



There was a thin plume of smoke rising from the top of Mount Etna in Sicily, creating a streak of white across the clear blue sky, when I visited a couple of weeks ago. This was a change from my last visit some years previously when the mountain grumbled, boomed and even looked a little fiery and ferocious against the night sky.

Etna and its mood changes is something the people of Sicily are used to, and its activity over millennia has left it surrounding slopes and landscape littered with boulders and lumps of hard, black lava. But in between these obstacles is a rich, multi-layered soil, created by successive upheavals of the earth, a scattering of ash and even remains of creatures from long before the island emerged from the sea.

This is what attracted world-class winemaker Peter Vinding-Diers, who has established an estate, Vinding Montecarrubo, in the south-east corner of Sicily. Famed for making wine in Bordeaux, Brazil, Chile and Hungary and transforming several estates along the way, Peter grew up in a wine-loving household in Denmark and was determined to work with wine. He had a stint as a journalist and even as a war correspondent when he parachuted into Vietnam, but mainly his life has been a journey with and through wine.

Now aged 80, with his wife Susie who has accompanied him through all his wine adventures around the world, he has settled on flat piece of land, on the edge of an extinct volcano, 150 metres above sea level. It was scrubland when they first saw it in 2005 and with the help of a borrowed bulldozer, and much hard work, it has been transformed into two vineyards which were first worked organically, and now biodynamically. "First of all, we had to fertilise the soil. It had been neglected for so long and so 200 tonnes of manure did the trick.

Then we needed to select grape varieties and I decided to plant Syrah in this vineyard," said Peter as he strode out amongst the vines. "Syrah has been grown in Sicily for over 200 years, so it seemed the right thing to do,



but I wanted a pure Syrah and a friend in the Rhône helped me out." The rumour is that cuttings from Montecarrubo came from a very prestigious plot on the Hermitage hill but Peter just smiles at that suggestion. Another vineyard is planted with Grillo, a traditional Sicilian white grape that was extensively cultivated for marsala, but as sales of fortified

CHANGE OF HORIZON: Eighty-year-old Peter and his wife Susie in their Montecarrubo vineyard; inset, Etna sends up smoke signals.

wines have fallen, Grillo has been used more for dry wines, giving a crisp, lively, refreshing taste, with a mineral, salty character. And in the way that Peter had acquired his Syrah cuttings from France, he sourced his Grillo from a unique place too. He was permitted to take cuttings from vineyards on the tiny island of Mozia which sits a short boat-ride off the shore of the western point of Sicily. There is an odd Yorkshire connection to Mozia in that

this whole island of just 850 metres x 750 metres was bought in 1902 by Giuseppe Whitaker, a descendant of the Leeds family who made a vast fortune in the marsala business. Giuseppe transformed the island into a nature reserve with a scattering of vineyards and to this day it is still run by the Whitaker foundation. If you are ever in the area, it is well worth spending an afternoon on a boat trip out to Mozia, and don't miss *The Charioteer*, a magnificent ancient Greek statue that was found in shallow water in 1979.

So, with land cleared and vines planted, Peter and Susie set about building a home and a winery. The work on an estate like

this never stops. Alongside the vineyard there is a mountain of stones that were taken out of the soil as it was ploughed. Then a neighbour came by with a crushing machine, so those stones are being crushed and worked back into the soil, improving it. There are olive trees too, with the crop going to a local pressing plant.

Having spent a lifetime in various wine regions around the world, and built up a significant profile and fame, why would Peter and Susie swap the gentle life of Bordeaux or Chile for the hard-working challenge that is Montecarrubo? Peter didn't really have an answer but his manner and clear focus on vines, soils and new winemaking techniques showed that he really enjoys a challenge. Alongside the rows of maturing barrels there is an unused amphora which he thought he might experiment with. "But I decided that it wouldn't work with my wines". He has ongoing experiments with yeasts, malolactic bacteria and tiny details of winemaking, all with the aim of being natural and organic. All the while there is a gentle breeze from the Ionian Sea wafting over his vines, keeping pests and diseases at bay. He has found a barren piece of land and made it into a top-class vineyard.

And the wines are top-class too. I tasted through seven vintages of Vignolo, a 100 per cent Syrah wine from the vines growing a stroll away from the winery. It was fascinating to taste the evolution of the wines as the vines developed their roots and gathered more flavours. I could easily believe the tale about cuttings coming from Hermitage. There is depth and white pepper spice on the nose, dark cherry and plum fruit with a clear fresh definition and finish. The Syrah character is precise and vibrant, with layers of savoury complexity and gentle tannin. The 2017 was showing extremely well, complex, soft and intense, while the 2019, the vintage currently on sale (Corney & Barrow, £59.95) has lifted pepper, backed by a firm ripe structure.

I also tasted Scherzo 2021, a blend of Cabernet Franc and Merlot which shows the green herbal character of the Cabernet Franc with the silky texture of Merlot. This wine is around £60 but has not yet reached the UK.

When there are perfectly good Sicilian wines available at under £10, a £60 price tag is challenging but these wines are a significant step up from the rest. Top-quality, handmade and elegant – and a cracking story. **m**

A Viking in Sicily

Veteran winemaker Peter Vinding-Diers left his Danish roots behind for an island adventure.



wine club august offer

SAVE WATER, DRINK WINE: 12 BOTTLES, £90

Whites, rosés and reds are all in this case of wine that will see you through these long, leisurely weeks of summer lunches and dinners in the garden or indoors. And with a possible drought ahead, it is always good to have a stock of wine laid by to quench thirst and accompany meals.

This 12-bottle case should cost £121.88 but The Yorkshire Post price is just £90. Delivery costs £9.95 for a single case but if you order two cases to the same address, it is free.

How to order: Google "Yorkshire Post Wine Club" and the offer pops

up or go to www.houseoftownend.com/yorkshire-post-wine-club to find it. You can send a message to the wine club email address: yorkshirepostwineclub@houseoftownend.co.uk or just ring the order line on 01482 638888, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. Outside this time, leave a message with your telephone number and we will ring you back.



There are 12 bottles in this case, two each of:
White: Vinho Verde 2021, João Portugal Ramos – crisp and dry with citrus and white peach notes; Sangiovese Bianco 2021, Toscana Bianco, Duca di Saragnano – a white Sangiovese with orange blossom and quince notes.

Rosé: Bodegas Bagordi Rioja Rosé 2021 – sunshine sipping, to team with your favourite salads; Granbeau Rosé Grande Cuvée 2021, Xavier Roger – fashionably pale pink with summer berry flavours.

Red: Frappato 2019, Feudo di Santa Tresa, Sicily – crushed strawberry fruit with a touch of spice; Grenache 223, 2021, De Visu, Languedoc, France – ripe, juicy, red berry fruit.

off the shelf

Finest Cotes de Gascogne 2021, France, 11.5%, Tesco, down from £6.50 to £5.50 until September 5 (Clubcard members only):

Fresh, bright pink grapefruit and lemon flavours. Serve well-chilled as an aperitif and match it with any fish dish.



Yalumba Y Viognier 2021, South Australia, 13.5%, Booths, down from £9.50 to £7.50 until Tuesday:

A fragrant Viognier with spring blossom on the nose and full-flavoured peaches and apricots on the palate.



Guigal Côtes de Rhône Rosé 2021, France, 14%, Waitrose, down from £12.99 to £8.99 until August 30:

This pale pink blend of Grenache, Cinsault and Syrah is packed with crunchy, vibrant, crushed raspberry fruit.



Santa Julia Uco Valley Malbec 2019, Mendoza, Argentina, 12.5%, Sainsbury's, down from £10 to £8 until August 30:

Packed with black cherry and spiced damson flavours. Perfect for a barbecue.



on the grapevine

Pride of pampas: With a fistful of awards, *The South America Wine Guide* by Amanda Barnes is a must

for any wine lover's library. Amanda has lived in South America for years and has an insider's view of the people and the places. She works diligently through the big-hitting countries of Argentina and Chile, introducing the landscape, people and history in an engaging way. Grape varieties and regions follow with terroir, producers, winemakers and wines highlighted. But she also covers the smaller wine-producing countries with the same attention to detail. Brazil, Uruguay, Peru



and Bolivia are covered with Paraguay, Colombia, Venezuela and Ecuador also getting space. What makes this book

different from many others is that she also talks about local foods and travel, and gives general tips about getting around. There are stunning photographs scattered throughout the book, a few helpful maps and an overriding theme of introducing the wines of this fascinating

continent to readers. *The South America Wine Guide* is available from www.academieduvinlibrary.com, at £35.

Own-label Champagne: If you are dining at Shaun Rankin's Michelin-

starred restaurant at Grantley Hall, try the new house Champagne which has been specially blended and packaged by Champagne Météyer with the help of Yorkshire wine merchant Firth and Co. The wine is a Blanc de Blancs, made from 100 per cent Chardonnay grapes, aged three years on lees and it is a perfect style to enjoy as an aperitif.

Keeping cool: If you are planning to buy wine while on holiday and then drive it back to the UK, remember to keep the car cool. A case of wine in the boot of a car can easily overheat and push the corks out, spoiling the wine. In extreme heat, pack the bottles in ice and don't leave the wine in the boot for long periods.