

Tenuta Terre Nere, Calderara Sottana 2005 Etna Rosso

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The more wines I taste from the lava-prone slopes of Mount Etna, the more excited I am by this south eastern corner of Sicily. I have previously raved about Andrea Franchetti's [Passopisciaro](#) but it was only last week that I had the chance to taste a couple of Marco de Grazia's reds which were just as exciting, though inspiringly different. Indeed, the Sicilian pair stood out for me as being the most attractive and intriguing wines at Justerini & Brooks's showing of de Grazia's current Italian collection, heavy as it is on big Piemontese names.

De Grazia's first vintage at Terre Nere ('black soils') was 2002, a year later than Franchetti's. Talking to him, I got the impression that De Grazia is still exploring the possibilities but there is no doubting his passion for this rediscovered wine region, which he thinks is every bit as expressive and nuanced as Burgundy or the Langhe. He continues to acquire vineyard here and last year even made a white wine from young Carricante vines. But the crown jewels are the old Nerello bush vines, many planted before the arrival of phylloxera, mainly Nerello Mascalase and Nerello Mantellato (the latter another reason for a new grape book...) Gaja's ex agronomist Federico Cultas has had considerable influence here and this year those trying to spin gold out of the ancient territory and ancient vines grown there will include incomers from Holland, Belgium, Piemonte and Tuscany as well as investors from further west in Sicily such as Tasca D'Almerita, Corvo and the Planeta family who have considerably extended their investment here. It sounds like quite a party.

It also fits quite well with those who have vineyards in lower or warmer sites as grapes don't ripen on the north facing slopes of Etna, at altitudes of up to 900 metres or more, until the end of October or sometimes even early November.

De Grazia's original parcel was in the **Vigneto Guardiola** at 800 to 900 m and it is from this site that he makes a particularly ambitious wine, one that is brooding, tight and concentrated – more claret like than the more opulent produce of the lower **Calderara Sottana** vines at 700 m which I would drink with enormous pleasure from around 2009. The Calderara Sottana, from 40- to 140-year-old vines is wonderfully rich and spicy, with a frothy, winking kind of appeal that almost has a hint of cappuccino about it, but a deep undertow of chewy mineral elements too and then great lift on the finish. This is a real charmer, even if less 'serious' than the still rather surly Vigneto Guardiola, whose potential may not become clear for at least another five years. Both labels declare 14% alcohol.

In J&B's offer of the 2005s, The Calderara Sottana is £90 a dozen in bond while the Vigneto Guardiola is £74 for six bottles in bond. (De Grazia makes a third wine at the more expensive price.) Americans can find these wines relatively easily by the single bottle already, as well as the basic **Etna Rosso 2005** from around \$14 a bottle which I have not tasted but which should provide great short term drinking if its peers are anything to judge by.

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