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Decanter

Intriguing Italy

235 wines from top to toe



EXPERT RATINGS

Value Barolo alternatives, Sicily's native whites, premium Amarone and Chianti Classico 2010

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Italy's gastronomic whites

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Sicily's native whites

Italy's historical Mediterranean destination-island is now making waves thanks to the rapidly rising quality of its wines. Carla Capalbo recommends her top 18 whites



The Italians describe Sicily as a continent. The range of landscapes and climates on this remarkable island go from volcanoes and mountains to salt flats and beaches, with temperatures and rainfall that are equally variable. So it's no wonder that the vine has played such an important part in Sicily's history and economy.

Currently white wine makes up about 60% of the island's production. While some international varieties are grown and vinified, it's the indigenous grapes that are telling the most powerful stories about the island's

character. At least a dozen native white varieties are currently in production, with the main focus being on Catarratto (which itself makes up about 60% of all Sicilian whites), Carricante, Grillo, Inzolia (Ansonica), Grecanico, Trebbiano, Malvasia and Zibibbo (Muscato di Alessandria). Many others are produced in very small or localised quantities.

In the past 20 years, Sicilian winemaking has moved away from its mass-production of grapes and must, and undergone huge transformations,' says Giorgio Melandri, one of Italy's top wine experts. 'It began with the help of



Marco De Bartoli, Vecchio Samperi, Vino da Tavola, Marsala NV '95
£34.60-£56.95 All Wines, East, Les Caves de Pyrene

Revolutionary non-fortified dry Grillo made in 'perpetuo' (like a solera), balancing austerity with abundance, freshness with purity. Biodynamic. Drink 2019-2045 Alc 16.5%



Tenuta delle Terre Nere, Calderara Sottana Cuvée delle Vigne Niche, Etna Bianco 2017 '96
£21.68 Austini & Brooks

Perfect balance of freshness and richness. This 100% Carricante is perfumed yet austere, citrus yet saline, full yet energised. Fermented on lees. Organic. Drink 2019-2029 Alc 13.5%



Lantieri, Malvasia di Lipari Bianco Secco, Salina, Vulcano 2017 '95
N/A UK • £11.99-12.95

An island Malvasia that speaks of earth and sea: dried fruits, sea-plants, coffee and herbs all conspire in this portrait of Vulcano. Long and fresh to the end. Drink 2019-2026 Alc 11%



Girolamo Russo, Nerina, Etna Bianco 2017 '94
£48 Hambro Grape, Minimal Wine

A volcanic terroir wine (Carricante blended with four other grapes), dry, fluid and long with yellow fruits and well-integrated acidity driving its salty, tightly smoky finish. Organic. Drink 2019-2029 Alc 13%



Marco De Bartoli, Integer Zibibbo, Terre Siciliane, Pantelleria 2017 '94
£32.49 Les Caves de Pyrene

Light amber and softly cloudy, with a wildly aromatic nose of black tea, apricots, oyster plant and the sea. A long maceration turns Muscat's floral sweetness to salt and iodine. Biodynamic. Drink 2019-2024 Alc 11.5%



Tenuta delle Terre Nere, Santo Spirito Cuvée delle Vigne Niche, Etna Bianco 2017 '94
£21.68 Austini & Brooks

An original, smoky nose, showing layers of candied citrus, pollen and wild herbs. The palate is agile and long. 100% Carricante, organic. Drink 2019-2029 Alc 13.5%



Tornatore, Etna Bianco 2018 '93
£16.69-£17.46 (2017) Blendon-P.B. Bay Great Wine, Hay Wines

Made from 100% Carricante, with fine balance between minerality and fruit and hints of sweetness, full of white peaches, balsamic herbs and a refreshing citrus finale. A ritely direct wine. Drink 2019-2024 Alc 12.5%



Vino di Anna, Palmento, Etna Bianco, 2018 '91
£21.50-£22 Les Caves de Pyrene, Noble Green

This unfiltered blend (Catarratto with five other varieties) has a saline nose with hints of white peaches, lychees and citrus, plus subtle tea tannins that accompany its fresh finish. Biodynamic. Drink 2019-2023 Alc 11.5%



Graci, Etna Bianco 2017 '90
£21.99-£24.83 All Wines, Barry Bros & Hault, Barco & Gomez, Tarrico, The Good Wine Shop

Classic, elegant style for this fresh, saline Carricante-Catarratto blend. Its richness carries hints of samphire, minerality and subtle earthiness to a long, salty finish. Organic. Drink 2019-2024 Alc 13%

the big brand-name estates which spread the word about Sicilian wines in general around the world. Then, when the wines from the volcanic slopes of Etna burst onto the scene, that message shifted to one about high-quality wines that were specific to a very unique terroir. This changed the way that even the bigger brands made and marketed their wines. Indeed, most of the big names from other parts of Sicily have recently bought properties on Etna. What's impressive is how Sicily has accommodated these changes.

As in other parts of the world, it's often individual pioneers who show the potential of a wine or area. The late Marco De Bartoli was inspiring not only for his groundbreaking work in redeeming the reputation of Marsala, but also for his intuition about vinifying both the aromatic Zibibbo (used on Pantelleria for making passito dessert wines) and Grillo (the main grape in Marsala) as dry table wines. Many others have followed suit.

On Etna, it was Giuseppe Benanti who first brought the world's attention to the power and complexity of Carricante, in his legendary Pietramarina (sadly not available for this tasting). Producers such as Marc De Grazia saw in Carricante's saline expressiveness from the black volcanic soils the possibility to make long-aging whites to stand alongside Burgundy and other top white wine regions. Sicily is also leading the way in organic wines: 10% of its production is now certified, and some fine biodynamic and 'natural' wines are also being made.

Finally, a note about this tasting: I invited 80 Sicilian wineries to submit their wines; about 40 of them did so. These included many well-made examples with excellent price-to-quality ratios, which did not make it into this (small) final list, but whose wines are exported around the world and well worth trying. The selection below showcases the diversity of some of the best grapes and their producers. ☐

Carla Capallo is an award-winning wine and food writer, photographer and consultant who has been based in Italy for many years.



Tenuta di Fessina, A'Puiddara, Etna Bianco 2016 90

£34.60-£38.50 fessina.it, Harvey Nichols, Howard Grapes

A well-structured Carricante: yellow floral aromas, minerality, saltiness and length, showing notes of nettle, wild sage and Mediterranean flora. Drink 2019-2029 Alc 12%



Arianna Occhipinti, SP68 Bianco, Terre Siciliane, Vittoria 2018 89

£22-£23 LesCavesDePyrene.com, Nolle Green

A seductively aromatic nose of sweet flowers and apricots is tempered by the drier flavours of tea, capers and eucalyptus leaf in this hugely likeable macerated wine. A Moscato-Albanello blend. Drink 2019-2023 Alc 12%



Cantine Nicosia, Vulka, Etna Bianco 2017 89

£14-£16.99 Boutique.Cotes.Kauff.com, Nicole Green, Tanteo, The Bottle Bank, Toulonaise

Floral nose, with notes of fermentation. A dynamic palate with flavours of wheat, ripe fruit and salinity. Carricante-Catanaro blend. Organic. Drink 2019-2022 Alc 12.5%



Feudo Montoni, Inzolia dei Fornelli, Palermo 2018 89

£18 FeudoMontoni.com

From 100% Inzolia, this has attractive light bitterness in the mid-palate, with notes of yellow and white fruits, candied lemon and toasted coffee. A good long finish. Organic. Drink 2019-2024 Alc 13%



Tascia d'Almerita, Fondazione Whitaker Grillo, Mozia 2017 89

POA FondazioneWhitaker.com

Tascia's distinctive saline Grillo is from Mozia Isola in the lagoon beside Marsala's salt flats. Notes of candied citrus and capers are carried on good acidity to a salty finish. Organic. Drink 2019-2023 Alc 13.5%



Federico Curtaz, Ganma, Etna Bianco 2015 88

N/A UK www.federicocurtaz.it

Made from 100% Carricante. The nose has hints of petroleum (like a Riesling), ripe white fruits and minerality. On the palate fine acidity maintains freshness into the finish. Drink 2019-2027 Alc 13%



Hibiscus, L'Isola Bianco, Terre Siciliane, Ustica 2017 88

N/A UK www.spartanwinery.com

From the tiny island of Ustica, this Catarratto-Zibibbo reflects its seascape origins through salinity and white floral notes. Freshness and minerality carry it to a long, energised finish. Organic. Drink 2019-2023 Alc 13%



Vaccaro, Catarratto-Zibibbo, Terre Siciliane, Trapani 2018 88

N/A UK www.vaccaro.it

An aromatic and attractive nose in this blend, with marine scents, sage and oregano. The palate is balanced and saline, long and juicy. Organic. Drink 2019-2022 Alc 12.5%



Francesco Intorcchia, Heritage Vergine Secco, Marsala 2004 94

POA TheMarsala.com

This rich-amber fortified wine (100% Grillo) speaks of Marsala's noble history: deep, multi-faceted and mineral. Mediterranean herbs, spices, toasted nuts and a complex, long finish. Drink 2019-2045 Alc 18%