

# The Barolo of the South

THE LOWDOWN ON **AGLIANICO** story and photo by Laura Donadoni

**TOUTED BY UNIVERSITY** of Bordeaux enology professor Denis Dubourdieu as “probably the grape with the longest consumer history of all,” Aglianico was cultivated by the Phoenicians, exported by the Greeks, and adored by the Romans before it was nearly decimated by phylloxera. Indigenous to the Campania and Basilicata regions of southern Italy, Aglianico is a dark-skinned variety that produces highly tannic, full-bodied wines with abundant acidity, though their flavor profiles vary depending on terroir and aging regimens.

Many winemakers across the world have started to grow Aglianico, experimenting with different agricultural conditions to further test the grape’s adaptability. Winemakers have now planted the variety in such diverse places as California and Australia, achieving positive results in the New World.

Because Aglianico tends to excel in warm, dry settings, it favors Mediterranean climates, but it’s been known to prosper in areas with volcanic soils and heavy rainfall as well. The variety is able to adjust quite seamlessly as long as it’s planted at high altitudes. While it buds early, it ripens at a rather leisurely pace, with harvest often taking place as late as November; this ensures that the tannins ripen along with the sugars.

Often referred to as “the Barolo of the South,” Aglianico wines are known for their elegance and possess aging potential similar to the world-class Nebbiolo wines of Piedmont. Even 20 years on and beyond, they will likely exhibit softer tannins as their overall acidity lessens. The most renowned styles of the variety hail from the Taurasi (Campania) and Vulture (Basilicata) DOCGs, but some interesting examples can also be found in the Murge area within the Castel del Monte DOC of Puglia.



*Giovanna Paternoster of Quarta Generazione holds a healthy bunch of Aglianico grapes.*

## **TAURASI DOCG, CAMPANIA**

Campania’s proximity to the Tyrrhenian Sea and the Apennine Mountains influences the flavor profile of these expressions, making them ripe, structured, rich, and ample in both length and depth. Taurasi wines must be produced with at least 85% Aglianico and aged for three years (one of which must occur in barrels).

Aged 12 months in French casks and barriques, the **Antica Masseria del Sigillo (\$33)** from Claudio Quarta’s Cantino Sanpaolo winery is a single-vineyard wine produced from 45-year-old vines. The vineyard is situated at 350 meters above sea level and faces southwest.

## **VULTURE DOCG, BASILICATA**

Aglianico is planted and cultivated on the mineral-rich slopes of the extinct Monte Vulture volcano, and because the vines are planted at a higher altitude, they can benefit from cooler conditions. The hot, dry summers, however, make this a notable region for the grapes to reach full maturity without losing acidity. Here, the

variety ripens late, spending extra time on the vines to gain complexity and depth. These wines require a lengthier aging process in order to develop their most robust flavor profiles.

For the **Quarta Generazione (\$34)** from Aglianico del Vulture, fermentation unfolds at controlled temperatures before the wine spends 12 months in big barrels and small new barriques. It can age an additional ten to 15 years after release, and only 1,500 cases were produced.

## **CASTEL DEL MONTE DOC, PUGLIA**

The vineyards on the Murge plateau lie between 180–450 metres above sea level. The soil is dolomitic limestone, and the dry Mediterranean allows for full ripening. The wines are typically floral, fruity, and well structured, though they’re less austere than their Vulture counterparts.

One of the DOC’s standout wines is the **Tormaresca Bocca di Lupo 2015 Aglianico (\$70)**, an organic expression that aged 20 months in barriques and one year in bottle before release. SJ