GOLD MEDAL WINE CLUB

Taste the Adventure!

Sicily - Italy
It is well documented that the Mediterranean Island of Sicily has traced its viticultural beginnings back more than 2,500 years. Given the fact that it is the largest island in the benign Mediterranean and the climactic conditions there are among the best in the world, the fact that Sicily has produced amazing wines for so long a period is no great surprise. However, it has not always been that way for the former Italian penal colony.

Early on, Sicily was known for its sweet wines, primarily those of the Moscato style. The island is blessed with bright sunshine and moderate rainfall that is remarkably consistent from year to year. Mildew and rot are minimally problematic and chemical sprays are rarely applied. This factor has given rise to a large number of vineyard sites that are organically farmed and marketed.

The soils that constitute Sicily’s wine growing regions (there are twenty-seven currently classified sub-regions on the island) are all affected by the island’s volcanic composition and particularly by the massive strata volcano, Mount Etna, which is located on Sicily’s eastern quarter. Soils tend to be darker and mineral-laden and nearly perfect for growing vines. The rocky character of the mountainous terrain is a natural habitat for vines that must struggle to survive. As the Sicilian viticultural explosion has evolved, plantings have risen to new heights (literally) to utilize the richer soils and cooler air found at higher altitudes.

But it hasn’t always been easy for Sicilian wines to flourish and compete on the international marketplace. As late as the latter 20th Century, Sicily’s near perfect growing environment played a central role in the downfall of Sicilian wine. Fueled by the miraculous rise and acceptance of mainland Italy’s splendid wines, the Italian government offered Sicilian growers subsidies to upgrade their vineyards to specific vine-management techniques that would increase the yield of much of Sicily’s existing vineyard land. The growers jumped at the chance and many acres of low-yielding bush type vines were soon converted to high-yield training methods.

The natural result was an increase of imbalanced wines that lacked both finesse and taste. Consumer confidence in Sicilian wines soon decreased and the market was soon awash with extremely low quality (and low priced) Sicilian wine. Around the turn of the new century, this trend was reversed and the modern high quality Sicilian wine industry emerged. Along with this reversal was a batch of new, more boutique-style wineries that fueled the upward trend. After a decade or so, the international wine community began to recognize the quality and importance of Sicilian-grown and produced wines. Accolades and numerous international awards greatly increased the status of today’s resilient Sicilian wine industry.

To their credit, Sicilian farmers and wineries have stuck to the varietals that made Sicilian wines famous in the first place. Nero d’Avola
and Catarratto are the most important native grapes, occupying 16% and 32% of Sicily’s vineyard area respectively as of seven or eight years ago. The latter is an important element in adding body and flavor to some of Sicily’s more acidic wines.

Sicily is not unlike many other notable wine producing areas that have undergone a major renaissance in their winemaking statues. To say that Sicily now emulates the great swath of mainland Italian wines would be a reach, but the fact is that Sicily’s finer wines are not that far behind. Continued adherence to modern winemaking techniques and always important cultivation practices will continue the island’s upward spiraling significance.

It is a pleasure to introduce Sicilian wines to our International Series members. We feel it is an adventure in great wine that is well worth taking.

**Region Spotlight:**  
*Mamertino di Milazzo, Sicily*

The wine region of Mamertino di Milazzo is located in Northeastern Sicily, almost due east of the City of Messina and the famous Messina Strait that divides the island of Sicily from the toe of Italy’s boot. Most vineyards are located on the western coast of the Capo di Milazzo Peninsula that faces the Aeolian Islands further out in the Tyrrhenian Sea.

Due to the favorable maritime influences, history has recorded the fact that wines have been produced in the region for the past two thousand years. The original farmers were actually mercenaries from the time about 300 years before the birth of Jesus Christ. After a defeat, they chose to stay in the pleasant environs of the Milazzo Peninsula and eventually became farmers. None other than Roman Emperor Julius Caesar favored the area’s wines, which he frequently served at public events and triumphs. The wines are also mentioned in the writings of other noted Roman literary figures including Martial and Pliny.

From a modern perspective, the DOC Mamertino di Milazzo was officially recognized in September, 2004. Since that time, a number of its wines have grown in popularity and statue to rival many mainland Italian wines.

Modern wines are simply referred to as Mamertine and are not defined by a single definitive style. Ranging from dry to sweet, they offer a diverse taste opportunity for the consumer. The wines are very Sicilian in nature and are made from distinctively native Sicilian varietals. Included are the Nero d’Avola, Grillo and Inzolia (Ansonica). Both red and white wines are produced in DOC Mamertino di Milazzo and are generally considered to be excellent price/value selections.

**WINE REGIONS OF SICILY**

Sicily is Italy’s southernmost wine producing region and the largest island in the Mediterranean Sea. For over 2,500 years, Sicily has been a significant location for viticulture, although the style of its wines have changed significantly over time (from sweet Muscats to fortified Marsala, and finally, to its dry table wines produced from the island’s indigenous grape varietals).

The island of Sicily is blessed with a classic, warm Mediterranean climate and mineral rich soils thanks to the mountains and active volcano, Mount Etna, that dominates the eastern skyline. With a wide range of sub regions and indigenous wine varietals, Sicily currently stands as one of Italy’s most promising and interesting wine regions.
THE FLAG OF SICILY

The flag of Sicily was first adopted in 1282, after the successful Sicilian Vespers revolt against the king Charles I of Sicily. The trinacria symbol with the winged head of Medusa with wheat ears and three bent legs. See The Flag of Sicily for symbolism.

Three bent legs are said to either represent the triangular shape of the island of Sicily, or the historical three administrative regions of the island during the Muslim rule from 831 to 1072. The wheat ears symbolize the famously rich, fertile land of Sicily and the head of Medusa is for protection of the island – to ward off any future evil. The colors of the flag, red and yellow, represent the cities of Palermo and Corleone respectively – the towns in which the rebellion of the Vespers began.
Feudo Solaria is the name given to a historical territory located between the cities of Milazzo and its southwestern cousin Tindari. Located on the Tyrrenian Coast of Sicily, this territory is the home of Cantine Grasso, a winery that has been handed down father to son for five generations (since 1887). The winery has recently been merged with the new Feudo Solaria Winery umbrella that includes three winery brands: Cantine Grasso, Feudo Solaria, and Vigne di Entella. Our International Series feature includes wines from the Cantine Grasso and Feudo Solaria branches.

To explain the modern-day Feudo Solaria Winery, one must start at the beginning with Cantine Grasso. Cantine Grasso is steeped in family tradition and traces its roots back to 1887 when Peppino Grasso began his career in the wine industry. Peppino was the first in his family to plant vineyards. In 1925, Peppino’s son Alexis Grasso constructed the family’s first winery and complimented the project with a number of enormous barrels that were used for both storage and fermentation. Some three decades later, in the mid-1950’s, Alexis’ son Carmelo Grasso constructed a second winery that helped the Grasso Family promote locally and dominate the local wine trade.

In 1984, Carmelo’s son Alessio Grasso (the 4th generation) took over and began introducing modern winemaking techniques that elevated the quality of wines and further set the winery apart from other nearby estates. Alessio also took a special interest in expanding and diversifying the land under vine, while shifting to organic viticulture methods. Alessio still stands as the winemaker of Cantine Grasso/Feudo Solaria today, with the help of his son Tullio.

The fifth generation of Grassos is now involved in the winery operation. Alessio’s two sons, Tullio and Carmelo, have individual roles in the family’s business. Tullio helps his father with the winemaking and vineyard management chores while Carmelo is involved with the company’s sales and marketing efforts.

The numerous national and international awards the winery has amassed throughout its multi-century existence place it among the very top tier of wineries on the island. The 120+ awards are a testament to the company’s commitment to quality and the number is likely to grow in the near future.

For the nearly 130 years of its existence, Cantine Grasso/Feudo Solaria has embraced the classic traditions of Sicilian grape growing and winemaking while taking advantage of the modern techniques introduced throughout the wine world. The winery has also remained faithful to Sicily’s classic native varietal, the Nero d’Avola grape, that represents the greater part of its high quality wine production.

Looking to the future, the Grasso family has adopted the new Feudo Solaria name as the larger, corporate name to promote their growing collection of Sicilian wines. Wines are still made with the Cantine Grasso designation, to celebrate their family’s history and the traditional wines made in the Mamertino di Milazzo region. Wines under the Feudo Solaria brand celebrate native varietals grown in the specific vineyard of Sulleria in Rodi Milici of Mamertino di Milazzo. Vigne di Entella wines are produced from the Belice Valley in Western Sicily and blend a mix of native grapes with international varieties. The Grasso brothers (Tullio and Carmelo) bring a fresh perspective to the historical family winery and promise to bring even greater success to the company.

As mentioned in the main section, Sicily’s reemergence as a top quality wine producer can be traced back to the efforts of some of its high quality producers - and Feudo Solaria must be included in any formalized list of these top wineries.
Produced in the Mamertino di Milazzo region, this red blend carries the distinguished ‘Mamertino Rosso Riserva’ designation which requires the wine to have been aged a minimum of 24 months (6 of which in oak barrels). Another rarity with this wine is the mention of the specific vineyard name where the grapes were grown - Sulleria.

Typically, wines in Italy (and all of Europe) are defined by their region and the labels rarely mention specific vineyard names - in this case, the Grasso family shows their pride for Sulleria by placing the name on the label. A blend of 60% Nero d’Avola, 30% Syrah, and 10% Nocera, this wine is deep ruby red in color with a bouquet of ripe fruit, iris, and spice. The palate offers fruity undertones, soft tannins, and a nice balance of complexity and elegance. Aged 6 months in oak. Enjoy now until 2023.

### Cantine Grasso Mamertino di Milazzo 2014 Bianco (White)
**Mamertino di Milazzo region**

This 2014 white blend features 50% Grillo and 50% Inzolia, two varietals that are widely grown throughout the island of Sicily but considered fairly obscure or unknown to the rest of the world. Produced from the Mamertino di Milazzo region in north eastern Sicily, this wine is the perfect compliment to seafood appetizers, vegetarian dishes, and roasted fish. Golden yellow in color, this 2014 Grillo-Inzolia offers a crisp and fruity nose with aromas of white peaches and grapefruits with hints of fresh herbs. The palate is light and refreshing with perfectly integrated savory notes and an overall delicate softness. Aged in stainless steel vats for 3 months. Enjoy now until 2019.

### Feudo Solaria Sulleria 2012 Mamertino Rosso Riserva (Red)
**Mamertino di Milazzo region**

Produced in the Mamertino di Milazzo region, this red blend carries the distinguished ‘Mamertino Rosso Riserva’ designation which requires the wine to have been aged a minimum of 24 months (6 of which in oak barrels). Another rarity with this wine is the mention of the specific vineyard name where the grapes were grown - Sulleria. Typically, wines in Italy (and all of Europe) are defined by their region and the labels rarely mention specific vineyard names - in this case, the Grasso family shows their pride for Sulleria by placing the name on the label. A blend of 60% Nero d’Avola, 30% Syrah, and 10% Nocera, this wine is deep ruby red in color with a bouquet of ripe fruit, iris, and spices. The palate is rich and well-balanced with a touch of oak on the finish. Aged 12 months in oak, 12 months in bottle. Enjoy now until 2022.

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