

Passopisciaro 2001 IGT Sicilia

2 Nov 2004 by JR	
before	and after.

Andrea Franchetti is best known for his isolated and grandly, nay, idiosyncratically ambitious southern Tuscan propertyTenuta di Trinoro. There is more about this maverick estate in <u>wine news</u> and its extraordinary wines in the <u>2002</u> <u>tasting notes</u> archive.

But now he has another wine, the produce of a dramatically transformed patch of hillside on the northern slopes of Mount Etna (see pictures above). The land, at 1,000 metres above sea level one of the highest vineyards in Europe, was cleared and planted with cuttings from old Nerello Mascalese vines native to this part of Sicily. The grape is late-ripening anyway but at this altitude in 2001 the crop was not harvested until 10 Nov - with similar harvest dates in 2002 and 2003 apparently.

Passopisciaro apparently means "the-step-of-the-fish-dealer" in Sicilian, though I cannot imagine any fishmonger travelling this far uphill.

But what of the wine? Absolutely delicious, I must say - and very interesting flavours that have nothing remotely reminiscent of fish but, rather, extremely ripe red cherries. The wine carries its inconveniently high 15 per cent alcohol nonchalantly - possibly even more nonchalantly than the same load is carried by the Tenuta di Trinoro 2001 which is apparently just as strong and tastes just as sweet, though in a much more Tuscan, straight-backed structure. The Sicilian wine is for hedonists and could be drunk with pleasure immediately even if Franchetti is presumably hoping to make one of the island's longest-lived wines from this curious new vineyard.

The wine can be acquired, with cunning and stealth, from Trinoro's various importers around the world, notably Corney & Barrow (who have moved from EC1 to E1 - see details in the directory) which has a few bottles to allocate at around œ25.85 apiece. Call Clare Jones at Corney & Barrow on 020 7265 2441 for more details. C&B also import the second wine of Tenuta di Trinoro, the earlier-maturing and much less intense Le Cupole di Trinoro 2001 at œ27.44 a bottle. This wine, made up of 43 per cent Cabernet Franc with 27 per cent Merlot (the a grape Franchetti claims to be lessening in favour of Cabernet Franc), 25 per cent Cabernet Sauvignon and five per cent of the Roman grape Cesanese d'Affile, really is like a fainter version of the massive Tenuta di Trinoro (2001 sold out by C&B, 2002 about to be offered).

Few reds, and surely no Sicilian wines, are more distinctive than this one - and now we know why (see below).

Andrea Franchetti adds some winemaking background: Nerello Mascalese makes a hard, harsh wine without much colour, so we picked very late, nov 6-10, hand plucked the good berries (10 girls from Randazzo, 800 kilos per day), packed them with metabisulphite in a tank and kept the fruit there at about 4°C. The berries turned white as the sulphur was absorbed by the skins, then after two weeks a deep blue colour appeared and then pervaded the tank as the skins' cellular walls broke down, so we heated it up and the fermentation started. I didn't think I could use the Nerello, and still want to blend it with Cesanese and Petit Verdot that I planted on the lava and is extraordinary.

Tenuta 2001's mix is 48% Cabernet Franc, 22% Merlot, 19% Cabernet Sauvignon, 11% Petit Verdot. The tannins here do ripen to sweetness, then the wine hardens after about two years from bottling. People think there is residual sugar when they taste it from the barrel.