

AL FEU (Italy, Sicily, Marsala)

BACKGROUND: Michele Castiglione has a special feeling for drinking good wines, an incredible curiosity and a professional background unrelated to vineyards and cellars! He is in the corporate insurance business, but for sure has inherited from his grandfather a great passion for viticulture and winemaking.

After the 2nd World War, his nonno Michele Rizzo (born in 1915) had a large estate encompassing 65 hectares, but none of his three children wanted to continue managing the land and during the following decades many hectares were sold.

Only Giuseppa Silvana (Michele Rizzo's daughter and Michele Castiglione's mother) kept alive part of the family's tradition by selling grapes to the local cooperative. Only a few



years ago Michele wanted to revive the tradition and decided to bottle his own estate wine under a new brand, Al Feu. Currently the property consists of 8 hectares under vine (2 of them recently replanted and therefore incapable to produce wine yet). One hectare is planted with pomegranate (Marsala has the best pomegranate in the Mediterranean after Israel) and one more hectare is planted with other crops and some olives.

The vineyards are located in Contrada Pozzillo and Falconeria, halfway between Trapani and Marsala, an area rich of charm and history. Michele had to

start from scratch, heavily investing on vineyards and equipment.

Feu is the Sicilian noun for Feudo, meaning manor or small estate and Michele's Grandfather used to talk only in dialect!

PASSION! Michele is a man on a mission. *"In our wines we try to enhance that unique bond established between the land and the grapes, according to the natural rhythm of the nature and preserving, at the same time, the environment for the next generations"*. Guess what? Michele loves natural wines and the estate is transitioning to get the official organic certification.

Michele's debut harvest was in 2020 (with only 7.000 bottles produced) and therefore he defines himself a young apprentice. In 2021 the production's level increased to 12.000 bottles and Al Feu, meanwhile, joined Vinnatur, the most radical and uncompromising association of natural growers. All the productions sells out quickly both on the domestic and export markets. Michele's grandmather Maria is still alive (she just turned 99 years old) and obviously drinks Al Feu wines!

The Al Fèu brand has its roots in distant times, from the Rizzo family, formerly Riccio. The Riccios came from Campania, more specifically from the Amalfi coast. In Sicily the surname changed in Rizzo and the ancestry is attested since the end of the 13th century

and is classified with the coat of arms of the third cadet branch of the Neapolitan patricians up to the present day.



The coat of arms included the riccio animal (hedgehog) and hence it was incorporated in the Al Feu logo, which also contains the year of birth of Michele's grandfather (1915). His passion and commitment have been handed down to the new generations over the years up to today.

Today the Rizzo Castiglione family, interpreting the values of his founder, spreads the culture of good wine and local quality products.

VINEYARDS & VARIETALS Al Fèu wines come from the historic vineyards owned by the family in Contrada Falconeria and Pozzillo, in an area located between 250 and 300 meters above sea level characterized by a mild but not arid climate with significant temperature variations between day and night. The wide excursion allows the natural ripening process of the grapes and a good concentration of aromatic substances in the skins, giving way to balanced and intriguing wines.

In these clayey and calcareous soils Michele cultivates Catarratto, Zibibbo (aka Muscat of Alexandria), Insolia, Syrah and Merlot. Nero d'Avola has been replanted and we have to wait a bit before tasting it.

Catarratto is one of the main Sicilian white grape varieties, cultivated in every corner of the island, thanks to its vigor and high yields. This intensive cultivation has distorted what is an incredible grape that gives back wines of great elegance and drinkability, but unfortunately, we are submerged by a ridiculous overproduction.

Thank goodness, many small producers have managed to make a good clone selection to produce small masterpieces: white wines of great depth, endowed with flavor and elegance. Many clones of the Catarratto are known, so much so that now we speak about it as a family of grapes, even if the most loved and cultivated is Catarratto Bianco Lucido (Glossy White Catarratto), followed by the Catarratto Bianco Comune (Common White Catarratto). Al Feu cultivates the latter one.

Think that until a few years ago Catarratto was used for the production of Marsala, thanks to its innate aromatics, the richness of the aromas, and also to the tendency to oxidize easily developing mature and decadent scents. Grillo then replaced it because of its great vigor and its excellent ability to oxidize without losing its finesse too.

Zibibbo (aka Muscat of Alexandria) thrives in the Mediterranean warm climate. It's a wine grape, a table grape and a raisin grape (three in one!). Brought in Sicily by the Phoenicians, rather than being called Muscat of Alexandria, this ancient grape is known in Sicily mainly with its Arabic name, Z'bīb, which simply means dried grape or "raisin".

Syrah seems to have a long love affair in Sicily and it's undoubtedly considered the most "Sicilian" among the international varieties planted.

This grape is at home for sure and It was planted 150 years ago, well adapting to the local climatic conditions.

THE LABELS: *“Nature is our greatest inspiration guiding our daily choices with her innate elegance”* - Michele Castiglione is a great lover of the outdoors. *“The common theme you will find in our label is a pensive, thoughtful woman. Men has urbanized the cities, paved the streets, destroying the mountains by taking away the marble,*



polluting the oceans and burning the forests and animals living there. We took possess of the land without caring of the consequences. We pretend to love animals and we use them in labs for experiments or we run them down under our tires”.

Therefore... what’s the solution for the future? According to Michele only women and their awareness can save the world. *“We need women to think what’s best for the mankind”.*

WINES IMPORTED: Steep Hill imports two wines so far - the white blend of Catarratto and Zibibbo and the Syrah.

It’s not uncommon for the traditional Sicilian winemaking blending varieties together and Michele’s most important white is a coupage of Catarratto and Zibibbo, with the breakdown varying every year according to the vintage’s characteristics. In 2021 it was 80% Catarratto 20% Zibibbo. The two varietals are separately processed from day one. Hand harvested grapes are carried to the cellar. Destemming and soft pressing. Fermentation begins spontaneously in stainless steel tanks triggered by the indigenous yeasts present in the skins. No inoculated yeast. The maceration-fermentation lasts for over 10 days. During the whole process no corrections or additives are made. 7 months long ageing in steel vats. Unfined (therefore suitable for vegans), unfiltered and unoaked. 5.200 bottles only produced. Alcohol Content: 12% VOL

As always in the cellar, Al Feu approach is hands off, avoiding technical manipulation.



Syrah is hand harvested in mid August and the grapes are immediately carried to the cellar. Destemming and crushing. The 10 days skin contact, in addition to give color, provides the wine of a pleasant tannic note which enhances its complexity. After the spontaneous fermentation triggered by indigenous yeast only, the wine is left into stainless steel vats to refine on its lees for about 7 months and then is bottled in spring. Unfined (and therefore suitable for vegans) unfiltered and completely unoaked! Total

production: 5.200 bottles. AbV: 12,5%