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15 Jun 2021

Italian new releases, part 6 - the south and islands

The final part of Walter's useful audit of new releases. See also [Valle d'Aosta and Piemonte](#), [Lombardia, Alto Adige and Trentino](#), [Friuli and Veneto](#), [Emilia-Romagna and Toscana](#) and [Umbria, Marche and Abruzzo](#). The Barone Macrì estate, a Calabrian discovery, is pictured above.

I have finally managed to taste more than a handful of wines from Lazio, a wine region that seems to be one of the most inert in the whole of Italy. Significant in this case is that the wines below are almost all made from international varieties and in an international mould. These wines do not do a lot to put their origin in perspective, but I do not fault them because their quality gives a glimpse of what can be achieved, even if some of their price tags border on the ridiculous.

I do fault the execution of Lazio's local variety Cesanese, though, which is potentially great, but the versions described below suggest that their makers do not know how to handle it, and have moulded it into the same international style. Cesanese seems to resist that, and that is a clear message in itself.

I have long admired the Paternoster estate in Basilicata, which has been producing and bottling Aglianico del Vulture since 1925. In 2016 Amarone producer Tommasi, which also owns Casisano Colombaio in Montalcino, acquired a majority stake in Paternoster, which apparently needed a big financial injection after a generational change in 2008. With this acquisition Tommasi have obtained a Basilicata jewel and they should aim at being its custodian rather than owner.

Although Tommasi does a decent job in Montalcino, their Brunello is a little brawny and I feel the elegant side still needs to come out under their management. As for Paternoster, the 2015 and 2016 Don Anselmo made under the old regime will be benchmarks for a long time to come and I hope Tommasi will use this particular wine to navigate the estate's future. If Tommasi realise they are standing on giants' shoulders, interesting things could happen.

Elena Fucci has hit the Aglianico nail on the head with her elegant and polished renditions of the variety, which she ages in new or second-year barriques and tonneaux. Generally I am no fan of this approach because, more often than not, it suppresses the characteristics of Italy's indigenous varieties, while putting too big an international stamp on them. But that is not the case with Fucci's single-vineyard Titolo, an Aglianico aged so skilfully in 100% new oak that you hardly notice the barriques.

But even Fucci cannot withstand the lure of the amphora in what could be described as Titolo 2.0. Officially called Titolo by Amphora, it is an Aglianico from the same vineyard as the 'straight' Titolo, but fermented in temperature-controlled but untreated terracotta amphora. The result is surprisingly slick, which is undoubtedly why it had no trouble passing the control systems in order to carry the denomination on the label. (More often than not, amphora-aged wines are considered atypical and fail that test.) In the case of Fucci it is an admirable, and above all delicious, effort even if I might like to see a little more extremism in this wine.

The jewel-like denomination of Cirò seems to get all the attention in a Calabrian context but there is more that deserves attention such as the wines of Barone Macrì in the hills close to Locri in Calabria's lower south-east. The estate has a pretty impressive range of wines made from local varieties, including Mantonica and Greco Nero, as well as Nerello Mascalese blended with the latter for the Terre di Gerace Red. This entry-level wine I found spectacular for the money – €6.90 in Italy – while its white counterpart was more than decent, too.

100% Nero di Troia partially fermented at 25 to 38 °C, and partially at much lower temperatures 'to heighten the fruity notes'. Aged part in barriques and part in stainless steel.

Deep, almost impenetrable ruby. Lifted, sweet damson with slightly artificial, sweet creamy notes. Quite compact and still a little closed on the palate. Seems a little similar to their Nero di Troia, especially when it comes to high acidity, but this is richer in tannins. Almost a little mouth-watering and drying on the finish. It has a level of acidity you hardly ever come across in Puglia. Soft creamy touches of damson fruit on the finish makes it a little artificial but overall it is not without merit. It almost seems like the creamy sweet notes were needed to counteract the drying tannins. (WS)

14%

Drink

2020

-

2024

15.5

Paradiso, Basato Nero di Troia 2016 IGT Puglia

100% Nero di Troia aged for 14 months in barriques.

Impenetrable dark crimson. Fantastic earthy, deep damson and raspberry nose with sweet hints of oak and almonds. Really lifted and perfumed, on the verge of being soapy. A rich layer of slightly drying tannins supporting the dark fruit lifted by lots of acidity. Ends a little mouth-watering. It is an interesting wine that needs fine-tuning. (WS)

14.5%

Drink

2020

-

2024

16

Basilicata

Paternoster, Vulcânico Falanghina 2019 IGP

Basilicata

100% Falanghina (but unspecified which one) grown in vineyards at between 450 and 600 m above sea level. Fermented at 16 °C in stainless steel and aged on the fine lees in stainless steel for around five months.

Straw yellow. Savoury mandarin, pickled lemon and lush white- and yellow-fruit nose. Zippy, viscous lemon fruit palate. Appetising and with a lemony, savoury finish. (WS)

13%

Drink

2021

-

2024

16

Vulture

Elena Fucci, Titolo 2018 Aglianico del Vulture

100% Aglianico grown in a vineyard at 650 m above sea level on soils consisting of a mixture of lava and ash locally known as 'pozzolana'. The vineyard is partially trained on Guyot and partially on 'capanno', an 'albarello' or bush vine trained upwards within three wooden stakes that are tied together at the top to form a 'teepee'. Fermented in stainless steel and MLF took place in 100% new French oak barriques in which it was aged for 12 months.

Deep crimson ruby. Still very youthful and enticing nose. Wild strawberry, raspberry, with hints of black pepper and cooked red beetroot with a pinch of nutmeg from the oak - a super-slick job done. Succulent, tangy crushed red fruit,

liquorice and lively acidity – very youthful and vibrant. This will give pleasure for many years to come. (WS)

14%

Drink

2020

-

2030

17.5

Elena Fucci, Titolo by Amphora 2017 Aglianico del Vulture

100% Aglianico from a vineyard of 50 to 75 years old called Titolo and on 600 m above sea level with a south-south-east exposure. Bunches were destemmed, but not crushed and fermented in temperature-controlled but untreated terracotta amphora, where it stayed for 13 days on the skins, which was the same period in which the alcoholic fermentation was completed. After racking and pressing the skins, the wine was returned to amphora where it went through MLF and in which it was aged for 18 months followed by six months in bottle.

Real purity of fruit on the nose with black forest fruit, iodine notes and nutmeg. Crunchy savoury, chalky tannins and with just a hint of apple skin denoting a tiny bit of oxidation, but this has great depth and is surprisingly polished for such a radical approach. Lifted acidity and rustic, crunchy tannins on the finish. It is edgy but not really radical. Will be fascinating to see this age. (WS)

14%

Drink

2022

-

2032

17 +

Paternoster, Rotondo 2017 Aglianico del Vulture

100% Aglianico grown in the Villa Rotondo vineyard at 500 m above sea level. Alcoholic fermentation in stainless-steel tanks for 15 days at 25–28 °C, with regular

pumping-over and punching-down of the cap. Malolactic fermentation and ageing in new French barriques for 14 months, followed by 12 months in bottle.

Deep crimson. There is quite a bit of oak on the nose but it cannot suppress the Aglianico characteristics: dark cherry and wild strawberry with a hint of liquorice mingling with perfumed, sweet oak. Palate that's lively, juicy and almost a little mouth-watering with cherry fruit and with firm, slightly dry tannins. Modernist, but with plenty of character. (WS)

14%

Drink

2021

-

2026

16.5

Paternoster, Synthesi 2017 Aglianico del Vulture

100% Aglianico grown at between 450 and 600 m above sea level. Maceration on the skins in stainless steel for 12-15 days at 25-28 °C, with regular pumping-over and punching-down of the cap. 80% of the wine was aged for 12 months in large Slavonian oak casks and 20% in used French barriques for 14 months, followed by seven months in bottle.

Impenetrable dark ruby. Concentrated dark-fruit nose with nutty overtones of oak and hints of vanilla. Lush dark fruit with enough acidity to balance it and fine long tannins. International veneer but with enough personality to counteract. From an extremely hot and dry year, this is an amazingly balanced wine at a surprisingly modest 13% alcohol. (WS)

13%

Drink

2021

-

2028

17

Paternoster, Don Anselmo 2016 Aglianico del

Vulture

100% Aglianico from a 50-year-old vineyard at 600 m above sea level. Fermentation and maceration on the skins in stainless steel for 15 to 18 days at 25–28 °C with pumping-over three times a day until three-quarters of the fermentation was complete, followed by rack and returns. Half of the wine was aged in large Slavonian oak casks, while the other half was aged in French oak barriques of second passage.

Deep ruby. Cherry, damson and raspberry with sweet liquorice notes and a hint of oak. Succulent and poised and still a little closed. Elegant palate weight, complex damson and raspberry fruit lined with finely ground tannins on the finish. (WS)

14%

Drink

2021

-

2030

17 ++

Paternoster, Don Anselmo 2015 Aglianico del Vulture

100% Aglianico from a 50-year-old vineyard at 600 m above sea level. Fermentation and maceration on the skins in stainless steel for 15 to 18 days at 25–28 °C with pumping-over three times a day until three-quarters of the fermentation was complete, followed by rack and returns. Half of the wine was aged in large Slavonian oak casks, while the other half was aged in French oak barriques of second passage.

Deep ruby with orange tinges. Deep and concentrated dark-fruit and cherry nose with a hint of dusty oak and tamarind. A little richer and more concentrated on the palate than the 2016. The damson and cherry fruit on the finish is lined with powdery tannins adding chew to the finish. (WS)

14%

Drink

2021