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AGLIANICO DEL VULTURE



THE ITALY ISSUE

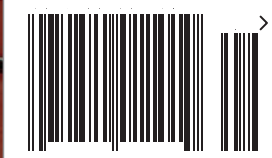
Trailblazing Winemakers from Southern Italy

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Erminia and Rocco D'Angelo of D'Angelo wine in Vulture

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Vulture Rising

These Southern Italian wineries are bringing new life to the ancient area.

In the northernmost province of Basilicata, which stretches up from the arch of Italy's boot, lies a mountainous, wild area. It recalls the brisk Alps of the north more than warm, southern climes. There, anchored around the extinct Monte Vulture volcano is a patchwork of ancient towns scattered among the undulating foothills that harbor some of the country's most exciting, site-expressive wines.

The region is home to two denominations: Aglianico del Vulture Denominazione di Origine Controllata (DOC), established in 1971, and the Superiore Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita (DOCG), which was established in 2010 and is the only DOCG in Basilicata.

Grown here at elevations up to 2,000 feet, Aglianico is a late-ripening variety that benefits from the area's cool, dry yet sunny, mountainous terrain and yields energetic, structured reds that can deliver power and finesse in equal measure.

Commercial winemaking in the area dates back nearly a century, but a new generation of winemakers has brought this historic area to the forefront. Get to know these wineries to best explore Italy's most dynamic wine region.



BY
ALEXANDER
PEARTREE

PHOTOS BY
ILARIA
MAGLIOCCHETTI
LOMBI

D'Angelo

Rocco D'Angelo, Winemaker
Erminia D'Angelo, Export Manager

One of the oldest, most established wineries in Vulture, D'Angelo walks a fine line between tradition and innovation. The family-run winery's beginnings span back a century, and for the first few decades, it was predominately in the bulk wine business—an origin story echoed across southern Italy.

It wasn't until the 1950s that the winery shifted its focus and began to bottle just its own wine under the Casa Vinicola D'Angelo label. It was one of the first wineries to produce bottles labeled as Aglianico del Vulture DOC.

Currently helmed by the family's fourth generation, the winery is managed by a sister-brother duo: Erminia, who runs the commercial side of the business, and Rocco, the winemaker and vineyard manager. After their father, Lucio, passed away in 2007, Erminia and Rocco followed in his footsteps.

"My brother and I started to manage the winery so very young," says Erminia. "But we grew up in the winery playing between barrels and barrique because our childhood home is on the top floor of the winery."

Vinification of their red wines follows traditional methods in the winery's large concrete tanks that were constructed in the early 1960s. The tanks are used for maceration, fermentation and aging. Erminia notes that "with the concrete tanks you have slow and natural maturation with good micro-oxygenation of the wine," which is key for the proper evolution of Aglianico.

While the winery's production areas are in the town of Rionero in Vulture, its nearly 62 acres of vineyards are in the nearby town of Barile and the more distant town of Maschito. The Barile vineyards sit at the foot of Monte Vulture, around 1,300 feet in elevation, with volcanic tuff dominating the soils. The Maschito vineyards are down the slope, in a warmer area that shows more clay-driven soils.

This diversity of site contributes a range of Aglianico expressions to the winery's portfolio. The Aglianico del Vulture, Caselle and Canneto labels are sourced from Barile, yielding zesty, mineral-driven wines that express the volcanic soils. The Tecum label is sourced from 80-year-old vineyards in Maschito, resulting in a rich, concentrated and earthy expression.



Azienda Agricola Elena Fucci

Elena Fucci,
Owner/Winemaker

Anative of Barile, Fucci grew up wanting more than what was offered by a sleepy town in the shadow of Monte Vulture. Her parents, both teachers, encouraged her to follow her passions. By the time she went to university, Fucci was hard set on leaving Barile behind.

But that all changed in 2000, when her grandfather, Generoso, was looking to sell the land that she and her family grew up on, which included nearly 15 acres of Aglianico planted on the highest part of the contrada Solagna del Titolo. Faced with the prospect of losing the land her grandfather had tended since the 1960s, Fucci had a change of heart.

That year, she started studying viticulture and oenology at university in Pisa and began her eponymous winery.

"I started to make one wine because I have a single vineyard," says Fucci of her iconic Titolo bottling, which was named after the contrada in which the vineyard resides. "Maybe I produce only one label, but better."

She started out making a minuscule 1,200 bottles of Titolo in 2000. Production has since reached 25,000–30,000 bottles. It still only represents roughly half the yield allowed by the Aglianico del Vulture DOC for a plot of her size.

Fucci has also expanded her portfolio, albeit only slightly. The 2017 vintage was the first release of Titolo by Amphora, which spends 10 months in untreated Italian terra cotta. She more recently released Titolo Pink, an Aglianico rosato made from her vineyard's youngest vines, between six and 10 years old.

Perhaps her most endearing addition is the Scceg bottling. It comes from four plots of neighboring vineyards owned by friends of her grandfather. The sites were at risk of going untended or being sold. But wanting to continue the legacy of these 70-plus-year-old Aglianico vines, Elena agreed in 2016 to maintain their vineyards and create a wine in their honor.

Scceg means pomegranate in Arbëreshë, the local dialect spoken by the inhabitants of the area, including Elena and her family, who are descendants of Albanian refugees. The fruit signifies good luck and prosperity, and Scceg sheds light on a culture that is slowly fading and gives new life to nearly forgotten vines.



Grifalco

Andrea Piccin (left),
Co-owner, Sales Manager
Lorenzo Piccin (right),
Co-owner, Winemaker

Boundary-pushing wineries are often led by those who think beyond their regions. They draw inspiration from winemaking and viticultural practices of other areas. The best do this with a sense of reverence for their land and terroir. This is Grifalco.

Fabrizio and Cecilia Piccin founded the business in 2004. The couple came to Basilicata with knowledge and experience from over a decade in Tuscany, where they owned and managed the Salcheto estate in Montepulciano. In the 1990s, Tuscany was going through a boom, with investors snatching up properties. The Piccins took the opportunity to sell their winery and look to other areas in Italy to start a new business.

"Aglianico and the Vulture area back then were completely unknown," says Andrea, son of Fabrizio and Cecilia. "So, if you wanted to make something moneywise, as an investment, Vulture was the perfect place to do it."

The winery is now led by Andrea, who runs the commercial side of the business, and his brother Lorenzo, the winemaker. They bring new focus and drive, but they're still appreciative of their parents' experience and foresight.

"One of the best things my father did when he came here is he didn't buy one piece of big land around the cellar," says Lorenzo. "Instead, he bought many parcels in different villages. He had in mind that this place is great because each village can have

its own microclimate, different terroir, different soil composition."

The family owns nearly 40 acres of organically farmed vineyards spread across the four villages of Venosa, Ginestra, Maschito and Forenza. Vine age ranges from 10 to 80 years, and each parcel is fermented separately.

Lorenzo draws inspiration from Piedmont, where he studied viticulture and oenology. The superficial ties between Nebbiolo and Aglianico are nothing new—both yield tannic, ageworthy wines that express terroir.

For the two cru wines, Daginestra and Damaschito, he decided to apply the technique of extended maceration in 5,500-liter oak vats, which was historically used in Barolo. With minimal pumpovers during the 50–60 day period, the wines slowly extract. After two more years refining in large oak and one in bottle, the resulting wines are elegant yet ageworthy.

Founded by Anselmo Paternoster in 1925, this historic winery is one of the defining pillars of Vulture. It has evolved with the times and has been a leader in bringing a more modern winemaking style to the area.

As one of the first formally trained winemakers in the area, Anselmo's son, Pino, was very much the main driver behind this call to modernity. In the 1970s, he led the charge along with other historic wineries, like D'Angelo, to bottle Aglianico with the newly approved DOC.

Additionally, in the mid-'80s and early '90s, formal training led him to eschew the more commonly used local chestnut barrels and employ Slavonian and French oak, yielding a more refined expression.

Today, the winery is led by Fabio Mecca, winemaker and fourth generation of the Paternoster family. He continues the legacy, producing a range of Aglianico and Falanghina bottlings from 50 acres of organic vineyards throughout Barile.

"It's easy for us [to be organic] up to a certain point," says Mecca. "We are [2,132 feet] in elevation, and therefore, we are very well ventilated in this zone."

Yet, he is quick to note that the area is not without its difficulties. Aglianico is a late-ripening variety that is often harvested at the end of October to early November. Weather conditions that late in the season can be unpredictable, so attention to detail in the vineyard is key to ensure proper ripeness.

With six wines in the current portfolio, total annual production at Paternoster is around 100,000 bottles, making it a relatively small operation. Most of the volume is accounted for by the entry-level Synthesi bottling, an Aglianico from a blend of vineyards in Barile. The top Aglianicos of the estate come from two single vineyards, Rotondo and Don Anselmo. The former is the site of the current modern wine cellar and an area purchased by Pino in the mid '70s, while the latter is a low-yielding site named after the winery's founder.

In 2016, Paternoster became a part of Tommasi Family Estates and is now managed by the Veneto-based wine firm. The winemaking is still directed by Mecca, and the wines now benefit from a distribution network that spans approximately 30 markets.

Paternoster

Fabio Mecca, Winemaker





Basilisco

Viviana Malafarina,
General Manager/
Winemaker

It takes a special person to steward some of the most historic vineyards in Italy while also maintaining a winery building constructed in the 16th century that sits above caves dug a century earlier. Malafarina is exactly the right person for this job.

Her path was circuitous. After earning a degree in Slavic languages and teaching for a stint in Kiev, Ukraine, she worked as a chef and sailor on a superyacht and then as a tour leader on the Orient Express, catering to guests from across the world. It was there she met Antonio

Capaldo, chairman of the Campanian firm Feudi di San Gregorio, who offered her the opportunity to manage his newly acquired Vulture endeavor, Basilisco.

Malafarina moved to Barile in 2011 to take on her new post. She quickly fell in love with the surrounding vineyards, where she worked alongside Pierpaolo Sirch, who was the agronomist for Feudi di San Gregorio. Over the years, she started to help more in the cellar under the direction of a few consultant winemakers, including Lorenzo Landi and Denis Dubourdieu.

Since 2013, winemaking has been under her charge. With an annual production as small as 65,000 bottles, she often works alone in the cellar.

The roughly 60 acres of organically farmed vineyards also fall under her purview. As a self-described “soil freak,” she vinifies each vineyard separately to best express the unique soil, aspect and elevation of each. She later decides to either blend the wines, as in her Teodosio and Basilisco labels, or bottle them separately, like in her three Aglianico crus: Cruà, Fontanelle and Storico.

These are microexpressions of time and place. They’re labors of love for Malafarina, but one in particular might be nearest to her heart.

The Storico vineyard is a nearly five-acre plot of 80-plus-year-old ungrafted Aglianico planted using the capanno training method, a historical trellising system. It’s a living museum of vines with yields that are a tenth of what is allowed by the Aglianico del Vulture DOC regulations.

In the wine world, “everybody’s trying to go back the past. To go back to the authenticity, to the old days,” says Malafarina. “We are still there in Basilicata.”

Learn more about
Vulture winemakers at
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