

Etna, Sicily

An aerial photograph of a volcanic landscape. In the foreground, there is a dark, rocky, and uneven terrain. A winding path or stream cuts through the landscape, leading towards a body of water in the background. The water is a deep blue color. The surrounding area is covered in dark, rocky material, with some patches of green vegetation visible. The overall scene is rugged and desolate.

The region has developed explosively since that lightbulb moment, expanding from a mere five quality estates to 110 today. Benanti's restrained wines have won international repute. As the buzz around Etna wine reaches fever pitch, new producers are crowding onto the market and most major Sicilian estates (Planeta, Cusumano, Tasca) have a stake on the mountain – but is the fuss deserved, or is Etna at risk of overheating?

Etna Bianco still suffers from a lack of definition, however – the DOC allows up to 40% of lesser white

Carricante (140ha),
Catarratto (22ha),
Minella, Grecanico,
Insolia

Andrea Franchetti (Passopisciaro) and Marco de Grazia (Tenuta delle Terre Nere) are the showmen who turned the world onto Etna. Arriving in the early 2000s, both were looking to replicate their respective successes in Tuscany and Barolo. Franchetti initially had little interest in Nerello, admitting ‘It took me 10 years to learn that it’s a high-quality variety.’ Nerello isn’t easy – low yields are vital to avoid a mean, astringent mess, and new oak does it few favours – something most producers now thankfully seem to have learned.