true Sicilian, Giovanni Valenti is from Catania, Sicily’s second largest city which lies on the eastern coast of the island in sight of Mount Etna. He comes from a family of sailors in Catania where Giovanni grew up. Here is where he married, raised a family, and worked. After a stint as a naval officer, Giovanni became a sales manager for Lavazza, the giant coffee producer. He studied accounting and finance. For twenty-two years he was an executive responsible for sales at Stock di Trieste, a venerable producer of wines, sparkling wines, whiskey, brandy, grappa, and an entire range of liqueurs. Alessandro, Giovanni’s son, chose sales and marketing in the fashion industry as his path. He has held marketing management positions with Louis Vuitton, Polo Ralph Lauren, Giorgio Armani, and Gianni Versace.

The wine story begins in the 1970s. Giovanni was an executive with Stock di Trieste and was accompanying a film crew covering the Festa dell’Etna, a very large bacchanal in Linguaglossa, near the town of Passopisciaro in Sicily. Although Giovanni was a well versed wine drinker, he really did not know the fine wines of the Etna region. After their film shoot, the group was offered some well-aged Nerello Mascalese from barrel. As the saying goes, it was love at first sip! Giovanni vowed then that someday he would produce a wine of this quality and show the world that Etna, too, could make great wine. At the time, little recognition was bestowed upon this tiny appellation and Giovanni wanted to prove the potential for the greatness that Etna had to offer.

Fast forward thirty years and Giovanni Valenti was ready for a second career. Alessandro was now an experienced marketer and was excited about the opportunity to work with his father. Both loved wine. To put the Valenti name on a winery and try to become one the regions finest producers would be a dream come true for both Giovanni and Alessandro.

In 2004, the father-son duo began acquiring vineyard land in the Etna region. They soon discovered an old distillery in Passopisciaro, built in 1890 but abandoned in 1954, with an excellent cellar for wine. Fully refurbishing the building and filling it with the latest wine making technology was the founding of Cantine Valenti. The Valenti name was on the door. Now what?

As luck would have it, the first Valenti purchase was the famed Guardiola vineyard, the highest vineyard in Etna at 7-800m (2296-2624 ft). Subsequent purchases, including a vineyard older than 100 years, have also proven to be outstanding. The Valenti holdings are a mixture of some very old vines (mostly 40-50 years of age) and new plantings. The vineyards are all some the highest in the Etna region and with elevation comes cooler terroir. The vineyards are planted primarily with the famed red variety of the region, Nerello Mascalese, a little Nerello Cappuccio, and for white wine Carricante.

Each lava flow from Mount Etna is known as a contrada and given a name. Valenti has vineyards in the following contradi: Arcuria and Santo Spirito, planted to Carricante; Guardiola, the oldest and highest in altitude, Bonanno and Corvo, the newest, all planted to Nerello Mascalese.

Giovanni is rigorous about implementing organic farming practices and uses only natural products to prevent disease and treat the vines. The diversity of plants and herbs throughout the vineyards is testimony to these farming efforts. Add soil tilled by donkeys and other farm animals, plus hand-harvesting, and you get true artisan viticulture.

Winemaker consultant Emiliano Falsini was brought on board. With his expertise in making natural wines, ones using very little added sulphites and no other chemical additions, the Valenti wine style began to take shape. Giacomo Schiavino was later added as full time winemaker. After many years working with the grapes from their vineyards and refining their winemaking in the cantine, Valenti wines are true expressions of purity of fruit, sense of the terroir, and balance.

To christen the winery in a very family way, Alessandro’s sons, born in New York, were baptized in the cellar of Cantine Valenti to create in them a sense of belonging.

Wines

- Enrico IV Bianco (Carricante)
- Norma Rosso (Nerello Mascalese, Nerello Cappuccio)
- Poesia Rosato (Nerello Mascalese)
- Puritani Rosso (Nerello Mascalese)