

Sicily: The Business Island in the Sun

Charles Scicolone (January 15, 2012)



Wine, Olive Oil, Pasta, Coffee Sicily has it All!

It is always a pleasure for me to visit Sicily. All of my grandparents were born there and Michele and I first went there on our honeymoon. It is such a beautiful and enchanting Island that I will use any excuse to go there. My excuse came in the form of an invitation to spend five days in Sicily tasting wine and food and visiting the sites. I had to accept!

The trip was sponsored by the regions of Trapani, Ragusa and Catania. It was unusual because my fellow travelers included an international group of journalists, wine and food buyers, and travel



agents from India, Russia, and Tunisia as well as the USA. I was travelling with my friend, Louis Coluccio owner of Coluccio and Son's in Brooklyn, wholesalers and retailers of Italian food products.

We arrived very late in Palermo and did not get to the Hotel Baglio Oneto, which is between Marsala and Trapani, until after midnight. There was a very nice light supper waiting for us when we arrived.

The next morning after breakfast there was a short conference followed by a meeting with different producers of olive oil, wine, grappa, coffee, pasta, balsamic vinegar, and food products. We went around to the different tables to sample the wine and the food products.

I stopped at a table that had only one wine and one grappa. The producer was Natale Peraino and the wine is called Don Girolamo, classified as a Vino da Tavola. It is a white wine made from, I believe, the Grillo grape and it is aged for 10 years in large barrels called botti made of chestnut and oak. It had a very deep orange color and it tasted like Marsala, but much more rustic. It was one of the most unusual wines I have ever tasted. It is the only wine that they make and it is not imported into the USA.

In the afternoon we visited Frantoio Torredi Mezzo an olive oil mill located in Trapani where the very personable and knowledgeable Alberto Galluffo, an olive oil panel member, is a consultant. Mr Galluffo also makes his own very good olive oil. This was a state-of-the-art factory and the production was all controlled by a computer. The olive oil I liked the best was made from three different types of olives--Cerasuola 50%, Nocellara 25% and Biancolilla 25%. It had grassy quality and tasted of tomatoes and artichokes. I believe the olive oil from both producers is available in the USA.

That night we visited the Giuseppe Bianchi Distillery located in Marsala. It not only produces grappa but also Amaro and Limoncello as well as well as sweet wine and Marsala. We tasted a Marsala Superiore Riserva 1989 and a 20 year old Marsala Virgine Riserva which were excellent and went very well with the biscotti that they gave us. Their products are not imported into the USA. I often wonder why it is so difficult to find Marsala of this quality here.

Near Ragusa we visited another olive oil producer, Frantoi Cutrera, and had a long discussion about virgin olive oil with the son of the owner Sebastiano. The producer said that it must pass a government test to be labeled virgin olive oil and this is partly based on the acidity. He said that there was no such thing as light olive oil or extra light olive oil. When asked about his oil he said that they only press the grapes once and his oil always passes the government's tests. Their oil is available in the USA

On the way to Catania we stopped for a tasting at the Planeta winery near the town of Vittoria. The one wine that I wanted to taste was the Cometa 2010 IGT Sicily. This wine is made from 100% Fiano, a grape that was brought to Campania by the Greeks and gained fame there as Fiano di Avellino. The wine is vinified at the winery in Menfi at Ulmo and the grapes come from the Gurra and Dispensa vineyards. Destemming is followed by gentle crushing and static settling at a low temperature. It is inoculated with select yeast when clear. Fermentation takes place in stainless steel for 20 days and the wine is aged in stainless steel. This is an elegant, full-bodied and aromatic wine. It has hints of citrus and tangerine with a nice mineral character and good acidity. When I tasted this wine in February 2010 at the winery I could not believe how good it was. They told me then that wine is no longer aged in barriques! This is a great white wine.

At another tasting of wine and food products in Catania I met Rosario Greco, export manager of the Cantina Vivera winery and we had a very interesting conversation about Sicilian wine. I tasted the "Salisire" Etna Bianco DOC 2009 made from 100% Carricante, one of the best white grapes from the Etna region. The vineyards are at 600 meters and the soil is volcanic with many rounded stones. There are 5,500 vines per hectare and the training is spur pruned cordon. The harvest takes place the second week of October. The grapes are soft pressed without oxygen and are fermented in temperature controlled stainless steel tanks. The wine rests on its lees for 10 months and in bottle for six months before release. This is a very fruity up front wine with good citrus aromas and flavors, a mineral character and good acidity.



A' Mami Sicily IGT Bianco 2009 Made from 50% Chardonnay and 50% Carricante. The Carricante comes from Linguaglossa where the Mittenella vineyard is located at 600 meters on the northeastern side of Etna. The Chardonnay comes from Corleone where the Solicchiata vineyard is located at 450 meters. There are 4,500 plants per hectare and the grapes are picked in the middle of August. The wine has citrus aromas and flavors with hints of tropical fruits and mineral notes.

They also make a wine called "Altrove" Sicilia IGT Bianco made from Catarratto, Insolia and Chardonnay from the vineyards of Muranna and Dagata in the hills around Corleone. Rosario said the vineyards were organic and the winery "biological". These wines are available in the USA.

I asked Rosario if he know a good restaurant in the Catania fish market and he suggested a restaurant called M!M. This was the best meal we had in Sicily. We ate crudo, followed by pasta with sardines, and a mixed grill including triglia (red mullet), swordfish, calamari, and octopus. With the lunch we drank Pietranera 2009 made from 100% Zibibbo grapes from Marco de Bartoli. The grapes come from the island of Pantelleria, the closest part of Italy to Africa. Zibibbo grapes are used to make desert wines for which De Bartoli is famous. The vines are on terraced hills at 350 meters, the soil is volcanic and the training system for the vines is alberello pantesco, very, very short vine. This wine however was vinified dry. There was very nice fruit in the mouth but the finish was dry and it was a great combination with the fish we had for lunch.

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