

## Etna: know your vintages

**2014** The combination of a warm, dry autumn following a wet summer promises outstanding quality for both whites and reds.

**2013** Cool, with changeable weather during the harvest. Nerello wines are fresh, perfumed and elegant.

**2012** Scorchingly hot, with no let-up in the autumn. Reds often rather monolithic, masculine and high in alcohol (up to 16%). Whites lack refinement.

**2011** Good year which produced concentrated fruit. Excellent typicity in reds and some outstanding whites.

**2010** Good but rarely great. Dry summer and cool autumn.

**2009** Cold and rainy autumn; difficult vintage but still some good wines.

**2008** Outstanding, long-lived Nerellos.

*‘We shouldn’t be trying to imitate Burgundy, or Barolo – Etna stands perfectly well on its own’*

Antonio Benanti

lived and breathed Etna longer than anyone. His I Vigneri collective spreads the gospel of *alberello* (bush) training methods, while making a range of quirky and often delicious wines.

Giuseppe Benanti calls the new producer gold rush ‘the Etna spectacle’, citing ‘the many wealthy types who came to have a go’, but the return of Etna’s younger generation to old family vineyards is bearing fruit. Estates like Pietradolce, Girolamo Russo and Scirto are producing impressive wines focused on typicity rather than flamboyance. There is increased emphasis on organic agriculture and sensitivity in the winery.

Franchetti is positive when asked whether the boom could bust: ‘It’s the grapes, the soil and the

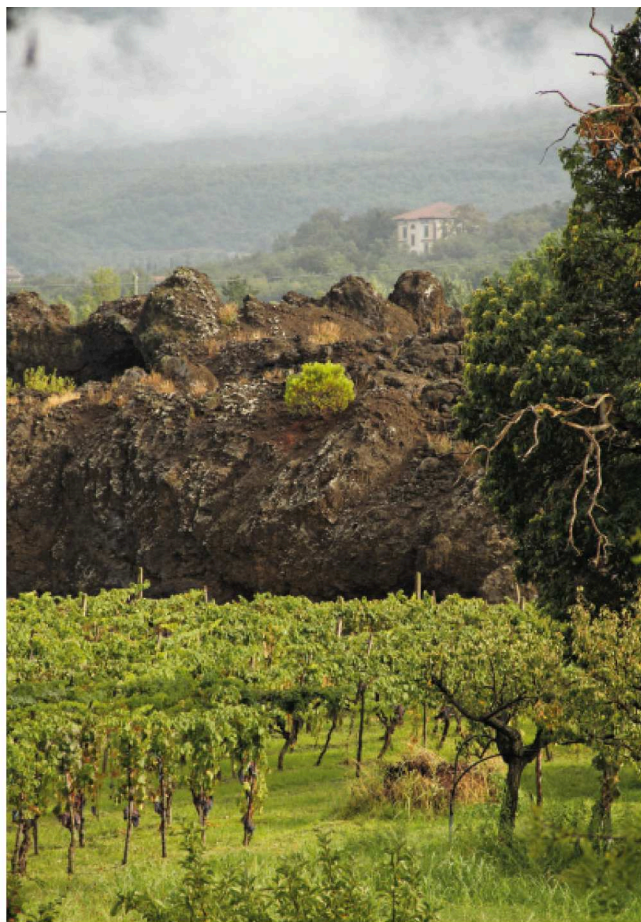
volcano that are special here,’ he says. ‘Fashion can’t take that away’. The volcano could though, despite Foti’s assertion ‘We don’t fear Etna – it’s part of life for us’.

Reminders of Etna’s primeval power are all around: Fattorie Romeo del Castello’s vineyard near Randazzo ends abruptly next to a 10m wall of spoil from the 1981 eruption. This destroyed half the estate, yet after 30 years, wild vines are pushing up through the lava, just as Etna’s sons and daughters seek to remaster the wines. **D**

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**Above: signs of Etna’s power are never far away, as this wall of spoil from the 1981 eruption in Romeo del Castello’s vineyard near Randazzo illustrates**

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## Six of Etna’s new wave of wineries



### C & S Biondi

This small estate near easterly Trecastagni seems to raise the bar every year. Architect Ciro rebuilt his family’s abandoned vineyards in 1999, initially with Salvo Foti as consultant winemaker. Of their three *contradas*, San Nicolò is the jewel in the crown. Ciro and wife Stephanie have successfully innovated in recent vintages, adding a voluptuous oak-fermented white (Chianta) and two characterful single-vineyard Nerellos to their established Outis label. [www.ibiondi.com](http://www.ibiondi.com)



### Constantino

Fabio and father Dino work in construction, but their passion clearly stretches further. Dino purchased a few hectares of vines in 1970, initially vinified for home consumption, or sold as *sfuso* (bulk wine). They started bottling in 2012, and now own 10ha in Viagrande, spread around a stone winery built in 1698. The vineyards are a treasure – ungrafted, up to 150 years old and farmed biodynamically. The wines are joyful and uncomplicated. [www.aziendagricolacostantino.it](http://www.aziendagricolacostantino.it)



### Cornelissen

Belgian Frank Cornelissen is legendary for his no-compromise approach, eschewing any vineyard treatments or sulphur in the winery. Cornelissen’s purism has brought him both a cult following and controversy. Arriving in 2000, he now has 17ha spread across several northern *contradas*. His recent vintages show increasingly focused, terroir-driven wines. Magma, vinified from *contrada* Barbabecchi at 1,000m, is sensational if expensive. [www.frankcornelissen.it](http://www.frankcornelissen.it)