

Wines

An adulation for Terre Nere



Michael Tabone

From time to time the world of wine gives birth to a personality that typifies an area, a landscape, a culture, a wine-growing region which in a world awash with boring, stylised wines uplifts those of us who think great wine is one who is grown and bottled inspired by its *terroir*. It is this link between the wine grower and his surroundings that gives wine personality.

Without doubt, one such personality is Marco de Grazia. Accompanying him for a drive through his Terre Nere estate on the western side of the Etna, one cannot help but be impressed by his love, enthusiasm and near adulation of the vines and land he tends. He is both convinced and convincing that if Sicily is to make great wine, Etna is the place.

At around 20 hectares, the vineyard is terraced along varying altitudes starting at around 600 metres above sea level with the highest at around 1,000 metres. Varying soils also enrich the complexity of the landscape and the resultant wines. There are alluvial, varying degrees of lava ash, and 'galet' type soils.

The vineyard is mainly planted with the indigenous Nerello Mascalese of impressive age groups. Some dating back to pre-Phylloxera,



Marco de Grazia in his beloved vineyards close to the Etna.

which means well over 100 years, and, to top it all up, there are three or four different vine-growing methods - 'Spalliera' and 'Albarello' are the main ones.

Naturally, a wine grower who believes in the diversity of his *terroir* goes out of his way to try to keep the wines from the different parcels as natural as possible. No chemicals or artificial fertilisers and sprays are used and vinification and ageing remains separate until bottling.

De Grazia's background is quite complex too: Sicilian ancestry, Tuscan childhood and American upbringing. His wine education was acquired in Burgundy and his love for this French region is also very

evident. He was, and still is, inspired by the various Burgundian *crus*, a term he often uses for his various parcels at Terre Nere.

"I have no words to describe the feeling, except to say it was pure magic"

To accompany a dinner of melon and *prosciutto*, followed by grilled lamb, sausages, 'Etna' burgers cooked between lemon leaves and fantastic Faggiolini

Mascalesi, we drank a number of wines. 'Etna Bianco' 2008 is made from a blend of around five varieties. It is quite robust with slight mineral hints.

Terre Nere's Rosato 2008 is fantastically dry, crisp and fresh - thirst-quenching. Etna Rosso 2008 is made from the young vines of the estate. This is entry level, so it is on the fruit side of things, maybe lacking middle palette. In Magnum, there was the delicate and easy drinking Vigne di Eli from the Calderara Sottana parcel and the complex, rich and full bodied but incredibly fresh and mineral Guardiola 2007. This is, of course, too young to drink but will reward patience for 10 or maybe more years.

De Grazia is a keen wine collector and to finish the meal off we shared a wonderful moment of history and inspired gustatory pleasure when he treated us to a bottle of Maderia - Cossart Gordon - Cercial Solera 1860. Yes, 1860! I have no words to describe the feeling, except to say it was pure magic.

De Grazia did not make Terre Nere, nor the Etna landscape that it is situated in. He is just the man who was inspired by the natural magnificence of the area and who, together with his equally inspired team, grows and bottles wines that are true to their origins. May he inspire other Sicilian wine makers.

The manga that poured French wine into Asia

In the cobblestone square of Bages, a tiny village in the Medoc wine country, a dozen influential Bordeaux vintners dressed in flowing red robes gathered for an unlikely event.

The vintners from southwest France were about to induct two Japanese comic book authors into their exclusive wine brotherhood, the *Commanderie du Bontemps*.

Yuko and Shin Kibayashi, a fashionable sister-brother duo publishing under the pseudonym Tadashi Agi, created *Kami no Shizuki* (The Drops of God), a phenomenally successful manga series that has brought wine to subway commuters across Asia, and sparked a wine boom.

The authors, with millions of copies already under their belts, fell in love with wine the way you do: over a bottle of 1985 Chateau Lynch Bages, Domaine de la Romanee Conti, a Burgundy legend that retails for €600.

The "magnificent floral aromas" astonished them. Inspiration struck. They would go where no other manga artist had gone before - wine.

In the four years since it first appeared, the 21-volume saga, where wines can be compared for excellence to a star rock con-

cert, has sold six million copies in Japan and three million in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Korea, according to French publisher Editions Glénat.

In France, nine volumes have appeared, selling 350,000 copies. Fans eagerly await the 10th volume in October. "This book is a real bridge between the two cultures: manga fans discover wine, wine amateurs discover manga," said editor Stephane Ferrand.

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"It's really well done," said Bordeaux's legendary winemaker Jean-Michel Cazes, whose 1983 Chateau Lynch Bages and his luxury hotel Chateau Cordeilan-Bages, to his surprise, appeared in book five.

He expressed admiration for illustrator Shu Okimoto, and the accuracy of the information woven into the storylines. "It's not my culture, but when I look



Japanese brother-sister duo Yuko (second from left) and Shin (left) Kibayashi, known as Tadashi Agi, sign autographs in Paris during a press conference to launch the ninth volume of their manga *Les Gouttes de Dieu* (Drops of God).

at it, it explains wine very well. People learn about wine through the cartoons."

In fact, the hero of the saga knows little about wine, so readers

learn along with him, opening the door to millions of future consumers. "The Japanese love the ritual side of wine. In Korea, they have even discovered that wine

can be a diplomatic tool," said Shin Kibayashi. "Wine is universal, it can very well bridge differences between races and countries." (AFP)