



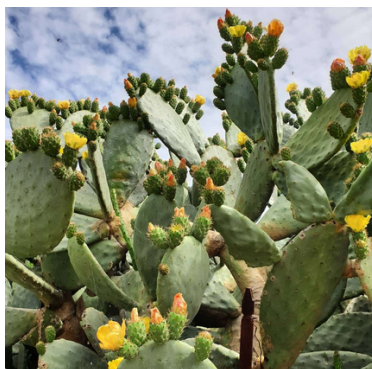
PAOLO MARCHI, SILVIA SCHIRRU AND PIETRO MARCHI

## SA DEFENZA: DONORI, CAGLIARI, SARDEGNA

There are some times when we just want to stop and give a round of applause. This is one of them. The *famiglia* Marchi and all of the creative and hardworking people involved in Sa Defenza are acting upon something truly great. Not just for their territory of Donori and their neighbors, but also for the future of Sardinian natural wine.

We taste amazing wines from young producers all the time, but it's when you visit and spend a few days with them that you can see who has their hands in their pockets and who has their hands on the pickaxe. The *fratelli* Marchi, Pietro and Paolo, are leading a self-sufficient medium scale organic farm in a very hot

and humid place with substantially poor soils and almost a necessity for industrialized agricultural techniques. They may not be



raising their vines on cliffs by the sea or in the slanted slopes of the high alps, but the project in its extremities is undeniably founded on principles of heroic viticulture.

  
SA DEFENZA  
*agrivinicola*

**"The name is strongly connected to the family's respect for the nature of the terrain, capable of protecting those who live there and to yield excellent organic wine, which captures the essence and the spirits of the territory."**



It barely rains when they need it to. The soil is filled with rocks. The region is known to have big problems with pests in the vines. Although the area is adequately ventilated, bright and favorable to the fulfillment of all the vegetative-productive functions of the vines, the soil is poor and it seems irrigation is used regularly in most vineyards and olive groves in the region.



With just their few hands, except during harvest season, they manage the labor involved in maintaining these 14 hectares of stubborn vineyards under certified organic regulations. Everything else is also done and managed in-house.

Paolo designs the labels, both brothers manage the cellar and tasting room, the two brothers manage the vineyards and their father Salvatore still works often in the vines and the citrus, olive and stone fruit tree groves. As their wines are quite popular all over the island, they also run all of their own daily deliveries to clients, and participated in a few during my visit. The brothers are co-owners in the wine business along with their sister Anna, who is on maternity leave and lives in a different part of the island. Anna was taking care of the office, accounting, inventory and customer communication, but Pietro's partner Silvia now has taken on that role for the time being.

Because the value of the project is so clear to the locals in Donori, there are many young people nearby that line up to work harvest with them. Where many need to turn to cooperatives for their labor, Sa Defenza picks and trains between 12-14 (usually repeating) people that are interested in learning as they go, enjoying fantastic daily meals prepared by the family, and especially in making a checked 14 euros per hour (9-10 euros after taxes). Although the ability to witness payment evidence is something that we require when starting a relationship with a wine maker, it's always refreshing when they offer without me asking. The way that Pietro phrased it: "If you go through all of this, why shouldn't you be proud to present this information and miss the opportunity to set an example?" I couldn't agree more with that logic.

The size of the Marchi's land is quite large in respect to the majority of winemakers we work with, but only 20 of the the 45 ha. of land is cultivated, and only 14 of which are vineyards. The other 25 ha. of land that surround their crops are made up of mostly myrtle and eucalyptus brush forests and some 4 ha. of arable land.

Most of this land is was passed down to "Dottore" Salvatore Marchi from his grandfather Giovanni Bussu in the 1960's. Giovanni was a shepherd that would bring his animals down to Donori from his hometown in Gavoi (about 120 km north) for the winters to avoid harsh weather, and eventually purchased farmland and their small family house in Donori. He was also a trader of cattle and orbace, a traditional Sardinian woolen cloth.

Salvatore and his wife Silvana Plato, a local school teacher, fortunately decided to invest his inheritance into agriculture and continue the family tradition. It wasn't until 1999 that the family as a whole decided to produce larger amounts of grapes to sell to co-op cantinas and the dream of becoming *vignaioli* (*vigneron*) came into fruition. In 2005, Anna, Pietro and Paolo started to discuss how to build a cellar on the farm, as their older brother Marco had planned to do prior to his passing. They spent the following 5 years studying viticulture, winemaking and the business thoroughly, and In 2010 they established the business. The construction of the cantina went on from 2013 - 2015, then "Cantina Sa Defenza" was born.

They named the company after the locality where the



farm is located and it translates to "defense" in lingua sarda (a language, not a dialect of Italian), which also correlates with their mission to defend their history and the dream of their brother Marco.

To ensure an efficient buildout of the cantina, to invest in new vineyard projects and to pay seasonal workers exceptionally well, the company applied for federal ISMEA loan and grant dedicated to

youth entrepreneurship in agriculture. It aims at young people with experience in agriculture that are taking over management and development of existing farms and *ricambio generazionale*; when a following generation is taking over a family farm for an agricultural project. Sa Defenza was selected as a recipient of this loan/grant and put it to good use.



Their expansive subterranean concrete cellar has tall ceilings, is quite clean and mostly filled with tall steel INOX tanks with the exception of a little corner dedicated to experiments in glass demijohns and some barrels that their friends, "Cantina Carta," are making their oxidative wines in. Part of the incentive for building a larger cellar was to also offer to other small winemakers in the region a vinification space or a place to legally bottle wine. The name *defenza* also implies standing with and for all the other farmers and artisans of their community.

About 30 km north of Cagliari City, the Località Sa Defenza is located in Donori, a small ancient town in the center of an horseshoe-shaped range of hills that has been a historic mining area for minerals and granite. It is filled with ancient vineyards of native varieties but I would say I saw just as many olives groves and flocks of sheep around. Sheep were literally everywhere. In fact, due to the diversity of mediterranean shrub and herbs in Donori's micro-climate, the quality of dairy produced in this valley is very unique has a very good reputation with Sardinian cheesemakers. A notable local producer is "Aresu." These sheep and goat cheeses from Sardinia are some of my favorite cheeses in the world and I could undoubtedly eat them every day of my life, no joke. Not to mention the prices are generally very reasonable.

Parteòlla is the name of the greater region, and is the home of one of Sardinia's most important wine-growing regions (Parteolla IGT) where the art of

winemaking has been handed down since ancient times. The cultivation of the vine and its transformations into wine have been witnessed since the period of the Nuragic civilizations (18th century BCE until the Roman colonization). Wine containers in typical forms of the Sardinian culture "Askoid jugs" that were used up to the early Iron Age have been found in the Nuragic village of Monte Olladiri "in Monastir. In the same village, there was the discovery of a "*presso*," made of stone and presumably used for pressing grapes.

I stayed a few days in the house of one of the Marchi's uncles in the center of the town, and was only an 8 min walk from there to Sa Defenza. After a quick coffee and brioche at the only bar in the Donori main piazza, I walked through the town past all these old grey and yellow houses with ornate flower and citrus tree gardens in courtyards with crumbling walls and rusted metal until reaching the railroad tracks where the road



side was lined with cactuses as tall as trees. On the first morning, Pietro wanted to show me his approved CBD cannabis projects. As someone who's ears perk up at the sound of the subject, I was delighted. Besides producing a high-quality outdoor-grown product, Pietro's interest lies in it's potential in creating foliar sprays to combat insects, treatments as well plant-based fertilizers.



It's quite common to see organic vine treatments made from medicinal plants macerated in vats with water. For example, nettle is used as it's usually abundant in most vineyards and the treatment that it makes is used to prevent aphid invasions because the composition annoys the insects. It's also a great plant fertilizer. For the treatments that Pietro is currently concocting, he



places the freshly trimmed cannabis with fern leaves and nettle from their vineyards into jute coffee bags in giant vats to macerate. The result is then blended with water and sprayed on the plants and added to the soil. Pietro's idea is that all of these plants produce a high amount of radical plant hormones in the treatment that alleviates stress in the plant and assists germination even in unsuitable environments. Pietro told me that if a plant has a lot of branches, like salix (willow), you can tell it produces a substantial amount of hormones needed for a *concime* (fertilizer).

With a series of macerated cannabis fertilizers, he has been testing the effects for several years with other cannabis plants as he believes that the best treatment for a plant is the plant itself, just as many winemakers return any trimmings of the vines to the soil in the vineyard. However, he has been experimenting more recently on the vineyards, and is currently waiting on the results of a laboratory soil analysis to see if the use of these fertilizers are in fact making a determinable impact on the soil.

Although the two brothers prefer to allow only spontaneous plants to grow amongst their vines, they do have a few rows where they seeded specific plants, but never in more than a row or two. Like all of their seemingly hundreds of experiments, they always start *piano piano*. For example in two rows of the vineyard nearby the cantina that's used in their rosato wine (seen in the photo of Pietro above), they added two varieties of lavender between vines in the rows to see if the weeds will dominate the soil around and prevent undesirable weeds from pushing through.

You may have seen irrigation lines in some photos of the vineyards, and I feel is an important subject to address as irrigation can often be stigmatized to be considered as not an aspect of "raw wine" agriculture. The Marchi brothers decided recently to add these in for potential use as they have experienced several summers with moments of sheer devastation as a result of little to no rainfall. There is of course the point that if the soil can be managed properly, then water retention is achieved in the soil, but as you can see from what you read before, that sometimes even the most careful farmers can't work miracles.

Since their installations, they've only watered a few of the vineyards up to once or twice a year in the most dire circumstances as it also comes at a monetary cost to run water there. Because the result is better wine, or some wine at all, I'm honestly quite thankful that they chose common sense over a radical agricultural ideology that's based on privileges that not all farmers are blessed with. If you have a small garden in your backyard of beautiful organic tomatoes, and it doesn't rain for several weeks, you're probably going to water those tomatoes because you love those tomatoes and you want to eat them because they're delicious and otherwise you'd be contributing to food waste.

One of the vineyards that they are working with where there was never need for extra water is their "Maistru" micro-plot of 70 year old + Nuragus vines raised in alberello shrubs (seen below in the photo of Paolo). Besides the type of soil and it's depth, the age of the ro



rocky layers in the soil to attain water naturally from the depths of where water is best retained.

The wine that Sa Difenza makes from these vines is stunning, unique and enjoyed by anyone I've drank it with. The previous vintage was sold out so there's none in the USA right now until the next order. For now, we have both the red and white versions of their litro-style table wines they called "3/4," because the bottle





## PORCEDDU ROAST Salvatore and Silvana Marchi

is 3/4th's of a liter. We will also trial their 3 liter boxed wines in the USA this year, in both red and white, which I find to be absolutely delicious and quite fun.

The only other white wine of theirs we have in right now is the "Sacava sulle Bucce," which means "Sacava," which is the name of the Vermentino vineyard that the grapes are from, "on the skins," because of the 20 + days of maceration the wines undergoes with its skins. This wine displays a poetic interpretation of this very important Sardinian grape. Sa Defenza also makes a Vermentino pet-nat called "Furau" that we will be bring in later this year in 750ml bottles and some in cans.

Strong red wines are essential to Sardinian culture and cuisine, so we made sure to bring in the two that were shining the most from Sa Defenza's lineup for the first order: "Deminera" and "Tresbingias." *Deminera* (of mines) is the name of the single vineyard that the wine comes from and is named after the mineral mines nearby the vineyard. *Tres bingias* means three vineyards in *lingua sarda* and the wine comes from three of their red grape vineyards that also happen to be some of the highest altitude vineyards in the region.

I've always had an affinity for Cannonau and the other high-test red wines from Sardegna, even when it's 96 degrees in the shade and you wouldn't think of drinking something at 15.5% unless it had a pineapple and ice in

it. With just a little chill, these red wines are all you could ask for when cooling out *nell'ombra* with some fire-roasted pork. On the last day of my visit, the Marchi family prepared *porceddu*, a fire-roasted suckling pig that was first smoked briefly with a mix of dried harvested shrub. The feet are then



removed and tucked into the fat pockets near the stomach and hearth roasted for 2 hours over orange tree wood. It was truly incredible. It gets chopped and served over a sheet of crumbly *pane carasau*. Someone passed me a piece of the pane with brains smeared on it, and I couldn't say no. They had also prepared "*sa burrida*," which is dogfish boiled with bay leaves, then sautéed with walnuts and vinegar. Throughout the few days I was there, the red wines also paired surprisingly well with many savory surprising dishes. Try the following dishes for interesting pairings: *su mazzamurru*, *malloreddus*, *la panadas*, and *culurgiones*.





CANNONAU AND SYRAH  
VINEYARDS THAT GO INTO  
"TRESBINGIAS' BLEND."

## CANTINA SA DEFENZA

**Total cultivated area:** 45 hectares

**Vineyard area:** 14 hectares

**Other crops:** 2.5 ha citrus, 1.5 ha plums, 0.5 ha peaches, 1.5 ha olives, 4 ha arable land, 14 ha of uncultivated Mediterranean shrub like Myrtle and Eucalyptus.

**Annual Production:** 35,000 Bottles

**Oenologist or cellar manager:** Pietro and Paolo Marchi

**Agronomist or agricultural manager:** Vineyard predominantly managed by Pietro, but also by Salvatore (father) and Paolo.

**Fixed workers/ Owners:** Pietro, Paolo and Anna Marchi.

**Seasonal workers:** *Harvest* - 12-14 workers friends and locals that seek the work 14 eu/ hour before taxes.

**Type of employment contract used for permanent workers:** "Busta Paga"

**Type of employment contract used for seasonal workers:** "Contratto mensa"

**Supervised Labor Agreement Contract:** Agreed



**Agreed** signifies both parties have agreed to signing the document and is currently under review by both parties. **Signed** represents a signed contract that permits efficient and complete transparency if any questions are raised at any time about onsite part-time and seasonal labor, compensation and treatment of laborers hired through contracted cooperatives, as well from any offsite properties that the winemaker may purchase grapes from.



# SA DEFENZA - "3/4" 2021 Bianco

## Production

**Bottles produced:** 8000

**Vineyard Name(s):** Monteonigu / Loc. Sa Defenza

**Vineyard Surface:** 0.5 hectares / 1.5 hectares

**Varieties:** 50% Vermentino / 50% Semidano

**Average age of vines:** 22 years / 14 years

**Altitude:** 200 meters / 100 meters

**Soil:** Sandy clay / Old granite, Sandy

**Exposure of rows:** South

**Rootstock:** 1103p - Adapted to drought and saline soils. High Phylloxera resistance.

**Vine Training:** Guyot

**Irrigation:** Lines installed to some vineyards where dangerous drought is common. Used max. 2 times/ year.

**Plant density:** 5000 per ha

**Yield per Vine:** 25-40 kilos

**Production per ha (kg/ha):** 5000

**Treatments:** Copper powdered sulfur at 0.4% 50 kg / ha in two times and towards the end of July. 25 kg / ha of pure sulfur in powder for a total of about 75 kg per ha.



**Fertilizers:** Several estate-made plant-based fertilizers that are made up of a series of local herbs that macerate in vats of water. Shredding native herbs and pruning waste where bovine manure is needed, then pomace and stalks.

**Harvest start date:** 1st week September

**Harvest mode:** Manual in small boxes

**Certifications:** Organic Certified



# SA DEFENZA - "3/4" 2021 Bianco

## Vinification

**Pre-press processing:**

Automatic Destemmer

**Pressing mode:** Pneumatic Press

**Vinificators:** Steel INOX

**Maceration:** 24 hours

**Yeasts:** Indigenous yeasts

**Sulphur dioxide and/or  
ascorbic acid:** None

**Stabilization:** No

**Filtering:** No

**Steel refinement:** 8 months

**Refinement in the bottle:**

1 month in consideration of the  
lunar cycle.

**Bottle type:** Bordeaux

**Cap in:** One-piece Sardinian cork  
sourced from a small family producer.

## Analysis

**Acidity:** 5.3 g/L

**PH:** 3.9

**ABV:** 12%



# SA DEFENZA - "3/4" 2021 Rosso Field Blend

## Production

**Bottles produced:** 10,000

**Vineyard Name(s):** Deminera / Tresbingias  
/ Loc. Santa Barbera / Loc. Sa Defenza

**Vineyard Surface:** 1 ha / 2.5ha / 1 ha / 1 ha

**Varieties:** *Base:* Cannonau, Bovale Sardo, Monica, Syrah, Barbera Sarda. *Small addition of:* Carignano, Cagnulari, Montepulciano, Sangiovese, and Merlot.

**Soil:** Sandy Clay, Disintegrating Granite.

**Exposure of rows:** South

**Altitude:** 100-150 meters

**Rootstock:** 1103p - Adapted to drought and saline soils. High Phylloxera resistance.

**Vine Training:** Guyot

**Irrigation:** Lines installed to some vineyards where dangerous drought is common. Used max. 2 times/ year.

**Average age of vines:** 14 years

**Plant density:** 5000 per hectare

**Yield per Vine:** 1 kilo

**Production per ha (kg/ha):** 5000

**Treatments:** Copper powdered sulfur at 0.4% 50 kg / ha in two times and towards the end of July 25 kg / ha of pure sulfur in powder for a total of about 75 kg per ha.



**Fertilizers:** Several estate-made plant-based fertilizers that are made up of a series of local herbs that macerate in vats of water. Shredding native herbs and pruning waste where bovine manure is needed, then pomace and stalks.

**Harvest start date:** 1st week September, and 2nd week October.

**Harvest mode:** Manual in small boxes

**Certifications:** Organic Certified



# SA DEFENZA - "3/4" 2021 Rosso Field Blend

## Vinification

**Pre-press processing:**

Automatic Destemmer

**Pressing mode:** Pneumatic press

**Vinificators:** Steel INOX

**Maceration:** 10 days

**Yeasts:** Indigenous yeasts

**Sulphur dioxide and/or**

**ascorbic acid:** None

**Stabilization:** NO

**Filtering:** NO

**Steel refinement:** 8 months

**Refinement in the bottle:**

1 month in consideration of the  
lunar cycle.

**Bottle type:** Bordeaux

**Cap in:** One-piece Sardinian cork  
sourced from a small family  
producer.

## Analysis

**Acidity:** 6.5 g/L

**PH:** 4

**ABV:** 15.5%



*One of the several varieties of lavender  
growing in Loc. Sa Defenza red vineyard*







# SA DEFENZA - "Tresbingias" 2020 Rosso

## Production

**Bottles produced:** 10,000

**Vineyard Name(s):** "Tresbingias"

**Vineyard Surface:** 2.5 hectares

**Varieties:** 40% Cannonau / 30% Bovale / 30% Syrah

**Soil:** Sandy Clay, Disintegrating Granite

**Exposure of rows:** Southwest

**Altitude:** 300 meters

**Rootstock:** 1103p - Adapted to drought and saline soils. High Phylloxera resistance.

**Vine Training:** Guyot

**Irrigation:** Lines installed to some vineyards where dangerous drought is common. Used max. 2 times/ year.

**Average age of vines:** 14 years

**Plant density:** 4000 per hectare

**Yield per Vine:** 0.5 - 1 kg

**Production per ha (kg/ha):**  
3000-5000

**Treatments:** Copper powdered sulfur at 0.4% 50 kg / ha in two times and towards the end of July 25 kg / ha of pure sulfur in powder for a total of about 75 kg per ha.



**Fertilizers:** Several estate-made plant-based fertilizers that are made up of a series of local herbs that macerate in vats of water. Shredding native herbs and pruning waste where bovine manure is needed, then pomace and stalks.

**Harvest start date:** Mid-September

**Harvest mode:** Manual in small boxes

**Certifications:** Organic Certified



# SA DEFENZA - "Tresbingias" 2020 Rosso

## Vinification

**Pre-press processing:**

Automatic Destemmer

**Pressing mode:** Pneumatic press

**Vinificators:** Steel INOX

**Maceration:** *Cannonau* - 22 days /

*Bovale* - 22 days / *Syrah* - 25 days

**Yeasts:** Indigenous yeasts

**Sulphur dioxide:** Small addition during racking.

**Stabilization:** NO

**Filtering:** NO

**Steel refinement:** 12 months

**Refinement in the bottle:**

1 month in consideration of the lunar cycle.

**Bottle type:** Bordeaux

**Cap in:** One-piece Sardinian cork sourced from a small family producer.

## Analysis

**Acidity:** 7.6 g/L

**PH:** 3.9

**ABV:** 15%



*Paolo cleaning wild cardoons*



# SA DEFENZA - "Maistru" 2020

## Isola dei Nuraghi IGT

### Production

**Bottles produced:** 1900

**Vineyard Name(s):** "Maistru"

**Vineyard Surface:** 0.2 hectares

**Varieties:** Nugarus

**Soil:** Sandy Clay, Granite

**Exposure of rows:** West

**Altitude:** 110 meters

**Rootstock:** Unknown

**Vine Training:** Albarello

**Irrigation:** None

**Average age of vines:** 70-85 years

**Treatments:** Copper powdered sulfur at 0.4% 50 kg / ha in two times and towards the end of July 25 kg / ha of pure sulfur in powder for a total of about 75 kg per hectare.



**Fertilizers:** Several estate-made plant-based fertilizers that are made up of a series of local herbs that macerate in vats of water. Shredding native herbs and pruning waste where bovine manure is needed, then pomace and stalks.

**Harvest start date:** First week September

**Harvest mode:** Manual in small boxes

**Certifications:** Organic Certified

# SA DEFENZA - "Sacava Sulle Bucce" 2018 Orange

## Vinification

**Pre-press processing:**

Automatic Destemmer

**Pressing mode:** Pneumatic press

**Vinificators:** Steel INOX

**Maceration:** 2 days

**Yeasts:** Indigenous yeasts

**Sulphur dioxide:** Small addition during racking.

**Stabilization:** NO

**Filtering:** NO

**Steel refinement:** One year

**Refinement in the bottle:**

6 months

**Bottle type:** Bordeaux

**Cap in:** One-piece Sardinian cork sourced from a small family producer.

## Analysis

**Acidity:** 5.1 g/L

**PH:** 2.8

**ABV:** 13.5%



