



BENANTI

June 2016

Our History

The “Azienda Vinicola Benanti” was founded in 1988 in Castiglione di Sicilia, on Mount Etna’s Northern slope, under the name Tenuta di Castiglione, by local entrepreneur Giuseppe Benanti, owner of a large industrial pharmaceutical company but a countryman at heart, such that he was recently awarded the title of Accademico dei Georgòfili by the prestigious, Florence-based homonymous Academy, for his indubious merits in the advancement of the development of the Etna wine region.

Driven by a love for fine wine and a passion for the volcano, Giuseppe Benanti, then aged 43, purchased vineyards on Etna’s Northern slope with the aim of reviving the old family tradition in winemaking, which his great-grandfather had started at an amateur level in the late 1800’s in Viagrande, on Etna’s South-Eastern slope.

Despite the existence of a long-established “DOC”, Giuseppe was well aware that no high quality wine had yet been produced on Etna and that there was no experienced local enologist to turn to for advice.

But rather than rely solely on a “star” enologist from Northern Italy or from abroad, he decided to hire a young and talented local man – Salvo Foti – and then asked prominent advisors from Piemonte (mainly the enologist Monchiero) to oversee his work for several years.

Giuseppe Benanti’s goal in the 1980s and 1990s was to establish a new benchmark on Etna and show that the local terroir, coupled with man’s hard work, would be capable of delivering fine, elegant wines with a clear volcanic identity, from local but also from alloctonous grapes. After all, little was known then about the native grapes (Nerello Mascalese, Nerello Cappuccio and Carricante) and even highly-regarded commentators, such as Giacomo Tachis, were suggesting that Benanti try to grow Pinot Noir in addition to Nerello Mascalese. Others, such as Sicilian-born, but Piemonte-based, Professor Rocco Di Stefano of the Enological Institute of Asti, were less sceptical about Nerello Mascalese and actually encouraged Benanti to invest on it, given that its similarities to some clones of Nebbiolo were regarded as predictive of a potentially bright future.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the grape composition of Benanti’s first vineyards reflected the then current belief that Etna’s eventual positioning on the world’s stage would probably be that of a wine region growing both autoctonous and alloctonous grapes, hence the presence of the local varieties Nerello Mascalese, Nerello Cappuccio

and Carricante but also of international ones such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir and Chardonnay.

That was a time of great debate, a lot of experimenting and little prior knowledge to rely on, but Giuseppe could sense that the road he was about to follow would eventually lead somewhere meaningful.

The first fifteen years of the winery's life were characterized by a steep learning curve and some trial and error, as the team made of Giuseppe Benanti himself (a chemist by degree), Salvo Foti and external consultants experimented with countless micro-vinification techniques.

The winery eventually introduced to the market both Etna DOC wines and more creative blends involving alloctonous grapes, with the aim not so much of creating a long-term "business" but simply of making "very good wine", driven purely by pride and certainly without a formal plan.

As Benanti's work started to be appreciated by the global wine community, the subsequent relentless arrival on Etna of several other producers from the early 2000s – many of whom actually turned to Benanti for initial advice and even material help – contributed to generating increased visibility for Etna and to creating a much needed critical mass of good wineries working with local grape varieties, to the extent that consumers around the world were now starting to recognize such grapes more and more.

The new, clearer evidence of the bright future that autoctonous grapes could potentially have, coupled with the growing involvement with the winery's everyday activities of Giuseppe's sons Antonio and Salvino – both holders of management degrees and with a sharper view of things – were among the key factors that encouraged Giuseppe Benanti to discontinue the use of any alloctonous grapes and focus exclusively on his core, traditional Etna DOC wines, many of which had in the meantime attained global notoriety, such as Pietra Marina Etna Bianco Superiore (Etna's most highly acclaimed white wine), Rovittello Etna Rosso (the winery's first red wine ever produced, from the Northern slopes) and Serra della Contessa Etna Rosso (introduced in the mid-1990s following the acquisition by Giuseppe Benanti of the homonymous estate in his native town of Viagrande on Etna's South-Eastern slope).

Since 2012, the winery is run by twin brothers Antonio and Salvino, today aged 42, with founder Giuseppe providing continuous inspiration.

After dropping their respective jobs in other fields, the two brothers have made the winery their "reason to be", and, with a long term view in mind, they have further refined their father's vision and are working hard to take the winery to new heights, through a number of recent entrepreneurial decisions, such as, for example:

- *the promotion to the post of sole enologist, in 2013, of resident talent Enzo Calì, who had been working under Salvo Foti's external supervision*

for almost 10 years

- *the upgrade of the winery's vinification facilities, with significant investments made in new temperature control systems, new fermenters, new de-stemming and pressing equipment, new laboratory instruments, new vinification and storage vats, a new bottling line, new large-sized casks and a new humidity control system for the cellar*
- *the creation of a new warehouse, with state-of-the-art temperature control equipment, a new software and professional racks*
- *the establishment of an organized "cellar door" and wine tasting program at the winery, to interact more efficiently with wine enthusiasts and professionals alike*
- *the lucid decision to sell non-strategic vineyards and parcels of land in general, such as those containing alloctonous grapes or those located beyond the Etna DOC boundaries, in order to generate significant liquidity to re-invest in the core activities*
- *the recent purchase of new, better vineyards and land, in the best possible spots on both the North and East slopes of Etna*
- *the imminent planting, in late 2016, of new vines in the North, East and South-East slopes of the volcano, and, more specifically:*
 - *2 new hectares of Nerello Mascalese in Rovittello (North)*
 - *2.5 new hectares of Carricante in Milo (East)*
 - *2 new hectares of Carricante in Viagrande (South-East)*
- *the strengthening of the relationship with local farmers who have traditionally been conferring grapes to Benanti, and the consequent creation of a collaborative model designed to aggregate a number of small growers around Benanti*
- *the exclusive use, and the patenting, of four proprietary local yeasts, extracted from the local grapes, chosen through a five-year study*
- *the establishment of close relationships with small, like-minded wine importers around the world, acting as ambassadors of the brand and often aided by Antonio and Salvino Benanti themselves*

What started as Giuseppe's "dream" 30 years ago has now become an organized family venture relying on strong core competences and a solid reputation.

By reinforcing more and more the winery's traditional boutique profile and artisan culture, coupled now with much better technology and a growing number of highly suitable land parcels, Antonio and Salvino aim to make Benanti one of the most respected wineries in Italy within the next years. Their project is very much underway and a lot of hard work and personal resources are being devoted to it. Amongst other things, for example, the winery has plans to make its wine portfolio even more terroir-specific, in line with the Etna DOC's trend to differentiate wines by slope and even vineyard.

Having successfully completed a generational transition, and with a clear vision of the future, the Benanti family winery is therefore not only an important piece of Etna's history and present, but, most importantly, it is well positioned to be among the leaders of Etna's future development.

The winery's philosophy has not changed much over the years and it has been refined and made very rigorous over time. It can be defined as a genuine devotion to the Etna DOC region and its multi-layered cultural and enological richness, made of three very fine local grape varieties and a multitude of sub-terroirs with different combinations of altitude, soil type, sun exposure, rainfall and ventilation.

Benanti's purpose is to produce highly "territorial" wines, with a typical volcanic soul and distinct elegance and character. Wines made to last, thanks to a careful vinification and ageing process, and to be appreciated over time.

In recognition of the quality of its work, Benanti was named Italian Winery of the Year by the Gambero Rosso wine guide in 2007 and Top-100 Winery of the Year by Wine & Spiritits magazine of the USA in 2012. Over time, it has also received very good reviews by publications such as Wine Spectator (USA), Wine Enthusiast (USA), Wine Advocate (USA) and Decanter (UK), amongst others.

Total production amounts to ca. 150,000 bottles, which can be enjoyed at selected restaurants and fine wine boutiques in Italy, the USA, Canada, the UK, France, Japan, Singapore, China, Australia and Scandinavia.

Fact Sheet

Name	Benanti
Established	1988 (initially as “Tenuta di Castiglione”)
First vintage	1990
First wines to market	Rovittello Etna Rosso DOC 1990 and Pietra Marina Etna Bianco Superiore DOC 1990, released at Vinitaly 1993
Founder	Giuseppe Benanti (born 1945)
Managers	Antonio Benanti (born 1974) and Salvino Benanti (born 1974), sons of Giuseppe Benanti
Enologist	Enzo Calì (born 1976), at Benanti since 2004
Main site	Via Giuseppe Garibaldi 361, 95029 Viagrande (CT)
Cellar	Via Giuseppe Garibaldi 475, 95029 Viagrande (CT)
Hectares owned	14, located in Rovittello (North Etna), Milo (East Etna) and Viagrande (South-East Etna)
Hectares managed	10, owned by local farmers and managed by Benanti
Employees	13 (excluding vineyards)
Profile	Family-owned and -run winery devoted to qualitative excellence
Image	Prestigious, historic winery, recognized as a pioneer of fine wine making on the Etna volcano
Percentage of export	70% (growing)
Main export markets	USA (New York, California and Illinois being the top three States), Canada, UK, France, Scandinavia, Japan, Singapore, Hong Kong, Australia
Awards	<ul style="list-style-type: none">* Italian Winery of the Year, 2007 (Gambero Rosso)* Top 100 Winery, 2012 (Wine & Spirits Magazine)* 11 Gambero Rosso “Tre Bicchieri” awards* Several “F.I.S. Bibenda” and “Slow Wine” awards* Good scores/comments on Wine Spectator, Decanter, Wine Advocate, Wine Enthusiast, Jancis Robinson, Vinous.com, Gourmet Traveller Wine, New York Times, Wall Street Journal

Production

ca. 150,000 bottles

Current wines

Spumante (white):

- **Noblesse**, Spumante Metodo Classico Brut, N.V.
(100% Carricante)

Whites:

- **Etna Bianco DOC, 2014**
(100% Carricante, from East and South Etna)
- **Pietra Marina**, Etna Bianco Superiore DOC, 2012
(100% Carricante, from East Etna)

Reds:

- **Etna Rosso DOC, 2014**
(80% Nerello Mascalese + 20% Nerello Cappuccio, from North and South Etna)
- **Nerello Mascalese**, Etna Rosso DOC, 2013
(100% Nerello Mascalese, from North and South Etna)
- **Nerello Cappuccio**, Terre Siciliane IGT, 2013
(100% Nerello Cappuccio, from South Etna)
- **Rovittello**, Etna Rosso DOC, 2012
(90% Nerello Mascalese + 10% Nerello Cappuccio, from North Etna)
- **Serra della Contessa**, Etna Rosso DOC, 2012
(80% Nerello Mascalese + 20% Nerello Cappuccio, from South-East Etna)

Expected medium- and long-term evolution of the wine portfolio

- Upgrade of Rovittello and Serra della Contessa to “Etna Rosso Riserva” and use of pre-phylloxera vines only in their production
- “Split” of today’s single-grape Nerello Mascalese into two separate, slope-specific wines (a Northern Mascalese and a South-Eastern Mascalese)
- Introduction of a third Etna Bianco, from new grapes to be planted in 2016 in Viagrande (South-East Etna)

Philosophy

- cultivation and use of autoctonous grape varieties only
- expression of the entire Etna DOC region (North, East, South)
- production of elegant wines, with distinct typicity, character and ageing potential
- use of proprietary, patented local yeasts
- use of Carricante as the only grape in white wines
- use of stainless steel, and no wood, for white wines
- very careful use of wood for red wines
- use of thick, dark bottles and single-piece corks for all wines
- no rushing of wines to market