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## **‘Land of extraordinary wines, Mount Etna won’**

**The winery Al-Cantàra was awarded prizes at the Vinitaly: it was placed second in Sicily and sixth in Italy. PucciGiuffrida: ‘Here there is a strong identity’.**

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Ombretta Grasso

When he took part in the Vinitaly for the first time in 2008, he recited lines by Nino Martoglio, like a story-teller of the past, for the visitors who stopped to taste his wines, ‘to tell them about both wines and their land. A good wine is like a poem.’ Then the ‘artistic corks’, film shows and other cultural events on local photography, painting, theatre and books started, creating that strong bond among culture, wine and Sicilian land that fascinates Al-Cantàra winery in Randazzo (CT): all the wine names come from poems titles and are a tribute to Sicilian writers and playwrights, such as Martoglio, Tempio, Meli, Pirandello, Ercole Patti and Alfio Antico.

Since that Vinitaly edition, the production has increased (from 1,500 to 100,000 bottles per year), as well as the number of prizes, from the first Special Mention Diploma (Gran Menzione) for ‘O’ scuru O’ scuru’ red wine in 2008 to the selection of seven wine labels this year. Al-Cantàra winery was placed first on Mount Etna, second in Sicily, after the winery G. Milazzo di Campobello in Licata, and sixth in Italy. ‘I am walking with a spring in my step, I am flying in the air, I am full of joy. Who could have imagined that we would win seven prizes’, the incredulous PucciGiuffrida, gentleman and businessman, well-known and esteemed accountant in Catania, wine producer for passion, smiles proudly. ‘Not only my winery, but also Mount Etna did win. For me it is important that the value of this wonderful land continues to be rewarded, that Mount Etna stands out’.

Divinity of nature, land of high contrasts, hell and paradise at the same time. There is no halfway, everything is too red, completely black or white as snow, sunny and cold on Mount Etna. ‘This is the secret of the wines produced in the shadow of the volcano: the strength and the energy given from lava ashes and minerals. This is the power of Mount Etna. I often says that if you plant a stick in its soil, it sprouts.’ This is a unique land, which is extreme, generous and rugged at the same time, and gives lively and full-bodied wines. ‘About 10-15 years ago many wine lovers and producers started to realise that. They understood that this fertile soil and the relevant temperature range give extraordinary wines, which are refined, particularly harmonious, and have a strong identity. The numbers of cellars and hectares planted to wine on Mount Etna are increasing: from 40 cellars in 2005 to 160 today, from 400 hectares to 1100. A real explosion. We could say that it is the fashion, but if the quality of the product is not good enough, in a couple of years the fashion changes. Yet in our cellar there is a Carricante white wine of 2009 which is still great, because here even white wines are long-lived.’

Mount Etna: a magic place that arouses imagination and evokes a universe of colours, aromas, flowers, sounds, unexpected bonds, and ancient knowledge. 'Everybody wants to taste a bit of Mount Etna. An island in the island. Even more, a galaxy containing many constellations made of lots of stars. Every *contrada* has its own peculiar features, and from one area to the other, soils are very different.'

Attracted by the volcano, many wineries have put down roots. Too many? 'Not such a big number, Giuffrida says, 'but it may be better to stop the new vines and let the soil rest. These wines are real jewels and must be protected and extolled. The number of producers who buy 50-100 hectares all at once is increasing. They transplant vineyards to other places: this is legal, but works against small producers. In addition, there should be more control and inspections: there are areas where even the smallest brick cannot be removed and others where some wineries are levelling lava flows with excavators, modifying this unique landscape irreparably.'

The volcano gives identity and culture, 'From the grape variety Nerello Mascalese we produce 8 different wines, from white to grappa and sparkling wine, which are coming soon', but also the team plays its role: the enologist Salvatore Rizzuto, who graduated at the University of Alba and gained his experience working in the Langhe and in Burgundy; the cellarman Giovanni Guidotto; the Sales Manager Gianluca Cali; the farmer Giuseppe Puglisi, who 'strokes the leaves to let them feel our love'. But a bit of madness is needed too: 'Good results are the fruits of far-sighted acts of madness', the General Manager of the Agricultural Councilorship Dario Cartabellotta says. This is an opinion that I share. 'Love, that does not exist without a bit of madness, led me to go on'. Al-Cantàra winery is the result of Giuffrida's daughters' love. 'They gave me a Sommelier course for Christmas in 2002, he remembers, 'and a beautiful dream started, I never imagined that I would like it so much. 'If you can dream it, you can do it', is a famous quotation by Enzo Ferrari that I always keep in mind.'

His wines with their original labels made by young artists, such as Annachiara Di Pietro, are travelling around the world, from Japan to the USA. 'The beginning of the year was electrifying. However, because of Covid-19, sales volume was cut by 90%', Pucci Giuffrida says 'and only a few weeks ago the market woke up. Yet if we complained about that, we would be unfair, since there are people who lost everything. Wine keeps well and we can start again, even if prices are decreasing'.

'What is missing to establish Mount Etna as the cradle of wine and a fundamental stop of this kind of tourism? 'What we may never have: the ability to be united. In the North of Italy, for example with apples, there is the cartel and people work together as a team. While we are not able to do the same, even if there is the farmers' cooperative here. This is part of our nature, we are individualist: maybe this is the real limit of Sicilian people. Yet I am optimistic, Mount Etna production will continue to grow, this is not a passing fashion. Together with the unique terroir, there is the charm of the volcano, its culture and landscape. There is a magic that cannot be easily found elsewhere.'

## GROWTH

From 40 cellars to 160. A real explosion. Just a fashion? If the product is not good, fashion changes in a couple of years

## FUTURE

Here there is a magic that cannot be easily found elsewhere. It is missing what we may never have: the ability to be united and work as a team.



Some of the seven wines from Al-Cantara selected by the 5StarWines jury. It is the winery with the highest numbers of selected products.



On the right there is PucciGiuffrida, on the bottom the owner is with the enologist Salvatore Rizzuto.



## THE WINERY

Al-Cantàra winery was founded in 2005 in ContradaFeudoSant'Anastasia in Randazzo (CT), on the North Western slope of Mount Etna, at about 600 metres above sea level and just a few steps from the Nature Reserve of Alcantàra. It is the result of the passion and obstinacy of its owner PucciGiuffrida, whose love for Sicilian literature and theatre influenced all the products (Etna Doc wines, Pgi Sicily wines, raisin wine and extra virgin olive oil made from olive variety '*nocellaraetna*'). In fact, their names evoke poems, novels and works by Sicilian writers and playwrights. Great attention is given also to the artistic and fine pictures on labels, entrusted to the creativity of young artists, such as Annachiara Di Pietro. The production process is inspired by local tradition and based on the protection of the landscape, with a green management of the vineyard, grape harvesting by hand, sustainable vines and the organic conversion of Carricante cultivar. Experiments continue to be carried out on NerelloMascalese, the grape variety *par excellence* on Mount Etna.