

## CAMPANIA: DIAMONDS IN THE TUFF

When you examine Italy as a whole and attempt to list regions by their top producers of high quality wines, Campania has to be in the conversation for top 5. Add us to the conversation and we'd argue it is Top 3. It's important to note that this has only been the case in the past 15 years, give or take. Not that there weren't great wines being made for a long time prior, but more that the world has really only recently taken notice.

The diversity and quality of the native grapes from the region are the reason. Campania is easily the most impressive white wine region in Italy with regards to local grape varieties; Fiano, Greco, Falanghina are the big three but the pool of incredible wines goes deeper still with Coda di Volpe, Pallagrello Bianco and Biancolella. Too often the world measures the "best" wines in red only, and outstanding wines made from Aglianico for generations have more than proven its varietal worth. But wines from Piediroso, Pallogrello Nero and Casavechia are now turning heads and making believers of wine lovers out there, like you, who are taking time to discover them.

-Kevin Wardell, October 2020

## WINE NO.1

Vadiaparte

Coda di Volpe

Irpinia, Campania, Italy 2019

Organic

RE-ORDER: \$19/ VADIAPARTE CODA DI VOLPE

### GRAPE: CODA DI VOLPE

To get to the bottom of the "Tail of the Fox" we'll just yield the floor to our friend and mentor, Ian D'agata: "Though teachers will never admit it, they almost always have a favorite student in their class, much as writers will always have a favorite one of their characters over another. So I feel entitled to state unabashedly that Coda di Volpe Bianca is one of my favorite Italian native grapes."

Insanely high praise from the legend. Could it even be possible that in the region that already boasts white wine rockstars- Fiano di Avellino and Greco di Tufo as well as restaurateur fan-favorite, Falanghina- there is yet another great to be discovered? Hold on to your foxtails folks.

GROWER: Vadiaperte is ground zero for Coda di Volpe and continues to set the bar for those paying attention. Antonio Troisi carries on a storied family production, including the region's first ever single varietal bottle Fiano di Avellino made by his great grandfather. His parents were the ones who established the Vadiaperte label and have passed him the torch to tend to the naturally farmed vineyards on volcanic "tufo" soils, up to 2,100 feet above sea level in the hills of Montefredane. Their "cru" wine, 'Torama' is truly Coda di Volpe at its apex. They don't make very much, as you might imagine, but it is more than worth seeking out in order to make like a fox and chase this rabbit further down the hole.

GLASS: As if Muscadet were grown on an old volcano... This simple statement has just made 60% of you involuntarily salivate. You know who you are, you Pavlovian pups. It may seem a bit crisp and simple at first, but much like Muscadet, there are many layers crammed within its narrow profile. Spring meadow, fresh straw, flinty tuffaceous, salted green melon, preserved lemon on a barbecued oyster. Lean, focused and minerality for nations. But there is also this unique, fragrant appeal that quickly has you desiring a revisit to refresh the experience. Kind of like biting into a ripe and spongy pomelo pith. Without having to pay too much attention, it is an amazing every day drinker. With a little extra focus and patience, this wine is much, much more.

SIDE NOTES: To add to the confusion... The one place Italian wine lovers may have tried Coda di Volpe was in the famed wines Lacrima Christi del Vesuvio Bianco... which turns out is more likely a grape named Caprettone.

## WINE NO.2

Vestini Campagnolo

Pallagrello Bianco

Terre del Volturno, Campania, Italy 2018

Organic

RE-ORDER: \$21 / VESTINI CAMPAGNOLO PALLAGRELLO BIANCO

### GRAPE: PALLAGRELLO BIANCO

Yet another white grape to learn, love, and be excited about from Campania. Pallagrello is a dynamic grape variety that has a range to become many things. It has the weight (but not the intense perfume) of Viognier, and the acidic depth of Chenin Blanc. Of the only dozen or so producers working with it, some are pushing the exotic limits of the grape by leaving residual sugar on their wines. Although that approach may have a market appeal it is not likely the best expression of the grape. Tropical at its core, when thoughtfully grown, it can display impressive minerality and structure. There is still so much to be discovered here as the Pallagrello Bianco grape has only really been identified as its own variety in the last 15 years!

GROWER: Rare to find a symbiotic relationship such as this: Vestini Campagnolo may as well be synonymous with Pallagrello Bianco. Not saying that other producers don't also make great wines from this grape variety (to be fair though, only a mere handful) but this is truly THE one. Alberto Barletta and Peppe Mancini created Vestini Campagnolo based entirely on the research of the almost extinct Pallagrello (both red and white) as well as the Casavecchia grapes in 1990. Picture a garage, a small stack of barrels and only a few gnarly vines growing in the backyard. These days you'll find pristine Organically farmed vineyards grown in an enviable mix of volcanic soils with a southern Apennine mountain influence.

GLASS: This is just a beautiful Sauvenerres... errr, I mean, Pallagrello. Deep with white flowers, but can you say overripe flowers? Not insanely fragrant like a fresh bloom, but almost more oily and matured. Unlike your Fianos and Grecos, the minerality here is much more dry river bed, almost chalky, as opposed to being distinctly volcanic. Yellow plums, mango, lemongrass and ginger dust. It would be redundant at this moment to point out what foods might make for a transcendent pairing here. Just don't shy away from some spice. It can clearly handle it.

SIDE NOTES: This modern genealogical identification of native grape varieties in Italy is still very much in process. What was once a formidable list of near a thousand grapes has been filed down to around 375 (give or take.)

### WINE NO.3

Reale 'Cardamone'

Piedirosso + Tintore di Tramonti

Tramonti, Campania, Italy 2018

RE-ORDER: \$27 / REALE 'CARDAMONE'

#### GRAPE: PIEDIROSSO + TINTORE DI TRAMONTI

Piedirosso, or 'Red Foot' (locally called Per' E Palummo) is named for its red colored stems that look like pigeon feet when its berries are plucked, and not for the stain it might leave behind after a good foot stomping, as one might imagine. Tintore is, however, certainly capable of the latter, as it is one of the surprisingly rare 'black grapes' where the actual pulp of the fruit itself is red in color. This localized grape from Tramonti, overlooking the striking Amalfi coast, has long been utilized here for exactly that: adding depth of color to wines in need. Most of the remaining Tintore vines to be found here are well over 100 years old.

GROWER: Luigi Reale stays busy enough running his restaurant and Inn in Tramonti, a beautiful hillside village nestled above the Amalfi Coast. (And a must stop for those in search of a perfect Napoli Pizza.) His vines are up to 120 years old, own rooted, pre-phylloxera; truly viticultural gems. Tramonti is its own unique natural museum with vines such as these ranging up to 250+ years old. Both his Red and white blends show so much character and strength due to these vines and their incredible location. Reale only makes about 1000 cases of wines each year, which somehow makes them even more special to experience.

GLASS: This wine truly embodies a transparent 'sense of place.' You can smell and taste where it comes from at every turn. Mountain born crunchy freshness. Amalfi salty, savory with Mediterranean wild herbs. Warm tree-ripened red fruit from generous southern sun, yet also restrained from cooler coastal winds. A wisp of volcanic smoke from the soils created by the iconic neighbor, Vesuvius. It honestly might be one of the more uniquely delicious wines out there and somehow achieves that with incredible subtlety. There is nothing angular or muscling through, trying to be the 'primary' component in this wine. It has an honest harmony and weaves a new story with each sip. Savor it and let each one unfold.

SIDE NOTES: Reale's Old Vines look like the viticultural equivalent of Ents. Free standing, tall reaching and huggably thick. Brimming with vigor and wisdom like the stalworth Nonna's that trudge up and down the steep hills of Tramonti every day.

WINE NO.4  
Pallagrello Nero  
Roccamonfina, Campania, Italy 2016  
Organic and Biodynamic

RE-ORDER: \$34 / I CACCIAGALI 'SPHAERANERA' PALLAGRELLO NERO

**GRAPE: PALLAGRELLO NERO**

Pallagrello is also a 'newly identified' grape, though it has certainly been for a while. It was actually long thought to be the red version of Coda di Volpe, with Pallagrello Bianco also caught up in that confusion, despite their differences. But the Red Pallagrello, despite its mysterious identity, was grown more widespread throughout Campania at one time, even as far east as Molise and as far south as Calabria. Nowadays the few that are working with it are producing fabulous results and creating a new reputation for what could be an emerging red star for the south.

**GROWER:** I Cacciagali is a modern winery with a very traditional approach. It is a hopeful marker for the direction that some wine growing regions of northern Campania are going. Organic and (more importantly) the intelligent, demystified application of Biodynamic farming allow Diana and Giovanni to work their land, grow their grapes, and produce stunning wines that are completely natural and simple. I Caggiagli is located in the shadow of the spectacular, inactive volcano of Roccamonfina, not far from the Mediterranean coast. It has long been a fertile farming land for growing hazelnuts and chestnuts.

**GLASS:** This wine piques the intellect straight away as it tips toward Syrah and flirts at Gamay. Brooding fruit but not at all burly, with flavors of black mission fig, black mulberry and black cherry. Ample with ripeness and purity and a distinct rawness of fruit flavors, delightfully devoid of any discernible winemakers polish. Usually the descriptor 'forest floor' invokes wet earth, growth and even decomposition. But in this case it is more about dried leaves and cracked clay earth. The amphora aging process layers in groovy B-sides to this already complex situation, like brick dust, terracotta and sweet turmeric. I Cacciagali seems to always deliver incredibly compelling wines that will linger in your mind for a long time. Commit this one to memory. Revisit whenever possible.

**SIDE NOTES:** This wine is aged in Amphora, large clay vessels fashioned after ones used historically in Georgia 6000 years ago. They allow for oxygen (unlike Stainless steel) but do not impart flavor to the wine (like oak.)