

WESTERN RESERVE WINES CLUB NOVEMBER 2023

WINE: *Passopisciario Passorosso 2021 Italy*

VARIETALS: *Nerello Mascalese*

Viticulture Area: *Northern Side of Etna*

Bottle Price: \$47.99 | 6 Pack Case Price: 259.15 plus tax



INTRODUCTION

In 2000 Andrea Franchetti decided to restore an old farm and cellars on the slopes of Mount Etna, an active volcano in northeastern Sicily. The winery sits at about a thousand meters of altitude above the small wine town of **Passopisciario** in the district of Castiglione di Sicilia, on the northern slope of the volcano. His first task was to clear and restore long-abandoned terraces of ancient vines on the northern slopes of the mountain, replanting at a density

of 12,000 vines per hectare on thin lavic soil. His arrival on Etna helped to initiate the renaissance of viticulture on the mountain and an international discovery of the wines of Etna. At Passopisciario, he focuses on the native grape Nerello Mascalese and its various expressions of terroir and altitudes through a series of crus, as well as the varieties Chardonnay, Petit Verdot, and Cesanese d’Affile.



REGION

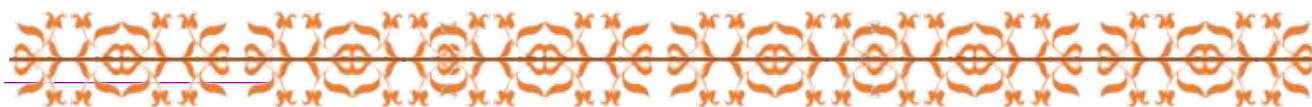
The high altitude, sun-drenched vineyards are idyllic yet a constant plume of smoke and the odd ash-filled belch present a constant reminder that Etna is indeed a volcano with attitude, given to relatively frequent lava spills. These spills devastate the landscape, yet each flow leaves a unique mineral profile, giving rise to the notion of various terroirs, here called *contrade*. The borders of the *contrade* reflect old feudal property lines, which are still mapped out on the local land registry. Franchetti respects and plays to the strengths of his chosen terroir on Etna, producing wines of remarkable complexity and individual personality. Significant temperature differences between day and night also play an important role, necessitating a longer growing period and this, in turn, contributes complexity and intensity, as do the profound mineral elements of the volcanic soils.

Franchetti makes nine different wines at Passopisciario, with six focused on the grape Nerello Mascalese. The wine **Passorosso** is a bright, holistic rendering of the grape that is unique and ever-present on the volcano, blending from different altitudes and terroirs. During the first several years of making wine on the volcano, Franchetti realized that once the Nerello grapes reached the cellar, they produced different wines depending on the district from which they came from; starting in 2008, he began to bottle the top sites separately, helping to usher in a cru system on Mt. Etna. These five Contrada wines — **Contrada C**, **Contrada P**, **Contrada G**, **Contrada S**, and **Contrada R** — each come from vineyards of different ages and are each on a lava flow with different minerals, grain size, and altitudes.

WINEMAKING ON MT. ETNA

Thousands of mouths across a fifty-kilometer diameter on Mount Etna have spit lava from every different depth under the earth, covering the surface of the volcano where vines take root. Flowing lava — descending sometimes dense and slow, at times fast as water — eventually stops, spreading and hardening at various altitudes. After cooling for many years, these flatter areas over the centuries became established properties, each one producing a different taste of wine because of the different mineral origin of their soils and, more importantly, because of the grain that the lava had broken into during its cooling process: sand, gravel, powder, or rock. Under their same old names the properties became territorial subdivisions called *contrade*, and, with regards to the wine, they represent Etna's own version of a cru. Cru, a word that suggests areas that bring a typical, recognizable flavor to its produce, finds an almost exaggerated example in Etna's *contrade*.

The arrival of new producers on Etna coincided with my own in 2000, and the focus has gradually turned more to individuating each *contrada*. Everyone's winemaking since then has been showing the superiority of taste of the same handful of *contrade* that were considered the best before World War II, when winemaking was very active. The names of these areas are appearing increasingly on the labels in this renaissance of Etna wine.



Light: Instead of originating from the sun above, light on Etna is diffused like tulle netting across the mountain so that it seems to emanate from the objects on the ground. It bounces between the sky and the two surrounding seas over the muffled horizons, and light rays dissolve into the specter of the black volcano. Indirect light is common to many of the great wine regions of the world, like the light reflecting from the sea and rivers of Bordeaux and that coming off the silver surface of the Rhine to the vines planted on the stiff cliffs above. Light surrounds every side of the leaves, stimulating vigorous photosynthesis in the vines, beaming in the colors of clothes, inspiring the viticulturalists.

The Wine: The red wine of Etna is of nerello mascalese, an ancient grape, rare except on this volcano, where it is still splendidly cultivated like a mountain grape in old and ancient bush vines. It has little color, large bunches with strong, thick skins, and it ripens late – for the vines planted at 800 meters and above, as late as November. The light red color of the wine is from the variety, not from dilution; the berry is large, and instead of using the bitter skins, the wine is made from the juice, which is best when plants are not too stressed. During fermentation, the nerello has notes of marzipan and a boorish, carnal quality, which are so pagan that the embarrassed wine-makers let it fade; often, there's a hint of nail polish when the yeasts are disturbed, but in every other sense, the fermentations on Etna happen easily because of the lack of pesticides, up to now, on the mountain. Notes of citrus and camphor come into the wine from the lava flows, and an aromatic acidity gives the impression of a sort of reddened white. When well made, nerello mascalese improves over eight years, then begins to age slowly, gaining hints of a sweet smokiness.

– Andrea Franchetti, excerpt contributed to Armando Rotoletti's [Etna: Wine and People \(2015\)](#)



Vini Franchetti

TENUTA DI TRINORO / PASSOPISCIARO / SANCABA



• RAMPANTE • PASSOCHIANCHE • • SCIARANUOVA
• MONTEDELCE • GUARDIOLA
• PORCARIA
• CHIAPPEMACINE



LEGEND

- Chardonnay
- Cesanese
- Petit Ver
- Nerello M



PRODUCER

Viticulture on Mount Etna has extremely ancient origins, and winemaking in the region is now experiencing a phase of renaissance. The wines are made with Nerello Mascalese, the grape that grows all over the mountain, and there exclusively. It is grown in many different mixes of lava from the old eruptions and at remarkably different elevations. These vineyards are quite separate from each other and are Mount Etna's distinct and accurately mapped crus, here called *Contrade*.

At Passopisciaro, we have 26 hectares (64 acres) of vines across the northern face of Mount Etna, from which we produce six different bottlings of Nerello Mascalese. These showcase the profound differences in the terroir – lava flow, aspect, and altitude – of the various *Contrade* that we work with: [Rampante](#), [Sciaranuova](#), [Guardiola](#), [Porcaria](#), and [Chiappemacine](#).

Around our winery in the *Contrada* of Guardiola, we have also planted 4 hectares (10 acres) of Chardonnay, from which we produce our [Passobianco](#), and 2 hectares (5 acres) of Petit Verdot and Cesanese d’Affile, which are used to make [Franchetti](#).

Tasting Notes:

Jamessuckling.com – James Suckling, 94points: Made with Nerello Mascalese taken from all the vineyards. The aromas show plenty of strawberries and cherries with wrought iron and pumice. Medium-bodied with creamy and polished tannins with hints of cedar and light nutmeg. Savory and lightly tannic giving it tension and beauty. Drink or hold.

Food Suggestions:

Thanks to its high acidity, you can feel confident pairing with tangy flavours and tomato bases sauces too. Its lightness, precision and delicate florals work similarly to Pinot Noir. So lighter pork dishes work well, as does confit duck, and even richer fish dishes, like sardines and mackerel.

Remember We Taste The Bad Ones So you don't have to! CHEERS!!!

Sources: <https://www.vinifranchetti.com/passopisciaro/the-wines/passo-rosso/>

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