

# With red hot flames, the Nero to fiddle with

A Nero d'Avola from the hills around Messina, with intense flavors and elegant aromas. It pairs perfectly with all kinds of barbecued and grilled red meat



We can learn something about grilling from the Americans. Barbecuing meat outdoors has become a traditional practice in strengthening friendships and creating new ones, almost a lifestyle in and of itself for anyone with a yard who knows how to light charcoal and is aware of the socializing effect for anyone with a grill. And gathering around are friends who, while waiting, may well have already started sipping a glass of wine. The rites of the cookout are also becoming more and more widespread in Italy, too. The ancient fascination of gathering around the fire crosses all boundaries: from north to south, as well as continuing across generations.

There is simply nothing better than organizing a nice outdoor BBQ especially with fine summer weather and in good company. As far as the meat itself goes, there is always the choice between steaks and ribs, filets and chops, skewers and sausages. With the wine, on the other hand, habits and taste call for red. And the specific choice has been sent in by our team of tasters who promptly responded with a 2004 Mamertino DOC Nero d'Avola, from Azienda Agricola Vasari, a product of Sicily. This is a wine with an intensity and a body sufficient to hold up to and balance the likewise intense flavor of the meat, often brushed with extra virgin olive oil and garden herbs like rosemary and sage.

## The Glass

The maximum sensations from these intense and persistent aromas can best be expressed in a goblet with an ample circumference at the center and slightly more closed at the opening. The ideal dimensions are therefore a diameter of 8 centimeters (3-1/8 inches) at the widest point, and then 6-7 centimeters (2-3/8 to 2-3/4 in) at the mouth.



### A Red with Character

Rarely, or perhaps even never before, has a varietal in Italy acquired such extensive fame in so short period of time. In order to ascend to the attraction of worldwide attention, Nebbiolo and Sangiovese, with which Barolo and Brunello di Montalcino are respectively made, needed more than a century. With Nero d'Avola, it just took a couple of years. It goes without saying that the media have something to do with this. But the old fable of Sicilian producers sitting on a gold mine from which they were happy to simply extract rough nuggets is a metaphor that well conveys the recent history of this indigenous island grape. In actuality, once these nuggets began to be worked and refined, all the talk was of an oenological Renaissance in Sicily. And the main character is none other than Nero d'Avola, with the grapes so rich in color and filled with sugars, capable, when worked to their best expression, of giving life to wines of great structure and complexity, yet not lacking in a

certain elegance that also make them easy to drink. In this way, after years of studies on the land, identifying the best zones and the best cultivation systems and soils, Nero d'Avola blossomed forth into new life. Earlier, it was often confined to being blended with other types of more northern wines to add robustness. But now, all that is necessary is to take best advantage of nature in Sicily: the optimal soil and hot sun cause the bunches to ripen to perfection. The final result is one of the most famous reds in all of Southern Italy, permuted through all the variables by scores of wineries, and also beginning to be identified by different sub-zones and even by crus, as happened to Barolo.

### An Organic Choice

The hills around Messina lend themselves well to this noble vine. The Vasari family is fully aware of this. They have centuries of winegrowing tradition to look back on, they have dedicated themselves above all else to the cultivation of indigenous Sicilian varietals: Catarratto, Grillo, and Inzolia for the whites, with



In 1990 Vasari vineyards received Certification of Organic Farming

Nocera and Nero d'Avola, of course, among the reds. In 1990, the current owner Ruggero Vasari introduced certified organic cultivation, a choice motivated by the need to create wines that are the authentic expression of the land, with the full respect of nature, of its cycles, and of its variables. The vines, for example, have been planted on the most naturally suitable soils, at an elevation of around 300 meters (1,000 feet) with a western to northwestern exposure. The yields are contained, varying from 40 to 60 hectoliters per hectare (or around 180 to 270 cases per acre) of wine, resulting in greater concentrations and flavors in the skins. In the case of this specific wine, the harvest is done by hand, usually from around September 10 to 20 each year when the grapes are at their ripest. The vinification in turn starts out with a lengthy maceration, more than fifteen days on the skins to extract the color, the aromas, and the tannins. After fermentation, the wine is aged in wood, some of which is small oak casks. And finally, it is refined with additional bottle-aging of around six months.

intense aromas, rich in floral scents with hints of red berries, made all the more complex by the presence of spicy tones. Sensations that then return to the palate, where the wine goes on to make its entrance with a great freshness and softness. Pleasing sensations that contribute to its easy drinkability, with tannins that turn out to be balanced and not aggressive, until the notes of red berries that already announced themselves to the nose now reemerge. It is thus a wine that gives satisfaction and provides an importance to lunch or dinner without putting the personal finances into crisis. It is important to select a glass that will make the best of it: wide in the center to increase the surface area in contact with the air in order to oxidize and amplify the aromas, but more narrow at the opening to permit these aromas to issue forth in a concentrated manner without being easily lost.

The ideal pairing as mentioned is with grilled or barbecued red meats, but because of its intensity and persistence, it is a wine that also matches a meal based on game, such as hare or wild boar, and there's no reason not to enjoy it with pasta, too. Otherwise, if cooking is not on the agenda, all that is necessary is to pull out some slightly aged cheese, such as a nice *caciocavallo*. And this Nero d'Avola from Vasari will take care of the rest.

## Marmertino DOC Nero d'Avola 2004



Azienda Agricola Vasari  
Contrada Casale  
98043 Santa Lucia del Mela  
(Messina) Sicily, Italy  
azienda@biovinvasari.it

**PRICE**  
14.50 Euros  
**BOTTLES PRODUCED**  
55,000  
**ALCOHOL LEVEL**  
13.5%  
**SERVING TEMPERATURE**  
18C / 64F Degrees

**ORIGIN**  
SICILY, ITALY  
**GRAPE VARIETY**  
NERO D'AVOLA

**COLOR**  
Deep Ruby Red with dark  
Garnet Reflections

**NOSE**  
The bouquet is undoubtedly  
intense: rich with sensations of  
floral and red fruits. Notes of  
emerging spices in evidence.

**TASTE**  
The attack of this wine on the  
palate is fresh, balanced and  
round, soft velvety tannins,  
elegant confirmation of the red  
fruit perceived by the nose

**FOOD PAIRINGS**  
A wine that always lends itself  
perfectly to all types of red  
meats: cooked on the grill.  
However, it's intensity of body  
also marries exceptionally well  
with either wild game or with  
medium, aged or fully ripened  
cheese.