

The new Campania

Campania is Italy's most exciting wine region, says Tom Maresca. An ambitious new generation is heading south to work the land that their parents and grandparents fled, with outstanding results

IT MAY SEEM paradoxical to call Campania, with 2,500 years of wine history, a 'developing' wine region. But despite its ancient traditions, the presence of pioneers of the modern rebirth of Italian wine and the fact that its Taurasi stands among the finest red wines of Italy, Campania is in the throes of an exciting expansion and development. Much of this turns on the revival of several ancient and nearly lost varieties.

This spring I attended Campania Stories: I Vini Rossi, a week-long event held in Naples and Avellino. I tasted nearly 200 red wines from every corner of Campania: Avellino, Benevento, Caserta, Napoli and Salerno. I met with producers, some old hands or scions of well-known wine families, but many young and enthusiastic, filled with energy and optimism about their land and their wines. I was impressed by the respect shown for the region's great past and the will to renew that vinous legacy.

Piedirosso: a revival

Taurasi remains at the peak of Campania's red wines, but there are many other Aglianico-based wines in production, from almost every province of the region. Most notably, Benevento just received DOCG status – only Campania's second red DOCG – for its Aglianico del Taburno. Many provinces blend Aglianico with Piedirosso, another variety cultivated here since antiquity.

The most famous blend is Falerno Rosso from the province of Caserta. The name deliberately recalls the prized *falernum* of the Romans from the days when Campania the Blessed was the Côte d'Or of the Roman Empire. Also fine are village-named Piedirosso blends from the Amalfi coast – notably, Ravello (basic and riserva) and Furore from Marisa

'A handful of rediscovered and rescued varieties are exciting growers with their potential'

Above: vines overlooking the scenic valley around Ravello, on Campania's Amalfi Coast. Right: Donnachira, a family-owned estate, is best known for its white wines



Cuomo, the premier producer of the area. Beyond that, more and more producers are working with Piedirosso as a single varietal. After centuries in the shadow of Aglianico, whose asperities it can soften, Piedirosso is showing new dimensions as better field work and clonal selection show it to be capable of complexity and longevity on its own. Some marked successes emanate from the Campi Flegrei sub-zone near Naples. Gilda Martusciello, owner of Grotta del Sole, says Piedirosso 'has been known here since Roman times. It is still grown today on its own rootstocks, because of our sandy, mineral soils.'

Beyond Piedirosso, other rediscovered and rescued varieties are exciting growers and wine lovers alike with their potential. Casavecchia, Pallagrello Nero, Tintore, Sciascinoso and Olivella – ancient varieties that were barely clinging to life two decades ago – are now yielding delicious and probably very long-lived wines. All have their devotees. 'Pallagrello Nero is a very noble variety,

particularly for its magical tannins,' says Giovanni Ascione, owner of award-winning Nanni Copè. 'Those are abundant, but very silky. Pallagrello Nero can show beautiful red fruits on the nose and palate. It has a terrific capacity to read soil, yielding minerality and very fine spicy sensations. It can be pure elegance.'

Pallagrello Nero and Casavecchia are being actively propagated from a cluster of surviving pre-phylloxera vines, originally rescued by Manuela Piancastelli and Peppe Mancini, the proprietors of Terre del Principe, now one of the most important producers of these grapes. Discoveries like these have opened a vast field of unknowns in the region's viticulture. Many pre-phylloxera vines remain scattered throughout Campania, with who knows how many forgotten varieties still awaiting revival.

The five provinces of Campania have their own specialities, though Aglianico is grown in them all. It dominates in Avellino, where the Taurasi ➤



Left: top-quality Taurasi is made at Cantine Lonardi from Aglianico grapes
Below: Terre del Principe's Peppe Mancini and Manuela Piancastelli cultivate three varieties they saved from extinction



'Terroni is the dismissive term for southern Italians. But many young, well-educated and ambitious southerners are turning terroni into a badge of pride'



Left and above: Marisa Cuomo cultivates small terraced vineyards on precipitous slopes along the Amalfi coast

Campania: know your vintages

2013 Late spring and early summer were cool and rainy; the weather was more normal from mid-July into September. There was almost two months' difference between the earliest harvested grapes and the latest, resulting in a great diversity in wine quality: the best examples will be magnificent and long-lived, the worst delightful for immediate drinking.

2012 From mid-June until end of August it was scorching. September was cooler, but warm days (with good night-time cooling) continued into October. At harvest, quantities were down, but quality seemed good.

2011 For Taurasi, it was 'dry and warm, giving wines with nice concentration, structure and power' (Piero Mastroberardino); 'Tasted in barrel, the wine shows the same characteristics as 2010, so we keep our fingers crossed' (Antonio Capaldo); and 'Full-bodied wines, a little bit hard, that need more time to become ready, but with great ageing potential - 30 years!' (Angelo Valentino). For Falerno, marked temperature differentials gave wonderfully aromatic wines, needing time to soften. For Pallagrello and

Casavecchia, the 'hot weather necessitated early picking to preserve acidity' (Giovanni Ascione).

2010 An uneven growing season with wild temperature differentials somehow resulted in a fine harvest, especially for the late-ripening Aglianico. Falerno did well, and Pallagrello Nero and Casavecchia producers consider the vintage an excellent one. All see their wines as having long ageing potential: 20 years is a cautious estimate.

2009 Rainfall during harvest created problems. The best Taurasis are 'very fresh' (Piero Mastroberardino), 'approachable but no less interesting than 2008 or 2010' (Antonio Capaldo of Feudi di San Gregorio) and 'slender, with good aromas, drinkable now, with an ageing potential of 10 years' (Angelo Valentino, winemaker at Donnachiara). For Pallagrello Nero and Casavecchia, it was a wet, difficult harvest, necessitating great selectivity. But the Falerno zone achieved 'excellent ripeness, with fresh red berry fruit, sweet and soft on the palate, a wine that promises longevity' (Giorgio Imperato, winemaker at Villa Matilde).

DOCG is located, and is vital in Benevento and Caserta, where Piediroso is also growing in stature. Villa Matilde's Cecubo, for instance, uses a predominance of Piediroso, blended with even lesser-known local varieties, to produce a harmonious, modestly complex dinner wine.

The sub-zones of Naples exploit Piediroso's fondness for volcanic soils. They make both monovarietal Piediroso and blends with any number of other local grapes to produce medium-bodied, strongly mineral-inflected wines in every style, from everyday quaffers to serious dinner wines, largely with either Campi Flegrei or Lacrima Christi del Vesuvio geographic appellations. Salerno's Costa d'Amalfi uses an even more miscellaneous collection of varieties to produce wines that vary from the lightest pizza reds to impressively complex bottles. Marisa Cuomo, for instance, makes fine examples of the whole range.

Natural influences

What makes Campania special as wine country is a package of ecological and environmental factors - a mild-to-warm climate; the benign influence of the Mediterranean; ranges of hills and mountains that provide a variety of microclimates, altitudes and exposures; and myriad soils mixing decayed volcanic deposits with more recent volcanic ash and tufa,

marine sediments from when large parts of the region were sea bottom, moraines from ancient glaciers, and deposits from modern landslides and river floods. Many of Campania's present vinous blessings originated in natural disasters in this still geologically active land.

For me, Campania is now the most exciting wine region of Italy. *Terroni* (literally, people of the earth; effectively, dirt people) is the dismissive term for southern Italians, who are still the butt of northern prejudice. But many young, well-educated and ambitious southerners are turning *terrone* into a badge of pride, as they return to work the land their parents and grandparents fled. They're not going back as sharecroppers chained to subsistence, but as skilled professionals and sophisticated entrepreneurs, determined to revive the glories of Campanian viticulture by growing the great traditional grape varieties and vinifying them with care and respect. To see their enthusiasm is to realise the profound change that is overtaking Italy. That is exciting for any Italophile. To taste the wines these young people are making is doubly exciting for a vinophile. **D**

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Maresca's dozen wineries to watch

Many wine drinkers are familiar with a few fine producers from Campania, mostly largish firms famous for Taurasi - Mastroberardino, Terredora, Feudi di San Gregorio. Or they may know Villa Matilde for Falerno Rosso, or a handful of one-off wines such as Terra del Lavoro or Montevetrano. Here is a list of lesser-known wines and estates of the moment that are already garnering awards and attention in Italy and will soon be making an impact on the international market.

Cantine Lonardi

(aka Contrade di Taurasi)

Alessandro Lonardi is a small grower (4-5ha) and producer of top-quality Taurasi. He uses only his own grapes, which he ferments with wild yeasts,



because he believes that selected yeasts produce too standardised a wine.

Cantine Lonardi, Taurasi Coste 2009 18/20 (93/100)

POA Les Caves de Pyrène Black cherry and berry aroma. Spicy berry palate. Long, dry, fruit finish. **Drink** 2015-2025 **Alcohol** 14.5%

Cantine Lonardi, Taurasi Vigne d'Alto

2009 18 (93)

POA Les Caves de Pyrène Similar to the Coste, with vigorous dry fruit and spice throughout. **Drink** 2015-2025 **Alc** 14.5%

Cantine di Marzo

The di Somma family (niece and nephew of the di Marzos) took over this ancient but moribund estate in 2009 and have been rapidly revitalising it. Associated with Greco di Tufo since the 17th century, it has expanded into significant Aglianico production on selected plots of its 28ha estate, with outstanding results. ➤

Maresca's dozen wineries to watch (continued)

Cantine di Marzo, Linea Cantine Storiche, Irpinia Aglianico 2012 18 (93)

£14.50 **Bat & Bottle, Rutland Vintners**

Tarry nose. On the palate, there are black berries and cherries, tar and tobacco, with a juicy finish. **Drink** 2014-2025 **Alc** 14%

Donnachira

A family-owned firm working 27ha of vines, principally in the three Irpinia DOCGs: Fiano, Greco di Tufo and Taurasi. Best-known for white wines, it makes steadily improving Taurasi.



Donnachiara, Taurasi 2009 18 (93)

POA **Enologia**

Black pepper, espresso and dried cherries on nose and palate. Fine, leathery fruit finish. **Drink** 2015-2025 **Alc** 13.5%

Grotta del Sole

The Martusciello family owns 13ha of vines and leases six more in the Campo Flegrei zone. The bulk of its production is of mineral-inflected white wines, but it also produces impressive Piediroso, in particular its Riserva Montegauro.

Grotta del Sole, Montegauro Piediroso dei Campi Flegrei Riserva 2009 17.5 (91)

POA **Continental Wine**

Complex earth and dried fruit aromas. With soft black fruits, tar and tobacco, this is complex with an interesting palate, and a long, gentle finish. **Drink** 2014-2021 **Alc** 13.5%

I Capitani

The Cefalo family's 12ha of vines are in the Taurasi zone. Some white wine is produced, but Aglianico lies at the heart of its efforts.

i Capitani, Bosco Faiano Taurasi 2007 18 (93)

N/A UK www.icapitani.com

Black cherry and spice vanilla nose. Black fruit and spice palate, with long finish. **Drink** 2014-2025 **Alc** 13.5%



i Capitani, Emè Irpinia Rosso 2009 17.5 (91)

N/A UK www.icapitani.com

Berries and a thin veil of new wood. Well structured with an intense finish. **Drink** 2015-2025 **Alc** 14.35%

La Rivolta

A sizeable (29ha), privately owned estate in the province of Benevento, growing both white and red grapes. A little less than half

the vineyards are devoted to Aglianico, with a small amount of Piediroso.

Terra di Rivolta, Aglianico del Taburno Riserva 2008 18 (93)

N/A UK www.fattorialarivolta.com

Spicy, earthy and plummy. Fine acid and softening tannins. **Drink** 2016-2030 **Alc** 14%

Luigi Tecce

Luigi Tecce's 4-5ha of old Aglianico vines sit high (about 500m) on prime sites in the Taurasi zone. He describes himself as a 'less than minimalist' winemaker.

Luigi Tecce, Satyricon, Campi Taurasini, Irpinia 2011 18 (93)

£21.95 **Berry Bros & Rudd**



Classic Aglianico flavours and textures: a lovely wine. **Drink** 2015-2030 **Alc** 15%

Luigi Tecce, Poliphemo Taurasi 2010 18 (93)

£42 **Berry Bros & Rudd**

Deep and elegant, from its earthy nose through to the black fruit palate. **Drink** 2015-2030 **Alc** 14.3%

Marisa Cuomo

The premier estate of the Costa d'Amalfi sub-zone of Salerno province, Marisa Cuomo and husband Andrea Ferraioli cultivate postcard-sized, terraced vineyards on the hillsides. More than half the production consists of white wines. Aglianico and Piediroso are the principal red varieties.

Marisa Cuomo, Furore Rosso, Costa d'Amalfi Riserva 2008 17 (90)

POA **Annessa Imports**

Dark fruit with nice acidity and an elegant medium body. **Drink** 2014-2020 **Alc** 13.5%

Nanni Copè

This tiny Pallagrello estate is owner Giovanni Ascione's grand passion, and his wine has won top honours almost every year it has been made. Each vine is recorded on a spreadsheet and tracked meticulously at every stage.



Nanni Copè, Sabbie di Sopra, Il Bosco Terre del Volturno Rosso 2010 18 (93)

£37 **Corks of Cotham, Field & Fawcett**

Black berry and mineral nose; berry and fig and leather on palate. Soft tannins, excellent acidity, balanced and elegant. **Drink** 2014-2025 **Alc** 13.5%

Nanni Copè, Sabbie di Sopra, Il Bosco Terre del Volturno Rosso 2012 17.5 (91)

£36.99 (2011) **AG Wines**

Dried figs and earth on the nose. Soft berryish fruit over tar and tobacco; elegant. **Drink** 2015-2030 **Alc** 13.7%

Terre del Principe

In Caserta, Peppe Mancini and Manuela Piancastelli cultivate 11ha of Pallagrello Nero, Casavecchia and Pallagrello Bianco that they saved from extinction.

Terre del Principe, Centomoggia Terre del Volturno Casavecchia 2005 18 (93)

POA **Fine & Rare**

Deep, dark fruit nose; polished, balanced palate with mineral inflections; long tobacco/berry finish. Complex and interesting. **Drink** 2014-2025. **Alc** 13.7%

Terre del Principe, Centomoggia Terre del Volturno Casavecchia 2009 17.5 (91)

N/A UK www.terredelprincipe.com

All dark fruit and leather, slightly rustic and still young. **Drink** 2015-2030 **Alc** 13.5%

Trabucco

A small, family-owned property (2.5ha) in the Falerno sub-zone of Caserta province. Its vineyards sit on sandy soils that are interlaced with volcanic materials and tufa, which yield beautifully structured wines.

Trabucco, Rapicano Falerno del Massico Rosso 2011 17 (90)

N/A UK www.trabucconicola.it

Round red fruits on palate, with mineral and leather notes; complex and balanced. **Drink** 2015-2025 **Alc** 14%

Villa Raiano

A 23ha vineyard in the heart of the Taurasi sub-zone. The wines have jumped in quality in the past five or so years. The firm makes all the specialities – red and white – of Irpinia.

Villa Raiano, Campania Aglianico 2012 17 (90)

POA **Prestige Food & Wine**

Blackberry and earth nose and palate; well structured. Long tobacco finish. **Drink** 2014-2022 **Alc** 13.5%

Villa Raiano, Taurasi 2010 18 (93)

N/A UK www.villaraiano.com

Spice and cherry aroma, black pepper, fruit and leather finish. Needs a little time. **Drink** 2015-2025 **Alc** 13.5%

For full details of UK stockists, see p88