

A TEAM WITH LOTS OF VOICES

Assovini Sicilia's success stems from its awareness of the importance of every member; large and small producers alike contribute in a fundamental way to making the project really work. Created thanks to the ideas of three historic entrepreneurs, Diego Planeta (Planeta Estates), Giacomo Rallo (Tenuta di Donnafugata) and Lucio Tasca d'Almerita (Conte Tasca d'Almerita), the association in fact includes companies of various kinds: internationally famous producers as well as family-run businesses, all of which share the same philosophy. As opposed to what often happens in other groups, the association does not assign a number of votes according to the size of production, so every firm has the opportunity to express its own opinion, as well as to share ideas and know-how.

Performing the role of President today is a young producer, Francesco Ferreri of Valle dell'Acate. Supporting him is a Board whose members have an average age of 40: Mariangela Cambria (Vice-President and owner of Cottanera), Antonio Rallo (Tenuta di Donnafugata), Lilly Ferro (Fazio Wines), Alberto Tasca d'Almerita (Tasca d'Almerita), Stefano Caruso (Caruso & Minini), Alessio Planeta (Planeta), Laurent Bernard de la Gatinais (Tenute Rapitalà) and Alberto Aiello (Graci).

Here below, winemaking in Sicily is described through the eyes of some of its protagonists:

IT'S BIODIVERSITY. *"Sicilian winemaking has an extremely long history that combines a great variety of terroirs with extraordinary biodiversity. There isn't just one Sicily but a veritable vine-growing and wine-producing continent,"* maintains Francesco Ferreri, 38, elected President in 2014. *"Apart from this, there is great entrepreneurial ability and a vision that the producers have developed over the last twenty years, taking on board the concept of quality but also understanding the need to work as a team. Assovini Sicilia has contributed in a fundamental manner to this progress which, in recent times, has allowed us to achieve fame worldwide: today we are the only Regional association that can boast a turnover of 250 million Euros, divided up among around 70 members".*

"Sicily is a great big vine-growing and wine-producing continent, where everyone can create a space for themselves in order to satisfy any type of consumer, both in Italy and abroad. Assovini Sicilia has succeeded in conveying this unity in diversity," echoes Mariangela Cambria of Cottanera, now in her second term as the association's Vice-President. *"One in fact goes from areas where there is a hot wind blowing in from Morocco to the slopes of Etna, which are often covered in snow and offer a mountain climate combined with the sunlight of our Region".*

This diversity also has to be taken advantage of as a resource for tourism in this extraordinary Region, which has been spared from the overbuilding one finds in other parts of Italy and indeed exudes a unique charm, due to the intermingling of the ancient and diverse civilisations and cultures that have followed one another through the centuries.

IT'S SAFEGUARDING THE ENVIRONMENT. As Alberto Tasca d'Almerita of the Tasca d'Almerita company explains, the major challenge in the future will be to produce wine in a way that is increasingly environment-friendly, so as to hand down to future generations a patrimony that is intact and an eco-system that is in balance. For 20 years now, the concept of sustainability



has entered thoroughly into the consciousness of producers and an abundance of appropriate projects have been undertaken by Sicilian wine companies.

IT'S WOMEN. Mariangela Cambria underlines the role of businesses run by women: *“The role of the woman has changed profoundly: if at one time she mainly supported her husband, who was busy working in the vineyard or in the winery, now she is increasingly an executive who travels around the globe”*. Of the same opinion is Lilly Ferro, Regional Delegate for the Donne del Vino association and Export Director for Fazio Wines: *“Today,”* she explains, *“women want to become emancipated and distinguish themselves; their roles are not only in the spheres of sales or hospitality, but also in the professions of oenologist or agronomist”*.

IT'S YOUNG. Apart from women, young people – or rather, the new generations – have proved to be a great resource. As Alessio Planeta, who runs his family company, explains, Sicily has changed dramatically within the course of a single generation, passing from a disposition towards producing quantity to one focused on quality. At the same time, it has gone from being a “Region of brands”, in which a few forward-looking companies expressed their identities in an autonomous manner, to being a “Region of different territories”, thanks partly to the efforts of Assovini Sicilia.

IT'S A COMMON BRAND. With the precise objective of telling people about the manifold aspects of the Region, the “Sicilia en Primeur” event was created 12 years ago. Today the market knows that there are “lots of Sicilys”, because Assovini Sicilia has succeeded in conveying this pluralistic identity through its business-like approach. Assovini Sicilia is, in fact, a “club of businesses”. Indeed, this entrepreneurial spirit had a fundamental significance in setting up an ambitious Region-wide project, the creation of the Sicilia D.O.C.. *“The D.O.C. was introduced with the objective of creating a strong collective trademark and protecting the image and quality of Sicilian wine by bringing in well-defined rules and controls for every bottle that bears the name of the Region on its label,”* explains Antonio Rallo of Donnafugata, Past President of Assovini Sicilia and today President of the Sicilia D.O.C.’s Producers’ Consortium. *“It is on the one hand a matter of safeguarding both serious producers and the consumer, and on the other an extraordinary marketing opportunity for the entire Region”*.

IT'S PROMOTING LOCAL IDENTITY. *“Sicily has always been a name with great appeal. On the one hand, Assovini Sicilia’s producers have helped the Region to attain international renown, and on the other this amazing island is itself a real calling card around the world,”* maintains Laurent Bernard de la Gatinais of Rapitalà. *“In certain areas, the high quality of the wines, combined with their accessible prices, allows Sicily to be very competitive in the marketplace, even against the New World. In other zones the characteristic of this Region is to have maintained a strong local identity, linked to indigenous grape varieties. Assovini Sicilia has enabled us to create a team of entrepreneurs of many different types, but all with the same entrepreneurial mentality in common”*.

ETNA: FLAGBEARER AND TIP OF THE QUALITY ICEBERG FOR THE WHOLE OF SICILY – Among the small territories with a strong local identity Etna has pride of place: here the norm is represented by small-scale producers of outstanding quality. One of these is the Graci



estate of Alberto Aiello: *“Sicily,” he says, “is a big area with a long history and great people, who share the values of respect and loyalty. Each one of them is complementary to the others: the small producers can take advantage of the work done by the big ones, who have also opened up new markets for them, while the latter can benefit from the appeal linked to the local dimension and particular identity that the former embody. The challenge for the future will be for us to go from being a very attractive brand to becoming one of the classic areas in the world of winemaking”.*

According to Stefano Caruso of Caruso e Minini there is plenty of potential: *“We Sicilians have realized that to present ourselves on an international stage we have to band together and recover our own particular culture. We have also kept our feet on the ground and we are now able to offer wines that are standard bearers for our island, and at the right price”.*

Promoting all of these aspects is the goal that the Assovini Sicilia association has given itself ever since its foundation, and which it now pursues with ever greater enthusiasm.

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