

Tasting Notes
Feb 2024 Pick-up
Wines of Sicily and SW Italy



Welcome to your February 2024 Smart Wine Club pickup. The theme this quarter is wine from the island of Sicily and the southwestern part of Italy (surrounding the Tyrrhenian Sea). We'll explore grapes and wines from Campania, Calabria, and Sicily.

The region of Campania is one of the most historic in Italy, and includes the city of Naples. It enjoys a diverse range of climates and terroirs, and has over 100,000 acres of grapes in production within a very small region (in contrast, all of Oregon state, over 20 times larger in area, has just over 30,000 acres). The wines are known for being very aromatic and evocative of the vegetation of the region. From this area, you'll try a white grape, Fiano d'Avellino, which has grown there for over 2,000 years.

In contrast, Calabria is a poor, rural region where wine grapes were a much more important agricultural product in the past than currently. Now, the region focuses more on olives, grains, and citrus. The region is mountainous, making any large-scale production difficult and expensive. The grape Gaglioppo is one of the two most well-known from the area.

The island of Sicily is Italy's largest wine region with over 240,000 acres of grapes, and there are 65 unique varieties unique to the region! Western Sicily is home to the famous fortified wine Marsala, as well as the popular and tasty Nero d'Avola. Southeastern Sicily is full of mountains and beaches and is a tourist destination. Your 2nd Nero is a blend with Frappato di Vittoria, (these are the main two grapes grown in this region). Finally, the northeastern part of the island includes the famed volcano Mt. Etna. Reds from here are generally blends of two varieties of the Nerello grape, including the bottle you'll be tasting.

- **2022 Valdibella Grillo "Ariddu", DOC Sicilia** – Grillo is a white grape commonly grown in western Sicily. It is considered very "modern" in that it was created by Sicilian scientist Antonio Mendola in 1869. The grapes are hand-picked, pressed, and naturally fermented for about 20 days before finishing in stainless steel. It is a nice fresh straw yellow wine, with flavors of local herbs and citrus and a lasting finish. Reg retail: \$14 Smart price: \$12

Pairing: Grillo pairs very nicely with all kinds of lightly-prepared seafood, and especially well with sushi and other raw fish dishes. It also goes well with fresh cheeses like fresh mozzarella, burrata, and ricotta.

- **2022 Colli di Castelfranci Fiano "Pendino", DOCG Fiano d'Avellino, Campania** – Your second white is Fiano, one of the most historic and loveliest wines from the Avellino sub-region of Campania. This bottle has an intensely aromatic and fruit-forward, almost perfumed bouquet. You'll enjoy flavors of pear, melon, citrus peel, honey, and hints of toasted nuts. Reg retail: \$17 Smart price: \$15

Pairing: The richer flavor and body of Fiano pairs well with roast chicken, pork dishes, seafood chowder, potato leek soup, and creamy sauces.

- **2021 Villa Tonino Nero d'Avola, DOC Sicilia** – The first Nero d'Avola comes from a winery more well-known for Marsala production, but they also make lovely dry reds such as this. Typical of this varietal, the wine is aged only in stainless steel, no oak barrels. You'll enjoy aromas of dark cherry, plum, violet, and hints of tobacco and white pepper. Reg retail: \$12 Smart price: \$10

Pairing: Think of Nero d'Avola as kind of like “cabernet sauvignon light” or “syrah light.” It is lovely with grilled or roasted red meats, barbeque sauce and other spice flavors. Also excellent with Greek foods.

- **2021 Gulfi Rosso, DOCG Cerasuolo di Vittoria, Sicilia** – Your second Nero d'Avola is actually a blend of 70% Nero and 30% Frappato di Vittoria, which lightens it noticeably. These are the two typical red grapes of this area of Sicily. The first word of the name of the sub-region “cerasuolo” means “cherry-colored” and this blend is very typically cherry in color with red cherry flavors as well. Similar to our first Nero, they are not aged in oak. The wine is fruity and floral with aromas and flavors of red and candied cherry, red currant, peach, and almond. Reg retail: \$24 Smart price: \$21

Pairing: This blend is excellent with salmon or tuna, pork, and duck. Actually, it pairs with food similarly to a Pinot Noir.

- **2018 Ippolito 1845 Gaglioppo “Colli del Mancuso” DOC Cirò, Calabria** – This lovely red comes from a single vineyard, the most ancient in the Cirò area of Calabria. It is made 100% from the unique and little-known Gaglioppo grape. The wine has flavors of red fruits such as raspberries, cherries and plums; plus a typical “dustiness” that comes across as leather or clay. The flavor is very smooth and full with delicate tannins. Reg retail: \$22 Smart price: \$19

Pairing: Gaglioppo is known for pairing well with tomato-based dishes, so pick this one for your pizza or pasta nights.

- **2021 Benanti Nerello Rosso, DOC Etna, Sicilia** – Our final red is a blend of about 85% Nerello Mascalese and about 15% Nerello Cappuccio, both grapes very commonly grown on the slopes of Mount Etna. It is a fairly high altitude vineyard, ranging from 1,500-2,950 feet above sea level; with sandy, mineral-rich volcanic soil. About 20% of the total wine is aged 8-10 months in used oak barrels. The wine is medium-bodied and surprisingly light in color, with nice acidity, hints of minerals and salinity, and an intense fruity bouquet with a long finish. Reg retail: \$26 Smart price: \$23

Pairing: Nerello wines pair well with the earthiness of mushrooms and eggplant, especially dishes with herbs like oregano and thyme. Also try with richly spiced grilled sausages. There is a Sicilian dish called Involtini di Melanzane that features slices of eggplant filled with cheeses, baked in a tomato sauce and topped with a crispy anchovy breadcrumb mixture, which would be quite a treat with this wine.