

Italian wines have seen a tremendous growth over the last years in Norway

written by Michéle Shah | 3 Gennaio 2014



Interview to Lars G Rein-Helliesen – Opinion Leader and Italian Wine Importer

How do you view the potential of Italian wine in Norway in terms of market potential?

The short answer; Italian wines have seen a tremendous growth over the last years, but there is still potential in both volume, regional development and diversity.

The little longer; Norway is a quite conservative market, thus French wine have in the past been way ahead. But the interest in Italian wines grew from steadily the end of the 1990s, and from the second part of the last decade Italy passed France as most-selling wine producing country in our market – and the gap is growing. However even though there are a large number of Italian wineries and wines present and selling well in this market, many are not and there is still much territory to cover. Many regions and sub-regions have yet to show their potential.

How do you think Italian producers can improve their performance in the Norwegian market? What do you suggest?

Make good wine! And of course, many are doing a good job already. Marketing is not allowed in Norway, so to offer quality at decent prices is important. Also having good and competent partners in the trade is important, in addition to the usual things like packaging and so on ☺ but it must start with a good wine; a nice label may sell one bottle, but the second one is bought because of the wine inside.

What do you think of the quality/price ratio of Italian wines in the Norwegian market?

This market is pressing price, and as also alcohol is taxed in Norway it is important that the producers realize that this market is price sensitive and has low margins. But the challenges are not special for Italian wines ☺ the same challenge is due for all wines from all markets; we have a

strong competition in price vs quality.

What qualities do you personally appreciate most in Italian wines?

Well made wines true to their terroir and where the signature of the producer is visible in the glass.

How do you view Sicily's region and its wines in terms of market potential ?

Sicily is a unique region in many aspects. With its diversity the potential is great. Just consider the differences in terroir and viticulture between Etna, Vittoria, Ulmo, Noto, Marsala, Pantelleria, the Lipari islands, Agrigento and so on... To focus on indigenous grapes and their terroir is important and then always focus on quality. Sicily has great potential as a region, but also the individual sub-regions have great potential to stand out and present their uniqueness.

Please mention the potential of white varieties and the red varieties

Many wine makers have done a fantastic job in Sicily the last years to make great wines from indigenous grapes. To Norwegian wine enthusiasts the white Carricante of Etna is probably the most well known Sicilian white grape, but Grecanico, Grillo, Insolia, Zibibbo and others have great potential in their respective terroirs. For the reds, the Nero d'Avola of course is the most well known, but local varieties – like the Frappato of Vittoria and the Nerello's of Etna – has an increasing group of followers in our market.

How many Italian wines do you currently carry in your portfolio?

Appx 350.