

The Time Is Now

IN LOS ANGELES, TWO WINE DINNERS REVEALED WHY **SICILY** DESERVES THE SPOTLIGHT **by Allison Levine**

After the latest season of *The White Lotus* on HBO, the Italian region of Sicily is at the top of everyone's list—including that of wine connoisseurs. "The time for Sicilian wine here in the USA is now," explained sommelier Matthew Kaner while serving as the host for a seminar and dinner featuring two Sicilian producers at No. 10 Restaurant in Los Angeles last November. "Awareness is booming, and we continue to get access to more and more incredible boutique wines from all over the illustrious island," he said of the event, which was organized by the Italy-American Chamber of Commerce West (an identical seminar was hosted later the same week at French restaurant Tesse in West Hollywood).

The largest island in the Mediterranean Sea, Sicily has an incredibly long history of wine production, dating back 5,000–6,000 years. Phoenicians, Greeks, Byzantines, and Moors have all influenced the region's food and wine, while the British, as

lovers of fortified wine, popularized Marsala in the 1700s. By the early 1900s, the Sicilian province of Messina in the northeast corner of the island was home to the most vineyards in Italy. But phylloxera, the Great Depression, and World War II caused a setback in the first half of the 20th century, and Sicily's production was reduced to bulk wine.

Beginning in the 1960s, a shift to lower yields and higher quality, coupled with the introduction of international varieties, brought attention back to Sicily. And in 2011, the Sicilia DOC was established. Today the island is home to more than 60,000 acres of vines, nearly 8,000 winegrowers, and 530 wineries. Two of the latter, Cambria Vini and Cantine Madaudo, teamed up to showcase their wines at the dinners; both located in Messina, the wineries date back four generations, and their proprietors have remained friends since their inception.



Cantine Madaudo proprietor Rosario Madaudo; Alda Fantin, communications and PR at Cantine Madaudo; Nino Pelleriti, sales and marketing director at Cambria Vini; and sommelier Matthew Kaner lead a seminar and dinner focused on the wines of Sicilian producers Cambria and Madaudo at No. 10 Restaurant in Los Angeles, CA.



PHOTOS: ITALY-AMERICAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE WEST

Madaudo, which works only with indigenous grapes, presented its Etna wines. The 2021 Etna Bianco DOC, a blend of Carricante and Catarratto, stood out for its beautiful floral, mineral, and saline notes. Another standout was the 2018 Cerasuola di Vittoria DOCG, representing the only DOCG in Sicilia. A blend of Nero d'Avola and Frappato, the wine had good acidity and structure along with notes of plum, blackberry, chocolate, tobacco, and dried herbs.

Cambria works with international as well as indigenous grapes. But the highlight of its lineup was the ancient native variety Nocera. As Kaner observed, "Putting an unknown grape in front of a room full of sommeliers and press will always make the cameras come out and the questions be asked: 'What is Nocera and why hadn't I had it before?'"

Grown in the hills around the commune of Funari in Messina, the red grape produces a wine that is high in both acidity and alcohol. To the team at Cambria, it's the symbol of their territory and a versatile grape, as they use it to make three varietal wines and one blend. From the crisp 2017 Fin Che Venga Brut Rosé to the French oak-aged 2014 Mastronicola and the 2014 Kio Passito, the acidity is what shines in these wines. "Tasting wines grown from [Sicily's] lava-laden hilltops excited our palates while also eliciting our imagination to take us to [Mount Etna]!" Kaner noted while reflecting on the dinner. **T**