

Aglianico on the Rise

Southern Italy's greatest grape is being reborn in the hands of a new generation of vintners.

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BY MONICA LARNER



Humanity has enjoyed no wine grape more than Aglianico.

Cultivated by the Phoenicians, exported by the Greeks, consumed by the Romans, protected by popes and coveted as a blending agent during the phylloxera plague, "**Aglianico is probably the grape with the longest consumer history of all,**" says Denis Dubourdieu, oenology professor at the University of Bordeaux.

There are several theories concerning the origin of the name Aglianico, all of which underline its ancient roots. But even more fascinating than the grape's past is its future. "The history of Aglianico is incredible," says Antonio Capaldo, chairman of Feudi di San Gregorio. "The history of the wine is much newer."

The recent rise of Aglianico occurred in pinpoint areas of southern Italy, where the Mastroberardino family of Avellino deserves much credit for the grape's commercial success.

Aglianico's two greatest expressions are Aglianico del Vulture in Basilicata and Taurasi in neighboring Campania. It's also found in Molise, and has a rapidly growing presence in Puglia. But many of the places where Aglianico thrives are distinguished by their volcanic soils.

Basilicata experiences hot, dry conditions ideal for this late-ripening variety, but further north, the Taurasi area of Irpinia sees twice as much rainfall. That's more than compensated for by the region's well-drained volcanic soils. Here, Aglianico-based wines are structured, rich in depth and ample in length. There are several times more producers in Taurasi than in Basilicata, and Taurasi's proximity to the bustling port city of Naples has made it easier to market the wines abroad.

Thanks to its elegance and capacity for long cellar aging, Aglianico is often referred to as "the Barolo of the South." It's time to let the grape stand on its own as the protagonist of some of Italy's greatest red wines.



Ilaria Petitto
Donnachiara, Taurasi (Campania)

There's a fascinating trend underway in Italy, as an increasing number of women are at the helm of some of the nation's most dynamic wineries.

This movement is especially noticeable in southern Italy, where tradition and a strong family-based culture have fostered a new generation of women intent on carrying forward their family legacies.

Ilaria Petitto and her mother, Chiara, are perfect examples. The original Donna Chiara was Ilaria's grandmother (also named Chiara), a noblewoman who inherited a beautiful 20-hectare property just outside the town of Taurasi. The Aglianico from the property was sold to some of the biggest wineries in the region.

"Our dream was to one day make our own wine," says the 37-year-old Petitto.

Her grandfather died in 1997, and her father manufactures machine components. Her siblings pursued other careers. Despite the challenges, says Petitto, "My mother and I decided to do this together, and we were determined."

Since their first vintage in 2006, Donnachiara has grown from 30,000 to 160,000 bottles per year, of which 60% is sold in foreign markets.

The family crest was adopted as a logo and set against a modern design. The cozy tasting room is decorated with modern art and sculptures fashioned from the metal materials used in her father's factory.

The mother-daughter team produces a Campania Aglianico IGT, an Irpinia Aglianico DOC and two other 100% Aglianicos under the Taurasi DOCG, along with a long line of Campania whites. "We consider ourselves specialized in Aglianico," says Petitto.

Petitto has a law degree and completed her studies in Rome before returning to the family vineyard.

"What appeals to me is the feminine side of the wine business," she says. "Creativity and flexibility, or [not] being set in your ways, is fundamental, and wine gives me enormous possibility of expression."

90 Donnachiara 2008 Taurasi

What sets this Taurasi apart is the finesse and elegance it shows on the finish. One of the great reds of southern Italy, this hearty wine reflects many of the mineral characteristics inherent to volcanic soils. Black fruit flavors are followed by notes of smoke, ash, tobacco and polished tannins.

Michelangelo Selections. —M.L. abv: 13.5% Price: \$35