

The Story Of A Family Business

An Interview with Alberto Tasca, Owner, Tasca d'Almerita

EDITORS' NOTE *Alberto Tasca is the owner of Tasca d'Almerita, one of the Sicilian wineries leading the island viticulture and wine-making Renaissance. Tasca is also the Chairman of SOSustain Sicily, an initiative which promotes ethical and sustainable development in the Sicilian wine sector, accompanying and directing wineries towards the constant measurement and reduction of the impact that agricultural practices have on the territory.*



Alberto Tasca

WINERY BRIEF *For eight generations and nearly 200 years, the Tasca d'Almerita family has spear-headed Sicilian agriculture and winemaking through passion, innovation, and perseverance, emphasizing minimal winemaking intervention to preserve individual varietal characteristics. The winery (tascadalmerita.it) owns five different estates all over the island – from Tenuta Regaleali, a green oasis in the center of Sicily in the county of Sclafani, to Tenuta Tascante on the slopes of Mount Etna, from Tenuta di Capofaro whose Malvasia vineyards overlook the sea, to Sallier de La Tour Estate near Palermo where they focus on Syrah, along with a very unique project, that of the Whitaker project on the island of Mozia, where vineyards are located within an archeological park.*

Will you discuss the history of Tasca d'Almerita?

The story of the Tasca d'Almerita family is written in the land they cultivate, guard, and have passed down for eight generations. It is the story of a family business, projected into the future, an interpreter of that combination of quality and identity that has led Sicily to be recognized as one of the most fascinating and varied wine regions in the world.

Everything began in 1830 at Regaleali, from the Arabic “Rahl Ali” (Ali’s farmhouse), 1200 hectares in the heart of Sicily on the border between the province of Palermo and that of Caltanissetta. Here the impact of the landscape stuns and excites, among lakes and fields of wheat and olive trees, and today Tenuta Regaleali has an extension of almost 600 hectares with 12 different types of soils, 6 hills located between 450 and 900 meters above sea level, and is understood as “an island” in itself, a real monopoly, a unique territory in the Sicilian wine scene. It was here that at the end of the '70s, Count Giuseppe Tasca d'Almerita first demonstrated, with the Rosso del Conte, that Sicily could

produce wines of international level, able to compete with the best vintages from Europe and the New World.

Then it was Lucio Tasca’s turn, who with his vision experimented with the first international varieties, tracing a path then followed by many. In 2001, Lucio’s son, Alberto, continued in the furrow of his father’s experience preserving the spirit for research and quality with a passion for innovation that the family has in itself and a strong attention to sustainability. With a clear agricultural and wine project, in search of the most

suitable native varieties and in order to enhance the territories in their uniqueness, and with a look towards an increasingly sustainable future, over the years four other estates have been added, selected and desired for their pedoclimatic characteristics, and because each one carries its own identity and distinctive oenological vocation.

Tasca d'Almerita was also one of the founding fathers of SOSustain, the first program in Italy for sustainability in the wine sector, which provides for respect for a series of 360-degree sustainability requirements. This commitment led Tasca d'Almerita to receive the award as “European Winery of the Year” from *Wine Enthusiast* and the prestigious Green Emblem from Robert Parker Wine Advocate. In 2023, Tasca d'Almerita, already a Benefit company, obtained the B Corp certification, becoming part of a global movement of companies that respect high standards of social and environmental impact.

Will you provide an overview of Tasca d'Almerita estates and wines?

At Regaleali Estate, an altitude that goes from 350 to 900 meters, the particular climatic conditions and the great variety of different areas for micro-climate, soil composition, and exposure allow a full expressiveness to many vines elsewhere not suitable for the warm viticulture of the island. The white wines offer a wide aromatic spectrum, accompanied by an unusual freshness and brightness in Sicilian production. The red wines are full and fruity, but anything but soft or alcoholic – on the contrary, they are supported by a robust acidic and tannic backbone which makes them long-lived like few other island wines. The characters of the classic grapes of the island – cataratto, inzolia, grillo, perricone, nero d'Avola – are enhanced and shaped in directions unknown to the rest of the region; those of international varieties – cabernet sauvignon, chardonnay – take on



original aromatic and taste nuances. The Regaleali Estate has always been appreciated as a model company for the continuous experiments, for the ability to introduce innovative cultivation and winemaking techniques, for having been able to introduce international varieties, while at the same time for the careful enhancement of native vines.

At the Tascante Estate, on Etna, on the eastern coast of Sicily, everything exudes magnetism. It's a place where the rich history, the vibrant nature, and the profound cultural heritage come together to create a truly captivating atmosphere. More than 200 dry-stone walls, over 100 terraces, 7 hectares of chestnut trees, and olive trees create the unique heritage of the Tascante Estate in the different areas of the Pianodario, Sciaranuova, Rampante, and Grasà districts. The history of Tasca and that of Mount Etna came together more than 10 years ago and the Tascante project (Tasca and Etna) was born. Mount Etna is a force of nature in its purest, most primordial state. In each contrada, the altitude, soil composition, exposure, and the typology and morphology of the lava tongues create four distinct scenarios. On the Tascante Estate, the native vines of Nerello Mascalese, Carricante, and Nerello Cappuccio coexist on the northern side of the mountain, between Castiglione di Sicilia and Randazzo. Each wine shows its own strong personality. Nerello Mascalese grapes tell different stories in Pianodario, Rampante, and Sciaranuova. In Sciaranuova, an old vineyard has given life to a small production called Sciaranuova “VV.”

The Capofaro Estate is located in Salina, in the Aeolian Islands, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Here one of the finest expressions of the typical wine of the area, Malvasia delle Lipari, is produced. The charm of a vineyard more than 30 years old, illuminated by the historical lighthouse on the promontory, enchanted the Tasca d'Almerita family

who in 2001 decided to buy Capofaro, replanting a large part of the vineyard, but preserving the historical plant material. Today, Tasca d'Almerita compares its vineyards to others in various fertile areas of Salina, in the upper part of Valdicliesa, and studies the expressiveness of Malvasia on another island, nearby Vulcano, from which "Vigna di Paola" was born. Relais & Châteaux, the organization that brings together 580 of the most prestigious properties and hotels in the world, has awarded the 2020 "Sustainability Trophy" to Capofaro Locanda and Malvasia. This victory recognizes the Tasca d'Almerita family's great commitment to reducing its impact on the environment, and to stimulating knowledge and awareness in the local community in terms of sustainability and protection of natural resources and the sea.

The Sallier de La Tour Estate is located in Alto Belice, a few kilometers from Palermo, in the Monreale DOC wine area. The Estate belonged to the Sallier de La Tour family, Princes of Camporeale, since the mid-nineteenth century. The La Monaca winery was built in 1909 and takes its name from the hill behind the Estate. The soil is fertile, mostly clayey, with the presence of limestone, sand, and silt. The morphology of the land is gently undulating, with wide flat areas where the soils, very deep and fresh, mix with materials of alluvial origin. Numerous natural springs contribute to maintaining the vines' water reserves, making the Syrah variety perfectly suited to this area where the hot-humid microclimate and fresh soil allow the grapes to ripen constantly.

Mozia-Tasca d'Almerita | Whitaker Estate: In the 8th century B.C., the Phoenicians established a thriving settlement in Mozia. Due to its being a small island in the Stagnone di Marsala lagoon, surrounded by shallow waters, it was easy to defend against enemy attacks and offered a safe harbor for ships. Its 40 hectares of land soon became one of the richest colonies in the Mediterranean. Today, Mozia is one of the best-preserved Phoenician archaeological sites in the world. The island, still uninhabited today, boasts a microclimate in which the Grillo grape expresses all its vital force. The vineyard is in a beautiful location, surrounded by archaeological sites and near a salty pond, a place where the vine has long played an essential role. Here the destinies of two

families – the Whitakers and the Tasca d'Almerita – have intertwined in a unique ecosystem, where the charm of archaeology accompanies a wine rich in history. In 2007, the Whitaker Foundation entrusted Tasca d'Almerita with a project for the promotion and restoration of the historic vineyards of Grillo on the island of Mozia, with the ambitious idea of bringing the "Wine of the Phoenicians" back to life. Today, in Mozia, 12.7 hectares of vineyards are in production in a place that has neither electricity nor fresh water for irrigation; in fact, it is in the middle of a salty pond among the windiest in the Mediterranean.

Will you discuss Tasca d'Almerita's commitment to sustainability?

Tasca d'Almerita is a family agricultural company that has always dedicated the same attention and care to the land as it does to a family member. Since 1830, even before sustainability became a trend, Tasca was a company with a strong orientation towards sustainability. What does it mean? It has always chosen not to use chemical agents that could be harmful to the environment, to the soil, but also to the workers and the surrounding territory. It has always favored manual labor, non-harmful defense methods, such as the use of organic fertilizers, green manure with legumes, etc. Since 2010, thanks to SOSustain, a sustainability program for Sicilian viticulture recognized by the Ministry of the Environment, Tasca has started a scientific path that allows to measure and reduce the impact of our activities in the vineyard, in the cellar and throughout the organization. The SOSustain regulation is based on 10 minimum sustainability requirements that wineries must have to obtain certification, by an independent third party, and to use the SOSustain brand. Among these requirements is also the calculation of the four indicators of VIVA, the sustainability program in viticulture promoted by the Ministry of the Environment: Water, Air, Vineyard, and Territory. SOSustain starts from the assumption that the impacts of agricultural activities go beyond the boundaries of the fields that are cultivated, as they also concern the well-being of workers and the health of consumers, the involvement of local communities, the enhancement of the surrounding territory, and the conservation of natural resources. For this reason, the aspects that are taken into consideration by the regulation are multiple and range from the measurement of water consumption and the carbon footprint to the control of the weight of the bottle; from the measurement of flora-fauna biodiversity to the enhancement of territorial capital; from the measurement and reduction of energy consumption to the evaluation of the health of farmers and consumers.

Thanks to SOSustain, Tasca d'Almerita has reduced its impact in many areas. All concrete measures implemented in terms of environmental and social responsibility are contained in our Sustainability Report, a document that many wineries

are now creating, but which Tasca d'Almerita has been voluntarily producing for 12 years. The goal is to show, through scientific data, the winery's progress as well as areas for improvement.

The 12th edition of the Sustainability Report, in reference to 2022, is available to download from our website, www.tascadalmerita.it. The key elements of the document are defined as "the ten ingredients of sustainability" and are based on the requirements defined by the SOSustain and VIVA programs. Some of the most significant results from last year are the following:

- In terms of biodiversity protection, Tasca d'Almerita has dedicated 71 percent of the total land area of the estates to viticulture, while 29 percent is dedicated to pastures, arable land, olive groves, woods, lakes, streams, and uncultivated areas. In 2022, there was a 7.55 percent increase in natural areas compared to 2020.

- Since 2016, Tasca d'Almerita has calculated the VIVA program's indices on a company scale: Carbon Footprint, Water Footprint, Vineyard, and Territory. It met all the program's requirements, including saving 6,193,000 liters of water compared to 2017 numbers.

- At every Tenuta, the consumption of electricity per liter of wine processed remained lower than the limit defined by SOSustain Regulations. Compared to 2017, 609,170 kW of electricity was saved thanks to the use of solar panels.

- To help reduce emissions, 32 percent more bottles are a lighter weight than in 2020, well below the SOSustain benchmark.

- The absence of herbicides, the use of recyclable and environmentally friendly materials in the vineyard, the total absence of residue in the wines, and a sulfite content lower than the limits set by organic farming have also been confirmed.

- The grapes are grown locally, and 50 percent of the suppliers of raw materials for wine production are located in Sicily, supporting the local community and reducing transportation emissions.

- A reduction of 754 tons of CO2 emitted into the atmosphere from 2016 to 2023.

- The impact of Tasca's integrated defense strategy on the environment, farmers, and consumers is either lower or equivalent to what would be achieved with an organic defense approach.

In 2023, Tasca d'Almerita became a certified B Corp company. Tasca d'Almerita is the first Sicilian winery to achieve this milestone, recognizing a great commitment to the development of sustainable viticulture which is mindful of the planet and the community. This is a significant achievement, since the standards adopted by B Corp are today considered to be the strictest worldwide: out of more than 240,000 companies that underwent the B Impact Assessment – the evaluation process necessary to become a B Corp – only 3 percent has obtained certification from the international organization B Lab. With this recognition, Tasca d'Almerita, formerly a Società Benefit, has officially become part of a global movement of companies committed to a fair and regenerative economy which restores value to the environment and society. ●



Tasca d'Almerita in Sicily, Italy