

# TASTE OF THE SOUTH

The winemakers of southern Italy have hit a winning formula with their new and improved ripe, fruity reds. Our experts recommend 55 top picks costing over £5

**I**TALY has finally admitted that the consumer's love of ripe fruit and soft tannins is no passing fancy. The south's response, albeit late, has been a dramatic increase in quality. The quality pioneers who first dared to produce less and charge more have been joined by a host of others who, together, have dragged the average quality upwards. No longer do we need to apologise for a slew of hideously tannic or shamefully oxidised wines. Almost without exception the 139 wines tasted showed excellent varietal definition wrapped in an appealing package of ripe fruit and balanced tannins.

A regional summary of the top-scoring wines shows Puglia and Sicily to be the top performers. These two regions have finally abandoned a culture of absurdly high yields and sloppy winemaking. Of course, part of Puglia and Sicily's success is that both fielded the largest number of wines but this, in turn, is a reflection of larger volumes and greater commercial presence. Campania, however, scored highest in terms of the percentage of wines making it through (64%). Positive comments, mainly relating to the Aglianico's sheer class and distinctive personality, were the order of the day.

Calabria submitted eight wines and yet failed to place a single wine in the top 55. Sardinia scored an average hit rate of one in three but was dogged by comments such as 'left behind'. Half of the Basilicata contingent made the grade, largely due to the appeal of Aglianico, though the average price was well over £10.

The quality of wines tasted demonstrated that perceptions of wines from the south of Italy need to change. No longer does the South symbolise the lassitude of post-war Italy. On the contrary, it is home to a raft of artisan wines scented with varietal character and bursting with interest. These are wines that take the fight to the New World and offer similar levels of technical expertise allied to a spectrum of flavours that leave the tedium of the New World's often predictable oak-alcohol-acidity formula far behind.

Introduced by *Michael Palij MW*.

Tasters: *Steven Spurrier, Christelle Guthert, Nick Dummergue, Michael Palij MW*.



■ **Donnafugata, Merlot e Nero d'Avola, Angheli 2000 (Sicily) ★★★★★ 18.5pts**

Pronounced, appealing nose – gamey, mineral, toffee. Lovely open-textured palate – gamey, robust and sensuous. Full and impressive. Serious. 2–5 years. **£17; Evy, Vin**



■ **Feudi di San Gregorio, Piano di Montevergine, Taurasi 1996 (Campania) ★★★★★ 18.5 pts**

Dense, chocolatey nose. Powerful, big, impressive. Surprisingly understated, but impossible to ignore. A moving statement to Campania's huge potential. Up to 2 years. **£34–35; Ali, Evy**



■ **Francesco Candido, Duca Aragona, Candido, Salento Rosso 1997 (Puglia) ★★★★★ 18pts**

Holding up well. Still has some freshness. Full and rounded acid. Solid tannins and well-preserved fruit shows the breeding and age worthiness of this wine. Up to 5 years. **£13.50; EnW, Swg**



■ **Azienda Agricola Cos, Cerasuolo di Vittoria 2001 (Sicily) ★★★★★ 17.5pts**

Serious – youthful yet pronounced; soft red fruit, attractive, light and elegant. Very fresh, juicy. A perfect Beaujolais alternative. Drink now. **£9.85; Can**



■ **Cantine due Palme, Primitivo, Salento 2001 (Puglia) ★★★★★ 17.5pts**

Rich, dark berry fruits, some perfume. Fruit bordering on sweet, wrapped in oak. Still shows tannins. Up to 5 years. **£5.95–5.99; GWW, Unw**