

Fattorie Romeo del Castello

Visits

This visit at Fattorie Romeo del Castello took place in April, 2012.



Words by Jules Dressner, photos by Lauren Feldman, Shawn Mead and Ian Becker.

After lunch at the excellent *San Giorgio e il Drago*, we hopped in our cars to visit Rosanna Romeo and Chiara Vigo of [Fattorie Romeo del Castello](#). The estate is located just on the outskirts of Randazzo, so it was a very quick drive. A long dirt path off the main road brings you to the 17th century house where Rosanna and Chiara live part time (their main residence is in Catania).



Rosanna, who is a local, inherited the farm from her grandmother in the 70's. She then married Mr. Vigo (originally from Naples), and together they took care of the farm and vines, but sold all of the grapes. After his death in 1987, Rosanna continued to maintain the farm alone. Her daughter Chiara, after travelling the world to pursue her masters degree, become a published author as well as a certified [kundalini yoga](#) master, decided to return in 2007.

From an early age, Chiara found herself drawn to the parallels between works of nature and art. Inspired by this connection, she found a perfect middle ground with wine labels: this passion became the foundation of her masters' thesis, which she later developed into the great book [Arte e Vino](#). After many years yearning to return to the farm, a chance encounter with [Salvo Foti](#) in 2007 gave her the perfect reason.

"He made me understand that I had a treasure, something I wasn't really conscious of."

She returned almost immediately with the goal of independently bottling wine from her family's estate for the first time since her grandfather in the 1950's. Because of her lack of agronomical and oenological knowledge, Salvo offered to mentor her by showing her how to tend the vines and make the wine. 2007 was the "first" vintage of the *Vigo* wine, the cuvée being an hommage to Chiara's father.

The 14 hectares of vines are 70-100 years old, all in Nerello Mascalese.





In the background, you can see the huge wall of lava that borders the vines.



[Mount Etna](#) is one of the most active volcanoes in the world, and its massive eruption in 1981 almost completely destroyed the entire Romeo Castello property. The flow's original trajectory was headed directly towards the house, but at the last minute took a right turn, sparing the property. It was a

great tragedy that cost the family a lot of land, but's it's also the very reason why the wines are one of a kind. The lava wall heavily affects how the winds hit the vines and how temperature is contained, thus creating a unique micro-climate. The result is a bright, concentrated red with a ton of personality.

At no point have chemicals ever been used in the estate's history. Chiara has recently reintegrated wildlife into the vines, and Stefano Bellotti of [Cascina Degli Ulivi](#) is consulting on how to incorporate biodynamic practices. His first visit was in January; he plans to return in summer, and Chiara can't wait to visit his farm to see what he does first hand.

Walking back, we got to see this 1000 year old tree.



At some point, another completely different tree started growing OUT of it. Pretty trippy man!

I then petted Rosanna's dog because it was super cute.



About a ten minute walk South of the house, Chiara has replanted vines -also in Nerello Mascalese- that have yet to produce fruit.



They aren't too far from the Simeto river.



If you look closely, you can see exactly where the flow of lava that borders the vines ended. The river is very dry this time of year, but fills up considerably.

We then visited the old palmento, which is adorned by that creepy [leatherface](#) thing that was just as terrifying in person as it is in the picture.



It was time to taste, so we stepped into the house. First up were the 2007 and 2008 *Vigo*'s which have both been available in the US before. Since Chiara is such a label geek, it's no surprise that she has spent a lot of time thinking about her own designs. The *Vigo* label features a map showcasing the exact place where the lava flowed through her property (highlighted in red).



It was inspired by this map of the 1981 eruption of where the lava flowed.



Next up where the *Allegracore* wines, which are new and about to be available in the United States for the first time. Chiara explains the idea behind this cuvée in her [Louis/Dressner interview](#):

"We started with the Vigo wine in 2007. I used my last name as an homage to my father, because he worked this land and died here. But we'd originally wanted to call the wine Allegracore because it's the name of the parcel. I love the name, because it means "the place that makes a happy heart"! This was not possible because D.O.C legislation dictated that everything made in my area had to be Etna Rosso. But thanks to a dedicated group of vignaioli who fought against this, as of 2011 you are allowed to write the name of a parcel on an Etna Rosso. So now the base wine will be called Allegracore, and the Vigo cuvée will only be produced in great vintages. Allegracore will be cheaper because it's aged in stainless steel. The Vigo will be made the same way as 07 and 08: stainless steel fermentation then aged in barrel. At least for now!"

It is quite glou-glou. The labels are pretty cool too, and will change every vintage. Here is the initial line up for 09, 10 and 11, along with the original label used by Chiara's grandfather on the far left.



For the first three, Chiara has actually used pictures of the original art nouveau wallpaper in the house. You can actually see the electrical wiring!



FATTORIE
ROMEO DEL
CASTELLO

ALLEGRA CORE

2009

ETNA ROSSO D.O.C.

Carta da parati (sala da pranzo)

Luca Vitone



Here is it is real life. Not too sure what's going on with that clown though...

