



# PUGLIA AND SICILY: THE NEW, AFFORDABLE CALIFORNIA?

**Left: Donnafugata pickers extol the joys of the harvest in Sicily. Below left: a traditional trullo and vineyard near Martina Franca, Puglia. Below right: Donnafugata's 5-star dessert wine**

Even a small percentage of Cabernet Sauvignon, for example, can mute the indigenous characters.

With over 150,000ha of vineyards, Sicily has more hectares under vine than any wine region in Italy. It competes with the Veneto and Puglia to be the largest producer. But less than 10% of total production is bottled.

While Puglia is mostly red, two-thirds of Sicily's production comes from still white wine. Yet Sicily's best known grape varieties are black. Nero d'Avola is its trump card and is the most widely planted red grape on the island.

It blends well with the native Nerello Mascalese, Frappato and Perricone, while international grapes Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Syrah are also widely used. Syrah shows the best results, being close in profile and rumoured to be of similar parentage, but the most interesting wines are dominant Nero d'Avola.

For whites, Catarratto covers around a third of Sicily's vineyards and was historically favoured for providing quantity for Marsala production.

The Grillo grape now produces finer Marsala and is showing potential for aromatic, dry table wines of distinction. The other white grape of note is Inzolia – also written Insolia or Ansonica – produced either as a single varietal or

blended with Catarratto and/or Grecanico. These are unique expressions with a future worth following.

Some commentators have labelled Puglia and Sicily as the new California. The climatic conditions might be similar but flavours remain uniquely southern Italian and the wines are some way behind their American rivals.

With greater understanding, though, the potential exists to make some fine wines here in the future. Here's a few to be going on with.

## SWEET

### ■ Donnafugata, Ben Ryé, Passito di Pantelleria, Sicily 2003 ★★★★★

100% Zibibbo from the island of Pantelleria. Naturally sweet from dried, late harvest grapes. Gentle, pure orange marmalade aromas – fresh and delicious. Caramelised notes of honey and dried figs on the palate. Lifted and carried acidity to aid the sweetness with a long pure and clean length. A great substitute for Sauternes. £18 (375ml); Har, Vin

## WHITES

### ■ Cusumano, Cubia-Insolia, Sicily 2003 ★★★★★

Aged in large botte, resulting in a less aggressive, soft, full and round style. Lovely rounded acidity supporting depth and a long finish. A very good modern example and best consumed over the next two years. £15; Euw

### ■ Donnafugata, Vigna di Gabri, Sicily 2003 ★★★★★

Made from Ansonica and 20% barrel fermented to add weight and a spicy note. Perfumed, tropical and pure aromas leading

to a structured and complete palate. Has a fullness of body to partner a variety of food. Up to 3 years. £15; Har, Vin

### ■ Fondo Antico, Grillo Parlante, Sicily 2003 ★★★★★

An aromatic example displaying florality and perfume. Plenty of depth and rounded mouthfeel with a gentle floral and spice note. Lovely interplay between juicy fruit and acidity with the length to suggest good drinking until 2006. £9; Bia, EaW

### ■ Marchesi Antinori, Tormaresca Chardonnay, Puglia 2003 ★★★★★

Very clean and restrained. Elegant ripe peach flavours, buoyant acidity in a very precise and well made style. Excellent value Chardonnay with elegance. Up to 2 years. £5.99; BWC

### ■ Trulli, Premium Selection Chardonnay, Puglia 2002 ★★★★★

Shows a surprising freshness with a chalky minerality from Salento, deep in Italy's heel. Barrel fermented with good integration between fruit and oak. Complete palate with amply ripe fruit, balanced acidity and a long length. A lot of classy Chardonnay for the price. Up to 2 years. £5.99; IWS

### ■ Planeta, La Segreta, Sicily 2003 ★★★★★

Made from 60% Grecanico with Chardonnay, Viognier, Sauvignon Blanc and Fiano. Multi-layered complexity. Rich, aromatic and full mouthfeel with a broad, complete length and lifted acidity. Drink soon. £8.49; EnW

### ■ Torrevento, Castel del Monte Bianco, Puglia 2003 ★★★★★



**Right: Rivera's Il Falcone is a classic Puglia wine – charming perfumed nose and spiciness over pure berry fruit. Soft, silky, firm fruit and oak tannins.**

70% Bombino Bianco and 30% Pampanuto. Fragrant, steely and mineral with a hint of stone fruits. Broad yet fresh with a very dry finish and a crisp lift of acidity. Unusual in its lack of fruitiness but freshness indicates early consumption. £4; TrW

## REDS

### ■ Conti Zecca, Nero, Puglia 2001

★★★★

70% Negroamaro and 30% Cabernet Sauvignon, aged 18 months in barrique. Deep, semi-opaque colour and a multi-layered depth on the nose. Seriously structured tannins providing a platform for rich, dark berry fruit. An impressive extraction with a refreshing lift of acidity destined for a long future. 2–8 years plus. £18.05; HBa

### ■ Cottanera, Fatagione, Sicily 2001

★★★★

85% Nerello Mascalese, 15% Nero d'Avola displaying a perfumed freshness and vanilla notes from a year in barrique. Succulent, ripe yet lifted berry fruit, depth in a clean modern fashion. Has the structure to age for 5 years plus. £14.50; Ast

### ■ Cusumano, Nero d'Avola 2003, Sicily 2003

★★★★

Very clean example with pure raspberry fruit aromas and soft silky palate weight with a juicy lift. Tannins are ripe and supportive with the purity best enjoyed soon. £8.99; Euw

### ■ Donnafugata, Sedara, Sicily 2002

★★★★

100% Nero d'Avola with a vibrant ruby colour. Immediate fresh berry explosion, very pure with a minerality and a gentle spice note. Clean, modern, unique flavours; a juicy, succulent length; and good palate weight. A very attractive style with fresh fruit tannins. Up to 3 years plus. £10; Vin

### ■ Donnafugata, Tancredi, Sicily 2001

★★★★

Varietal expression of 30% Cabernet and 70% Nero d'Avola. Purity of fruit and structure of tannins with an excellent depth and a long, complex length. Cabernet seems to work better in Sicily than Merlot, allowing the juiciness of Nero d'Avola to shine through. A well-balanced, grown-up wine with a future of over 5 years. £20; Har, Vin



### ■ Feline, Alberello, Puglia 2002

★★★★

Rich, spicy and savoury palate with pure, vibrant and juicy rounded fruit. Soft tannins and moreish. A lovely example and best up to 5 years. £6; Wtd

### ■ Feline, Primitivo di Manduria, 2002 Puglia

★★★★

Silky smooth fruit profile yet with a power from oak. Slightly sweet although slick red berry fruit. Tight tannins and fruit structure with the ability to age up to 5 years. Very well crafted wine. £8; Wtd

### ■ Masseria Monaci, Eloquenzia, Negroamaro, Puglia 2000

★★★★

From the personal Estate of Severino Garofano, the man responsible for much of Puglia's elevation, comes this 100% Negroamaro. Wonderful depth of aromas with complex spice and plum, berry fruit. Seductive velvety palate showing structure and multi-layered complexity, very well judged extraction of tannins and a long harmonious length. Up to 5 years plus. £5.99; MeW

### ■ Masseria Monaci, I Censi, Puglia 2000

★★★★

Half Negroamaro and half Primitivo with

delicacy and a broadness from the latter. Soft, silky mouthfeel with a fine marriage achieved between the grape blend. Structure is deeper than pure Negroamaro with a certain spiciness and grip of tannins. Hints at a future of 5–10 years although approachable soon. £6.99; MeW

### ■ Rivera, Il Falcone, Puglia 2000

★★★★

A Puglian classic with a charming perfumed nose and some spiciness over pure berry fruit. Soft, silky entry, firm fruit and oak tannins. Long, structured and built to last for 10 years plus. £9.50; MnW

### ■ Rivera, Puer Apuliae, Castel del Monte, Nero di Troia, Puglia 2000

★★★★

Lovely direct purity with mouthfilling, juicy fruit and a touch of spice and earth. Despite advancing age the tannins are still solid and power hints at long future. Up to 5 years plus. £17; MnW

### ■ Torrevento, Vigna Pedale Riserva, Puglia 2001

★★★★

100% Nero/Uva di Troia with fragrant, pure grape aromas. Juicy, succulent palate with a pure grip of tannins and ripe fruit balance. Lovely softness on the palate with an →