

Italy, Sicily, Etna: Introducing Idda, a New Project by Gaja and Graci

MONICA LARNER

22nd Jul 2021 | [The Wine Advocate](#) |

A volcano is introduced with a masculine pronoun in Italian, as in *il vulcano*. In Sicilian dialect, however, Mount Etna, or Europe's largest and most active volcano, is addressed with a female pronoun by those who live under her constant veiling of fine ash and dust. She is considered the "mother of all mountains" (*'a muntagna*) in Sicily, because her generous flanks embrace much of the triangular-shaped island.

Her sun-kissed location at the heart of the Mediterranean, her high elevations and her fertile soils, created over 2.5 million years of volcanic activity, provide the perfect conditions for growing chestnuts, pistachios, apples, nuts and grapevines.

Two of Italian wine's most important families, the Gaja clan based in Barbaresco and the Graci family of Catania, joined forces in 2017 to create a new wine company on Etna. They named it after the Sicilian word for "she," Idda.

"The idea came the first time we accompanied my father to see the property in Biancavilla and we overheard our vineyard manager talking with his collaborator," explains Gaia Gaja. "I heard one of the two men saying, 'I am very worried today because I don't see what she is doing; she, *idda*, I don't see what *idda* is doing.' The other one replied, 'Yes, she is very upset today.' And so I went to Alberto and said who is this 'she,' who is this *idda*?"

"Alberto explained that there is only one 'she.' She is the mountain. This fertile, maternal, but also moody and violent woman that they [the Sicilians] have to deal with for life," says Gaia. "I really liked it, and it became the name of the wine."

Alberto adds, "We thought of all the women that we have in our families, such as Gaia, Lucia, Rossana, my mother, my sister Elena. These wines take energy from these very [strong] women." With this article, it is my pleasure to formally introduce the wines of Idda. This is the first time that reviews of the entire production are being presented to an international public.



From left to right: Gaia Gaja, Elena Graci, Rossana Gaja, Alberto Graci and Giovanni Gaja are the faces behind Idda.

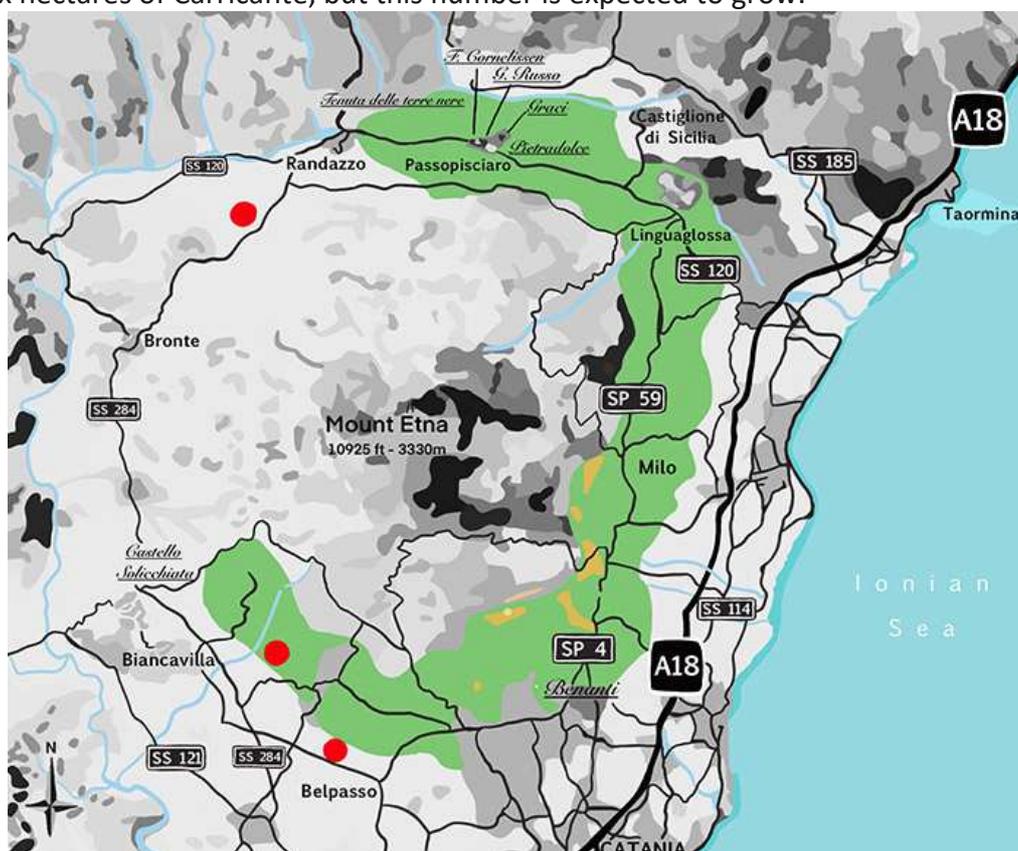
Totalling 21 hectares spread over three separate vineyard parcels, what sets Idda apart is its position on Etna's southern flank. The great majority of the wineries fueling the wild popularity of

Etna whites, rosés and reds today are found on the northern flank in a sweet spot between Randazzo and Linguaglossa.

Instead, Idda farms mainly in Biancavilla, Belpasso and a site called Tartaraci. The southern side of the volcano enjoys a long winemaking tradition and was previously home to many of Etna's largest vineyards that have since been abandoned. There is more rain in the area, and the south is historically linked to white wine production based on the Carricante grape. Average temperatures are also a bit higher and solar luminosity is plentiful. The harvest comes a bit earlier (by about 10 days on average), but total acidity is higher.

The area is known for generous and rich wines that are also more accessible.

Idda seeks to produce 90% white wine and only 10% red wine when the project is complete. At the moment, the estate makes 18,000 bottles of white and 34,000 bottles of red. It currently farms a total of six hectares of Carricante, but this number is expected to grow.



This map shows the cone of Mount Etna with the volcanic crater (measuring 3,326 meters or 10,912 feet in elevation, but of course this varies according to eruptions) in black at the middle, the Tartaraci vineyard site (or the red dot to the north) as well as the two vineyards, Biancavilla and Belpasso on the southern flank of the volcanic cone.

“My father had Etna under his skin for a long time,” says Gaia Gaja of her legendary father, Angelo Gaja, who continues his family’s winemaking legacy in Barbaresco and Barolo. He founded two Tuscan wineries, Pieve Santa Restituta in the Brunello di Montalcino appellation and Ca’ Marcanda in Bolgheri on the Tuscan coast.

“He visited Etna in the late 1990s, and it’s impossible not to be charmed by the charismatic Etna region,” she continues. “He always tells me that he remembers this big mountain, black, and the white snow on the top that looked like white fur on its shoulders. This place remained in his heart for a long time, and then he met Alberto.”



Alberto Graci (left) and Angelo Gaja

Alberto Graci and his family have been making wine on Etna since 2004. Production includes the top-shelf red Quota 1000 Barbabecchi (made with fruit harvested above 1,000 meters in altitude), as well as very interesting cru expressions of Nerello Mascalese from Feudo di Mezzo, Arcurià and Arcurià Sopra il Pozzo. However, all these wines come from the northern side of Etna, and Alberto has long been fascinated by the rich winemaking history on the southern side.

“I think the south side is very unique because it has different weather. We have very old soils. In Biancavilla, for example, the soils are 50,000 years old. This gives diversity and different personalities to the wines,” says Alberto. “What I love about Etna are these differences in personality or wines with great depth, with rustic energy and with beautiful, sweet tannins.”



Idda has two wines, a Bianco made with Carricante and an Etna Rosso based on Nerello Mascalese with a tiny blending component of Nerello Cappuccio. The 2018 Bianco was released last year, and the 2020 vintage is on the market now in Italy.

“We make two wines, a white Idda with the Carricante grape. This will be our main focus. It is a wine with a beautiful texture, density, but vibrant, savory and very mysterious to the nose, I think, with incense and a little bit smoky,” says Alberto.

“The Rosso is Nerello Mascalese and it comes from Biancavilla. It is an Etna DOC,” he adds.

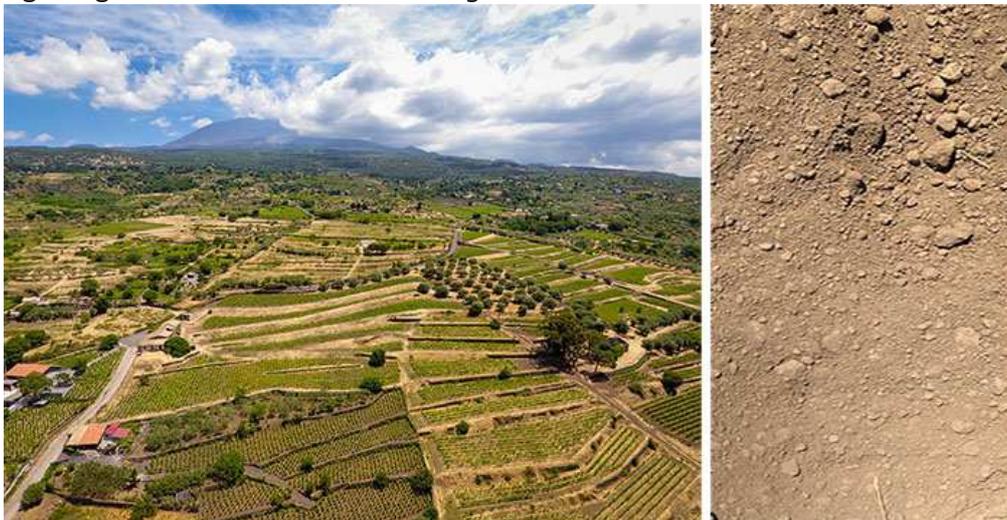


These two maps show details of the Belpasso vineyard (left) and the Tarataci (right). The photo in the center shows vines in Biancavilla.



The Belpasso vineyard and its soils

Much emphasis will be placed on the Belpasso vineyard (and its rocky volcanic soils seen above on the right), especially in terms of Idda's white wine production. Belpasso is located on a little "island" of soil sandwiched between more recent lava flows (dating back a few thousand years). This unique geological formation is called a *dagala* in Sicilian.



The Biancavilla vineyard and its soils

The Biancavilla vineyard was replanted in 2016, but some of the bush-trained vines, or *alberello*, date back to 1975. This site reaches as high as 800 meters above sea level and has very old soils dating back 50,000 years.



The Tartaraci vineyard

The five-hectare Tartaraci vineyard is located at 950 meters in altitude. The vines will almost entirely be replanted in the near future.



A sketch of the future Idda winery reveals volcanic stonewalls and circular enclosed gardens, called a giardino pantesco, on the roof. The architecture reflects local and sustainable building traditions. The new winery will be built within the Belpasso vineyard.

“Etna is a place that reminds you how little we are,” says Gaia. “When you are there looking at this gigantic mountain that is smoking in front of you, you understand how short our lives are and how quiet and respectful we have to be. This is an attitude that is important when farming land and when making wine.”

NOTE: These photos are courtesy of the winery. Only the video and the photo of the bottles are by Monica Larner.

<https://www.robertparker.com/wines/B7uvFTZEumheJ54Jm/idda-sicilia-bianco-2020#professional-notes>

Producer:
Idda
[More wines from this producer](#)

From:
[Italy](#), [Sicily](#), [Sicilia](#)

Color:
White

Maturity:
Early

Type:
Table

Sweetness:
Dry

Variety:
Carricante

RP Cellar
[Add to RP Cellar](#)

Print Latest Tasting Note
[Print note](#)

2020 Idda • Sicilia Bianco

2020

[WA Tasting Notes \(1\)](#) | [Other Tasting Notes \(0\)](#) | [My Tasting Notes](#) | [Find It Online](#)

Rating	Release Price	Drink Date
93+	\$54	2021 - 2028

Reviewed by
[Monica Lerner](#)

Issue Date
22nd Jul 2021

Source
[July 2021 Week 3, The Wine Advocate](#)

Hitting the market now, the 2020 Sicilia Bianco can perhaps be described as more Mediterranean in character next to the previous 2019 vintage (also tasted in this mini vertical) that appears more flamboyantly Sicilian in personality. This wine offers a greater level of depth and grace, and the inner complexity is also a far step above the other two releases. The main reason for this noticeable change is the increased presence of Belpasso fruit. This is one of three vineyard sites on Etna farmed by this formidable Gaja and Graci team, and it's the vineyard that shows the most promise, especially with regards to age-worthy whites. This bottle should hold up to the 10-year mark. Seeing partial malolactic fermentation, this wine is very specific to Carricante, with tangy citrus notes and orchard fruit followed by Mediterranean shrub oak and salty marine breeze. It is tonic, sharp and "electric" (a descriptor I eagerly borrow from Alberto Graci). This wine makes the argument that Carricante IS the vinous protagonist of Etna.

Importer Information:

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<https://www.robertparker.com/wines/2Er7585swsp4Nb7n3/idda-sicilia-bianco-2019#professional-notes>

Producer:
Idda
[More wines from this producer](#)

From:
[Italy](#), [Sicily](#), [Sicilia](#)

Color:
White

Maturity:
Early

Type:
Table

Sweetness:
Dry

Variety:
Carricante

RP Cellar
[Add to RP Cellar](#)

Print Latest Tasting Note
[Print note](#)

2019 Idda • Sicilia Bianco

2019

[WA Tasting Notes \(1\)](#) | [Other Tasting Notes \(0\)](#) | [My Tasting Notes](#) | [Find It Online](#)

Rating	Release Price	Drink Date
91	\$47	2021 - 2026

Reviewed by
[Monica Lerner](#)

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Source
[July 2021 Week 3, The Wine Advocate](#)

What stands out most in the Idda 2019 Sicilia Bianco is the authentically Sicilian nature of its joyous bouquet. This Carricante-based white opens to cedar, citrus, orange peel and cherries like the kind you would find in a sfincia di San Giuseppe with fried dough, ricotta and candied Sicilian fruit. The fruit is never heavy, offering elegant aromatic intensity instead, followed by pistachio and maybe a hint of wild fennel. The wine's volcanic identity is fully on display with ashy and salty mineral overtones. The 2019 vintage is identified by its creamy texture, length and more substantial fruit weight.

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<https://www.robertparker.com/wines/hRWqKPBYXHW8Wp9Bm/idda-sicilia-bianco-2018#professional-notes>

Producer:
Idda
[More wines from this producer](#)

2018 Idda • Sicilia Bianco

2018



From:
[Italy](#), [Sicily](#), [Sicilia](#)

Color:
White

Maturity:
Early

Type:
Table

Sweetness:
Dry

Variety:
[Carricante](#)

RP Cellar
[+ Add to RP Cellar](#)

Print Latest Tasting Note
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[WA Tasting Notes \(1\)](#) | [Other Tasting Notes \(0\)](#) | [My Tasting Notes](#) | [Find It Online](#)

Rating	Release Price	Drink Date
90	NA	2021 - 2025

Reviewed by
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[July 2021 Week 3, The Wine Advocate](#)

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The inaugural vintage, the Idda 2018 Sicilia Bianco offers a blueprint of where this Carricante-based white intends to go. With no malolactic fermentation in this vintage, the wine maintains ample brightness and energy. You get more complexity and depth in the 2020 vintage (also reviewed in this mini vertical); however, a clear sense of varietal freshness and directness is displayed here. A hailstorm on August 15th means that no fruit from the estate's Belpasso vineyard is used here, but that cru is heavily relied upon in the vintages to come. This wine offers citrus and lemon preserves, powdery ash and wild sage. It is drinking very nicely right now and should hold steady for a few more years. This wine is only sold in Italy.

<https://www.robertparker.com/wines/kgYgAvDbS8mpWoLR4/idda-etna-rosso-2019#professional-notes>

Producer:
Idda
[More wines from this producer](#)

2019 Idda • Etna Rosso

2019



From:
[Italy](#), [Sicily](#), [Etna](#)

Color:
Red

Maturity:
Young

Type:
Table

Sweetness:
Dry

Variety:
[Nerello Mascalese](#)

RP Cellar
[+ Add to RP Cellar](#)

Print Latest Tasting Note
[Print note](#)

[WA Tasting Notes \(1\)](#) | [Other Tasting Notes \(0\)](#) | [My Tasting Notes](#) | [Find It Online](#)

Rating	Release Price	Drink Date
93	\$54	2022 - 2030

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The Idda 2019 Etna Rosso shows depth, length and everything in between. This 2019 vintage benefits from a long and slow growing season, just what the native red grapes of Etna prefer. The spring season saw a lot of rain for ample water reserves, and the weather then transitioned to a dry but not too hot summer season. The late harvest helped to develop structure and linearity in the wine that you taste, thanks to bright fruit nuances of blackberry, plum and a touch of candied orange peel. The wine is light, vertical and otherwise void of any residual heaviness. It finishes with pretty accents of toasted nut and earthy terracotta.

<https://www.robertparker.com/wines/MigidWBWG5Gew7WH9/idda-etna-rosso-2018#professional-notes>

Producer:
Idda
[More wines from this producer](#)

2018 Idda • Etna Rosso

2018



From:
[Italy](#), [Sicily](#), [Etna](#)

Color:
Red

Maturity:
Early

Type:
Table

Sweetness:
Dry

Variety:
[Nerello Mascalese](#)

RP Cellar
[+ Add to RP Cellar](#)

Print Latest Tasting Note
[Print note](#)

[WA Tasting Notes \(1\)](#) | [Other Tasting Notes \(0\)](#) | [My Tasting Notes](#) | [Find It Online](#)

Rating	Release Price	Drink Date
91	\$47	2021 - 2027

Reviewed by
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Offering spice, depth and good definition, the Idda 2018 Etna Rosso was born in a challenging vintage. Summer hailstorms damaged much of the yields and meant that fruit management was completed manually and with extra care, cluster by cluster, to make sure only the best bunches remained on the vines. That hard work paid off to produce a delicate, almost subdued expression from powerful Etna in which more attention is given to the soft fruit and berry nuances. The wine sports a fresh and fruit-forward style with streamlined fruit weight and an almost ethereal personality. Spice, tar and resin fill in the rear.

Producer:

Idda

More wines from this producer

2017 Idda • Etna Rosso

2017



From:

[Italy](#), [Sicily](#), [Etna](#)

Color:

● Red

Maturity:

Early

Type:

Table

Sweetness:

Dry

Variety:

Nerello Mascalese

RP Cellar

+ Add to RP Cellar

Print Latest Tasting Note

Print note

[WA Tasting Notes \(1\)](#) | [Other Tasting Notes \(0\)](#) | [My Tasting Notes](#) | [Find It Online](#)

Rating

92

Release Price

\$47

Drink Date

2021 - 2027

Reviewed by

👤 [Monica Larner](#)

Issue Date

22nd Jul 2021

Source

[July 2021 Week 3, The Wine Advocate](#)

The 2017 Etna Rosso is almost all Nerello Mascalese with a small 10% part of Nerello Cappuccio that makes for an ideal blending partner. This was a scorching-hot vintage, but Gaia Gaja and Alberto Graci tell me that compact basalt rocky soils make for a unique situation in which vine root systems can find ample humidity underground despite dry and sun-drenched soil at the top level. Dig just under the surface, Gaia Gaja tells me, and the soils are cool and moist. This expression is powerful and bold, with dark fruit and dried cherry followed by crushed white pepper (a result of the Nerello Cappuccio) and lots of resinous spice. The tannins are soft and yielding, and there are subtle waves of hot-vintage aromas that appear mostly as scorched earth and black volcanic stone.

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