

Red of the Year Palari

BY DANIELE CERNILLI

I first met Salvatore Geraci in 1980. We were in Milan in the offices of *Vini&liquori*, a magazine I wrote for at the time. He was a Sicilian foodie, an architect, and a friend of Carlo Faggi, the editor. Both of us were under 30. Salvatore went around Italy sampling restaurants and also regaled us with stories of unforgettable dinners at the Connaught in London. He dressed elegantly, unusual for someone of our age in those years. Since then, he hasn't changed much. He still loves talking about food and wine and still dresses like a Brit with jackets made to order, knit ties, white linen suits in summer and Panama hats. But since 1990, he makes his own wine in Sicily. I hadn't seen him in years, but one day he came to the old Gambero Rosso offices, triumphantly bearing two bottles of Faro Palari. "I've finally done it," he said, and we tasted that wine together. It was a little rustic, but not bad: Nerello Mascalese grapes with a little Nerello Cappuccio, cultivated in his vineyards in Santo Stefano Briga, between Messina and Taormina, from bush-trained vines a half-century old. He wasn't sure he would release the wine, so we didn't put him into the guide. Every year he came back to have me taste his wine. "I'm releasing this year," he said, but then he didn't do anything about the 1991 or 1992, giving away bottles to his friends as gifts. He skipped 1993 and with the 1994, I told him I didn't believe him any more and didn't think he'd release the wine for sale that year either. He would, he promised, and it rated *due bicchieri* in our guide. But he didn't release it that year either and I got really angry. He sent us the 1995 bottles, but didn't have the courage to come himself. We ignored the wine. Only at the last moment we slipped it into the guide because that was the year he actually put it on the market. With the next year's, the 1996 vintage, he actually won *tre bicchieri*, and since then, he's received many awards. The '98, '01 and '04 were all splendid. This year a marvelous 2005 came out, and we are recognizing it as the Red of the Year.

It is a great wine, complex and elegant, not overly concentrated or difficult to drink. Salvatore is thrilled with his accomplishment, but modest. As a well-read man, he knows there are more important things in life. But you can't drink them.

Faro 2005

Palari

località Santo Stefano Briga - contrada Barna - Messina
tel. 090630194 - www.palari.it

This is Salvatore Geraci's jewel. Thanks to this wine, he also brought life into a denomination that had been forgotten. Made from a blend of indigenous grapes, it is largely Nerello Mascalese and Cappuccio, plus Nocera, Cappuccio Tignolino, Cor'e Palumma, Acitana, Galatena, Calabrese and more, varieties that grow on the hills overlooking Messina and the Strait. The color is brilliant but not dark. The wine is subtle and elegant, not at all concentrated. Fresh red fruit, mint, licorice, citrus rind, leather on the nose. In the mouth, perfect style and delicacy. Silky progression, majestically extracted tannin, perfect acidity and an enthralling finish.



Gambero Rosso

Palari

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Tanzer

2005 Faro Palari (\$95; a blend of nerello mascalese, nerello cappuccio and other varieties): Medium-deep red. Minerally red and dark berry aromas are complicated by faded rose, dried herbs and vanilla. Fresh and juicy, with moderately ripe red fruit and herbal flavors nicely framed by harmonious acidity. Offers good texture and length, finishing with notes of herbs and iron and youthfully assertive tannins. A pretty, nicely balanced wine of considerable grace. 90. Also recommended: 2005 Rosso del Soprano Sicilia (86).