



Picone

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ANNALISA SAGONA

PHOTOGRAPHY BY FRANCO BARBAGALLO

Franco Picone remembers when he was a grape buyer and a dealer in Lucca, Tuscany, working as an agent and a payment for grape growers. "I went from vineyard to vineyard, choosing the best grapes for various winemakers. One town in southwestern Sicily refused to harvest, even though the grapes were ripe. They were afraid. The right date had not yet arrived. Tradition demanded they wait for the local saint's day or until after a bad harvest the next year. I convinced them with a 'financial incentive'. That's how it used to be. Superstition." He recalls hearing his father trying to talk his grandfather into introducing corked wine into the family shop. Up to that point, everything was sold from the barrel or with a screw top. Now Franco and his son Nicola own Palermo's most admired wine shop and bar. The walls are lined with shelves full of bottles, 5,000 labels in all. "Today, a glass of wine has to have character, express its territory," Franco points out. He and his son work with restaurants who want an ample wine list without any storage problems. Bottles can be delivered to the restaurant door within minutes, if necessary. Nicola, in his turn, convinced his father to make food available in a separate tasting room. He knew that young wine drinkers like to linger and talk about the wine they're drinking, learn more. Now, almost everything in the cellar is available by the glass. Franco Picone's life with wine has mirrored that of Sicily's. Once wine was a cheap commodity like any other agricultural product. Now, it has to tell a story.

Vanni

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BY CORRADO BENZIO

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATTEO BROGI

We were put off by the sign in four languages that invited us to visit the shop's medieval wine cellars, imagining truffle-flavored oil and straw-covered flasks of Chianti for tourists inside. But once through the door, the atmosphere was reassuringly professional: wall-to-ceiling shelves of wine, and a long wooden counter. In the back, an arched doorway led to stairs and 300 square meters of cellar dating to the 1200's and holding many (but not all) of Paolo Petroni's 55,000 bottles. The cellar is so well made that some bottles are still good after 50 years. Paolo tells us, "This shop dates from the 19th century. Originally they sold olive oil. My parents, Giampiero and Giulietta, took it over in 1965 to sell wine. I remember going to Montalcino, Montespertoli and Certaldo to buy red in demijohns. Sometimes they bottled it for us, with our own labels." In the 1970's Giampiero bought bottles of Brunello and Barolo for the first wine enthusiasts, along with some Bordeaux and Champagne. Paolo was soon old enough to begin tasting the first Supertuscans, to travel to Vinitaly, to visit wineries around the country on his own. In pre-Internet days, he had a friend in New York City subscribe to a well-known wine newsletter so Vanni's knew a week in advance what wines were being recommended and could beat the competition. Today, many clients order from the 1,000 labels listed on the Vanni website. "We have a lot invested in the cellar. We have to keep selling, even if it's not an easy time." Paolo's next move? "I find myself driving around the Luccan countryside, looking for the perfect estate. Who knows? I might find it and make my own wine."