

Etna Rosso

With the potential of the Nerello Mascalese grape now clear, Sicily's volcanic red wine is on a roll, with a boom in investment and vineyard area. Michael Garner reports

THIRTY YEARS AGO, Etna Rosso was in danger of becoming a museum piece. Following DOC recognition in 1968, it had been barely kept alive by a few producers – notably Barone Villagrande, Cantine Russo and the local co-operative Torrepalino (now a privately owned company), serving an almost entirely local market. But a trickle of new interest in the late 1980s and early 1990s when Benanti and then Cottanera invested in the area, was to become a substantial flow soon after.

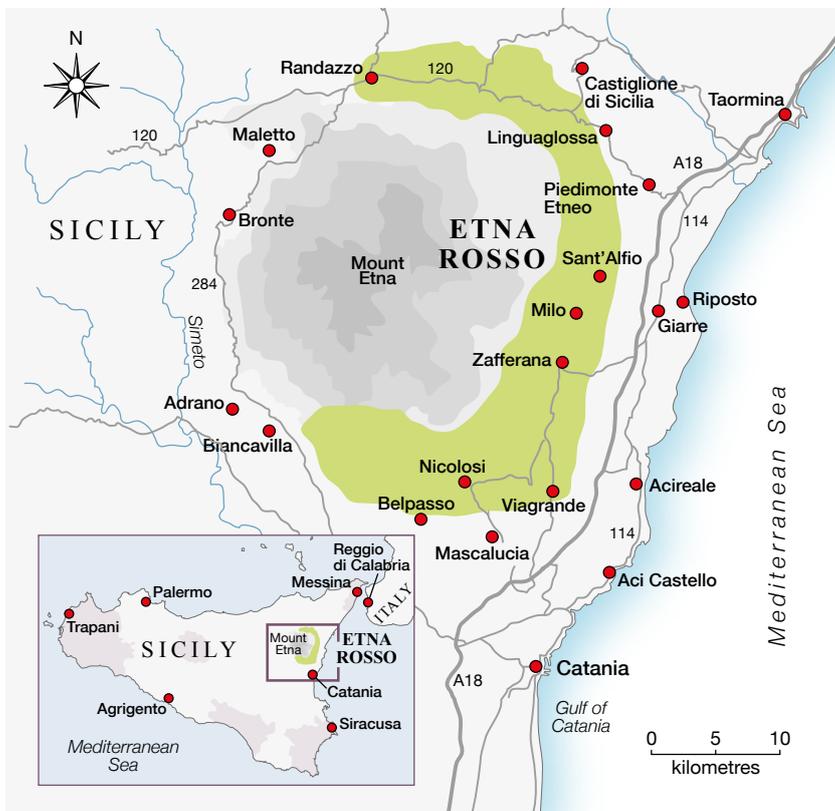
Between 2003 and 2014 the land under vine in the DOC zone more than doubled, though the consorzio, founded in the early 1990s by just a few growers, predicts that the growth rate will soon slow and peak at around 1,000 hectares. While some of the new blood came from within Sicily, including well-known names like Cusumano, Firriato, Planeta and Tasca d'Almerita, among the first outsiders to arrive were Belgian Frank Cornelissen, Andrea Franchetti from Tuscany and American Marc de Grazia at the start of the new millennium. Local families, meanwhile, have been quick to reclaim their passion for the land and wineries such as Girolamo Russo, Graci and Tornatore are now playing a vital part in the comeback.

Magic on the mountain

Etna ticks almost all the boxes: distinctive local varieties rarely seen elsewhere; cool-climate conditions at altitudes between 400m to 1,100m; myriad soil types from volcanic ash and pumice to patches of limestone and sand – there were even ancient, terraced and some pre-phylloxera vineyards waiting to be rediscovered. Meanwhile, using old maps, local communes have identified 133 *contrade* (the Italian word for 'district') where traditionally the best vineyards were to be found and which are now embodied within the production discipline as MEGAs (Menzioni Geografiche Aggiuntive).

The excitement has mainly been generated by the potential of the Nerello Mascalese grape, which originated in this part of the island. Comparisons have been made with Pinot Noir thanks mainly to its uncanny ability to express the character of an individual terroir, and also Nebbiolo because of a pale garnet hue, broad aromatic profile, coursing acidity and plentiful tannins. Local consultant winemaker Salvo Foti has added a splash of colour to the story by championing the age-old alberello or bush-trained vineyards and helping to reinvent the traditional palmento system in the cellar. This two-tier approach consisted of a trough for foot-pressing the grapes situated above the fermentation vats and had long since fallen into disuse.

All Etna lacks is an established, documented track record of fine wine production: its history prior to Barone Villagrande's first bottling at the end of the 1940s is tied, along with the island's other table wines, to bulk wine. So, given the huge turnaround on Europe's largest volcano, is there real magic on the mountain?



Etna Rosso: know your vintages

2015 A mixed growing season, which led to lighter-than-normal wines. They nonetheless show real finesse thanks to Etna's renowned cool climate.

2014 A fine autumn after the wet summer resulted in a smaller-than-average crop of balanced and perfumed wines that are delicious to drink young.

2013 Coolest vintage in a decade. The wines have excellent acidity but are often, atypically, closed, needing time in bottle to develop.

2012 The hottest vintage since 2003, producing slightly jammy and alcoholic wines for early consumption.

2011 A balanced growing season produced a crop of similarly well-balanced fruit. Stylish and attractive wines which can be drunk now or kept a while longer.

2010 A good quality if not exceptional vintage and the wines are now ready for drinking.

Etna: the facts

- DOC recognition** 1968
- DOC area under vine** 771ha (80% red grapes)
- Etna Rosso grape varieties** 80% Nerello Mascalese (minimum), 20% Nerello Cappuccio (maximum)
- Minimum alcohol** 12.5%
- Ageing requirements** No minimum, but four years, including one in wood, for the riserva category
- Annual production** 19,818hl (2015)

Michael Garner is a DWWA judge for Italy and has specialised in the country's wines for more than 25 years >

The results

The volcanic Etna region has thrilling potential, said our tasters, but wines are best in younger vintages and when made in a fresh, vibrant style. Amy Wislocki reports

LIKE SO MANY reds from Italy, these wines show far better over a relaxed meal than in a formal, tasting room environment – ‘they would perform much better on the table’, commented Andrea Briccarello. Emily O’Hare agreed that Etna reds make great food wines: ‘They’re really good all-rounders because of all that acidity and tannin. And the tannin in them isn’t as dramatic as in Nebbiolo, so they can even pair well with fish dishes. They’re a really smart option when dining out.’

That said, the tasters questioned the balance of some of the wines. ‘I really like Nerello Mascalese as a grape,’ said Michael Garner, ‘especially the aromas. But the volume here is always turned up to 11, *Spinal Tap* style – you’ve got high acidity and high tannins, all blasting out. As a Nebbiolo addict, I should be able to deal with tannins, but I’m not sure with Nerello Mascalese that I’m getting the depth of fruit that I get with other very tannic varieties like Nebbiolo. I definitely prefer simpler styles of Nerello Mascalese because the danger of over-extraction in the variety is very apparent.’

Briccarello also found some of wines ‘too extracted, too overworked and too overdone’, adding that the variety needs careful handling. O’Hare on the other hand enjoyed the tannins, describing them as ‘impressively firm, but not too high’. She concluded: ‘If you like the expression of Pinot Noir with the character of Nebbiolo, this is an interesting wine.’

At the same time, the tasters were unconvinced by the comparison that is often drawn between Etna Rosso and Pinot Noir or Nebbiolo – often prompted by the lighter colour of Nerello Mascalese in the glass. ‘I don’t think it’s a fair comparison – I think Etna reds deserve their own space,’ stated O’Hare. ‘Also, I found the aromas more Bordeaux-like than Burgundy-like. And for me, the wines we tasted lacked the depth of fruit of Pinot Noir and the drama of Nebbiolo.’

‘If you like the expression of Pinot Noir and the Nebbiolo character, try these’ Emily O’Hare

What these wines can offer in spades, said Garner and O’Hare, is a sense of place – a real identity. ‘The wines have a very particular character and you wouldn’t confuse them with anything else,’ said Garner. ‘There is a real transparency to them,’ chimed in O’Hare. ‘They have a great terroir character and I’m convinced that given time that could become more interesting.’

All the tasters felt that the region is still young and evolving in winemaking terms. ‘It reminds me of Barolo 30 years ago,’ said Garner. ‘Etna as a phenomenon has been born in the last 10 or 12 years. There isn’t a fantastic amount of tradition, knowledge and experience there.’

Some producers are overworking the wines, observed Briccarello, because they are looking for sales in markets, such as the US, which prefer a bigger, more oaky style. ‘But in the UK we probably prefer the tighter, cleaner style. I want to see freshness, vibrancy and fruit in these wines.’ This helps to explain why the preference was for the younger vintages, particularly 2015 and 2014.

The general view on longevity was that these are not wines for long-term cellaring. ‘I didn’t see any wine that I’d want to drink after 10 years, largely because they lack the depth of fruit to age well,’ reflected Garner.

Briccarello felt the wines with a proportion of Nerello Capuccio in the blend did offer more fruit, and Garner also preferred these, finding them less astringent and better balanced. In the other camp, O’Hare was surprised to find she preferred the varietal Mascalese wines, describing them as ‘charming’.

The scores

88 wines tasted

Exceptional

0

Outstanding

0

Highly Recommended

36

Recommended

35

Commended

16

Fair

1

Poor

0

Faulty

0

Entry criteria: producers and UK agents were invited to submit their latest-release Etna Rosso DOC wines

Highly Recommended 90–94pts



Cantine Patria, Femina 2014
Decanter average score: 93/100pts
Individual judges’ scores: Andrea Briccarello 93 Michael Garner 93 Emily O’Hare 94
N/A UK +39 0942 986072

A powerful nose of cola, caramel and treacle with spices and herbs thrown in. Cedar, orange and lemon rind are entwined with cloves. Complex like Primitivo, but much lighter on palate. Very interesting and very thoughtful! **Drink** 2018–2022 **Alcohol** 14%



Girolamo Russo, 'a Rina 2014
93 AB 92 MG 93 EOH 94

£28.62 Mondial
Very pretty! Muted wild strawberries and blueberry notes with hints of clove and tarragon on a generous, balanced and structured palate. Roasted nuts and black pepper on the finish. This will develop nicely. **Drink** 2017–2025 **Alc** 14.5%



Graci 2014 93 AB 92 MG 91 EOH 96

£19 WoodWinters
High-toned aromas of purple flowers then almost Syrah-like leather and spices on the back palate, which lend richness and structure to the wine. Really stunning!
Drink 2017–2021 **Alc** 14.5%



Tornatore, Trimarchisa 2014
93 AB 94 MG 92 EOH 94

£45 Bibendum PLB
Succulent fruit flavours with bold toffee oak notes. Alcohol is evident but morphs into grippy tannins. Smoked bacon and roasted coconut notes on the palate followed by a sweet cherry finish. **Drink** 2017–2020 **Alc** 14.5%



Aitala 2013 92 AB 92 MG 93 EOH 91
N/A UK www.aitalavini.it

Jammy and wild berry notes with roast chestnuts and herbs. It is showing complexity in its aroma and flavour profile and is structurally holding interest through great acidity and grippy tannins. **Drink** 2018–2025 **Alc** 14%



Az Agricola Falcone, Aitho 2014
92 AB 92 MG 90 EOH 95

N/A UK www.aziendafalcone.it
An ethereal nose of confit cherries, plums and damsons with a whiff of dry Mediterranean herbs. Hints of white pepper and firm tannins, reminiscent of some Friuli reds on old volcanic terrain. Piquant! **Drink** 2018–2022 **Alc** 14.5%



Girolamo Russo, Feudo di Mezzo 2014 92 AB 93 MG 94 EOH 90

£49.29 Mondial Wine
Fresh white flowers and a perfumed soap nose. Wood polish and beeswax palate with stewed red forest fruits and an intriguing liquorice and fennel blossom note. Summer pudding meets spices from the east. **Drink** 2020–2025 **Alc** 15%



Nicosia, Lenza di Munti 2013 92 AB 91 MG 92 EOH 93

£9.45 Booths
A savoury and leather character followed by a ripe and slightly evolved palate of soft, baked red fruits. A whisper of white pepper and smoky dried fruit tones add nice complexity. **Drink** 2018–2022 **Alc** 13%



Nicosia, Fondo Filara 2013
92 AB 92 MG 91 EOH 94

N/A UK www.nicosiawines.com
Elegantly perfumed with attractive notes of blackberries and blueberries flowing onto a rich, intense palate of anise, dried fruit and nutty flavours. Supported by velvety tannins and vertical acidity. **Drink** 2016–2018 **Alc** 13%

The judges

Andrea Briccarello



Briccarello is wine buyer for the Galvin restaurant group and the winner of Best Wine List at the 2011 National Restaurant Awards. He was previously group sommelier and wine

buyer for Corrigan’s Mayfair and Bentley’s Oyster Bar & Grill, and has also worked at Michelin-starred Umu.

Michael Garner



Garner has worked in the wine business for more than 30 years and has specialised in Italian wine for more than 25 years. He is the co-author of Barolo: Tar and Roses, is a regular contributor

to Decanter, and has taught for the WSET.

Emily O’Hare



O’Hare is a VIA Italian Wine Ambassador and lives in Florence. She writes about Italian wine for Decanter and The Florentine, and organises tours around Italy for the restaurant trade. She

left her job as head sommelier and wine buyer at London’s River Café in 2015 to move to Italy.



Piano dei Daini 2014 92 AB 91 MG 93 EOH 92

N/A UK www.pianodeidaini.it
Dark chocolate and spices with sweet cola hints. Very rich and caramelly on the palate with dark spices and complex truffle and earthy notes. Lovely fresh minty and orange lift too. **Drink** 2018–2025 **Alc** 14.5%



Tornatore, Pietrarizzo 2014
92 AB 91 MG 90 EOH 95

£35 Bibendum PLB
Sweet tobacco and dusty books on the nose with candied fruit and vibrancy. There is a really great sense of terroir and variety here; extremely charming and accessible but smart. **Drink** 2018–2022 **Alc** 14.5%



Vini Franchetti, Passorosso 2014
92 AB 91 MG 90 EOH 94

£33 Corney & Barrow
Fresh and succulent strawberry and cherry fruit with an overlay of violets and liquorice followed by fresh rocket leaves. Finishes a little short but there’s great freshness here. Delicious. **Drink** 2017–2023 **Alc** 15% ➤

Highly Recommended (continued) 90–94pts



Al-Cantara, Lu Veru Piaciri 2014
91 AB 90 MG 94 EOH 90

N/A UK www.al-cantara.it

Heaps of cranberries and spices mixed with dried cherry, tarragon and butterscotch. It is approachable already but is quite broad-shouldered and chunky so could easily be kept for a few years. **Drink** 2017-2022 **Alc** 13.5%



Az Agricola Ciauria 2014
91 AB 90 MG 92 EOH 92

£15.80 Corks of Cotham, Stannary St Wine Co, Vin Cognito

The nose is driven by sweet wild fruit plus blueberries and morello cherries with a tropical mango edge. This finishes on tobacco and herbs, rustic tannins and a lightly bitter note. **Drink** 2020-2025 **Alc** 13.5%



Cantine Patria 2013
91 AB 89 MG 93 EOH 92

N/A UK +39 0942 986072

Spicy! Beautiful turmeric notes with vegetal, minty undertones. The strawberry fruit is there underneath vanilla oak, violets and aniseed giving great complexity on top of very fine tannins. **Drink** 2017-2022 **Alc** 14%



Cantine Russo, Rampante 2010
91 AB 93 MG 90 EOH 89

£18.72 Colombier

This starts well with intense violets, damsons and bergamot backed up by chocolate and cherry. However it ends up quite lean and green with perhaps a little oxidation. **Drink** 2016-2017 **Alc** 13.5%



Feudo Cavaliere, Millemetri, 2009
91 AB 89 MG 93 EOH 91

N/A UK www.feudocavaliere.it

This wine is quite restrained and tight on the nose and palate, but it is impressive how slowly it is ageing. There is good freshness of cranberry and cherry fruit, and high acidity. **Drink** 2017-2022 **Alc** 13%



Nicosia, Classic 2013
91 AB 92 MG 91 EOH 90

N/A UK www.nicosiawines.com

Sweet, ripe and intense notes of wild morello cherries and blueberries. A little spiky and charred, but there are generous spice notes, exotic fruit and an earthy finish, recalling a Syrah in style. **Drink** 2018-2022 **Alc** 13%



Pietro Caciorgna, Guardoilvento 2014
91 AB 89 MG 91 92 EOH 92

£21 Corks of Cotham, Stannary St Wine Co, Vin Cognito

Exotic fruit cocktail nose with raspberry and passion fruit notes and a touch of cedar. Crunchy wild redcurrants and a creamy blueberry muffin texture giving a lush mouthfeel. Tannins are high and serious here. **Drink** 2017-2022 **Alc** 13.5%



Planeta 2014
91 AB 92 MG 93 EOH 88

£21 Enotria & Co

Commercial style but enticing with herbal-toned strawberry and red cherry aromas. Very soft on the mid-palate with some jamminess and plenty of sweet stewed fruits. Delicious example of early-drinking style, if a bit short. **Drink** 2016-2020 **Alc** 14%



Tenuta delle Terre Nere 2014
91 AB 91 MG 89 EOH 92

£15 Justerini & Brooks

This is certainly a mature example: kirsch and redcurrant jelly notes are morphed into dark spices, charred peppers, sweet meats and Chinese five spice. **Drink** 2017-2019 **Alc** 14%



Terre dell'Etna 2013
91 AB 93 MG 89 EOH 90

N/A UK www.terredelletna.net

There is a distinct nutmeg and honey character to the nose here, with dried plums, berries and forest fruits on the palate. There is a waxiness to the mouthfeel, plus captivating Armagnac notes. **Drink** 2018-2022 **Alc** 13.5%



Ampelon Calderara, Passo alle Sciare 2013
90 AB 86 MG 95 EOH 89

N/A UK www.viniampelon.it

Highly aromatic nose of red and black fruits and notes of seasoned oak and tobacco. A touch of CO₂ in the glass, but this doesn't detract from the bonfire night finish of orange, clove and woodsmoke. **Drink** 2020-2025 **Alc** 14%



Antichi Vinai 1877, Petralava 2012
90 AB 89 MG 90 EOH 90

£18.46 Mondial Wine

Fresh, cherry and aniseed aromas leading onto stewed red fruit with rich cherry and cranberry notes. It is well polished but there are some riveting rustic edges and a cigar box finish. **Drink** 2018-2025 **Alc** 13.5% ➤

Highly Recommended (continued) 90-94pts



Emanuele Scammacca del Murgo 2014 90 AB 89 MG 92 EOH 89

£15 Roberson
A lovely freshness to this 2014 vintage boasting brisk acidity, fleshy cranberry and orange fruit and a touch of iron in the background. Nervy and drinkable stuff. **Drink** 2016-2020 **Alc** 13%



Fischetti, Muscamento 2012 90 AB 89 MG 88 EOH 92

N/A UK www.fischettiwine.it
Chalky blue fruit aromas with some charred notes plus wet leather and cigar box. Pleasing stony, nutty, mushroom flavours that are mouthfilling, but the finish is a little bitter and aggressive. **Drink** 2016-2018 **Alc** 15%



Nicola Gumina, Filici 2012 90 AB 91 MG 89 EOH 90

N/A UK info@nicolagumina.it
Earthy almost truffley nose with dark vermouth notes. A little warm and over-extracted but the juicy fruit enjoys a blast of tannin and tarragon. Maintaining its youth well. **Drink** 2016-2018 **Alc** 14%



Nicosia, Sosta Tre Santi 2012 90 AB 89 MG 87 EOH 93

N/A UK www.nicosiawines.com
A charming nose of bright cherry and plum followed by sweet and ripe wild berries. The palate is exotic and floral with kirsch, mint and cedar notes coming through. A thoughtful wine. **Drink** 2017-2020 **Alc** 13.5%



Nicosia, Vulka 2014 90 AB 89 MG 90 EOH 90

£26 Armit Wines
Lifted, attractive, high-toned notes of cranberry, sweet cherry and liquorice leading onto a shy and tight palate that is simple yet bright with hints of mocha and tobacco. **Drink** 2017-2022 **Alc** 13%



Pietradolce, Contrada Rampante 2014 90 AB 91 MG 88 EOH 92

£31 Fortyfive10, Handford
A traditional and respectful style that emanates dusty spices and fresh green herbs on the nose. The palate shows plenty of wild strawberry and black cherry flavours with a hint of butterscotch. Smart winemaking. **Drink** 2018-2022 **Alc** 14.5%



Scilio, Valle Galfina 2014 90 AB 90 MG 89 EOH 90

£27.99 Vindependents
Smoky notes dominate on the nose, along with a lovely scent of old books, leather and game coming through. Lots of ripe, almost jammy, blackcurrant fruit flavours but also a strong mineral core. **Drink** 2017-2019 **Alc** 14%



Tenuta di Fessina, Il Musmeci 2011 90 AB 89 MG 92 EOH 90

£18.99-£27.99 Amps Fine Wines, Cambridge Wine Merchants, Corks Out, Hennings Wine, Quaff, The Sampler, Vagabond, The Vineking
The fruit here is impressive; hardly any signs of age. There are violets and blackberries on the palate on top of tarragon and woodsmoke, followed by some serious tannins. **Drink** 2018-2023 **Alc** 14%



Tenuta Masseria Setteporte 2014 90 AB 94 MG 85 EOH 91

£25 Vindependents
Wonderful aromatics here: full of violets and cranberries, if a little reductive. The fruit is exotic and poised with strong cassis notes. The alcohol is certainly high, but this is commercially attractive. **Drink** 2017-2020 **Alc** 14.5%



Tenuta Masseria Setteporte, Nerello Mascalese 2013 90 AB 91 MG 92 EOH 88

£15 Roberson Wine, Vin Cognito
Fresh, lifted nose of cranberry and tobacco leading onto a palate exploding with pomegranate juice, mint and chocolate. Finely grained tannins line the finish, with a touch of green at the back. **Drink** 2018-2025 **Alc** 13.5%



Tornatore 2014 90 AB 90 MG 90 EOH 91

£25 Bibendum PLB
Dusty, dried spice notes on the nose with smoky and savoury undertones. This follows on to a palate of leather and tobacco along with lots of redcurrant and strawberry. **Drink** 2018-2022 **Alc** 14%



Vino Nibali, Kirnao 2014 90 AB 88 MG 92 EOH 90

N/A UK www.vinonibali.com
A shy and muted nose with flashes of orange and tobacco and a hint of white peach. Almonds and cherries stand out on the aromatic palate which is a little short on the finish. **Drink** 2017-2025 **Alc** 13.5%

Recommended 86-89pts

Wine	Score	AB	MG	EOH	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Alta Mora, Cusumano 2014	89	86	93	87	Lovely kirsch notes on the nose at first, followed by earthy and sweet cigar notes on the back palate. The oak is quite dominant but this drinks well.	14%	2018-2025	£18-£22	D Byrne & Co, Euro Wines, Hedonism
Antichi Vinai 1877, Koinè 2011	89	91	86	91	An energetic number with lively, succulent redcurrant fruit of impressive intensity. Subtle hints of leather and tobacco, finishing fresh with firm tannins.	14%	2017-2020	£27.32	Mondial Wine
Benanti, Rovitello 2012	89	88	89	89	This wine has been thought about; the fruits are soft and ripe with flecks of smoke and black pepper along with a walnut edge.	14%	2018-2022	£29.50-£35.50	Astrum Wine Cellars, WoodWinters
Calcagno, Feudo di Mezzo 2013	89	88	90	89	Distinctly Etna: there's a complex, mulchy porcini mushroom element that lies underneath bramble fruit and morello cherries and a twist of black pepper.	13.5%	2018-2023	N/A UK	www.vinicalcagno.it
Tenuta Monte Gorna 2014	89	89	88	90	Cloves, cardamom and black pepper envelope the nose and palate, with an almost chilli-heat, and the tannins are firm and strict.	13%	2018-2022	N/A UK	www.tenutamontegorna.it
Terra Costantino, De Aetna 2014	89	92	87	88	If you like a savoury wine, this is one to try. Dried herbs and succulent meat are tantalising against the redcurrant and liquorice notes.	13.5%	2018-2025	£18.95	Jeroboams, Laytons
Vivera, Martinella 2011	89	92	86	89	Spearmint and dense red roses entwine on the nose and palate, which edges a little toward jamminess but has a great vibrancy that picks it up.	13.5%	2017-2020	£24.35	Amathus
Az Agricola Giuseppe Mannino, Vasadonna, 2006	88	89	86	88	Candied fruits and panettone on the nose with cedar in the background. Very Nebbiolo in style, it is dry and nutty and beginning to show its age.	14%	2016-2018	£24.95	www.tenutemannino.com
Az Agricola Biondi, Outis 2014	88	88	85	90	A brightly fruited wine that smells and tastes much darker and denser than a Nerello Mascalese. A touch of nutmeg on the finish which is a little short.	13%	2017-2020	£32 (2013)	Buon Vino
Calcagno, Arcuria 2013	88	85	90	89	Some well-developed, roasted nut-skin and dried herb flavours balance some green notes in this savoury, almost tactile wine.	13.5%	2018-2022	N/A UK	www.vinicalcagno.it
Cantine Edome, Aitna 2014	88	90	84	89	This is developing fast: mushroom and almond notes meld with spices and plum. A touch of volatility, but there is a rich and silky tannin structure.	13.5%	2016-2018	£24	Amazon
Cottanera 2012	88	88	87	90	A rubbery, toasty nose followed by a lot of cherry and cranberry juiciness on the palate. Some forceful warmth on the finish	13%	2018-2022	£29.90	VinumTerra
Fattorie Romeo del Castello, Allegracore 2014	88	87	90	88	A more meaty and bloody style on the palate follows classic berries and herbal aromas. Alluring anise spice and heavenly fresh herbs. Well made.	14.5%	2018-2023	£19.95-£25	Tanners Wines, The Winemakers Club
I Custodi delle Vigne dell'Etna, Aetneus, 2009	88	91	85	88	This 2009 is showing its age with rustic balsamic notes, leather, chocolate and lots of spice. Lovely complexity and stewed fruits support the structure.	14%	2016-2018	£20	Passione Vino
Irene Badalà 2014	88	89	88	87	Perfumed but slightly sickly nose of strawberry and evident oak. An explosion of plump red fruits, Maraschino cherry and cinnamon on the palate.	14.5%	2018-2021	N/A UK	+39 39310 68378
Nicosia 2013	88	89	90	85	The oak is a little dominating, but this is a serious wine with woodsmoke and ground coffee flavours, sweet exotic fruit and a minty freshness.	13%	2017-2022	£10.49-£11.49	D Byrne & Co, Highbury Vintners, Scarlet Wines, Toscanaccio
Pietradolce 2015	88	89	87	88	A very pale example - almost rosato. Roses and violets dominate the nose with hints of liquorice, pomegranate and a background barnyard note.	13.5%	2017-2020	£15.99	Armit Wines
Pietradolce, Vigna Barbagalli 2013	88	90	88	85	The evident alcohol is eased by bracing acidity, vanilla and rhubarb notes and tertiary flavours of leather and spice.	14.5%	2018-2022	£62	Armit Wines
Benanti 2014	87	88	88	84	Intense chocolate and red fruit aromas then a juicy palate with slightly volatile cherry notes. Not much traction, but there is fine cranberry freshness.	13.5%	2017-2020	£17	Astrum Wine Cellars, Highbury Vintners, WoodWinters
Cantine Valenti, Norma 2013	87	83	88	89	Obvious development and the nose is reminiscent of vermouth. Fruit is slightly overwhelmed by the oak, but charming ethereal aromas to finish.	13%	2018-2025	£16.50	Vini Italiani
Contrada Sto Spirito di Passo Pisciaro, Animardente 2014	87	86	87	89	Bewitching cumin and fennel seed aromas. Wild game and plump cooked fruit on the palate with firm tannins.	14.5%	2016-2018	£28	Boutinot, WoodWinters
Graci, Arcuria 2013	87	90	87	85	A heady example showing rich dark plums and prunes. There is lots of ageing potential here, but it is rather hot and severe on the finish at the moment.	14.5%	2018-2022	£31	WoodWinters
La Gelsomina, Della Contea 2012	87	84	89	89	A savoury wine, very smoky and peppery. The alcohol is a little intrusive, but the cherry and plum fruit balance out the oak.	14%	2017-2022	N/A UK	www.lagelsomina.it
Palmento Costanzo, Nero di Sei 2012	87	88	87	86	An unusual mix of strawberry jam and wood ash, with further notes of plum and roast meat. Simple, but potent and effective.	14%	2017-2022	£25	Bat & Bottle
Pietradolce, Archineri 2014	87	86	90	86	A fleshy nose of ripe red fruits, sage and loganberry with earthy and mineral tones underpinned by warm alcohol and a generous tannic structure.	15%	2018-2022	£26	Armit Wines, Highbury Vintners
Al-Cantara, O'scuro O'scuro 2013	86	88	83	86	The oak is quite overwhelming but underneath the fruit is pure and delicate, with nutty complexity and dark spices on a savoury, mineral finish.	13.5%	2016-2018	N/A/UK	www.al-cantara.it
Cantine Edome, Aitna Vigna Nica 2014	86	88	87	83	Rhubarb, quinine, beef stock and bay with some cranberry on the nose. The palate is juicy with redcurrant and cherry, and even some peanut chocolate.	13.5%	2017-2020	N/A UK	www.cantinedome.com

Recommended (continued) 86–89pts

Wine	Score	AB	MG	EOH	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Conte Uvaggio, Il Nerello del Conte 2015	86	85	88	85	Shy red fruit nose leading onto an almost Nebbiolo-style palate with firm tannins, hints of tobacco, herbs and earthy undertones.	13%	2018-2022	£25	www.conteuvaggio.it
Firriato, Cavanera Rovo delle Coturnie 2011	86	89	82	87	Aromas of dark cherry, plum and aniseed. The palate is more concentrated, with some fleshy fruit and notes of cherry stone and dark spices.	14%	2017-2022	£25	www.firriato.it
Girolamo Russo, Feudo 2014	86	89	83	85	Fresh and spicy nose, with smoky red fruit, blackberries and damson, and an undertone of roses. The palate is intense spicy and earthy with a charry finish.	15%	2018-2022	£49.29	Mondial Wine
Girolamo Russo, San Lorenzo 2014	86	89	82	86	Umami notes of beef stock and cherries. There's also a slight medicinal and herbal note. The palate is generous and juicy with similar notes to the nose.	15%	2016-2018	£49.29	Mondial Wine
Palmento Costanzo, Mofete 2012	86	86	84	88	A huge mix of rubbery, medicinal and herbal aromas followed by an almost beef stock-like palate that is fleshed out with summer pudding notes.	14%	2016-2018	£15	Bat & Bottle
Piano dei Daini, Vigna Vico 2013	86	89	80	89	Kirsch and fruit compote nose with an intense, fleshy palate showing great depth and structure. Red cherry, chocolate and spices give an earthy finish.	14%	2016-2018	N/A UK	www.pianodeidaini.it
Terrazze dell'Etna, Carusu 2013	86	85	87	85	Vibrant redcurrant and pomegranate notes, cranberry and plum aromas. There's good freshness with spicy plum, raspberry and almond flavours.	13.5%	2017-2022	£23.99	Liberty Wines
Terre dell'Etna, Nerello Mascalese 2013	86	86	88	84	Rhubarb, gooseberry and jammy, red stewed fruit nose. On the palate, a touch of mocha is present, followed by velvety tannins and juicy plum fruit.	13.5%	2018-2022	N/A UK	www.terredelletna.net

Commended 83–85pts

■ Ampelon Calderara, Le Caldere 2012 85, 14.5%, 2016-2018, N/A UK www.viniampelon.it ■ Az Agricola Giuseppe Mannino, Tenute Mannino di Plachi 2010 85, 13.5%, 2016-2018, N/A UK www.tenutemannino.com ■ Fattorie Romeo del Castello, Vigo 2013 85, 14%, 2016-2019, £30 Tanners ■ Gambino Vini, Tifeo Rosso 2013 85, 13.5%, 2016-2018, N/A UK www.vinigambino.it ■ Scilio, 1815 2012 85, 14%, 2017-2020, N/A UK www.scilio.it ■ Tenuta di Fessina, Erse 2014 85, 13.5%, 2016-2018, £21 Fortyfive10, Honest Grapes ■ Terrazze dell'Etna, Cirneco 2011 85, 14%, 2016-2018, £31.99 Liberty Wines ■ Wiegner, Contrada Rampante 2014

85, 14%, 2016-2018, POA Sikelias Trade ■ Wiegner, Treterre 2013 85, 13.5%, 2017-2020, POA Sikelias Trade ■ Cottanera, Zottorinoto Riserva 2011 84, 13.5%, 2016-2020, N/A UK www.cottanera.it ■ I Custodi Delle Vigne dell'Etna, Pistus 2014 84, 13%, 2016-2018, £15-£20 Passione Vino ■ Scilio, Orphèus 2012 84, 14%, 2017-2022, N/A UK www.scilio.it ■ Tenuta Monte Ilice, Capinera dell'Etna 2011 84, 13%, 2017-2020, N/A UK www.tenutamonteilice.com ■ Barone di Villagrande 2014 83, 13%, 2016-2018, N/A UK www.villagrande.it ■ Cantine Valenti, Puritani 2012 83, 13.5%, 2016-2018, £25 Vini Italiani ■ Quanticco 2014 83, 14%, 2016-2018, N/A UK www.vinoquanticco.it

Fair 76–82pts

■ Conte Uvaggio, Nerello 2011 82

For full UK stockist details, see p133

Next month's panel tastings
Margaret River Cabernet
Sauvignon, Ribera del Duero
and Rosé Champagne

Expert summary: Michael Garner

The fresh 2014 wines and the Castiglione di Sicilia zone were the stars of this encouraging tasting, which shows how far this denomination has come in 15 years



Michael Garner is a DWAA judge for Italy and has specialised in the country's wines for more than 25 years

A HIGHLY IMPRESSIVE set of results for a denomination that until the early 2000s had barely registered beyond a local audience. Some 41% of the wines tasted scored 90 points or above and while none averaged more than 93, there were one or two that just missed the Outstanding level where individual tasters awarded very high marks but no consensus could be reached.

Our panel loved those beguiling aromas of red cherry and cranberry which, even at an early stage in the wines' development, are accompanied by more ethereal notes of spice, cedar, smoke, leather and tobacco. Marked acidity, abundant if generally ripe tannins and substantial alcohol levels provided decent structure.

Though such nuance is rare in such young wine, none of us identified great potential longevity. Of course this is more than reasonable: older bottles of Etna Rosso that prove how well the wines age are simply not available. Indeed, wines on show from the 2010 vintage and earlier seemed ready for drinking. So far then, these wines seem best for short- to medium-term enjoyment.

There were a few surprises where some prestigious names underperformed. The Rovittello bottling from Benanti – generally accepted as the producer who got

the Etna party started – just missed out on a Highly Recommended. In fairness, Benanti is known for its subtle, restrained Etna Rossos and such wines tend to be overshadowed by more strident, showy examples at blind tastings. Its wine was also from 2012, which fared rather less well than the other vintages on show.

The wonderfully fresh 2014 wines were on the whole the most successful group, the cool 2013 vintage perhaps slightly disappointing, the very ripe 2012 wines clearly from a much warmer vintage and the handful from 2011 already approaching full maturity.

The best-performing wines – which usually had the volume control turned up to 11 – came from smaller, local, family producers (Russo, Graci and Tornatore). The best-performing area was, unsurprisingly, Castiglione di Sicilia: 46 of the 133 *contrade* are in this large zone on the drier, warmer northeastern slopes of the volcano. **D**

'41% of the wines tasted scored 90 points or above, one or two that just missed Outstanding level'

My top three

Andrea Briccarello

■ **Tornatore, Trimarchisa 2014** This really impressed me with its complexity, spice and well-knit structure. Made from a single vineyard, this stunning wine has incredible aromatic notes and gamey undertones that will leave you intrigued. **94 Drink** 2017-2020

■ **Graci 2014** From vineyards planted at up to 1,000m, this wine is one of the most amazing expressions of Nerello Mascalese; reminiscent of the rich mineral soil of Etna. Pure and elegant, it will dance on your taste buds. **92 Drink** 2017-2021

■ **Tenuta Masseria Setteporte, Nerello Mascalese 2014** This variety is king in Etna Rosso, and this varietal wine is incredibly ripe with vibrant cranberry acidity and complex Asian spices. Planted at above 600m, this structured and masculine red captures all the essence of the grape and place. **91 Drink** 2018-2025

My top three

Michael Garner

■ **Girolamo Russo, Feudo di Mezzo 2014** A brilliantly balanced wine that manages to hold its 15% alcohol level comfortably in its stride – no mean achievement for a wine predominantly made from Nerello Mascalese. Great aromatics from 100-year-old bush-trained vines. **94 Drink** 2020-2025

■ **Tenuta di Fessina, Il Musmeci 2011** From the potentially excellent 2011 vintage yet showing little sign of age, this is a great example of what top Etna reds are all about. Vibrant and juicy with lovely aromas. True poise. **92 Drink** 2018-2023

■ **Vini Franchetti, Passorosso 2014** Outstanding freshness is the key to this charming, stylish wine that is cleverly put together by one of the area's first leading lights. Such captivating perfumes, very well-balanced, and already extremely approachable. **90 Drink** 2018-2022

My top three

Emily O'Hare

■ **Graci 2014** Alberto Graci gave up his work as a banker in Milan to work as a winemaker like his grandfather. Situated at Passopisciaro, Graci's Etna Rosso is made and aged in cement. Fantastically fresh and the tannins are impressive and proud. **96 Drink** 2017-2021

■ **Vini Franchetti, Passorosso 2014** A Nerello Mascalese of great purity and freshness from 70- to 100-year-old bush vines. The grapes are selected from a range of *contrade* at different altitudes and soils and the wine is bottled unfiltered from large, neutral oak barrels. **94 Drink** 2018-2022

■ **Pietro Caciorgna, Guardoilvento 2014** Paolo Caciorgna's wines show real flair and energy: vivid aromas and flavours with a mango and peach hint and an intensely primary fresh red fruitiness. You almost feel light-headed after a taste – rather apt as these are wines made from some of the highest vineyards in Europe. **92 Drink** 2017-2022

NB: the tasters' top wines are not necessarily their top-scoring, rather those which, on learning the wines' identity, they feel are the most notable given their provenance, price or other factors

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