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The accompanying article by Monica Larner is at the bottom of this email.

Italy, Puglia: Land of Two Seas, Missed Opportunities and New Faces – Monica Larner

GIANFRANCO FINO Es Primitivo di Manduria 2013 – 95 points

"I was initially puzzled by the 2012 version of this wine, but was absolutely smitten by the 2013 Primitivo di Manduria Es. This is a bruiser with an inky black consistency and impenetrable appearance with dark plum, raisin, blackberry, licorice, rum cake, cherry liqueur, grilled herb and teriyaki sauce. This wine is definitely the Romano Dal Forno Amarone of Southern Italy. It offers similar intensity and opulence and a stylistic signature that is both distinctive and impossible to imitate. Sweet tannins and bold intensity wrap over the palate in thick waves. The close is lavish, opulent and overstated. This is a wine of grand promises that will appeal to those who are not faint of heart. Gianfranco Fino delivers the power and the emotion of Puglia, no holds barred."

GIANFRANCO FINO Jo Negroamaro 2013 – 94 points

"The 2013 Negroamaro Jo is a massive statement wine that deals an unforgettable blow to all the senses, eyes, nose and mouth. This Negroamaro is absolutely Baroque in personality with so many embellishments and exaggerations, it's almost difficult to know where to focus your attention. It presents an inky, impenetrable appearance followed by amazing aromatic intensity that is as wide reaching as it is penetrating. Jammy black fruit, rum cake, spice and blackberry pie are protagonists. There are oxidized or aldehydic tones of apple skin as well that seems to be a defining characteristic of Gianfranco Fino's wines. Pretty spice notes of cinnamon, espresso bean and toasted almond fill in the back. The wine is slightly sweet, but it also offers so much in terms of complexity, tannins and richness that the residual sugar feels very well integrated. It's hard to image what foods you could pair this wine with other than aged cheeses such as Pecorino or Stilton."

GIANFRANCO FINO Es Piu' Sole 2012 – 94 points

"I thought it was impossible to beat the opulence of the dry Es, but that was before I tasted Gianfranco Fino's Primitivo di Manduria Dolce Naturale Es Più Sole (375ml) dessert wine. This is a delicious wine that is almost impossible to pair with food. You might be able to pair it with a Cuban cigar by the fireplace at the very most. It

peels back in thick layers with jammy fruit, plum, blackberry preserves, tobacco and Spanish cedar. Soft tannins segue to a mouthfeel that is rich with chocolate, spice and barbecue tones. This is a truly beautiful and very distinctive sweet version of Puglia's Primitivo grape."

GIANFRANCO FINO Es Primitivo di Manduria 2012 – 93 points

"The 2012 Primitivo di Manduria Es is a landmark wine for Puglia. It is also a very controversial one that had me scratching my head for month. Before I go on, let me just underline the massive appeal and seductiveness of this wine. Let me also say that it is full of flaws. Fino offers one of those rare occasions when something that is not perfect sings to the senses. It is an asymmetric wine, and that's what makes it special. The massive nose is redolent of dark blackberry and red apple, (there are some aldehydic tones here as well) with chewy sweetness and thick texture in the mouth. It is an Amarone style wine from one of the warmest winemaking regions in Southern Italy. I was so charmed by this wine that I had it analyzed in a laboratory and discovered that all its levels (alcohol, extract and more) are off the charts. Despite that power, the wine shows impressive integration. I debated for a long time, and ultimately decided to succumb to what is a highly individualistic expression from Puglia. Bravo!"

"It took me a very long time to wrap my head around Gianfranco Fino's Primitivo di Manduria Es. Ultimately, I surrendered to its monumental hugeness and its exaggerated extremities. This is a wine that goes against all the rules we learn when reviewing wines. The extraction is huge, the bouquet is all over the place and the alcohol sears deep into your palate. But for some mysterious reason, it all makes perfect sense. Of all the wines produced in Puglia today, none is more symbolic of the region than Es. Thanks to his achievements, Gianfranco Fino is the man of the moment."

Italy, Puglia: Land of Two Seas, Missed Opportunities and New Faces – Monica Larner

My defining Puglia moment occurred a few years ago as I was standing between ancient bush-trained *alberello* vines planted in iron-red soils in the Salento. This is the southernmost area of the thin peninsula that is appropriately characterized as the "heel of the boot of Italy." A mere 50 kilometers of land separates Otranto, a fortified bastion town on the rocky Adriatic coastline, and the fishing village of Gallipoli, built on a small island just off the sandy shores of the Ionian Sea. The topography between these two points is flat as a tabletop and the skies above are filled with reflected luminosity, given the proximity of the two seas that surround this tiny ribbon of land. It was early evening and I watched the sun set to the west. Its massive size and brilliant orange color grew in scope and intensity as the fiery sphere sank on the horizon. Transfixed by the sight, I received a little nudge from my traveling companion who drew my attention to the unexpected panorama at my back. Glowing with blue and silver reflections, and larger than anything I had even seen, was a full moon making its steady ascent. As daylight diminished, moonlight grew in strength. Only in Puglia have I ever seen the sun and the moon occupy two halves of the same sky.

With some 800 kilometers of stunning coastline wedged snug between two seas, Puglia is a land of unmatched beauty. (In English, we often refer to the region with its somewhat archaic name "Apulia," but I prefer the modern Italian name Puglia and have recorded this change in *The Wine Advocatedatabase*.) Despite the panoramic appeal and the enormous oenological potential of this sun-drenched peninsula, Puglia is often remembered as a land of missed opportunities as far as quality wine is concerned. The question before Puglia's producers today is whether they can turn their fate around.

That missed opportunity spans centuries to antiquity when the ancients identified Puglia as an ideal environment for grapevines: Soils are fertile, soft sea breezes help deter disease and relentless sunshine makes for effortless ripening. The ancient Greeks brought many of the grapevines that are indigenous to Puglia today and used this region as a giant nursery to satisfy their farming needs. For example, Uva di Troia may have its origins near ancient Troy as its Italian name suggests. From its first crop, Puglian winemaking was associated with volume production. Over the centuries, wine from Puglia was sold in bulk to Northern Italian regions where obtaining optimal ripeness could sometimes be a challenge. When producers in Piedmont, Tuscany and the Veneto could not coax their own fruit to maturity, it became commonplace to blend a spot of Puglia red to improve color, extraction and fruitiness. Such became the unyielding reputation of this region blessed with an ideal growing environment and hard-working farmers. As any number of vintners will confirm: Too much of Puglia's wine ended up outside of Puglia. As a result, the region lags behind today.

In recent years, Puglia has faced additional hiccups that have further delayed its wine evolution. One of the biggest problems is that Puglia counts too few wine "estates" defined as a single property with both a vineyard and a winery. When I asked Alcibiade Zecca what makes his brand Conti Zecca competitive, he answered earnestly: "I make my wine with my fruit." That may seem like an ingenuous reply to most wine entrepreneurs around the world, but estate winemaking remains a point of pride in Puglia. The number of vineyard and winery-inclusive businesses is happily on the rise, but there is too much leftover infrastructure consisting of vineyard-only bulk growers and cooperative wineries linked to Puglia's volume-minded past. Much more work is required to dismantle these monolithic, inflexible models.

Another hiccup came in the form of the so-called "Puglia wine renaissance" that characterized the late 1990s and early 2000s. This period saw important investments by vintners outside Puglia looking to expand their portfolios with warm-climate wines. The most celebrated of these investors was Piero Antinori, who dedicated his efforts wholeheartedly to his Tormaresca estate. A profound belief in the potential of Puglia inspired the Tuscan *Marchese* to bring the best technology and personnel to Southern Italy. His earnest dedication was seen as a symbolic game changer for the region. Encouragement by investors of Antinori's caliber ushered forth a new chapter of optimism. Unfortunately, it was too hyped and too short lived. Puglia was still unable to shake its reputation as a bulk producer in the minds of many consumers. They continue to see it as a region of cheap wines, not quality wines. Tormaresca remains a beacon of hope, but Antinori concedes that the many challenges were a surprise even to a man of his experience and vision.

A third hiccup, in my personal view, is Puglia's stubborn focus on red wines. Puglia is distinguished on a culinary platform because of its amazing fish and fresh catch of the day from the two seas that lap against its shores. The region is home to Italy's best seafood, hands down. Gastronomic highlights, for example, are the sea urchin shacks that populate the beach areas. You can purchase tall stacks of the thorny creatures and scoop out the fleshy roe with a piece of bread. Popular restaurants specialize in raw seafood ? so raw in fact, it makes Japanese sushi look like yesterday's news. At my favorite seafood haunts, crustacean limbs tremble with life when served on the plate before you. Poke at a sea sponge before popping it into your mouth, and it will likely squirt back at you. In terms of tourism, Puglia is almost exclusively a summer destination thanks to its gorgeous beaches and white-washed villages. The most luxurious resorts are closed in winter months. Because many producers were late to embrace costly temperature control technology in their facilities, white wine

production was rarely a priority. This oversight cost Puglia dearly. Even more troublesome is the fact that Puglia missed the rosé train. Rosato wines have an indigenous home in this region. In fact, Puglia, along with Cerasuolo (from the Montepulciano grape) in Abruzzo and Charetto from the Bardolino area near Lake Garda, are the true birthplaces of Italian rosé. Puglia's Five Roses by Leone de Castris was the first commercially successful rosé made in Italy. Puglia has a rich patrimony in rosé production that it has only begun to realize now. Given its history, it should have perfected its rosé offerings years ago.

Lastly, Puglia has been unlucky in the weather department. The name "Puglia" is said to come from the Latin *pluvia*, which means "without rain." The region is known for 300-plus sunny days in the span of a year and summer temperatures regularly rise above 40 degrees Celsius. Changes in the weather patterns over the past five years have been devastating to Puglia's agriculture. Increased rainfall in the hottest months has led to severe outbreaks of mold and downy mildew that are especially damaging to some of the indigenous grapes with thinner skins. Puglia has had its unfair share of bad luck when it comes to mold disease.

A New Puglian Wine Identity

In its infancy, there are encouraging signs that a new Puglia wine identity is taking shape. The missed opportunities of the past are quickly shifting to increased creativity and dynamic thinking among a new generation of super-motivated producers. That renewed sense of energy and excitement was tangible in the wines I tasted for this report. Organic and biodynamic farming is increasingly commonplace in Puglia and there is a mini revival surrounding *capasoni*, or traditional amphorae-like clay vessels used for aging wine. Puglia boasts an enormous patrimony of pre-phylloxera head-pruned vines called *alberelli*. These ancient vines are the protagonists of quality wine in Puglia and vineyard managers are doing everything to protect these unique biotypes. Only a few years back, precious *alberello* vineyards were ripped out to make room for more efficient trellis systems capable of larger production numbers. Today, *alberello* vines are revered and celebrated as a center stone for a newfound oenological confidence.

Many of the missed opportunities I mentioned above are already rectified. For example, the "estate" concept that was missing in the past is alive and well today. Of the 60 or so brands I tasted for this report, the overwhelming majority makes wine with estate-grown fruit. A good number of the brands tasted here are "new" in vineyard-years. They were founded within the past five to ten years. I have also seen considerable improvement in the white wines of Puglia with an increased number of international and indigenous varieties being used with careful temperature control techniques. Rosé wine production is also being carved out as its own distinct category with increased attention and care. There are plenty of options available today to pair with those delicious seafood dishes that make Puglia such an unforgettable culinary destination.

The curious new trend that surprised me most in this tasting regards the great red wines of Puglia made with Primitivo, Negroamaro and Uva di Troia (also called Nero di Troia). This is a hunch, but I suspect that Puglia's vintners are working toward perfecting the same style of wine they were criticized for in the not too distant past. It's a vinous test of wills along the if-you-can't-beat-them-join-them persuasion. Puglia's native red grapes (especially Primitivo) make full-throttle, robust wines with jammy fruit overtones and soft tannins. They are the proverbial "fruit bombs" of Italy.

Many producers understandably took shelter from the fruit-bomb philosophy, but more still seem to embrace it today with a level of enthusiasm that left me baffled and delighted. Gianfranco Fino's Es is a virtuoso example of this new approach. Not only is his wine super ripe and rich on a skeletal level, this tenacious producer has air-dried his fruit, Amarone-style, for even higher extravagance, extraction and overemphasis. He exercises this oenological exaggeration with a level of swagger and moxie that demands admiration and attention.

Gianfranco has the final laugh on people like me, the wine critic, who is left scratching her head after sampling his product. You may not like the lyrics, but it becomes that song on continual loop in your brain.

I am smitten by Puglia's red wine attitude. It is fresh, prideful and mindful of tradition. Puglia's portfolio offers super jammy and intense wines like Fino's Es, but it also exhibits a rise in excellent wines made from the decidedly more delicate and demure Uva di Troia grape. The stylistic range today is richer and more nuanced than I ever remember from the past.

Territorial Identity

According to regional officials, Puglia's wine map sees five distinct regions. They are: Daunia, Murge, Itria Valley, Magna Grecia and Salento. These five divisions represent a new way of looking at Puglia that was previously segmented into the "Castel del Monte" wine region in the north and "Salento" in the south. As the Puglia wine identity grows in scope, so do the details on its oenological map.

The Daunia is the far north of Puglia at the border of Campania, Basilicata and Molise. A continental climate is influenced by winds from the Balkans and sees colder winters and very hot summers. The soils are well-draining and deep. This area is home to a large collection of indigenous grapes including Bombino Bianco, Malvasia Bianca, Trebbiano, Nero di Troia, Montepulciano and Aglianico. One of the most interesting appellations here is Cacc'e mmitte di Lucera that takes its odd name from a dialectal expression for "pressing grapes quickly." The Murge is further south near the region of Basilicata. It is divided into three subzones including Murgia Alta, Castel del Monte and Trani. Murge's star grape variety is Nero di Troia, a main component in the Castel del Monte appellation. This is steadily becoming one of the most interesting in Puglia. Other grapes include Bombino Nero, Aglianico, Montepulciano, Greco and Moscato (for Moscato di Trani dessert wines).

The Itria Valley is the most picturesque region thanks to the cone-shaped *trulli* dwellings that populate the landscape. Limestone and calcareous soils prevail and this region offers higher-altitude vineyards on the Itria plateau that range from 350 to 420 meters above sea level. There are sharper diurnal temperature shifts here for more elegant fruit ripening. The main appellations here are Martina Franca, Locorotondo, Ostuni and Gioia del Colle.

The Magna Grecia segment of Puglia refers to the Ionian seashore near the city of Taranto. This is the natural home of the mighty Primitivo grape and the main appellation here is Primitivo di Manduria. The grape gets its name from the word *primo*, or "first." It is the first to ripen and the first to produce high-alcohol wines. This area of Puglia sees countless pre-phyloxera alberello vines that are still in full production.

The last of the five subzones is the Salento in the deep south of Puglia. This area is home to enormous production and there are 11 appellations located here including Copertino, Galatina, Nardò, Salice Salentino and Squinzano. Soils are iron-rich and red in color and the two main grapes planted here are Negroamaro and Malvasia Nera. Primitivo and Susumaniello are also present. In terms of white grapes, Salento is home to Malvasia Bianca, Verdea and Fiano.

Recent Vintages

Like elsewhere in Italy, the 2014 vintage was very difficult. Humid conditions and fluctuating temperatures set the conditions for downy mildew and other fungal issues. Puglia doesn't have a ripening problem, so fruit came to maturity. But many producers lost yields due to disease. The 2013 vintage showed fewer climatic extremes with a moderately cool summer and a long growing season. I found the wines of 2013 to show good acidity and

bright fruit flavors. This is not the case with the 2012 and 2011 vintages that were both very hot in comparison. Both years saw elevated summer temperatures and there are obvious jammy tones in many of the wines. The 2011 vintage definitely stands out for the super-ripe quality of its fruit. Harvest times came early, sugars are high and so is the alcohol in the wine.