

opening a bottle

Hey there fellow wine lover,

Thank you for joining our January virtual tasting — **A Tour of Sicily in Four Wines** — on January 8, 2023 at 8pm EST/5pm PST (USA). The session will be a 101 introduction to this vast, complex island and its wines. Unlike previous tastings, we will be tasting 4 wines instead of 3 (such is the breadth of Sicily, I can't bring myself to limit it!). The good news is that two of these wines are quite affordable, so you do not need to “break the bank.” Whichever route you go, **plan on a budget of between \$80-\$175 for the four wines**. As always, you are welcome to skip a wine if you feel like it.

The class is limited to 12 ticketed log-ins as well as any subscribers to Opening a Bottle.

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During the tastings we'll have 10-15 minutes (or so) per wine to discuss what we're drinking. The rest of the time, I'll be providing background on the viticultural history of Sicily: how the island's volcanic past shapes the present offering of wine grapes, how its years of changing hands from empire to empire impacted its vineyards, and how a new guard is transforming Sicily into Italy's most dynamic landscape for wine.

Zoom Credentials

Topic: Circumnavigating Sicilian Wine

Time: Jan 8, 2023 06:00 PM Mountain Time (US and Canada)

[Join Zoom Meeting](#)

Meeting ID: 894 7123 4721

Passcode: Sicily2023

Guests are responsible for buying their own wines if they choose to taste with us. I'll be tasting and discussing four different wines at four different points, but you are under no

obligation to buy and taste all four wines. Four wines is a lot to taste in one setting, but each of these wines will keep for several days in your refrigerator if you re-cork it, so feel free to have a taste and come back to it the next night.

Secondly, this is the perfect occasion to have a few friends over to help you taste and discuss these wines, should you choose to have four of these wines open.

You have four options to tasting with me during this class:

- **The Whole Shebang – 4 Wines**
 - (1) Etna Bianco/Carricante
 - (1) Catarratto or Grillo
 - (1) Frappato or Nero d'Avola or Cerasuolo di Vittoria
 - (1) Etna Rosso/Nerello Mascalese
 - Budget: \$100–\$175
- **White Wine Discovery – 2 Wines**
 - (1) Etna Bianco/Carricante
 - (1) Catarratto or Grillo
 - Budget: \$50–\$85
- **Red Wine Discovery – 2 Wines**
 - (1) Frappato or Nero d'Avola or Cerasuolo di Vittoria
 - (1) Etna Rosso/Nerello Mascalese
 - Budget: \$50–\$100
- **Just One Wine Please**
 - Etna Rosso – Of these, I think it is Sicily's most distinctive
 - Budget: \$30–\$55

Buyer's Cheat Sheet to Sicilian Wine

1 Etna Bianco or Carricante

Open time: *Etna Bianco can hold together for 3–5 nights after opening if properly re-corked and chilled*

For this tasting, we will start and end on the great volcano of Etna, where one of the most delicate white wines in Italy is made: Etna Bianco. However, this being the Wild West of Sicily, some Etna white wines (namely from Passopisciaro) are made from Chardonnay. These cannot be labeled as Etna Bianco, but a wine shop may be selling them as a white

from Etna, which they are. **We want those made from Carricante or a majority Carricante** (some blending with other local white grapes is allowed on Etna). The list below includes those wines, so try to stick with these producers. If your wine shop has someone else in mind, confirm that the wine is an Etna Bianco or made from Carricante.

Suggested wines:

- [Benanti](#) Etna Bianco – \$\$
- Benanti "Contrada Rinazzo" Etna Bianco Superiore – \$\$\$
- Benanti "Pietramarina" Etna Bianco Superiore – \$\$\$\$ (widely considered one of Italy's top white wines)
- [Ciro Biondi](#) "Outis (Nessuno)" Etna Bianco – \$\$
- Azienda Agricola Sofia "La Vigna di Gioacchino" Terre Siciliane Bianco – \$\$
- I Custodi delle Vigne dell'Etna "Ante" Etna Bianco – \$\$
- Girolamo Russo "Nerina" Etna Bianco – \$\$
- Tenuta Tascante "Buonora" Etna Bianco – \$
- Tenuta delle Terre Nere Etna Bianco – \$
- Tenuta delle Terre Nere "Le Vigne Niche" Etna Bianco – \$\$
- Calabretta Carricante Bianco Siciliane – \$
- Graci Etna Bianco – \$\$
- Planeta Etna Bianco – \$
- Pietradolce Archineri Etna Bianco – \$\$\$

1 Grillo or Catarratto

Open time: Grillo and Catarratto can hold together for 2–3 nights after opening if properly re-corked and chilled

Grillo grows everywhere on Sicily, but not all of it is great. Its stronghold is in western Sicily where it has become the backbone of Marsala, a fortified wine with a bruised reputation, as well as easy-breezy, cheap dry whites. But when everything is dialed in, Grillo — and the various Grillo-based blends — can give Sauvignon Blanc a run for its money any night of the week. This can be a great white wine for summer or for various seafood pairings, especially in the hands of these producers. A magical pairing: Grillo + spaghetti nera (squid-ink pasta) with shrimp.

Suggested wines:

- Gurrieri Grillo Sicilia – \$
- Mortelito “Calaiancu” Bianco Sicilia – \$
- Gorgi Tondi “Coste e Preola” Grillo – \$
- Gorgi Tondi “Kheire” Grillo – \$
- CVA Canicatti “Aquilae” Grillo – \$
- Tenuta Regaleali (Tasca d’Almerita) “Cavallo delle Fate” Grillo – \$
- Tasca d’Almerita “Mozia” Grillo – \$
- Donnafugata “SurSur” Grillo – \$
- Planeta “La Segreta” Grillo – \$
- [Porta del Vento Catarratto](#) – \$\$
- Donnafugata "Anthilia" Catarratto – \$
- Feudo Montoni "Masso" Catarratto – \$

1 Frappato, Nero d’Avola or Cerasuolo di Vittoria

Open time: Cerasuolo di Vittoria can hold together for 3–5 nights after opening if properly re-corked and chilled. Frappato can hold together for 2–4 nights

Wines from Southern Sicily are dominated by the black grape of Avola, better known as Nero d’Avola. Few Italian grapes have pole-vaulted more dramatically in quality over the last 20 years than Nero d’Avola, but for tonight, we are going to focus on its oddball blending partner, Frappato. When these two get together in the province of Vittoria, they form Sicily’s only DOCG-level wine (the theoretical highest appellation level in Italy), known as Cerasuolo di Vittoria. I love these wines, and think that — with a few exceptions — they’re vastly underrated. We are going for lighter red wines tonight, not the highly extracted, highly alcoholic reds that were en vogue on Sicily in the late 1990s/early 2000s, which (a) sent Nero d’Avola in the wrong direction of anonymity and (b) which stubbornly persist to this day. So, I’ve included a few varietal Nero d’Avola and Frappato wines on this list from producers I know and trust. If you need to stray off this list, make sure it is for a Cerasuolo di Vittoria or Frappato. Varietal Frappato is best served with a slight chill, and is a rare red wine that goes great with seafood.

Suggested wines:

- [Gurrieri](#) "Don Vice" Cerasuolo di Vittoria – \$\$
- Gurrieri Frappato – \$\$
- COS Frappato – \$\$

- COS Nero di Lupo – \$\$
- COS Pithos Rosso – \$\$
- COS Cerasuolo di Vittoria – \$\$
- Feudo Montoni "Vrucara Prephyloxera" Nero d'Avola – \$\$\$
- Feudo Montoni "Lagnusa" Nero d'Avola – \$\$
- Arianna Occhipinti "Il Frappato" – \$\$
- Arianna Occhipinti "SP68" Rosso – \$\$
- Arianna Occhipinti "Grotte Alte" Cerasuolo di Vittoria – \$\$\$
- Gulfi Cerasuolo di Vittoria – \$
- Mortellito "Calaiancu" Rosso Sicilia – \$\$
- Donnafugata "Floramundi" Cerasuolo di Vittoria – \$
- Planeta Cerasuolo di Vittoria –
- Feudo di Santa Tresa Frappato – \$

1 Etna Rosso or Nerello Mascalese

Open time: Etna Rosso can hold together for a week after opening if properly re-corked and chilled.

Oh, how the landscape of Italian fine wine has shifted over the last 20 years. That's because the wines from Mount Etna — largely abandoned and forgotten as recently as the 1990s — have risen through the ranks to be approaching Barolo and Brunello in terms of demand. Fans of Burgundian Pinot Noir ought to know these wines: centered on the local grape variety Nerello Mascalese (with a bit of Nerello Cappuccio blended in at times) they are lean, racy, wildly aromatic and built to age for decades. Most importantly: they come from the northern and eastern slopes of Europe's most active volcano, lending them a unique texture that separates them from the crowd.

We could spend an entire evening discussing just Mount Etna wines, but this being an introduction, I'm urging guests to simply buy one of the "entry-level" Etna Rosso wines to get a "first taste." But if you are familiar with Etna Rosso, by all means, knock yourself out. A quick side note: the Etna Rosso DOC designation (yes, it is still a DOC, not a DOCG) is strictly controlled based on elevation of the vineyards. Some wineries source grapes from vineyards above or below this line, and as a result, they cannot classify their wines as Etna Rosso on a technicality. The same goes for blending, so you might see some "Terre Siciliane" designated wines here. Unlike Etna Bianco, many of these can be trusted as similar to an Etna Rosso experience. If they're on this list, I can vouch for them.

Suggested wines:

- [Benanti](#) Etna Rosso – \$
- Benanti "Contrada Cavaliere" Etna Rosso – \$\$\$
- [Ciro Biondi](#) "Outis (Nessuno)" Etna Rosso – \$\$
- [Ciro Biondi](#) "San Nicolo" Etna Rosso ([my No. 1 wine of 2021](#)) – \$\$\$
- [Ciro Biondi](#) "Cisterna Fuori" Etna Rosso – \$\$\$
- [Passopisciario](#) Passorosso Terre Siciliane – \$\$
- Passopisciario Contrada G Terre Siciliane – \$\$\$
- Passopisciario Contrada G Terre Siciliane – \$\$\$
- Passopisciario Contrada G Terre Siciliane – \$\$\$
- I Vigneri di Salvo Foti Etna Rosso – \$\$
- I Custodi delle Vigne dell'Etna Aetneus Etna Rosso – \$\$
- Calabretta Nerello Mascalese Vigne Vecchie Sicilia – \$\$
- Azienda Agricola Sofia "La Vigna di Gioacchino" Etna Rosso – \$\$
- Palmento Costanzo "Moféte" Etna Rosso – \$\$
- Masseria del Pino "I Nove Fratelli" Etna Rosso – \$\$\$
- Girolamo Russo 'a Rina Etna Rosso – \$\$
- Pietradolce Etna Rosso – \$
- Tenuta Tascante "Ghiaia Nera" Etna Rosso – \$