

# Tenuta delle TERRE NERE

Sicily

**T**enuta delle Terre Nere is located in Sicily, on the northern slopes of the Etna Volcano. The estate is made up of roughly 30 hectares, of which 21 are vineyards. Roughly 4.5 of these have been uprooted (in the Calderara cru) and replanted, having let the soil "rest".

Two vineyards, for a total of roughly 11-12 hectares are in the Calderara Cru. Less than 1 hectare of Calderara is prephylloxera, the rest (which has not been uprooted) is about 40-50 years old. The trellising is "en goblet" or self standing, but in wide spacing: 2.2 x 1 meters. The elevation here is between 650 and 700 meters above sea level.

Two vineyards are in the Guardiola Cru, for a total of 2.1 hectares. Both are 60-90 years old, except for replanted vines. 450 vines were replanted in Guardiola in 2005. Training is en goblet 1 x 1 meter tight traditional spacing, steep and terraced, which means the vineyards have to be worked by hand. The elevation here is 800 to 900 meters above sea level. Above 1,000 meters, perfect ripening is uncertain for red grapes, but still vineyards are planted at these altitudes. In any case, these are the highest altitude red grape vineyards in the "old world"!

Two vineyards are in the "Feudo di Mezzo" cru, for a total of 1.35 hectares. The vineyards are terraced, but not as steeply as the Guardiola vineyard. The vines are en goblet, roughly 1 x 1 meter

spacing. The soil here is a blend of volcanic ash and volcanic sand, quite unusual in this area. The vines' average age is probably around 60-80 years old.

The soils differ vastly from patch to patch. 700,000 years of volcanic eruptions have created endless soil differentiations, many of which are radical. In this area the soil is roughly volcanic ash specked by black pumice and much more solid volcanic rock as well. Rocky is putting it mildly.

The great 2007 vintage will see the release of a new cru, Santo Spirito. A new hectare property was bought here after buying extraordinary grapes for three years. In 2008 we were able to buy 7 more hectares in this outstanding cru – adjacent to Guardiola! – and harvested here some of the finest grapes ever in 2008.

The weather variations in this area are profound and generally defined by exposure, "airyness", and altitude. But there are also microclimatic curiosities, such as the fact that Calderara lies between two rainfall areas, from both of which, for some reason, it is spared.

"Airyness", as they define it here, which is a well exposed vineyard that is not closed in by hills, is particularly important because mildew and oidium are rather rough here. In fact, due to the fact that the harvest here is roughly between mid and the end of October making it the latest harvest in Italy after Aglianico (first week of November), the weather always breaks before the

harvest, endangering the grapes at their most delicate stage. All in all, this is a very difficult climate, in many ways akin to Burgundy. And if - like me - you grow grapes organically, or biologically, if you prefer - i.e., using only bordelaise mixture and organic fertilization - mostly dung - it makes it even harder.

Most important, the extraordinary elevation yields dramatic temperature excursions. This, in turn, makes the wines of Etna extraordinarily fine and elegant, devoid of the heat and overripe sensations that overwhelmingly define "southern" wines.

And, in fact, everyone who has tasted the wines of Terre Nere, particularly the 2004s, from the barrel or the bottle (as Elio Altare) says they find them most akin to Burgundy or Barolo. And indeed the Etna could easily be seen as the Burgundy of the Mediterranean, as I mention on the Italian strip label.

This is particularly obvious from 2004 on because from then on I'm releasing wines produced from three crus. The grapes are vinified and aged separately. Vinification is simple, classic, Burgundian: maceration-fermentation between 10-15 days, malolactic and aging in oak - 25% new - bottling after roughly 18 months.

The 2004 vintage marks the real birth of Tenuta delle Terre Nere, because for the first time the estate is self sufficient, and the grapes produced were vinified at the estate's new cellars. ◇



## **Etna Rosso Calderara Sottana**

Zone: *Contrada Calderara, Randazzo*  
Cru: *Calderara*  
Varietal: *98% Nerello Mascalese, 2% Nerello Cappuccio*  
Vineyard Ext.: *11-12 hectares*  
Average Prod.: *23,000 bottles*