

Grillo: Try This Cool White Wine From Sicily

Nearly forgotten, a white grape of Sicily [re]captures the imagination.

BY KERIN O'KEEFE



Looking for a cool new white? Meet Grillo (pronounced GREE-lo). Hailing from Sicily, Grillo produces crisp and savory wines—some structured enough to offer moderate aging potential. Lighter styles have citrus blossom and peach nuances, while more aromatic versions deliver passion fruit, grapefruit and herbal sensations reminiscent of Sauvignon Blanc. Lees contact and barrel aging create more complex, mineral-driven wines loaded with apple and citrus flavors. Vineyards closest to the sea produce wines with pronounced saline notes.

A crossing of Catarratto and Moscato di Alessandria (Zibibbo) grapes, Grillo was once used exclusively in Marsala production. Plantings declined in the 1960s, when producers opted for more vigorous varieties. Grillo was nearly abandoned. But, in 1990, legendary Marsala producer Marco de Bartoli decided to vinify Grillo on its own as a dry white wine.

“Grillo is the best white grape for the hot plains around Marsala,” says Renato De Bartoli, Marco’s son, who runs the winery along with his brother and sister. “It thrives in the heat and doesn’t become cooked and jammy as do [some] international grapes.” A recent re-tasting of De Bartoli’s 2011 Grappoli del Grillo (91 pts) showed it’s just hitting its ideal drinking window.

In 2014, Grillo plantings reached approximately 16,000 acres—a 180% increase from 2004. Antonio Rallo, president of the DOC Sicilia consorzio and co-owner of the Donnafugata winery, calls Grillo’s resurgence dramatic.

“Grillo has taken off, especially in the U.S.,” he says. “It’s fresh and easy-drinking, but with a savory note that gives it a distinctly Sicilian personality.”



Donnafugata 2015 Sur Sur; \$19, 91 points. Vibrant and savory, this opens with lovely aromas of spring flower, citrus, herb and white stone fruit. The round, juicy palate offers ripe white peach, juicy grapefruit, pineapple and mineral alongside fresh acidity. A saline note backs up the finish. **Editors’ Choice.**

Cusumano 2015 Shamaris; \$20, 90 points. Apple, yellow flower and sea breeze aromas lead the way. The bright, elegant palate displays lemon, lime and walnut alongside vibrant acidity. A mineral vein underscores the savory flavors. Drink now or hold another two or three years for more complexity.



Stemmari 2015 Grillo; \$10, 89 points. Alluring aromas of citrus, white flower and a whiff of tropical fruit come together on this. The racy palate offers lemon zest, mango, sage, saline and an almond note alongside vibrant acidity. **Best Buy.**



Tenuta Rapitalà 2015 Grillo; \$14, 89 points. Subdued aromas of spring wild flower, hay and orchard fruit float from the glass. The vibrant palate offers lemon zest, sage, dried herb and a hint of saline framed in lively acidity. **Best Buy.**



Tasca d’Almerita 2015 Cavallo delle Fate; \$20; 88 points. This opens with delicate scents of pear and pressed yellow flower. The tangy palate shows lemon zest, nectarine and a hint of Mediterranean herb while a saline note provides backup.



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