

## Nanni Copè, Sabbie di Sopra il Bosco 2009

6 Mar 2012 by Walter Speller  
From €20.88 and around US\$45

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The first time I met Giovanni Ascione was in his role as presenter during a press tasting of [Centopassi](#) wines in Naples in November 2009. Centopassi is a Sicilian co-op not far from Palermo which makes wines from grapes grown on sequestered Mafia land. Ascione was accompanied at that tasting by Cento Passi's agronomist Antonio Castro, who gave a chilling account of what it is like to work in such an environment.

The second time I bumped into Ascione was in the Mosel, earlier this year, where he was busy visiting as many estates as possible during a three-day trip. His main activity, as you may have guessed by now, is writing and talking about wine, but since 2009, when he stumbled over a vineyard near his home town of Caserta, in Campania, he has taken on a part-time job as vigneron as well.

Here, in Castel Campagnano, he can call the 2.5 ha of Vigna Sopra il Bosco, planted with Pallagrello Nero, Aglianico and Casavecchia, his own. The main part of the vineyard was planted some 30 years ago but Ascione also has access to some centenarian Casavecchia vines in an adjacent plot, and it must have been these especially that spurred Ascione to acquire the vineyards out of a desire to protect these majestic plants. I can assure you from my own experience that when you see vines this old and sturdy, you want to hold, hug and own them. That the whole project is driven by endless passion while bordering on economic madness is evidenced by the minuscule production of 7,500 bottles of one label only, the Sabbie di Sopra il Bosco.

The Sabbie in this case indicates the sandy, poor soils on which the organically tended vineyard sits. The tiny estate is called Nanni Copè, Ascione's nickname as a child. It has a motto, too, proudly printed on the label: *una vita, tante vite*, meaning 'one life, many vines', which neatly sums up Ascione's experience as a taster and wine writer. **Nanni Copè, Sabbie di Sopra il Bosco 2009 IGT Terre del Volturno** is made from the aforementioned grape varieties and although the vineyards are tiny, it takes up to two weeks to harvest, as Ascione picks only those grapes that are fully ripe. This precise way of working necessitates many passages through the vines before the whole lot is in the fermentation vat. As he doesn't ferment the varieties separately, but according to ripeness levels, the blend is more or less ready even before the actual fermentation has taken off.

Ascione ferments in small stainless steel tank, using punching down and short pump-overs as the main extraction methods. The wine remains on the skins for a total of 19 days, while malolactic fermentation takes place in tonneaux, ie 500-litre casks. He ages the wine in new and old tonneaux for 13 months and then an additional eight months in bottle.

The 2009, his second vintage, is through and through Campanian: a deep purple ruby in the glass, it is reluctant to open up (and needs decanting for at least an hour) to precise and fine cherry, tamarind and spice. The palate, for the uninitiated, may come as a shock: it's not the very fine tannin that is the structuring element but a hefty dose of bright, fruit-driven acidity. Although we are in the south of Italy, the indigenous varieties, in comparison with international ones, almost all have the propensity to keep their acidity in a warm climate. In the case of Nanni Copè, the exposition of the vineyard, predominantly north west, has also undoubtedly led to a very low pH (3.45 to be precise), which, in turn, leads to this refreshing spurt of fine acidity, paired with relatively modest alcohol of 13.5%. The finish is long, almost exotic, and very fresh. Although I drank it with great joy over dinner, it really deserves prolonged bottle ageing and will effortlessly improve over the next 5-10 years or so - although I find it hard to resist already.

The wine is not yet imported into the UK but in the US it is distributed by Vinity Wine Company in California and by [Indie Wineries](#) in New York.

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