacity).

Man has transformed this lavic environment into a unique agricultural landscape, exploiting a harsh and wild soil that is loath to bend to his will.

The living sculptures, the centuries-old, twisted and unique alberello-trained mother vines, even ungrafted in some plots, are amazing. Vineyards have been cultivated in the steeply sloping areas since ancient times on characteristic terraces contained by dry lava stone walls. This extraordinary volcanic landscape, dotted with palmenti (traditional stone buildings with a multi-level structure for pressing the grapes using the force of gravity, a historical-cultural heritage), is part of one of Sicily's most authentically beautiful and interesting areas.

The uniqueness of Etna never ceases to amaze; the magnetic energy of the volcano dominates the landscape and wine scene. Etna emits something sacred, absolute, ancestral and mystical. The imagination runs wild among these craggy lava cliffs where it is said that wise Aeneas landed, cunning Ulysses blinded the Cyclops Polyphemus,



and Morgan le Fay welcomed King Arthur. This powerful and unpredictable giant, the highest volcano in Europe, has been a World Heritage Site in 2013.

With its heroic viticulture made of effort and passion and its magnetizing force, Etna attracts enthusiasts and winemakers from all over the world, inducing them to experience "a' Muntagna" (as the volcano is known locally) as a lifestyle rather than a way to earn a living.

With the first Sicilian DOC in 1968, one of the first in Italy to be precise, Etna laid the foundations for its future. The year 2000 saw the dawn of a veritable Etna renaissance: a young denomination, considering the time wine needs, that was rapidly expanding. Nowadays, the "Etna phenomenon" is a widespread topic. A place where vines have been cultivated for centuries, it is an internationally recognised wine territory. Over the last ten years,

the vine-growing area in the shadow of the volcano has increased by 80% (currently counting just over 1,450 hectares, 60% organic) and the number of bottles produced has quadrupled (around 6 million). There is a race for quality on Etna that forces everyone to maintain a high level.

The Etna map starts with the slopes: north, east, south-east, south-west: four macro quadrants which look like a large upside-down letter C in the Etna Doc area.

But, entering more into the specifics, 133 micro districts can be classified, historical sub-areas demarcated by particular lava formations, which define their geological identity: each district, depending on the different volcanic eruptions that have occurred over the centuries, has a unique soil and a specific microclimate, resulting in wines specific to its locality.





## THE WHITE REVOLUTION

A surge of white is rising up the slopes of the volcano, led by the carricante grape, which is rewriting the area's oenological geography. This acidic and sapid grape, that tastes of salt and flint, is giving life to wines with high evolutionary potential.

For the first time ever, the production of white wines on Etna exceeded that of reds in 2025. Who could have ever imagined that, in about ten years, the geography of wine on Etna would undergo such a substantial change? Yet it is happening. In some ways, it confirms that, in terms of territory, Etna has a versatility that other great wine terroirs do not have. Something similar, in Barolo or Montalcino for example, is simply unthinkable.

Etna Rosso, Rosso Riserva, Rosato and Spumante foresee at least 80% of Nerello Mascalese grapes (with the possibility of vinification in purity) and up to a maximum of 20% of Nerello Cappuccio. Nerello Mascalese originates from the Mascali plain, from which its name derives, while Cappuccio refers to the characteristic cloak shape that the leaves of the plant acquire to protect the bunches from the intensity of the sun and wind. Mascalese is low in anthocyanins (and therefore also in colour) but has a good supply of tannins. Cappuccio is the exact opposite, which is precisely why it is usually used in blends with Mascalese to which it adds colour and lightness while simultaneously softening its considerable acidity. The golden age of Etna reds is not over, but it is no longer a solitary kingdom. Alongside the red king, a white prince has made its way that could win the challenge of time and conquer the sovereign. The great whites of Etna are no longer a promise, but a living reality.

**Alessandra Piubello**

### TASTINGS :

#### **Girolamo Russo, Feudo 2023** Etna Bianco DOC

The first vintage from a 2-hectare vineyard of carricante at around 650 meters in Feudo, a hamlet near Randazzo. The aromas are fine and elegant; the sip is tense and sapid with good volume and a dynamic progression on the palate. Its lengthy and radiant finish invites further tasting.

Score : 16.5/20 (93)

#### **Federico Curtaz 2021** Etna Bianco DOC Superiore

This Carricante from age-old vineyards at 900 metres in altitude is a progressing wave that bursts with vitality and infinite energetic return. Hints of broom, yellow fruit and flint offer a crystalline and pure sip, enlivened by a sapid and refreshing vein. With no lack of volume and consistency, a highly satisfactory and pleasurable drink.

Score : 18/20 (96)

#### **I Custodi delle vigne dell'Etna, Imbris 2021**

#### Etna Bianco DOC Superiore

The carricante from Contrada Caselle in Milo evokes hints of aromatic herbs, hazelnut, orange blossom honey, intensifying into a clear smoky note. Envelopments makes the good articulation even more pleasant, and a refined, enjoyable closure seems endless. With 20 hectares in the best areas, Mauro Pauluzi, continues to safeguard Etna's vineyards.

Score : 17/20 (94)

#### **Benanti Viticoltori, Pietra Marina 2020**

#### Etna Bianco DOC Superiore

This carricante has internationally demonstrated the grape's potential and Milo as the only area where Superiore can be produced. Intense bouquet with impressive fragrances from sage to acacia, gunpowder and a subtle citrus vein. An engaging gustatory dynamic develops on the palate, alternating sapidity and freshness towards a deep and lengthy finish.

Score : 17.5/20 (95)

#### **Pietradolce Barbagalli 2020**

#### Etna Rosso DOC

The red fruit, graphite, aromatic herb and spice bouquet already preannounces enchanting traits. Expressive purity on the palate, embroidered with fine tannins and centred on tonic, lively ripe fruit, accompanied by gustatory tension to the lengthy finish. Structure and lightness combine weightlessly, making the wine a valid ally for sharing.

Score : 17.5/20 (95)

#### **Tasca d'Almerita – Tenuta Tascante, Contrada Sciaranuova VV 2020**

#### Etna Rosso DOC

A pure Nerello Mascalese wine from a 64-year-old walled vineyard near a forest at over 700 metres in altitude. A complex varied aromatic spectrum with notes of violet, blood orange, black cherry and spice. Sapid and enveloping in its decisive tannin finesse, it reveals a distinct personality, juicy sip, inviting freshness and lengthy finish.

Score : 17.5/20 (95)

#### **Famiglia Statella, Pignatuni Vecchie Vigne 2021**

#### Etna Rosso DOC

The old, alberello-trained vines, some pre-phyloxera, grow in Contrada Pignatuni in the municipality of Randazzo. Calogero Statella has managed to capture the soul of the volcano and its internal dynamism by bringing to light a wine that gratifies us with abounding energy in the mouth and a well-measured and vibrant structure.

Score : 17/20 (94)

#### **Graci, Arcurìa Sopra il Pozzo 2020**

#### Etna Rosso DOC

Fascinating and sensorially multifaceted, this wine catalyses the senses. A compelling opening with clear notes of red fruits, blood orange and volcanic ash impressions. The deep and consistent yet light taste with memorably fine tannins, develops with invitingly lively and juicy energy. From a one-hectare Nerello Mascalese vineyard with very low yields.

Score : 17/20 (94)