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DRINK WITH ME

MAY 21, 2024 / by SHELLEY BOETTCHER

2024 Sicilia en Primeur – Vivera



Vivera winery, with Mount Etna in the background (photo by Shelley Boettcher)



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Birds. I hear birds everywhere at **Vivera**, a small family-owned winery in Sicily. There are birds in the vineyards. Smallish grey-black birds — I forget to ask what kind — on the flowering bushes near the winery buildings. Swallows in the air, swooping to catch insects as the sun starts to set. I try to capture them against the backdrop of Mount Etna, but their speed is no match for me, completely distracted by the beauty around me.

And the wine!

Vivera Winery goes back to 2003, when Loredana Vivera's parents bought land not far from Linguaglossa, a pretty town on the northern side of Etna in Sicily.

After her father died, Loredana and her mother continued the work and, in 2008, the winery opened its doors.

With winemaker Irene Vaccaro, who Loredana describes as her “more than my right-hand woman,” they focus mostly on organic grapes indigenous to the region, but they have a few international varieties, plus an ancient olive grove, too. (The delicious oil is for sale at the winery.)

Located in Etna's shadow, just 10 kilometres from the sea, Vivera now has 50 hectares of land, certified organic, throughout three estates. Grapes grown on the Martinella estate, which I visited in May 2024, include Nerello Mascalese, Nerello Cappuccio and Carricante.



Winemaker Irene Vaccaro (photo by Shelley Boettcher)

Several wines are available; the Martinella Etna White is made with Carricante, while the Martinella Etna Rosso is made from Nerello Mascalese with a bit of Nerello Cappuccio.

We walk through the vineyards toward a concrete Second World War bunker on the property, overlooking a once-important bridge. That bridge, however, became less important after Etna erupted and the stream of lava redirected the once-powerful river in 2002.

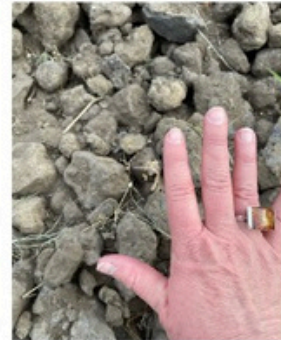


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The conversation then turns to the soil. Etna may take away but it also gives; the pumice-filled soil here is rich with minerals and nutrients, thanks to the ash and volcanic deposits.

I lean down to take a photo of the incredibly rocky soil. It turns out, however, that what I see is temporary — sort of.

“In the winter, the stones come up to the surface during the rain,” Vaccaro says. “And in the summer, they sink back down and you see the sand again. It’s a sort of recycling of the soil.”



Fascinating stuff.



As we walk back to the winery, I smell the intoxicating scent of wild mint and sage under our feet. It’s getting closer to twilight and the birds are getting quieter.

After a beautiful dinner of local cheeses, meats and vegetables, I buy olive oil and wine, the 2016 Martinella Etna Rosso, to take home. I don’t know when I will return to this corner of paradise, but I can at least take a taste of it back to Canada to share with family and friends.

Visiting the region? You can [sign up online](#) for olive oil and wine tastings at Vivera. In Quebec? A selection of Vivera wines are imported by [Monvino](#); in Ontario, a selection are

imported by [Gusto Grapes](#).

Last but not least, Oceania Cruises takes visitors on tours of Vivera; [find out more here](#).