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## Sicily eager to prove itself

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The 14th edition of Sicilia en Primeur took place at the end of April in Radicepura multi-functional park near Catania. The event is organised by Assovini Sicilia which consists of 76 Sicilian wine producers. This year the event received over 100 journalists, buyers and other industry professionals to taste the wines of 2016 vintage and other new releases. Sicilia en Primeur XIV was built around a green theme with a focus on ethical values and sustainability.

"It is important now to understand that sustainability is the future. Not only for the wine business but for all businesses in the world," says Francesco Ferreri, the president of Assovini Sicilia.

Sicily is slowly but surely building a reputation as a region capable of producing high quality wines. The wines of Etna, in particular, have found an enthusiastic audience amongst sommeliers. But Sicily is much more than just Etna. Being the biggest island in the Mediterranean Sea, Sicily is surprisingly diverse when it comes to different sub-regions and the wines they produce.

"Sicily offers some great value wines," says Emma Dawson MW, buyer for British retailer Marks & Spencer. "That is something that's really good for us in the UK. There are some great varieties that are different and have unique characters, whether that be Nero d'Avola, which is really bang on the trend of people loving fruity, rich wines, or Grillo, which again is quite a fresh and very versatile wine."

She adds, "Sicily creates from its environment great wines which have really rich fruit and easily appreciated character. But also, being an island with a lot of volcanic activity, those are the kind of places that have really terrific soils and can create wines with great finesse and complexity. So, Sicily offers a little bit of everything."

The focus during the event seemed drifted from the 2016 vintage to more broader discussions about Sicilian wine. There was some debate during the event whether Sicily's signature grape varieties Nero d'Avola and Grillo should lead the charge. The less-known varieties such as the white Catarratto and the red Nerello Mascalese, for example, also have a solid fan base. The discussion was a bit of a see-saw of what to plant, where and for what purpose. One thing most participants seemed to agree on was that Sicily has a lot to offer from different varieties and styles at different price points, which makes it very competitive in the global wine market, but that oversimplifying the region by pushing only certain varieties has its risks.

Coincidentally, during the event the news broke out that the Italian winemaking legend Angelo Gaja is going to invest in Mount Etna. The news was received with mixed emotions; some saying a name like Gaja will bring much needed attention to Sicily, while others said that the region doesn't need him to put Sicily on the map. Whatever the case, there is no doubt that Sicily is buzzing at moment.

**Ilkka Sirén**

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