

Al-Cantàra, the Mount Etna wine still on top at the Vinitaly

14/04/2019

By **Ombretta Grasso**

Three wines from the winery of PucciGiuffrida in the town of Randazzo have been selected by the '5StarWines' guide for the third consecutive year.



The revenge of the little ones. Like David against Goliath, for the third consecutive year a small winery on Mount Etna, which produces 'poetic wines' with a Sicilian soul, has been selected for the '5StarWines' guide, the worldwide bible for wine lovers and experts. Al-Cantàra winery is in ContradaFeudoSant'Anastasia, which is part of the town of Randazzo (CT). It is only ten years old, but it has already won a shower of international prizes. This is the winery of PucciGiuffrida, a well-known and esteemed accountant in Catania with a twenty-year experience as a legal administrator of confiscated goods, who loves Mount Etna and wine and became a wine producer for passion.

At the recently concluded Vinitaly, the winery triumphed again for the third consecutive year, becoming part of the 5StarWines selection with three wines: the red Etna Doc 'O scuru O' scuru' 2016 (91 points), the white Etna Doc 'LuciLuci' 2017 (90 points) made from the single grape variety Carricante, and the red Pgi 'Muddichidisuli' 2016 (90 points), made from the single grape variety NerelloMascalese. The 5StarWines is a printed and on-line guide which includes only the wines selected by an international jury of experts that obtained a score of at least 90/100 during the tasting. This year 625 bottles were selected out of 2,700 and many of them were Sicilian. Sicily is the region with more vineyards in Italy: more than 97,000 hectares are planted to vine. As regards Mount Etna, the revival is by now undeniable: the production of Doc wines is growing by 5.4 % with 3,600,000 bottles produced in 2018, 200,000 more than the previous year.

The quality and the peculiarity of Mount Etna wines are rewarded. 'The volcano is the winner – PucciGiuffrida says – it is the point of excellence of wine production in Sicily. The judges

recognise the extraordinary quality of a unique soil, the excellence of its wines and the great charm of the volcano: these features are appreciated by wine lovers from all over the world. Everybody wants to taste a bit of Mount Etna'. The owner of Al-Cantàra is happy with this success. 'Happy? Much more, we are living moments of glory. We are proud to have been selected three years in a row and to be the winery on Mount Etna with the highest number of prizes – he says with enthusiasm- We are small, but, as I said, we think in a big way. This demonstrates that we have done a good job, appreciated by an international jury of experts. This is an incentive to do even more and continue to grow while improving the quality still further. Already in 2008, when we took part in the Vinitaly for the first time, we were awarded prizes: this was our visiting card. We started with 1,500 bottles, but next year we will produce 100,000 bottles.'

According to Mr Giuffrida, the success is the result 'of the love, enthusiasm and the competence that distinguish the way all our team works in the vineyard, in the cellar and in the winery: the farmer Giuseppe Puglisi, the enologist Salvatore Rizzuto, the cellarman Giovanni Guidotto, the sales manager and all the workers. The task is huge: we started the conversion to organic production methods two years ago and next year our white wine will be organic. Al-Cantàra has always relied on the local grape varieties nerellomascalse and carricante. 'We wanted to combine the quality and the identity in a style which is easy to recognize. Our wines express the history and the culture of Mount Etna'.

At the Vinitaly Al-Cantàra presented its new 'A notturna', a white wine made from black grapes. 'We want to emphasize our grape variety to the highest level: from nerellomascalse we produce red, rosè and raisin wines and now also nerellomascalse vinified in white'. The name is again a tribute to Sicily, 'to the night serenades that boys used to sing to their lovers'. Giuffrida gives its wines the names of the poems of Martoglio, Tempio, Giovanni Meli, Francesco Guglielmino, dresses them with artistic labels and describes them at cultural events, exhibitions and shows. And he wins over wine lovers. 'The trend is positive – the sales manager Gianluca Calì adds – many buyers look for Mount Etna products now, and this is not only a momentary trend, but a certainty. There is curiosity and demand from China and Japan, our market is growing in Russia and we export a lot to the USA, in Canada in North Europe and North Italy. Many restaurant owners want Mount Etna wines.'

'The secret to winning? We have remained faithful to ourselves.' – enologist Salvatore Rizzuto comments. He graduated in Vine growing and Enology at the University of Alba and gained his experience working for several vineyards in Bordeaux, Piemonte and Sicily. Since 2008 he has been working in wineries on Mount Etna. 'Our pure passion is combined with a great attention to detail which allows the peculiarity of our wines to stand out. The success of Mount Etna wines clears the ground, because historically volcano wines have always caught the attention of wine experts and lovers. The nerello grapes are versatile and we produce all the possible wine versions from it. After sparkling and rosè, we decided to try a halfway, a nerellomascalse vinified in white. The marked salinity and minerality of nerello plus the 5 month aging on sur lie give the product its main features: a full-bodied wine with a saline and persistent taste'. All the operations are carried out carefully both in the vineyard with organic methods and in the cellar 'with a modern inert press which avoids oxidation'.

Together with Al-Cantàra, other wineries on Mount Etna have been selected for '5 Star Wines The book': red Etna Doc (reserve) 2014 (91 points) and the white Etna Doc 2018 (90 points) from Francesco Tornatore, businessman in the field of technology and optic fibres, who founded also another winery with Oscar Farinetti called Tenuta Carranco, in Castiglione; red Etna Doc 'Sul Vulcano' 2016 by Donnafugata winery (91 points); red Etna Doc 'Feudo di mezzo' 2016 (91 points) and red Etna Doc 'Arcuria' 2016 (90 points) from Calcagno di Passopisciaro, the winery of

two brothers in the area of Castiglione; white Etna Doc by FeudoCavalierewinery (90 points) of MargheritaPlatania in Santa Maria di Licodia; the red Etna Doc 'Petalava' 2014 (90 points) fromAntichiVinaiwinery in Passopisciaro; organic red Etna Doc 'Martinella' 2014 (90 points) of the Vivera family in Linguaglossa.

Etna continues to play a leading role also at the wine festival 'Contradedell'Etna', organised by Andrea Franchetti, which will take place on 14th and 15th April at the Castle Romeo in Randazzo. 'It is an Etna mania – PucciGiuffrida concludes – We are only niche producers and it could not be any other way on a volcano. There is constant grow, but we must work together as a team. Are we going too fast? There should be more control and inspections: some wineries are levelling lava flows with excavators, modifying the landscape irreparably: our *muretti* are world heritage sites. Yet consumers want to listen to the stories and traditions of this area during meetings, wine tastings and trips to unique and fascinating places. They want authenticity. It is absurd to cancel these local volcanic features that fascinate all the world'.