

## Pull That Cork

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### Terrazze dell'Etna: Three Shades of Nerello Mascalese from Sicily's Etna DOC

Posted on March 7, 2016 by Nancy (CSW)

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Our driver was unfamiliar with the location of the winery. He relied upon his GPS which sent us, not to the recently constructed wine cellar but, to the vineyards and home located further uphill toward Mt. Etna. We were happy for the detour, it allowed us a brief glimpse of the terraced vineyards after which the winery is named.



Vincenzo wasn't as thrilled, but was very gracious as he negotiated a road more intended for tractors than passenger vehicles. When the road became impassable he reached for his phone. A lyrical conversation, which we could not understand, ensued. His attention was drawn toward the house and a blond woman motioned for him to turn around and drive back toward the paved road. She met us at the road, her arm extended and waving from behind the wheel of her white Fiat 500. Vincenzo had to *step on it* in order to keep up as we buzzed downhill toward the winery. We could not have had a more delightful introduction to wine tasting in Sicily.

In nothing flat, Alessia Bevilacqua had everything arranged for our wine tasting. A collection of local cheese, olives and sausage were arranged along with the three wines we would taste. Before the tasting however, we talked vineyards, winemaking and enjoyed a tour of the winery.



[Terrazze dell'Etna](#), a relative newcomer to Etna DOC, is located northwest of Mt. Etna. Palermo native Nino Bevilacqua, Alessia's father, purchased vineyards there in 2007 and built a new winemaking facility. Consulting enologist Riccardo Cotarella was hired to work with winemaker Pier Giuseppe Carucci.



The 36-hectares of vineyards are a combination of old and new. Alessia told us the oldest Nerello Mascalese vines are 150 years of age and vineyard locations range from 650 to 900 meters above sea level in various locations. *Albarello* trellising is used (head trained or goblet to us) and the yield in these vineyards is quite low, but the quality is very high.

Vineyards are planted to [Nerello Mascalese](#), [Nerello Cappuccio](#), Pinot Nero, Petit Verdot and Chardonnay. Much of the vineyard work is done by hand, including all harvesting. Though the vineyard is not certified organic, Alessia told us chemical sprays are not used in the vineyards.

Because of the variety of vineyard elevations and the number of grape varieties planted, harvesting is done in essentially three phases. The first to be harvested is Pinot Nero and Chardonnay, and that harvest had been completed two weeks prior to our visit on the 19th of September. Nerello Mascalese for rosé production was in progress at the time of our visit and the last harvest would be Nerello for red wine production — as late as the last part of October.

One of the charms of wine tasting abroad is tasting wine made with indigenous varieties — as we were about to discover. Alessia had organized a tasting of Nerello Mascalese, the red variety for which Etna DOC is best known. The variety originated on the eastern slopes of Mt. Etna and is named after Mascali, a coastal city in the area. We were treated to three interpretations of Nerello Mascalese, a white, a rosé and a red. Clearly, Nerello Mascalese is the star of the show at Terrazze dell'Etna.



The tasting area in the winery is specifically designed to focus the taster's attention on the wine: the lights are low and classical music plays in the background. Food is served with the wine, because that is how wine is mostly enjoyed. The tasting area is lovely, though the photographer in me would have liked a bit more light.



**2013 Terrazze dell'Etna Ciuri** — *very light yellow in the glass with delicate floral aromas and flavors combined with minerals and earth. Bright and refreshing. 12.5% abv.*

Ciuri means flower in Sicilian and Alessia told us the wine is named for flowers found in a natural area, similar to the natural areas of Mt. Etna where the vineyards are located. The red Nerello Mascalese grape is pressed off and the nearly colorless juice is vinified without any skin contact.

This wine is the product of the innovative thinking at Terrazze dell'Etna —their thinking outside the box. They are thinking outside the Etna DOC regulations as well, which require Etna Bianco to be made from a minimum of 60% [Carricante](#),

up to 40% [Catarratto](#) and a maximum of 15% Trebbiano, white Minnella or other white varieties suitable to the area. Nerello Mascalese is not allowed in the production of Etna Bianco and for that reason you see Vino Bianco on the label.

**2013 Terrazze dell'Etna Rosato** — *transparent salmon color in the glass with fragrant cherry aromas and flavors, bright acidity and once again lovely minerality. 12.5% abv.*

Only 8 hours of skin contact prior to fermentation produces the lovely salmon color of this wine along with the bright and lively fruit and cherry flavors. This wine will be delightful on a warm afternoon and will easily move to dinner as well. We plan to test this theory soon — we brought a bottle home with us!



**2012 Terrazze dell'Etna Carusu** — *transparent ruby in the glass with generous dark fruit, dry earth and smoky aromas and flavors. Firm tannins give this wine great structure and the finish is juicy. A lovely wine that is easy to drink, but by no means simple. 14.5% abv.*

The color of this wine in the glass made me think of Pinot Noir, however the flavor is quite different as are the firm tannins. I particularly enjoyed the earthy, dark fruit flavors in this wine.

This blend of 80% Nerello Mascalese and 20% Nerello Cappuccio is aged 6 months in wood and one year in the bottle before release. The two Nerellos are frequently blended together in Etna DOC with Mascalese described as firmer and Cappuccio as softer.

Carusu means little brother in Sicilian, and this wine is considered the little brother of Terrazze dell'Etna's Cirneco, which is sourced from the oldest Nerello Mascalese vines (from 60 to 150 years old.) Alessia described Cirneco as a wine for meditation.

At this point you may be wondering why Chardonnay and Pinot Nero are being grown by Terrazze dell'Etna. Sparkling wine, of course. Terrazze dell'Etna produces a Cuveé Brut from 100% Chardonnay and Rosé Brut which is 90% Pinot Nero and 10% Nerello Mascalese. Both are produced using *metodo classico* with the second fermentation in bottle and all riddling is done by hand. Both spend 36 months on the lees. A labor of love.

If you are at all curious about these fine wines produced on the slopes of Mt. Etna, you are in luck. A portion of the 180,000-bottle production [is available](#) in the U.S. (except for the Rosato, which is why we snagged a bottle while we were there. We just couldn't resist.) We found the combination



of fruit flavors and earthiness in these wines really interesting. It's almost as if we could taste the volcanic soil that defines Etna DOC reflected in the wine.

We could not have chosen a better first wine tasting experience in Etna DOC. The opportunity to taste Nerello Mascalese made in three distinct wine styles successfully demonstrates just how versatile and delicious the variety is. Thank you, Alessia, for sharing you enthusiasm for Nerello Mascalese with us.



As we stepped outside the winery after the tasting, there was the mountain rising above us belching smoke and looking majestic. Mt. Etna of course dominates the landscape in the region, and I was constantly torn between keeping an eye on the ever-changing plume of smoke being expressed by Europe's tallest and most active volcano and the grapevines through which we drove. What a lovely dilemma.

Below is a slideshow of our visit to Terrazze dell'Etna. Please enjoy.

Terrazze dell'Etna Winery, Sicily



Cheers!

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