

# GIROLAMO RUSSO (not represented by Marc de Grazia Selections in the USA)

I was closing the gate to the Guardiola vineyard when a mutual friend, who was passing by, introduced me to Giuseppe Russo, a trained pianist with a degree in Italian literature, who had started managing his family's property (named after his father) on the northern slopes of the Etna since his father passed away the year before, in 2003. We struck up a friendship and, in the months that followed, I encouraged Giuseppe to pursue his project of vinifying the grapes - that had been sold up to then - and bottling the wine from the 15 hectares of vineyards that make up the estate.

The vineyards, mainly Nerello Mascalese with a small percentage of Nerello Cappuccio, stand within the township of Randazzo in the *contrade* (districts) of S. Lorenzo (8 hectares at 750-780 meters above sea level), Feudo (6 hectares at 650-670 meters altitude) and Feudo di Mezzo (1 hectare at 700 meters altitude). Giuseppe also manages 1 hectare in the district of Calderara Sottana belonging to his uncle. About 9

hectares are 50-100 year old vines, all strictly *en goblet* according to the tradition on the Etna, the rest are recently planted and the trellising *espalier*. Due to the declivity, all vineyards stand on terraces, but tractors can only enter in the aisles between the rows of the new vines (the only ones wide enough), the old vines can be worked exclusively with manual tools or with motorhoes.

The estate is certified organic for viticulture, only sulphur and copper base products, and manure is the only fertilizer used and this in small quantity. Vinification takes place in an old cellar where, in the old days, wine of the area was brought to be transported by the Circumetnea railway (in fact tracks can still be seen inside the cellar) to the port of Riposto, from where it was shipped to Northern Italy, France and America.

For the production of his wines, Giuseppe follows the same method as when he used to study the piano: extreme attention to details, but always keeping in mind the final result. Although yields are extremely

low (3.5 tons/hectare), only the very best clusters are selected for the bottled wines (the rest of the grapes are used for wine sold in bulk), harvest is carried out later than most producers of the area (around the end of October) in order to have perfectly ripe grapes and full and supple wines. One must also consider that the *vignerons* of the Etna, over the centuries, have selected the clones of Nerello Mascalese that ripened later so that vinification could be carried out in autumn when the weather was cooler (so that the temperature during fermentation did not get too high causing problems) and that low yields were considered here *condicio sine qua non* for good wine.

Three different Etna Rosso wines, released for the first time with the 2005 vintage, are made: two single vineyard from the San Lorenzo and Feudo districts, and "a'Rina" (meaning "sand") made from all the vineyards of the estate. ◇



## Etna Rosso Feudo

Zone: Contrada Feudo, Randazzo  
 Cru: Feudo  
 Varietal: Nerello Mascalese with a small percentage of Nerello Cappuccio  
 Vineyard Ext.: 6 hectares  
 Average Prod.: 3,200 bottles



## Etna Rosso San Lorenzo

Zone: Contrada S. Lorenzo, Randazzo  
 Cru: S. Lorenzo  
 Varietal: Nerello Mascalese with a small percentage of Nerello Cappuccio  
 Vineyard Ext.: 8 hectares  
 Average Prod.: 4,400 bottles