

# SNOW ON WINE

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## Napolitano Veiling of Vesuvius Vino



Some of you may be old enough to remember the original animated movie “Lady and the Tramp” with that memorable meal of spaghetti and meatballs under the bright Naples moon. As love struck pooches sucked in the same spaghetti strand they came together and that sly dog Tramp kissed the innocent and unsuspecting Lady! And every Italian knows that food, wine and love naturally go together. Across Italy food varies dramatically from region to region, and always is best complimented by wine lovingly crafted nearby. Yet in all our trips to Italy Julie and I were never offered a wine from the slopes of Mt. Vesuvius, above Napoli (and infamously Pompei). Not with the classic Pizza Napolitana, or spaghetti with meatballs, or Fruita d’Mari from Naples Bay! So we just assumed the slopes of nearby Mt. Vesuvius, Italy’s most famous volcano of Roman times, were bereft of vines. This seemed so strange after the hours we spent on Mt. Etna enjoying local wines. Mt. Etna is active and currently erupting, and home to rich delicious reds made from Nero d’Avola, and silky smooth whites with great minerality from Carricante and Grillo. And it’s slopes host another dozen different grapes varieties. Not surprising, Italy being home to more native grapes<sup>1</sup> than any other country, having at least 377, and by more recent studies<sup>2</sup> over 500. Next runner up-- France with a mere 204 genetically unique varieties<sup>1</sup>.

Of course Sicily’s Mt. Etna is active, but across Italy there are other well known wine areas on inactive and dormant volcanic terroir. South in the arch of Italy’s boot, Aglianico del Vulture, and in the North Soave. Across Europe’s wine country Greece has Santorini, Spain has the Canary Islands, and Portugal the Azores. And what of our famed state with all it’s Basalt and Volcanic ash layered soil. Then continuing down the Cascades/Sierra Nevada Mountains, part of the Pacific Oceans Ring of Fire, volcanos inactive or dormant abound. Volcanic terroir extend through Oregon into California and the Guadalupe Valley of Mexico. Home to dozens of North America’s best wine regions. Volcanic soil “...includes everything from lava in all of its forms ... jet black basalt to other fragments expelled from a volcano’s vent .... To pumice and volcanic alluvium that’s settled into valleys.”<sup>4</sup> These soils yield mineral laden and distinct wines, both red and white.<sup>3</sup> But Vesuvius frustrated our local drinking quest. We were just unable to find any wine of Vesuvius’s slopes, from Naples to Salerno!



Then last spring Rene’ at North Berkley Wine Importers called me to suggest some newly available wine from an area of Italy that essentially never exports their wine. **Mt. Vesuvius!** Generations old vineyards, and she promised great minerality and freshness. As you may have guessed these wines which are much loved locally, and rarely shared beyond local families and restaurants who buy most of their total production. Rene’ sent two red wines from Cantina Olivella – one of a single grape, Piediroso (translates as Red Feet) is labeled “Visuvio Piediroso”. The other is a blend of Piediroso with 30% Olivella and 30%

Aglianico and is labled, “Lacrimanero; Vesuvio; Lacryma Christi Rosso”. The back label states: “The origin of the wine is wrapped in a legend: it is said that God’s son cried when he recognized in Naples’



gulf a strip of sky ripped by Lucifer while he fell to hell, and where these divine tears fell, arose the vines that produce Lacryma Christi.”

Turns out Piediroso is one of the most ancient grapes of Italy with historic references going back to early Roman times<sup>2</sup>. And despite the hundreds of grapes in Italy, these three are the only ones cultivated in the ancient vineyards on Vesuvius’ lower slopes.

So Julie had me get a Papa Murphy thin crust pizza and cook it on the Traeger grill with smoke. The “Visuvio Piediroso” seemed at first quite a light red, but it just went perfectly with that pizza! Then we dared to try the



“Lacryma Christi Rosso” (the Red Tears of Christ) with Grilled Salmon. *I think that must count as communion!* What a nice combination. Soon we hope to grill-up something as close as possible to “Fruta d’mare” as it is made in Campania -- mussels, clams, shrimp, scallops, squid, and especially the tiny octopus often in arrabiata (translates explosively angry) sauce. A match with this wine made perhaps not in heaven, but at least where the tears of God’s son fell from heaven. So finally we have “local” wine from Amalfi and Napoli, but sadly are drinking it at home in Spokaloo.

Of course Washington wine lovers know that wine from volcanic soils is delicious. We are surrounded by volcanos, active, inactive and dormant. Making it difficult to find a Washington vineyard without some trace of volcanic derived soil. And we have Oregon, and Sonoma and Napa and so many areas where various types of volcanic soils are found. For me it is fun to explore the types of volcanic soil in Washington’s AVA’s. Then savor the wonderful minerality and bright fresh fruit characteristic of each volcanic terroir. Just don’t expect to find wine from the “local volcano,” Vesuvius along Naples Bay or the Amalfi coast. Or maybe your Italian is good enough to pass for local – then you may be allowed to drink the “Red Tears of Christ”.

So fire up the “Rosetta Stone” or “DuoLingo” programs, bone-up on “la lingua d’Italia”, then let’s meet to toast Pompei with the “Vino Visuvio” that **you** score!

#### Notes and References:

- 1) Jancis Robinson, J. Harding & J Vouillamoz, Wine Grapes, A complete guide to 1,368 vine varieties, 2001, ECCO & HarperCollins, New York, Pp XXVIII to XXXV.
- 2) Ian D’Agata, Native Wine Grapes Of Italy, 2014, University of California Press, Berkeley & Los Angeles, Pp 1 – 11.
- 3) Peter Weltman, “Volcanic Wine 101; What to Know About Booming Category”, Food & Wine, September 28, 2023.
- 4) John Szabo, Volcanic Wine: Salt, Grit and Power, 2016, Jaqui Small Llp, London, Pp 1-258.