

Have you always been in the wine business?

I was born in France, after my family moved there from Sicily after World War II. I came back to Sicily when I was 11. In my youth, I played soccer for second and third division teams in Italy. In 2002, I started Marabino with another partner, because we love the wines in this region. The winery is in Noto, located in the southeast of Sicily. I remember my grandfather, who had a vineyard in France, telling me that raw wines from Sicily, such as Nero d'Avola, were being imported by French wineries, because they added a darker colour to their French reds when blended with their varietals. Sicily was a good source of cheap blending wines for the French.

In Nero he trusts

Santino Scibetta, the loquacious wine business manager of Sicily-based Marabino winery, says you haven't tried Nero d'Avola until you have tasted one with a DOC status.

What would you say is your most important grape?

Nero d'Avola. It's a native grape, and we make it with a DOC status. The winds that come from Africa make the land in Noto very dry, and in summer the temperature can hit 40°C. These factors make our Nero d'Avola dark and intense. There are other vintners who don't make this varietal under DOC, and they, in my opinion, don't make authentic Nero d'Avola. I believe that, at the moment, we are the only DOC Nero d'Avola available in Singapore.

You planted Chardonnay, which is surprising, given the warm climate of your region. Were you concerned that people may not take to it?

Yes, our Chardonnay is different. It's an IGT wine, not a DOC, and we have two parcels for it: one is near the coast and the other about 6km inland. Sometimes, you can taste bold fruit flavours and salty accents of the sea in our Chardonnay, and you may not like it. But that's all right with us. If one out of hundred customers likes it, we are happy. We don't want to make 'Coca Cola



wines'—grapes that taste the same as others and appeal to lots of people.

Once, someone asked if I can make each vintage of our Noto (made from Nero d'Avola) the same, or better than the previous, and I said no. That's not real winemaking. Vintages will be different, that's the pleasure of drinking wine. I have a Japanese customer from Osaka who's a good example of someone who appreciates each harvest's diversity. He wanted 20 percent of my Archimede (made from Nero d'Avola) production, and paid me in advance for five vintages—2002, 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2006. He works not in the wine but in the chemicals industry, and wanted to give each vintage as a gift to his friends, and find out for himself which year was the best, which, for him, was 2004.



What took so long for Sicily's wine industry to play catch-up with its mainland counterparts?

Businessmen were afraid to invest in Sicily's vineyards due to the presence of the mafia there. You had to pay protection fees; you had to know the right people to get things done. But now the situation has changed. The mafia knows that if they don't cooperate with more investors, Sicily will suffer economically. So these days, we have more wine investors coming over from the mainland; they are less scared now.

Tell us about your plans to move to a biodynamic viticulture.

To move from traditional to biodynamic vineyards, you need about 10 years, as you'd have to let the land adjust to different soil conditions. Right now, our vineyards are organic. I know in Asia, it's not that important whether or not you are practising organic viticulture, but if you want to sell your wines in the U.S. or Europe, you have to do so. In two years, we'll start biodynamic practices—where we will introduce animal manure into the soil—for some of the organic vineyards. I think in five years, all our vineyards will become biodynamic and sustainable; they will be like a person who is able to take care of himself without any medicine.

What is the future for Sicilian wines?

I think, in the next few years, Sicilian wines will start to gain more awards and higher scores in competitions. In 20 years, they will be more famous than Tuscan wines.

Marabino wines are available at Top Wines. Tel: 6468 3866