Campania

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In a nutshell: ‘Ancient Greek’ vine varieties and great potential

Grapes: Aglianico (red), Fiano, Falanghina, Greco (white)

The vineyards of the region dominated by the city of Naples are in many ways some of Italy's most exciting. Many of them are planted with vines thought to be direct descendants of those brought here by the ancient Greeks. The very name of **Aglianico**, a red grape of enormous character which is so late-ripening it cannot be grown economically further north, is a corruption of Elleniko, or Greek. And then among white grapes **Greco**’s origins are fairly obvious. **Falanghina** is thought by some to have been responsible for the brownish wines of long-aged Falernum, arguably the most famous wine in classical literature. **Fiano**, capable of making nutty white wines which can also be aged, was mentioned by Pliny. All this could be dusty archive stuff were it not for the fact that so many producers are doing their best to make fine modern wines from these ancient grapes, each of which is bursting with character.

The most famous wine based on stern and sturdy Aglianico is **Taurasi** made in hills directly inland from Naples where it may be picked as late as November. The most famous Taurasi producer is Mastroberardino but they are now being rivalled by the likes of Caggiano, Molettieri, Terredora di Paola and the thoroughly modern Feudi di San Gregorio which has put an international polish on these ancient grape varieties. Perhaps their best-known wine is Serpico, an oaked blend of Aglianico made universally intelligible by blending in a bit of Merlot. They, like others here, also grow the local red grape Piedirosso which is even more commonly grown in vineyards nearer the coast of Campania.

The modern wine drinker is most likely to meet Fiano grapes here in a dry but powerful, ageworthy white labelled **Fiano di Avellino** after the town on the way to the Taurasi zone from Naples. Feudi di San Gregorio make several single-vineyard bottlings with even more character and some oak ageing. Today’s Falernum is the multi-coloured **Falerno del Massico** made on the coast north of Naples, most successfully by Villa Matilda. But perhaps Campania’s most intriguing white wine is **Greco di Tufo**, made from Greco grapes grown in tufa, a sort of soft, particularly well-drained limestone, just west of Taurasi.

Some favourite producers: Caggiano, Colli di Lapio,De Conciliis, Feudi di San Gregorio, Maffini, Mastroberardino, Molettieri, Montevetrano, Terredora di Paola, Villa Matilde.