

Blending Innovation With Tradition

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There is a rumor circulating that I've been having an ongoing love affair with Sicily. I must confess it is true and it can be confirmed by all the stories I've written about this magical island throughout the past several years. The wines of Sicily never cease to impress me. And the fiery passion and pride of the vineyard owners and winemakers are awe-inspiring.



Photo courtesy of Mandrarossa

Sicily is the second-largest wine-producing region in Italy with Puglia being first. However, Sicily takes first place for the actual number of vineyards in a region and with so many wineries spread throughout the island, exploration is endless. Since travel is on the back burner for now, my visits to Sicily for the foreseeable future will be through the amazing wine samples that I receive.

My latest wine delivery is Mandrarossa, a brand created by Cantine Settesoli located in Menfi, on the southwestern side of the island.



Cantine Settesoli was founded in 1958 and is the largest winery in Sicily. It is a source of ongoing research and innovative ideas. I had the pleasure of visiting the estate and tasting an array of wines from their portfolio a few years ago. However, I didn't have a chance to taste Mandrarossa wines. So, I was quite excited to open these bottles.



Photo credit: Penny Weiss

Mandrarossa is Settesoli's top brand and it emerged in 1999 after an ambitious team of industry experts got together and spent over 20 years in a mission to create high-quality wines of both indigenous and international varieties from Sicily. Their goal was to *"produce wines that represent the true essence of the territories they come from."* They spent years studying soils and microclimatic conditions that eventually led to identifying top estates (the ideal habitat) with the best variety/terroir combinations for allowing each grape variety to fully express its potential.

"Since 2014 an international team of agronomists and soil experts, together with Mandrarossa enologists, have carried out a scientific study on limestone soils and this has defined them a micro-region with a high-quality potential. The mapping of these soils has revealed wonderful vineyards where it is possible to grow local grapes generating wines such as "Bertolino Soprano" and "Terre del Sommacco", the new wines of Mandrarossa Contrada." Mandrarossa vineyards stretch across these limestone soils on intense sun-soaked slopes with cool sea breezes. These factors contribute to the authentic expression of the terroir.



Photo courtesy of Mandrarossa

Grillo (white) and Nero d'Avola, (red) are indigenous grapes of Sicily.

Nero d'Avola (Calabrese) is considered the number one Sicilian red and has been enjoyed since the end of the 17th century. It is one of the oldest indigenous grapes of Sicily and the most widely planted red variety. Nero d'Avola fills approximately 18% of vineyards.

Grillo, one of Sicily's best-known grapes, is found throughout western Sicily and is noted for its citrus flavors, sweetness and mild acidity. Due to the grape's high sugar levels, it is ideal for the production of fortified wines. Historically, Grillo was used in the production of Marsala wine but Catarratto has now taken the lead. And due to the innovation of new winemakers, Grillo has a wide range of styles, from crisp and savory, to structured and mature. It is interesting to note that in 1848 Grillo became a hybrid of Zibibbo and Catarratto.

Bertolino Soprano Grillo Sicilia DOC 2017

The grapes for this 100% Grillo are sourced from vineyards along the southwest facing hills of Menfi at 482 feet above sea level. Sea breezes and limestone soils contribute to the character and uniqueness of this wine. After fermentation, the wine ages for one month in steel and concrete vats. Further aging of 11 months takes place in large oak barrels.



Photo credit: Penny Weiss

Engaging aromas of floral, stone fruit and delicate citrus notes set the stage for this crisp, fruit-driven wine. The palate offers fresh stone fruit with an emphasis on peach, including notes of citrus and minerality. It has a lengthy finish with a lingering touch of lemon and peach. Enjoy as an aperitif or pair with appetizers, grilled fish, light pasta and vegetables.

Alcohol: 12.5%

SRP: \$42.99

Terre Del Sommacco Sicilia DOC 2016

This is 100% Nero d'Avola with grapes sourced from limestone vineyards along the southwest facing hills of Menfi, 1,017 feet above sea level. This wine is aged for eight months in steel and concrete vats followed by 19 months in large barrels. A minimum of eight months is spent in bottle before release.



Photo credit: Penny Weiss

On the nose, it is very aromatic with dark fruit, black cherry, baking spice and a hint of herbs. The palate is layered with juicy ripe berries, plum, black cherry, spice and a touch of earth. This is nicely structured with fine tannins and refreshing acidity. It will pair beautifully with roasted meat, game, stews and seared tuna.

Alcohol: 14%

SRP: \$49.99

Both wines are a beautiful expression of the wine-growing area of southwestern Sicily.

Curious as to how the pandemic and global warming may have impacted production, Filippo Buttafuoco, chief agronomist at Mandrarossa responded to my inquiry.

"In Sicily, we haven't faced major problems with global warming. We are fortunate to have a regular climatic trend and fresh sea breezes that ensure minerality, freshness and correct development of the grapes' production."

"COVID-19 has had no real effects on the vineyards; nature has not stopped. Our winegrowers continue to take care of the plants and in about 20 days we will start a harvest that promises to be extraordinary." As you can see by the photo, all precautions are taken and masks are mandatory, even in the vineyards.



Photo courtesy of Mandrarossa

I look forward to the day that I'm allowed to travel again. I can't wait to return to Sicily and be swept away by this captivating island!

Until next time...

Cheers!

Penina