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Drink

Sicily's rich tapestry of local wine varieties is full of surprises

Lots of sun and low incidence of diseases make Sicily perfect for vine growing and the largest organic vineyard in Europe



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The Aeolian Islands are a spectacular sight – seven massive foreboding volcanic mountains jutting out of the Tyrrhenian Sea, just north of Sicily. A Unesco World Heritage site, they are a popular tourist location in the summer months. However, the islands are best known for producing capers, grown on small bushes clinging to cracks in the bare rocks. You will also find some distinctive white, red and dessert wines crafted from unique local varieties. I feature one below.

The islands are a good example of the huge variety of wine produced in Sicily. There is no shortage of cabernet, merlot and syrah, but it is the fascinating wines produced by local varieties that are responsible for most of the excitement. Look out for nero d'Avola, nerello mascalese, frappato, perricone, and many more for red wines.

All of these four can be surprisingly elegant if grown in cooler high-altitude vineyards. Sicily is one of the largest producing regions of Italy. With plenty of sun and low incidence of diseases, it is the perfect place to grow vines and is the largest organic vineyard in Europe. It has a history going back over 2,500 years and was the centre of the Mediterranean wine trade for centuries.



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Today I feature four red wines, but the white wines are equally interesting. As well as the wines featured below, look out for the excellent Zisola (€26.99, Pinto Wines), and wines from Cusumano, Donnafugata, Pietradolce, COS, Occipinti, and Planeta.

Cortese Nostru Nerello Mascalese 2022, Terre Siciliane, Organic

13.5%, €16.95

Seductive pure dark fruits with a light spiciness and wispy tannins on the finish. With white meats or roast Mediterranean vegetables.

Donnafugata, 'Sherazade', Nero d'Avola, Sicily, Italy 2022

13.5%, €24.99

Soft with smooth black cherry fruits, a touch of spice and a smooth finish. Very attractive wine.

From The Corkscrew, D2; Avoca; Fallon & Byrne, D2; McHugh's, D5; Whelehan's, Loughlinstown; 64 Wine, Glashule and Deerpark; The Nude Wine Co; Red Island, Skerries; Drink Store, D7; Thomas Woodberrys, Galway; Clontarf Wines

Terre Nere Etna Rosso 2022, Sicily, Organic

13.5%, €32.95

Fragrant with elegant dark cherry and raspberry fruits, cut through by a fine mineral acidity and light but present tannins. Try it with duck, roast red meats, or firm cheeses.

From 64wine, Glashule; The Corkscrew, D2; Whelehan's, Loughlinstown; Pinto, D8; wineonline.ie; Baggot Street Wines

Corinto Nero 2017, Tenuta di Castellaro, Lipari

13%, €56

Made from the local corinto nero variety, this is a refined wine with good acidity and lifted damson and blackberry fruits. Enjoy it with braised red meats, game or firm cheeses such as Pecorino Sardo.

From Neighbourhood Wines, D2, D14