

# A Natural Choice

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*Biodynamic and easy to pair with Asian cuisine, Marabino wines are making their mark in Asia*

With its hot summer days and very little rainfall, the Val di Noto territory in Sicily, the third largest producer of wine in Italy, is a prime location for some of the most exquisite wines from the country. Poised on the tip of the island is Marabino, a winery that creates natural wines that are unlike others in region.

Sharing the vintages along with anecdotes of the winery's history with wine aficionados at a private tasting in October hosted by its local distributor, Top Wines Pte Ltd, was Santino Scibetta, Marabino's Wine Business Manager.

"When we started to produce wines, it was solely for leisure; to make the wines for ourselves. Then, if we have a choice, we would sell them," he admitted. On top of this unusual business approach, he disclosed that the winery is biodynamic, which means the winery does not use pesticides or chemicals to treat the grapes, and has to tend them meticulously in order ensure a good harvest.

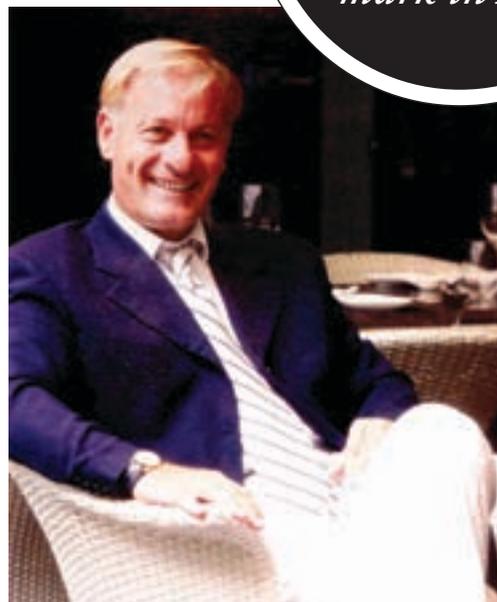
"We make the wine in the vineyards instead of in the wineries, working with the seasons and the elements.

Because we are a biodynamic winery, we don't use pesticides or chemicals to treat the grapes, and the entire process – from planting to harvesting – is done by hand," he continued.

Apart from the hot, dry summers in Sicily, the soil in which the Marabino wines are grown ranges from white limestone and black clay, to Mediterranean red. Combined with the heat and lack of rainfall, the grapes contain a high concentration of sugar, Scibetta explained.

And in order to control the biology of the vineyards, the owners have installed boxes for bats and other setups to encourage the nesting of animals. Additionally, throughout the vineyard, the owners have created "green islands" or spots that contains different types of herbs, fruit trees and flowers that draws butterflies, birds and bees that in exchange, help pollenate and fertilise the vines.

One example of this is the chardonnay called Eureka, which pays tribute to Greek



philosopher and mathematician Archimedes who hails from the region and coined the word when he made his discovery. Grown some 40-metres above sea level, the chardonnay has aromas of pineapple, pear, and banana, which is derived from the natural yeast in the grapes.

The Marabino Muscatedda, which uses the Moscato di Noto, a white grape variety that is native to the Val di Noto, is a natural sweet wine that is light on the palate but filled with the right touch of sweetness without overpowering. In another tribute to Archimedes, the Archimede Eoro Pachino Riserva, made from 100 per cent Nero d'Avola grape, is aged 20 months in Allier oak barrels, giving it a ripe red fruit, mineral and spices aromas, with a velvety tannin and a deep ruby red and violet hue.

Both the Rosa Nera, a rosé which Scibetta revealed goes very well with Chinese food, and the Noto are also from the same variety, with the rosé coming from a 25-year old vine while the latter is aged 10 months and takes its name from its origin.



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Despite the unique and natural flavours that comes from being a biodynamic winery, Scibetta revealed that as they do not use chemicals and other additives to plump up the wine, the winery can only produce a small volume of wine at each harvest, starting at just 7,000 bottles. Yet, he affirmed that it is one of the reasons why Marabino wines have become so popular today, adding that some 50 per cent of the winery’s produce for next year has already been sold out.

“We produce sufficient for markets where there’s a strong culture of drinking wine, or like Singapore, where the market wants to learn more about the wines. And for us, the two important markets now are Japan and Singapore, even more so than Hong Kong. In Hong Kong, while people consume nearly double the volume of wine than in Singapore, they have different tastes. In Singapore, over the past five years, customers are more starting to give more attention to what they drink and the quality of the wines, rather than the quantity,” Scibetta opined.

After Japan and Singapore, he added that plans are to explore other parts of South-east Asia, where there are a growing number of young consumers who are learning to appreciate quality wines.

“And I’m sure in five years, Singapore will be the most important place in Asia, along with Tokyo, for natural wines,” Scibetta concluded.

*Marabino is available at Top Wines Pte Ltd, 33 Tembeling Road, Tel: 6468 3866.*