

IL NUMERO DUE
CAFFÈ ITALIA



Federico Graziani & I Vigneri di Salvo Foti

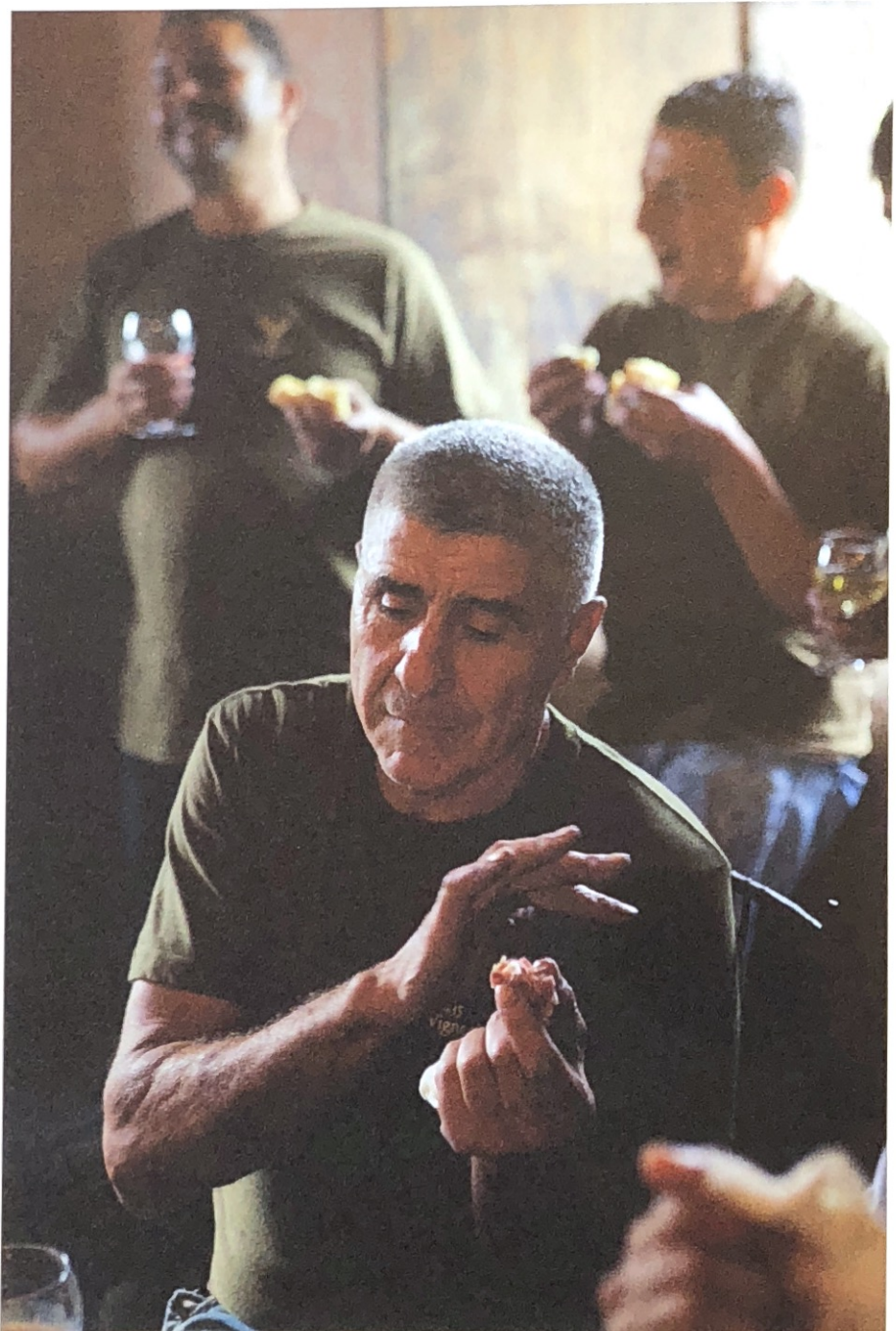
Profumo di Vulcano, Passopisciaro (Catania) Sicilia
I Vigneri 1435, Milo (Catania), Sicilia

I had been in contact with Federico Graziani for several weeks, in order to combine my arrival to his small vineyard on the northern slope of Mount Etna with the day the grapes for his *Profumo di Vulcano* were to be harvested. Coordinating the trip was a shot in the dark: I received no answer as to when I should arrive and when I finally booked a last minute flight to Catania I still was not sure I would be able to catch the harvest at the right moment. Around midnight, just after my arrival to my B&B outside Randazzo, a text message arrived:

- Dear Johanna, good news, tomorrow morning we harvest my vineyard. I will be at the bar in Passopisciaro at 6.45am. If you want to have a lie-in and arrive later, let me know.

Luckily, I woke up in time the next morning. At an altitude of 700m, in an area of blistering hot days and chilly nights, of decadent aristocratic palaces and of profound agricultural knowledge, Federico's vineyard is no more than half a hectare in total and it was all harvested by 8.30am

With Federico Graziani, I realised I had made an exception: he is not a "vignaiolo," a farmer of his own land. Instead, he has put his vines in wise hands; they





are taken care of by “I Vigneri 1435”, an extraordinary group of passionate wine workers lead by Salvo Foti, with Maurizio Pagano as his unofficial captain. Visionaries and hard workers. Lovers of the agricultural aspect of wine, human winemakers. “I Vigneri 1435” take their name from “Maestranza dei Vigneri” (“Winegrowers Guild”), which was established in Catania as far back as 1435 and greatly influenced the wine culture of the Etna region.

Today’s I Vigneri association is the culmination of more than 30 years of experience in Eastern Sicily, including historical, social and technical research aimed at achieving “excellence” in wine growing and producing. In their own words: “We have sought to use non-invasive methods and systems, to respect local traditions and our own ancient grape varieties as far as possible. Our aim is to avoid the damage that over-reaching ambition and egoism can cause, and our work ethic lies in the pleasure of ‘work well done’, without frenzy, in harmony with ourselves, and with all that surrounds us: environment, nature, the volcano Etna, which is so much a part of us.”

The grapes of *Profumo di Vulcano* are cultivated in a terrain of black sand and stones and, in accordance with I

Vigneri’s premises, the vines are grown ad alberello (gobelet), supported by chestnut stakes. They are on average seventy-five years old, some even centenarian, and this is a manual vineyard where everything is taken care of with the help of a mule or a motor hoe. Thanks to the age of the vines and the training system used, there is no need for irrigation.

From Passopisciaro, we head southwest along the road round Etna, to Milo, to spend the rest of the day in the Palmento of “I Vigneri 1435”. We are very lucky as we find ourselves right in the middle of an experience that most of us can only dream of – the making of their namesake wine, *I Vigneri 1435*, with techniques as old as two thousand years and with a wine press that has been used since 1840, similar to the one described by Pliny The Elder (23-79AD) and identically depicted in Pompeian frescoes.

Some Japanese wine buyers are also lucky visitors that same day, they are tasting the range of I Vigneri wines. One of them asks Salvo Foti: “What is your philosophy?” He smiles – you can see the only thing he wants to do is to go back inside and help his staff with whatever needs attention at that very moment – “I have no philosophy”, he says, “I make wine.”