

■ THE SOMMELIER JOURNAL

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THE SOMM JOURNAL

The Evolution of Artisanal Tequila

The Crafting of Roca Patrón

*The production team at Tequila Patrón in Mexico:
(left to right) David Rodriguez, Francisco Alcaraz,
Antonio Rodriguez and Ismael Solís.*

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CORRECTION

There were some factual errors in our June-July issue Wine Briefs segment "Oz Clarke Deconstructs New Zealand." Clarke characterized the west coast of the South Island (not North Canterbury) as one of the wettest places on the planet and the Central Otago region as being shielded from rain by the Southern Alps (not Apennines). Greywacke Winery is owned by winemaker Kevin Judd (not Mike Weesing); Weesomg spoke about the wine during the presentation.

THIS MONTH'S COVER

Crafting Roca Patrón, a new line of tequilas based exclusively on the tahona process, is the task of the production team at the Hacienda de Patrón distillery in Atotonilco, Jalisco, Mexico: (left to right) David Rodriguez, Francisco Alcaraz, Antonio Rodriguez and Ismael Solís.



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Staying (Inter)Active

Do you remember your camp days when you were a kid? What were your favorite activities? For me, it was horseback riding and archery and in the evenings sitting around campfires or mess halls talking with the new friends I made that summer.

So many of my most rewarding experiences in this business is reliving a similar experience in wine country: traipsing through vineyards with industry friends—whether it be sommeliers, distributors or winemakers—and being in the fresh air, talking about agriculture and tasting the results of the winery's labor.

With our first reports on SOMM Camps in this issue, Camp Director (and Editor-at-Large) Randy Caparoso allows you to live vicariously through his vivid report from Paso Robles as 19 sommeliers joined him for a trek through vines and enjoying talks and tastings with winemakers.

Contributing Editor Courtney Humiston, herself a working sommelier, was our Camp Director in Sonoma, walking our “professional” campers through the diverse soils of the Alexander Valley.

Up next issue is our Women in Wine SOMM Camp in Oakville.

Our goal at The SOMM Journal is to stay interactive with you, the reader. Take, for instance, Lana Bortolot's “Quaff Report,” mixing some of New York's most high-profile wine pros for a blind tasting. And every month, Anthony Dias Blue will form a panel of local buyers to taste through some stunning verticals.

You see, we can't do this without you. We've had an overwhelming response to our launch, but we aim to keep up the momentum, continue to improve the educational aspect and keep you busy reading—and ultimately learning at the same time.

Meridith May

Publisher and Editorial Director



PHOTO: MONA SHIELD PARNÉ

Meridith May with (left) Tim McDonald of Wine Spoken Here, Director of Judging at the San Francisco International Wine Competition, and (right) Kevin Vogt, MS, Wine Director, Emeril Lagasse Las Vegas. Photo taken at The SOMM Journal's Auchentoshan/Bowmore dinner at Milos at The Cosmopolitan. Read about it on page 56.

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She also consults for London restaurants, judges wine competitions, translates wine-related texts and lectures on wine. She has a particular love for German, Austrian, Italian and New Zealand wines. She has harvested and helped to make wine in New Zealand, Germany and Italy.



AMY ZAVATTO's writing about wine, coffee, spirits and food has appeared in *Every Day* with Rachael Ray and *Edible Manhattan* and on Foxnews.com, Frommers.com and many others. She is the author of *The Complete Idiot's Guide to*

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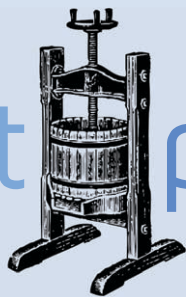


Sicily Rising

FRANCESCA PLANETA, OF **PIONEERING SICILIAN PRODUCER PLANETA**, IS PLANNING THE FUTURE OF THIS MISUNDERSTOOD ISLAND, ONE WINE AT A TIME

Francesca Planeta (center) is flanked by enologist Patricia Tóth (left) and Export Manager Penny Murray (right). Photographed at Sophia Wine Bar in Manhattan.

first press



Planeta's Dispensa Winery in Menfi. Francesca Planeta hopes that soon consumers will ask not for a wine from Sicily, but from Noto or Menfi.



A Tour of the Unknown Sicily with Francesca

By Lana Bortolot

IF YOU THINK YOU KNOW SOMETHING ABOUT SICILIAN WINES, your assumptions are likely to be overturned by Francesca Planeta. And there will be no arguing with her, thank you. Francesca, whose family owns the pioneering Planeta wine empire, consisting of six estates ringing the island, has all the expected attributes of a Sicilian woman: strong, self-possessed, passionate and opinionated.

But she also has the unexpected: a British mother, a London education, Master's degree number two at age 22 and a former career as global marketing executive at Nestlé S.A. All this bodes well for not only Planeta, but for all producers in Sicily, because when Francesca speaks about the wines her family makes, she is also speaking for all of Sicily.

"Sicily had a very bad image for wine—so I had to create something and show people that something new was happening," she says. "I had to give an image that was fresh and new. I really tried to break that classic image of Italian wines and move into something fresher and younger."

She says it wasn't always easy with people thinking Sicily was a backwater—and the wines not much better. "When I started, we had only the really bad connotation. Now things have changed because of tourism and quick communications. People [see] Sicily as a beautiful, pure authentic place to visit, and the attitude about Sicily is very positive." Francesca is hoping that will help change the attitude about Sicilian wines.

Sicily's 2012 upgrade from IGT to its own DOC (DOC Sicilia) should help. Sicily has 22 DOC regions and one DOCG, Cerasuolo di Vittoria. Francesca says the uplift helps give a stronger identity to blended wines such as those produced at Planeta (the lower tier of wines is now known as IGT Terre Siciliane).

It's an initiative the Planeta family has supported for nearly all the 20 years it has made wine in Sicily. Francesca's father, Diego, was president of an influential wine cooperation and director of a research institute for nearly 20 years before starting Planeta with her cousins in 1985. The first vintage was in 1995.

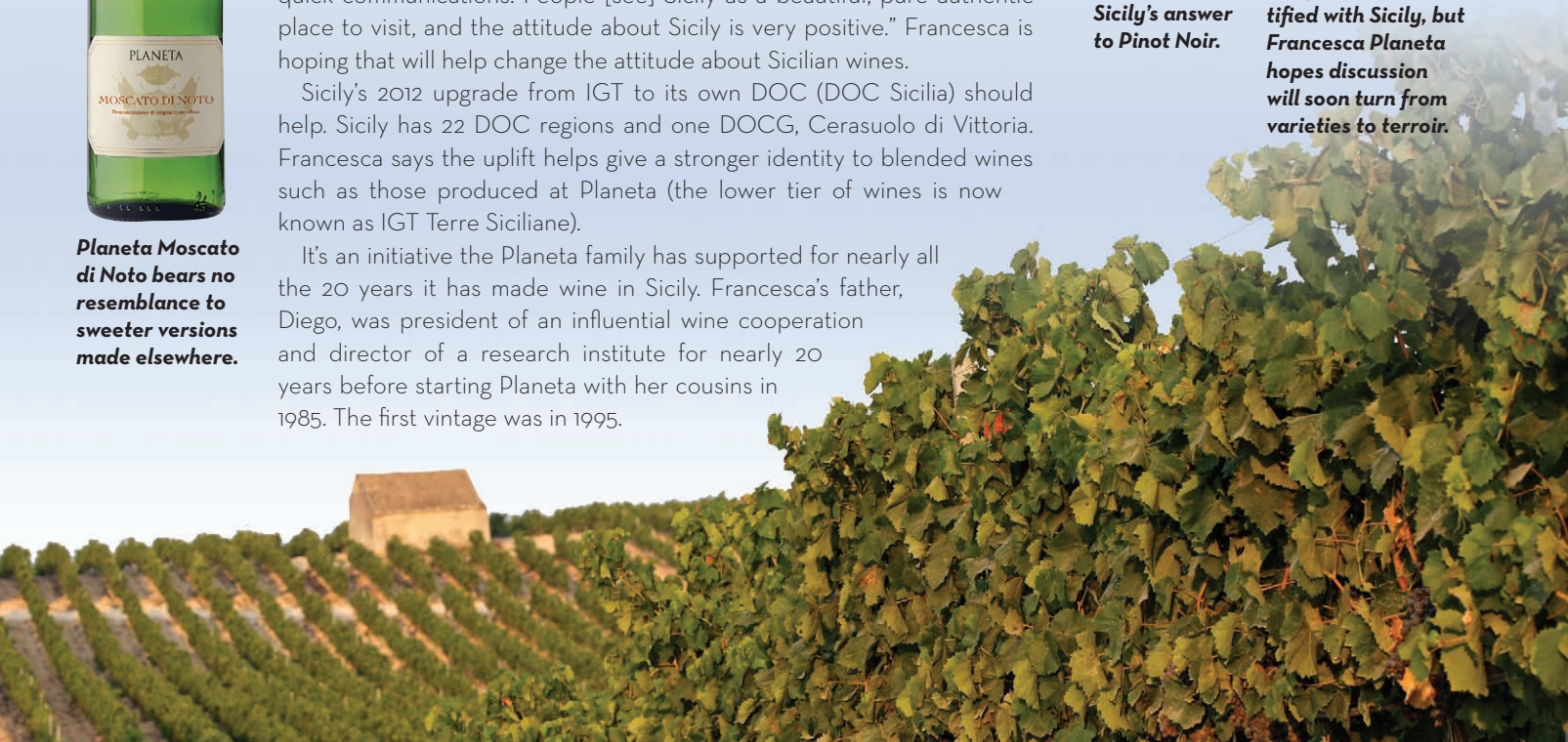


Planeta Moscato di Noto bears no resemblance to sweeter versions made elsewhere.



Cerasuolo di Vittoria is Sicily's answer to Pinot Noir.

Nero d'Avola is the red grape most identified with Sicily, but Francesca Planeta hopes discussion will soon turn from varieties to terroir.



Though not trained in enology, Francesca brought her brand sense into the mix. She created new labeling and messaging, repackaging not only the Planeta brand, but also Sicilian wines in general. "I started here with no money and tools. Creativity was much more important than the business itself. I had to think of everything myself," she recalls. She knew she needed unique positioning, and considering the locations of the six Planeta estates, she created a messaging that spoke to the diversity of the island.

Our project has been to discover different terroirs. You never can generalize about Sicily. You get different styles and characters as you go from Mount Etna to the sea," she says. "We don't talk any more about the variety; we talk about the areas and those characteristics that give an identity to the wine."

Planeta winemaker Patricia Tóth, a Hungarian-born enologist, was making wine in Friuli—contentedly, until her former cellar master advised her to go to Sicily. "It looked so far . . . over the sea, and much more exotic," she says. "I took my luggage in 2005 for one harvest and I forgot to go back." She says other young winemakers like herself have put Sicily on the map in the past 20 years and "now is the right moment for sophistication and getting to the details and the richness of the region."

Export Manager Penny Murray, who has been with Planeta since 2002, says the education about Sicilian wines is an ongoing project. "It's still a battle to get people to understand Sicily—some regions are not well known," she says. "A lot of people look to Sicily as hot and wild and they don't realize how diverse it is. The wines are aromatic, bright with good acidity."

The six estates produce 2.2 million bottles per year, sold in 70 countries. The United States is the largest market, with the distribution focused in California, Florida, Massachusetts, Nevada, New York and Texas. Murray makes about six trips a year to the U.S., noting, "It really makes a difference when you explain person by person what Sicily is about."

People tend to know Etna and Nero d'Avola, but the lesser-known appellations are a hand-sell. Planeta hopes to put them on the map with unique wines focused on indigenous varieties. From the Dorilli Winery in Vittoria, Sicily's premier region, with only 34 producers, a soft, supple blend of Nero d'Avola and Frappato found big success when Murray sampled it by the glass and positioned it as Sicily's answer to Pinot Noir.

"It's a wine that people love, but its success is very much by trial," Murray says. She hopes to replicate that with Moscato Bianco from the Buonivini Winery in Noto. The super-dry white bears no resemblance to its sweeter cousins produced elsewhere, overturning assumptions not only about the variety, but how a warm-climate appellation can produce a crisp and fresh white.

Francesca cites Chardonnay as another Sicilian sleeper. "This wine has become the image of the changes in Sicilian wine. After a long journey full of surprises and successes, Planeta Chardonnay is today an icon for the whole of Sicily," she says. "The vines that produce it are unique in their location and terroir, and with calculated, careful fermentation and maturation in French wood, we have produced a wine unique in its grace and power."

"I hope in ten years' time, we're not going to talk about Nero d'Avola as a variety but we'll be more precise on the area," Francesca says, adding it is her hope that people will ask not for

a wine from Sicily, but from Noto or Menfi.

"It's going to be the future of Sicily: not to have one idea of Sicilian wine, but to have many different areas that are going to be known."

An Island Dynasty

Planeta's six estate wineries represent every corner of Sicily and offer a cross-section of Sicilian wine.

Sambuca di Sicilia (Agrigento)

93 hectares (230 acres); acquired in 1995 (the original Planeta); vineyards since 1985
wines: Alastro, Plumbago, Chardonnay, Sito dell'Ulmo Merlot, Maroccoli Syrah
varieties: Grecanico, Nero d'Avola, Merlot, Chardonnay, Viognier, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot

Dispensa Winery, Menfi (Agrigento)

158 hectares (390 acres); two wineries acquired in 2001 and 2005; vineyards since 1996
wines: La Segreta Bianco, La Segreta Rosso, Rosè, Cometa, Burdese
varieties: Nero d'Avola, Grecanico, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Syrah, Fiano, Chardonnay, Merlot, Viognier

Dorilli Winery, Vittoria (Ragusa)

34 hectares (84 acres); acquired 2001; vineyards since 1997
wines: Frappato, Cerasuolo di Vittoria, Dorilli Cerasuolo di Vittoria Classico
varieties: Nero d'Avola, Frappato

Buonivini Winery, Noto (Siracusa)

51 hectares (126 acres); acquired 2003; vineyards since 1998
wines: Santa Cecilia, Passito di Noto, Moscato di Noto
varieties: Nero d'Avola, Moscato di Noto, Merlot, Syrah

Feudo di Mezzo Winery, Castiglione di Sicilia (Catania)

26 hectares (24 acres); acquired 2012; vineyards since 2008
wines: Brut, Etna Bianco, Etna Rosso, Eruzione 1614 Carricante, Eruzione 1614 Nerello Mascalese
varieties: Carricante, Nerello Mascalese, Riesling, Pinot Nero

La Baronía, Capo Milazzo (Messina)

8 hectares (20 acres); vineyards since 2011
site of experimental ancient varieties; 20 hectares of olive trees
varieties: Nocera, Nero d'Avola



Planeta produces a Cerasuolo di Vittoria, Sicily's only DOCG, at the Dorilli Winery in Vittoria.

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Missouri has 128 bonded wineries, double from 2004, all supplied by 393 vineyards totaling 1,700 acres. Every winery brings in grapes from other states to satisfy customer demand, though its four AVAs of Ozark Mountain, Ozark Highlands, Hermann and (the one every prospective MS candidate learns early on was first in the U.S.) Augusta, struggle to keep up with demand.

Vinifera is a dicey proposition here, hence *Vitis aestivalis* variety Norton is the signature variety. Its reputation for sweet wines has been chipped away by a campaign promoting this low-yielding grape, with high acidity and relatively low tannins. "Chemically Norton doesn't make any sense and really needs to be drunk with food," said Hermannhof Winery's veteran winemaker Paul Leroy. "The grape is so dense that adding press juice into a fermenter to stimulate fermentation is commonplace," said winemaker Cory Bomgaars of Les Bourgeois Winery. Its flagship white, Vignoles, is high both in sugars and total acidity with an unusually high level of tartaric acid.

Missouri's modern era began in the mid-'60s with Augusta's Stone Hill and Mount Pleasant wineries, with the picturesque Hermann AVA nestled upon rolling hills and family farms along the Missouri River. The town of Hermann was founded in the mid-19th century by German immigrants from Philadelphia seeking respite from the big city, helping make the state the largest wine producer in the U.S. after Ohio in the late 19th century.

The state's oldest, dating to 1847, Stone Hill Winery was purchased by "Big Jim" Held in 1965 and now run by his son Jon. His house vineyard is Norton. He holds that the tendency towards high pH levels "separates the men from the boys" in growing the tightly-packed Vignoles and Norton. His dry Vignoles impressed me with its earthy nose and hint of sweetness, restrained by enough acidity and mineral grip.

St. Louis native Jim Dierberg, a banker and proprietor of three Santa Barbara County labels, got a taste for wine as a soldier in Germany, eventually purchasing the circa 1852 Hermannhof Winery in 1976. Echoing his winemaker's sentiments in not manipulating Norton, Dierberg thinks opening the canopy and timely leaf removal important to reducing malic acid's dominance. His Vignoles sported pear and apple aromas, was sweet with corresponding acidity; clean and fresh, it was good with Massaman curry.

At lunch with owner/winemaker Tony Kooyumjian of Montelle and Augusta Wineries, his wife Cindy and their son Tom at their Klondike Café, I first encountered Riedel's dedicated Norton glass. "Norton's a strange duck with a tremendous amount of anthocyanins and limited tannins, so it's important for us to get them fixed quick by fermenting with oak staves. Before we figured that out we had some



With the Kooyumjian family of Montelle and Augusta Wineries (left to right): Tom Kooyumjian, Tony Kooyumjian, David Furer and Cindy Kooyumjian.

vintages that weren't color-stable five years later," said the elder Kooyumjian. Their 2002 Augusta Norton caught my palate, three years of outside aging in fine-grain MO oak barrels giving it an expected toasty aroma but also a rounded and supple palate filled with sweet spice notes, sour berries and a medium length finish.

Established in 1859, Mount Pleasant Winery is on a hilltop in the center of historic Augusta. Second-generation owner of Chuck Dressel commented about his burgeoning exports to China. Why China? "Because the name means something serene for that culture... Our Augusta Red sells at a higher price than Beringer red," he claimed. His portfolio includes a credible Norton aged two years in oak and a simple but balanced white blend, Villagio, made with Vidal, Vignoles and a 19th-century hybrid with links to the Loire Valley called Rayon d'Or.

Les Bourgeois Winery is co-owned by winemaker Cory Bomgaars, with 30 acres of on-site grapes; another 30 is managed within five miles, and others sourced from throughout the state. It has its hands full since, as the state's largest custom-crushing and -bottling facility, it also makes wines for many other wineries. The highlight of my visit was its Late Harvest Vidal possessing a complex, alluring nose of orchard fruits and earth.

St. James is the state's largest winery. Accompanied by winemaker Andrew Mellett, owner Peter Hoeffler, whose parents founded St. James in 1970, showed me a range of Nortons, many which hadn't received yeast or enzyme additions. Three- and five-year-old Norton here showed good concentration, with plenty of spice and berry character, balance and well-integrated tannins. A tireless experimenter, the Kiwi Mellett prefers to add stems to Norton over powdered tannin or wood chip amelioration, adding white wine lees to kick up the nitrogen, sometimes employing electrocution and metals to augment phenolics. "There's no rules here and we can do whatever we want"—to which Hoeffler replied rhetorically, "Why have a winery if you can't have fun?"

Cheers! David Furer
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