

# CAMPANIA: a closer look

Drawing on this year's Campania Stories event, **Aldo Fiordelli** examines the region's development across vintages and varieties, sharing 30 wines that showcase its diversity

**T**here is a variety of red fig from the Irpinian village of San Mango sul Calore, one that is an autumnal delicacy. It is late ripening compared to other figs, which tend to be consumed across the Mediterranean in July and August. But Irpinia – a sub-region of Campania in southern Italy located 400m-700m above sea level, with 1,300mm of rainfall per year – has a climate that can be defined as 'mountain Mediterranean'. It explains just how much the altitude influences agriculture and viticulture: grapes as well as figs are late ripening.

Here, in the warm 2020 vintage, the Aglianico grape started veraison (the beginning of the ripening process) around 2 September – more than one month later than most red varieties planted across Italy. The harvest typically lasts through to the middle of November, and at times even longer.

Aglianico has one of the longest growing seasons, stretching far beyond the 100-day norm. It is just one of the 35-40 indigenous grapes planted throughout the region – a single but significant example of the originality of Campania – alongside Falanghina, Fiano and Greco, and lesser-known Casavecchia, Ginestra, Pallagrello, Piediroso, Ripoli and more (see p78 for Susan Hulme MW on the grapes of southern Italy). The region harbours a fascinating identity which encapsulates a variety of climates, grapes and styles produced in small volumes, offering wine consumers an unmatched opportunity.

According to Italian agricultural agency AGEA's SIAN database, in 2018 Campania produced just 2.53% of Italian wine. It is 'a thumbnail of Italian viticulture', as journalist Luciano Pignataro suggested while speaking at Campania Stories, held in September 2020 at the archaeological site of Paestum in Salerno. This relatively new annual event brings together industry professionals and producers to explore trends, exchange thoughts, visit different appellations and taste new releases – all to get a closer look at the 'thumbnail' of Italy that Campania provides.

## Vintages: delving deeper

The 2019 vintage began with a moderate winter, as has become common in the last few



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years, and a cool, rainy spring that curbed vegetative growth. Flowering started 10-15 days later, and the fruit-set was irregular, with a lot of millerandage. The summer was more archetypal, with windows of hot sub-Saharan temperatures intertwined with Azores anticyclones. It was completely dry with the exception of some beneficial rainfall in the final days of July. The autumn was warm, above average, with cool nights favouring the phenolic ripeness of red grapes. The harvest started more or less on time, just one week later than usual. All in all, it was a very good vintage, yet with yields 20% lower than 2018.

The 2018 vintage produced fresh, enjoyable wines, less concentrated than in 2019. White Falanghina was penalised by this lighter vintage, as was Greco, which made firm wines in more than one case. Fiano performed well in both vintages, developing more richness in 2019. Falanghina recovered a bit of concentration in warmer areas such as Sannio, Cilento and the inland of Salerno, whereas Fiano tended to get a bit soft and exotic.

In Irpinia, 2019's warmth was definitely more beneficial for the aggressive acidity of Greco, giving it more balance sooner, whereas the region's cooler conditions in 2018 resulted in more tension and greater balance, allowing for superior quality on the overall spectrum. In my opinion, Greco and Fiano are too often slightly phenolic, which can be helpful for ageing but not as promising for elegance.

## Ageing gracefully

All of the whites tasted at this year's Campania Stories had benefited from longer bottle ageing, considering the event was held in September instead of April due to the lockdown. This suggests that these wines are worth holding on to, with the aim of refining their structure and increasing their aromatic complexity.

In terms of red wines built for the long haul, such as Taurasi, the latest vintages presented were the warm and fat 2015 and the 2016, characterised by drastically lower yields due to spring frost. Feudi di San Gregorio steadily remains the area's leading producer. Estate chairman Antonio Capaldo and winemaker Pierpaolo Sirch are working on a detailed map of their crus within Irpinia, bottling single vineyards under the Feudi Studi label.





Castelfranci and Montemarano are two of the top areas producing wines for the long haul, demonstrated by Feudi, Cantine Delite, Canonico & Santoli and Villa Raiano. In comparison, Aglianico from the village of Taurasi to the northwest tends to be more approachable. Villages such as Paternopoli and Luogosano produce Taurasi wines that sit in the middle of these two extremes.

### **Grape progress**

Aglianico is at the centre of an intriguing style revitalisation, a winemaking revolution of sorts. A few years ago it was nearly impossible to drink young Aglianico, whereas at the September event I enjoyed some delicious 2018s, thanks to the combination of lighter extraction and a more approachable vintage.

In the past few years, the crunchy style of noted producers such as Giovanni Ascione (Nanni Copè) has established a different way to tame the mechanical bull ride that is the Aglianico grape, as have producers such as Barbot in Irpinia and Galardi in Alto Casertano. A lighter and more fruit-forward style is exemplified by the fresh 2014 vintage, now ready to drink. Top examples here are Perillo and Cavalier Pepe.

## ‘Aglianico is at the centre of an intriguing style revitalisation, a winemaking revolution of sorts’

However, with respect to Aglianico, there are other red grapes deserving of a closer look too, among them Piediroso (*see p83*). Often considered an easy-drinking wine for mass marketing, Piediroso is a gem for lovers of lighter-bodied, Pinot Noir-esque wines, its old vines capable of producing great results and varying styles. There is a huge difference between the coloured, concentrated Piediroso from Taburno and that of Campi Flegrei’s flat sandy soils. In Campi Flegrei, for example, Cantine del Mare produces a stunning Piediroso full of smoky minerality and a distinct iodine character.

Such discoveries summarise the charm of Campania: a region that’s not easy to understand, often varied in terms of styles and, fortunately, far from conventional, where a pioneering spirit is alive and well. ➤

**Above: Marisa Cuomo’s coastal vineyards**



**Rocca del Principe, Tognano, Fiano di Avellino 2017** 89

£24.28 (2016) **Justerini & Brooks**

From an estate in Lapio. The Tognano cru is located on volcanic and clay soils. This wine undergoes longer ageing compared to the classic DOP bottling, released after 12 months in stainless steel on the lees. Full of mineral character and well-defined, struck-match aromas, then a vibrant palate with peach and lifted seaweed persistence. **Drink** 2021-2023 **Alc** 13%

**Villa Raiano, Ventidue, Fiano di Avellino 2019** 89

£17.69-£19.40 (2017) **All About Wine, Kwoff, North & South**

A tight wine with a phenolic profile of ripe yellow apple, angelica and straw, then a crisp, stone fruit flavour. Lean, with a simple profile, it displays a good grapefruit finish which invites you to drink another glass. A wine with good personality and character. **Drink** 2021-2023 **Alc** 13%

**Cantine del Mare, Terra del Padre Riserva, Campi Flegrei 2017** 96

N/A UK [www.cantinedelmare.it](http://www.cantinedelmare.it)

From a coastal 11ha estate. The sandy soil welcomes pre-phylloxera 120-year-old Piedirosso vines trained between trees using an ancient system called 'alberata', still helpful in achieving good Piedirosso yields. Fermented and aged in oak, the wine boasts an iodine, dried-seaweed and smoky character over elegant strawberry fruit with liquorice and black pepper. Savoury, with a hint of olives, a firm palate, a creamy, ripe finish and refreshing acidity. A gem for Pinot Noir lovers. **Drink** 2021-2030 **Alc** 13.5%

**④ Borgodangelo, Riserva, Taurasi 2013** 95

N/A UK [www.borgodangelo.it](http://www.borgodangelo.it)

An intoxicating nose of incense, wild blackberry and chocolate is supported by firm tannins and acidity on the tight, ripe palate. The tension doesn't overwhelm the suppleness of fruit, and the finish of salted cioccolato di Modica is amazing. Not surprisingly, this is from the 2013 vintage, rich in tension and structure at the cost of softness. Aged for 24 months in large oak vessels before a year of bottle ageing. Austere, precise. **Drink** 2021-2035 **Alc** 15%

**⑤ Delite, Pentamerone, Taurasi 2012** 95

N/A UK [www.cantinedelite.it](http://www.cantinedelite.it)

From a 5.5ha estate with vineyards mostly situated in Montemarano at 500m-600m.

Along with Castelfranci, this is one of the villages producing the most powerful Taurasis. Phenolic ripeness was a challenge in warm 2012, but altitude and the age of the vines allowed for a wine full of depth, from mint chocolate and cassia to notes of tar. Concentrated yet elegant; velvety tannins and firm acidity balance the alcohol. The finish is a bit volatile, but overall there's no sign of premature evolution. **Drink** 2021-2035 **Alc** 15%

**⑥ Galardi, Terra di Lavoro 2017** 95

£35-£40 (ib, 2016) **Cru, Westgarth Wines, Wineye**

A flagship Campanian red, this Aglianico (80%) and Piedirosso (20%) blend is from Alto Casertano on volcanic soils with western exposure. At 450m, the altitude is crucial in this warmer climate compared to Irpinia. The hot 2017 vintage was interpreted in an outstanding way, with a fruity nose full of Mediterranean herbs, plus crunchy fruits on the palate. Firm yet ripe tannins and refreshing acidity give great balance to the dense, velvety fruit, with a cioccolato di Modica finish. Delicious to drink now, with potential for the long haul. **Drink** 2021-2035 **Alc** 14.5%

**Perillo, Taurasi 2010** 95

£42 (2009) **Vinissimus**

Perillo presented the oldest wine of the 2020 Campania Stories event with this 2010 Taurasi. In Castelfranci, one of the highest villages of Irpinia, the Baiano vineyard is the source of this outstanding wine. A rethinking of Aglianico identity, it's dense garnet in the glass, full of fresh wild-strawberry aromas with earthy tones of boiled beetroot, smoky woodland and tar. If the red-fruit character is fairly atypical for Aglianico, the fresh profile is supported by chewy, ripe tannins and firm acidity, with a toasty character from small oak barrels. The savoury finish is amazing. A more elegant style of Aglianico, thanks to the altitude, the vintage and modern winemaking. **Drink** 2021-2030 **Alc** 14.5%

**⑦ Canonico & Santoli, Hirpus Aglianico, Irpinia 2015** 94

N/A UK <http://lnx.canonicoesantoli.it>

From grapes harvested in the last days of October, this is relatively light in alcohol and gently handled, with fermentation and ageing in 50% stainless steel and 50% second-fill barrels. The wine is restrained and concentrated, with good definition of blackberry, wild fruits, black pepper and vibrant earthy minerality on a dense



palate. Firm in tannin and acid, it has fine mid-palate extraction, no unnecessary oak structure and a good tobacco and fruit finish. **Drink** 2021-2035 **Alc** 13%

**Contrada Salandra, Piedirosso, Campi Flegrei 2017** 94

N/A UK [@contradasalandra](mailto:contradasalandra)

Ex-engineer Giuseppe Fortunato is dedicated to a scientific as well as natural approach in his vineyards. He replants with his own vines and works mostly with Piedirosso and Falanghina, preferring to age the wines a bit longer than is typical. This Piedirosso is very pale ruby in colour with an intense smoky character, full of earthy strawberry notes and black pepper. It shines due to its silky palate and crisp acidity, with graceful concentration and a chalky finish. Amazing elegance and drinkability. **Drink** 2021-2025 **Alc** 13%

**Delite, Nonna Seppa, Irpinia Campi Taurasini 2013** 94

N/A UK [www.cantinedelite.it](http://www.cantinedelite.it)

The combination of a tight vintage with mostly clay soils has produced a powerful wine with bright blackberry and defined wild berries, emerging from a restrained nose with a savoury and mineral style. Intense and clean, cigar-box and dark-chocolate scents complete the picture, announcing a dense, velvety, ripe palate with refreshing acidity and great suppleness. It doesn't lack mid-palate extraction and is dark and ripe on the fruity finish, not without some austerity. An Aglianico with quintessential complexity. **Drink** 2021-2030 **Alc** 15% ➤



# Fiordelli's top 30 Campanian wines

## ① **Ettore Sammarco, Vigna Grotta Piana, Costa d'Amalfi 2019** 94

N/A UK [www.ettoresammarco.it](http://www.ettoresammarco.it)

Based in Ravello, overlooking the Amalfi coastline, the soil here is sand and clay of volcanic origin. A quintessential blend of indigenous character – Ginestrella, Biancolella and Falanghina – this wine is partially fermented and aged in oak. Straw-coloured in the glass, it has a cedar aroma and flavour, with subtle oak supported by zesty and vibrant fruits. Silky and full of savouriness: a white wine to wait for in order to enjoy all its salty minerality, complexity and integrated oak that will come with age. A gem. **Drink** 2021-2025 **Alcohol** 13.5%

## ② **Vesevo, Greco di Tufo 2019** 94

£14.95-£15.99 Exel, Liberty Wines, Symposium Wine Emporium, The Wine Reserve, Valvona & Crolla

Without any particularly ambitious winemaking, this is expressive and rich. The 2019 vintage, firmness of the grape and graceful extraction of phenolics give a wine full of nuance and tension. Defined aromas of rosemary, lemon peel and sage, plus grapefruit and ripe pear, are supported by zesty acidity amazingly integrated with the fruit. Stands out for its savoury finish. **Drink** 2021-2023 **Alc** 13.5%

## **Contrada Salandra, Falanghina, Campi Flegrei 2018** 93

N/A UK [@contradasalandra](mailto:@contradasalandra)

The steepest vineyards of Giuseppe Fortunato over Campi Flegrei give his Falanghina a graceful tension and definition, while longer ageing brings more weight and balance. If the 2017 appears too lean and a bit simplistic, possibly from an early harvest, the 2018 has a more complete profile: white melon, grapefruit and honey richness. It's vibrant on the palate, with a full weight and tingling freshness due to a low pH, typical of this variety. **Drink** 2021-2023 **Alc** 13%

## **Di Meo, Fiano di Avellino 2019** 93

N/A UK [www.dimeo.it](http://www.dimeo.it)

From Salza Irpina at 520m, the grapes for this wine are harvested by hand and fermented in stainless steel. The wine is then aged for three months on fine lees. It has a marine nose with lemon, smoky depth and Mirabelle aromas and flavours. Great concentration, good balance of vibrancy and silkiness, and long, bright acidity, finishing with savoury, toasty Fiano flavours. **Drink** 2021-2025 **Alc** 13%

## ③ **Marisa Cuomo, Fiorduva, Costa d'Amalfi 2018** 93

£70-£73 (ib) Cru, Wineye

In 2018, the opulent style of Fiorduva Furore is, if possible, riper than usual. Late harvested, the grapes Ripoli (40%), Ginestra (30%) and Fenile (30%) are very rich, showing the minerality of this coastal range's dolomitic soils. Gold in the glass, it has a kind of bittersweet character, with dried apricot and candy floss. Lemony and zesty in the mouth, with a tight palate and almost aggressive acidity that's integrated with the fruit. The amazing length is shared by toasty oak and the iodine character of the grapes. **Drink** 2021-2022 **Alc** 14%

## **Tenuta del Meriggio, Fiano di Avellino 2019** 93

£20.20 Tannico

The 2019 vintage, richer than the 2018, combines with the inherent grace of Fiano to produce refined whites such as this. Aromas of straw, olives and lemon emerge, with a chewy malic palate integrated with mid-palate weight and fruit. Zesty with savoury length, good for food pairings such as spaghetti with clams. **Drink** 2021-2025 **Alc** 13.5%

## **Mila Vuolo, 2mila18, Colli di Salerno 2018** 92

N/A UK +39 089 282178

Fruit from the warmer Salerno hills undergoes malolactic fermentation and longer lees ageing of nine months, giving the wine an extraordinary weight and richness. A very restrained nose of crusty bread, grapefruit and lemon is perhaps a bit rustic, but the wine is full and weighty with a silky texture and refreshing acidity. Delicate and a bit warming on the palate, it finishes with a typical, rich marzipan finish. Slightly oxidative, complex and long. **Drink** 2021-2025 **Alc** 13%

## **Mustilli, Falanghina del Sannio 2019** 92

N/A UK [www.mustilli.com](http://www.mustilli.com)

Mustilli is one of the best producers from Sannio, and one of the oldest. Consistency is impressive by local standards, and this 2019 Falanghina has a restrained style with smoky, citrus aromas and sulphur minerality on the nose, followed in the mouth by white pepper and peach flavours. Zesty and savoury, not without weight, it's a great example of Sannio Falanghina. **Drink** 2021-2024 **Alc** 13%

## **Viticoltori Polito, Riva, Cilento 2017** 91

£17.99 Amazon UK

From clay-calcareous soils at 360m in Torchiara, Cilento, Carlo Polito produced a very good Fiano in 2017 with longer ageing, 10% fermented in oak. Toasty on the nose, it has firecracker minerality followed by a savoury seaweed character. The palate is silky, full of tension, not phenolic and very well made. The finish features petrol notes well integrated with stone fruit. **Drink** 2021-2025 **Alc** 13%

## **Di Marzo, Greco di Tufo 2019** 90

£16.50 (2018) Bat and Bottle

Made with Vincenzo Mercurio, a leading wine consultant in Irpinia, this is from the chalky and clay soils of San Paolo, Santa Lucia and Tufo. Aged on the fine lees for six months, its nose is elegant, with a lemon-peel scent and slightly smoky depth. Very polite: smoky on the palate too, but well integrated with Mirabelle and peach notes. Chewy, mid-weight, savoury, and there's some phenolic grip on the finish. **Drink** 2021-2030 **Alc** 13%





**Feudi di San Gregorio, Taurasi 2015** 94  
£21.60-£23.75 Corking Wines, Exel, Hallgarten Wines, Hic, Wine Poole

This blend from different plots in the warm 2015 vintage is classic Taurasi. Aged for 18 months in French oak barrels after two weeks of fermentation and maceration in stainless steel, this Aglianico has an elegant nose of coconut, blackberry, raspberry and sweet tobacco. On the palate, the fruit shows all its maturity, with grainy, crunchy tannins, firm acidity and a straw finish. **Drink** 2021-2035 **Alc** 14%

**Mila Vuolo, 2mila15, Colli di Salerno 2015** 94  
N/A UK +39 089 282178

The red-grape harvest here, at 200m on clay and limestone soils, occurs about a month earlier than in Irpinia. This wine is fermented in stainless steel, aged in barriques for 24 months, then blended in stainless steel before two years of bottle ageing. Toasty notes of coffee, leather, earthy cassis, blond tobacco and salted cioccolato di Modica. Complex, deep, broad and relaxing on the palate, with rustic tannins and a chewy finish. Funky notes do not penalise the wine's quality, in my opinion, but contribute to its authenticity. **Drink** 2021-2030 **Alc** 14.5%

**Feudi di San Gregorio, Serpico, Irpinia Aglianico 2014** 93

£40.10-£41.20 (2013) Corking Wines, Exel  
From the historic Dal Re vineyard with 100-year-old vines at 350m-400m, this doesn't disappoint, even in a cool vintage.

Restrained cassis and milk chocolate, with crafted tannins, firm acidity and a sweet tobacco finish. The palate is tight yet balanced by fruit and alcohol. A precise wine that will age well even without huge concentration. **Drink** 2021-2024 **Alc** 14%

**Regina Collis, Hircinus, Taurasi 2014** 93  
N/A UK [www.reginacollis.it](http://www.reginacollis.it)

Mariaregina Tecce farms 5ha, mostly in Paternopoli. This classic-style Aglianico is fermented in stainless steel and aged in big oak vessels for 36 months, then spends 10 months in stainless steel. It's deep in mineral notes, with restrained cassis, graphite and ripe tannins. Firm yet velvety, with austere acidity integrated with bright blackberry fruit – expressive of the 2014 vintage. Smoky finish. A complex wine for the long haul. **Drink** 2021-2030 **Alc** 14%

**Sclavia, Montecardillo Pallagrello Nero, Terre del Volturno 2019** 92

N/A UK [www.sclavia.com](http://www.sclavia.com)  
A crunchy wine from Pallagrello grown in Volturno at 500m on partially volcanic soil. Grapes are fermented in stainless steel and aged in oak barrels for six months. It's full of cinnamon with focused cassis fruit and almond-paste hints. Firm yet crunchy with high extraction, brilliant acidity and an austere finish due to its youth. Very nice with pizza. **Drink** 2021-2024 **Alc** 12.5%

**Stefania Barbot, Ion, Irpinia Campi Taurasini 2017** 92

£27.15 Tannico  
The fragrant fruit of Ion adds interest to

this Aglianico from Paternopoli. After 25 days of fermentation and maceration in stainless steel, the wine ages for 24 months without oak. Its only defect is its high alcohol, but it's well balanced by crisp acidity, and the tannins are very ripe. Focused on fresh fruit, it's an enjoyable Aglianico. **Drink** 2021-2027 **Alc** 15.5%

**Pietracupa, Taurasi 2015** 90

£45.25 (2014) Handford, Highbury Library, Sociovino

This comes from Torre Le Nocelle on clay-calcareous soil. The vines are relatively young, but the wine's ripeness and extraction are balanced. The oak ageing in big vessels is respectful of the fruit. Intense, full of Mediterranean herbs, fresh wild fruits and earthy tones. The style is fairly reductive in a good way, with a clean palate, ripe tannins and refreshing natural acidity. **Drink** 2021-2035 **Alc** 13%

**Villa Raiano, Taurasi 2015** 90


£20-£28.90 (2014) All About Wine, Butlers Wine Cellar, Hedonism, Kwoff, Noble Green, The Wine Loft, T Wright

Castelfranci is one of the best villages for Taurasi due to its altitude and yellow marne soils. This has a typical dark profile with blackberry notes, layered with violet aromas. Velvety, slightly peppery palate; shows less extraction than some Taurasis. Balanced acid and good suppleness. Aged in oak, stainless steel and bottle for 12 months each. **Drink** 2021-2030 **Alc** 14%

**Salvatore Martusciello, Settevulcani Piediroso, Campi Flegrei 2018** 88

N/A UK [www.salvatoremartusciello.it](http://www.salvatoremartusciello.it)  
This Piediroso stands out for its elegance and drinkability. Pale purplish, with aromatic rosemary, strawberry, green pepper and pink rose. Slightly smoky on the palate, juicy with light tannins and long, delicate acidity. Despite its lightness, it shows elegant 'pinosity' and savoury length. **Drink** 2021-2025 **Alc** 12.5%

**Tenuta Cavalier Pepe, Santo Stefano, Irpinia Campi Taurasini 2015** 88

N/A UK [www.tenutapepe.it](http://www.tenutapepe.it)  
This has great definition and suppleness thanks to its style and vintage. It's clean and precise, aged for 12 months in barrels and 24 months in concrete tanks. Intense blackberry fruits are followed by a peppery palate and chalky finish. Light extraction and a chewy character, more supple than hard. A different expression of Aglianico. **Drink** 2021-2025 **Alc** 14% 



Regina Collis, Taurasi