

February 2023: Volcanic Wines

We already know that winemakers are of an experimental and adventurous disposition, so it will come as no surprise that the slopes of volcanoes (even currently active ones) are not off limits when it comes to establishing a vineyard. It really does seem a little nuts to grow grapes on the slopes of a volcano – after all, Sicily's Mount Etna has erupted at least 3 times in the last 10 years, and is actively spewing lava as I type this.

So, you may ask, why not plant your vines on a nice flat stretch of land as far as possible from the local volcano? Well, the thing is, while volcanic eruptions are terrible for vineyards in the short term – no matter how hardy the vine, nothing stands in the way of molten lava! – in the long term, the volcanic soil left behind is mineral rich, which vines absolutely love. It has also been found that volcanic soils impart a distinctive character to the wines produced that you just don't find in other regions. Volcanic soils are free-draining, and they're actually not particularly fertile – this makes the vines work harder to produce the very best grapes they can. The result tends to be smaller, higher-acidity, slightly less ripe fruit, which produces taut and sometimes savoury wines, packed with concentrated flavour while not being overwhelmingly full-bodied.

Of course, it is not imperative for a volcanic wine to be planted and grown on the slopes of an active volcano – not everyone is such a thrill-seeker. Rather conveniently (or thankfully!), planting on the slopes of extinct volcanoes can be just as effective in the vineyard. So, in addition to Sicily's Etna, you will find that other regions in Europe such as Hungary and Soave in Northern Italy are planted with vineyards and benefit from the influence of volcanic activity with just a touch less risk!

While expert opinion is divided as to the scientific effect of volcanic terroir, in terms of flavour and character it certainly has a noticeable impact, producing wines with distinct minerality, smoky notes, high acidity and often a touch of umami which keep you coming back for more. The reds can be earthy, while the whites can have an unexpected richness to them, making them brilliant wines to enjoy with all manner of cuisines. At their best, these wines practically explode on the palate, and the 6 wines in this month's case are no exception. Enjoy!

Custoza DOC 2021, Monte del Frà, Veneto - £17.99, 12.5%



Custoza is a small hamlet in the northern Italian commune of Sommacampagna, which is situated to the south east of Lake Garda. The name Sommacampagna is derived from the word 'Somma', which is a type of volcanic caldera – and it is in this caldera that much of the Veneto region's grapes are cultivated.

This classic and yet relatively little-known Italian white is perfect for those of you who love the wines of Gavi di Gavi, Soave and Lugana – the blend is made up of a variety of grapes all of which feature in the wines of the aforementioned regions. 40%

Garganega, 15% Trebbiano Toscano, 15% Trebbianello and 30% Cortese.

Fresh, fruity and light, this is a white to drink right now at its' youthful best. Aromas of stone fruit and white flowers on the nose, with green apple and tangerine flavours on the palate. Pair with platters of fresh seafood, savoury croissants and freshwater fish – the fish from Venice's lagoon would be sheer perfection.

Estate Dry Furmint 2019, Juliet Victor, Mád, Hungary - £29.99, 13.5%

The region of Mád in Hungary has its foundations rooted in mineral rich soils which are the result of thousands of years of volcanic activity and eruptions. Hungary's national grape, Furmint, thrives on these soils and produces wines of outstanding quality and finesse. This Furmint is clean on the nose with notes of quince and vanilla with stone fruit

character on the palate, indicative of time spent in barrel (80% of the blend spends just a little time in oak). These are accompanied by flavours of ripe honeyed peach, marmalade peel and a touch a spice. There is a flinty characteristic on the finish, reminiscent of a more traditional Chablis, so this is a great wine to discover as an alternative. Pair this wine with gammon steaks, pulled pork or slow-roast aubergines.

And why 'Juliet Victor'? The winery name is a symbol of the essence of elegance and a commitment to the highest level of quality. József Váradi, the founder and leader of WizzAir (one of Europe's most successful aviation companies), has provided the ultimate for this extraordinary wine. 'Juliet Victor' is a moniker from his own initials using the international phonetic alphabet while bringing to life the language of aviation!

Etna Rosso Nerello Mascalese 2017, Graci, Sicily - £34.99, 14%

Graci Winery is located in Passopisciaro in the municipality of Castiglione de Sicilia – which is located on the northern slopes of Europe's most active volcano, Mt Etna. This region has over 1000 years of winemaking history, with dark rich soils heavily influenced by the presence of the volcano. The soils are rich in all manner of minerals, from nitrogen to iron, and the grape vines thrive in this terroir. Graci uses only grapes indigenous to the region (Nerello Mascalese, Carricante and Cataratto) and produce their wine with great attention paid to the sustainability of production and environmental preservation.



The estates' vineyards are all certified organic and as a result they produce wines that showcase the natural characteristics and influence of the volcano.

Graci Etna Rosso is produced from 100% organic Nerello Mascalese, sourced from 15-year-old vines which grow on Etna's volcanic slopes. It is elegant and crunchy with a succulent nose of wild strawberry, savoury herbs and hints of blood orange. It has a surprisingly delicate structure, smooth tannins and a lingering finish. Pair with poultry, pork, tuna or salmon. And perhaps have a bash at making a side of traditional Sicilian Caponata (a dish of olives and aubergines).

Valpolicella Ripasso Classico 2019 'Lena di Mezzo', Monte del Frà, Veneto - £24.99, 14%

Lena di Mezzo's vineyards are situated on hillside terraces 250 metres above sea level in Custoza, Bardolino and Lugana of Northern Italy. The vineyards are rich in volcanic and limestone soils, which impart plush aromatics and smoky notes to this food-friendly and versatile wine.

A blend of 80% Corvina and Corvinone with 20% Rondinella, this Valpolicella is woody and dark in nature, smouldering with nuances of raspberry, autumnal spice and forest floor. A deep, plush texture with balanced acidity – ripe red and black berry fruit flavours dance across the palate, complemented by lashings of sweet baking spices. Floral with hints of cinnamon on a lengthy finish, this is a wine that will stay with you long after the last sip.

Pair with braised or grilled meats, cured charcuterie and strong cheeses. Also, a fantastic a partner to rich, meaty pasta dishes, and porcini mushroom risotto. Or, simply enjoy by the glass without accompaniment, as a 'meditation wine'.

'Unwritten Poem' Blaufränkisch 2019, Tiwari House, Hungary - £22.99, 13%

Tiwari House is a local landmark with its natural wine estate, state of the art vegan winery and it is at the cutting edge of wine technology as it houses its very own research centre on site. The estate is entirely family-owned and located in amongst the volcanic hills of Lake Balaton, also known as the Sea of Hungary. The vineyards are surrounded by national parks, volcanic and basalt soils, and has a cool climate perfect for producing pure and concentrated red wines. The volcanic, red clay soil, with loam texture, is free-draining, absorbing and re-radiating the heat from the sun, aiding the even ripening of the grapes.



This Kekfrankos, otherwise known as Blaufränkisch, has mesmerising notes of ripe dark cherries, berries and dark chocolate on the nose with a hint of tobacco. Flavours of blackcurrant and plum, combine with vanilla and black pepper spice to produce a wine that would be the perfect match for rare duck breast, roast lamb, Wagyu beef steak, and even squares of good quality dark chocolate.

Pegaso Zeta 2021, Telmo Rodriguez, Cebreros, Spain - £29.99, 14.5%



Life-time friends and long running business partners, Telmo Rodriguez and Pablo Eguzkiza have been working together for over 30 years. They started working together in the late 1980's at Telmo's family Rioja estate, Remelluri, and the pair went on to lead the way in changing the perception of Spanish wines in the wake of the Franco-era. Cebreros is a small village to the west of Madrid in the Sierra de Gredos, known for its abundance of old vine Garnacha vineyards, which thrive on the slatey, granite rich soils which are underlaid with layers of magmatic rock. The grapes are harvested from old bush vines 100% by hand and fermented using wild yeasts. Because the volcanic soil is free-draining, the juice is highly concentrated and full of flavour, producing a wine of great balance with good acidity and plush tannins.

Claret-cherry in colour, with a gentle nose of ripe red fruits, herbal aromas of bay and earthy hints, give with red berry fruited wine a rustic feel, while the granite and slate of the Sierra de Gredos produce mineral hints. A toasty palate of red fruit, and peppery spice makes this a ridiculously moreish wine. Pair with plates of mixed tapas and cheeseboards.

Shelf Price £159.94 Normal Case Discount: £139.05

Wine Club Price: £120