Wine Tour in Tuscany

I hope you will enjoy the day and feel the wine.
Modern viticulture today is quite different to the grape growing of the past; Europe is still the greatest grape growing area (80%) but throughout the five continents the tendency is to put more emphasis on quality, the most important factor. This is why nowadays a great deal is invested in the vineyard and in all the operations needed to obtain a perfect ripening of the grapes.

Vegetative cycle of vines
In the 19th century a virulent disease infected all vines here in Europe and killed them. It was caused by an insect called phyloxera which destroyed the roots of plants and in particular of vitis vinifera. The solution found was to graft our vitis vinifera on roots of American vines that were resistant to this disease. This practice was soon developed and perfected, and indeed to this day all vines are grafted on “American roots”, in other words the part above ground is the vitis vinifera while the roots belong to American vines. The new vine formed by the combination of the two plants is called vine cutting.

The small vine is then planted in the ground in winter or at latest at the beginning of spring. It takes about 3 years for it to produce fruit. It will have some bunches of grapes by the second year but it is best to wait before picking them.

After the third year the vine’s production increase but the quality is not stable: it can give excellent or less good produce. From the fifth and sixth year onwards the phase of constant productivity begins. It will last from twenty to thirty years. At this point, if the plant is well cared for, it will give its best. By the time it reaches forty years the vine enters old age, its production is discontinuous and it starts going down in quality.

In planting a new vineyard four factors should be taken into account: the root-stock, the climate, the soil and lastly the human factor. The interaction between these factors determines the quality of the vineyard and the future of its wine.
Vital cycle of vine

- **Mar** - **Nov**: Budding, Flowering, Changing of colour, Maturity, Falling of leaves
- **Rest**: Growth, Ripening, Forming of leaves, Rest

Annual cycle of vine

- **3 years**: no productivity
- **5 years**: growing productivity
- **30 years**: almost constant productivity
- **40 – 50 years**: old age
Root Stock
Everey wine growing area has its autochthonous or at least main root stock. This a fundamental factor because the right choice will enable the production of quality grapes.

In Tuscany the root-stock are
- Sangiovese (red)
- Canaiolo (red)
- Malvasia (white)
- Trebbiano Toscano (white)

Nowadays there are a great deal of other root stock that do not come from our area:
- Cabernet Sauvignon (red)
- Merlot (red)
- Syrah (red)
- Chardonnay (white)
- Sauvignon (white)

Climate
In the Italian peninsula there are various different climates. Because it is so long and because of all of its mountains and the sea, the Italian peninsula has a highly varied climate. Winters are mild and summer hot and dry, rainfalls are concentrated in the winter period. This climate is suitable for the cultivation of vine, the only unfavourable factors are the late spring rainfalls (they could damage the flowering of the vines) and the rainfalls at the harvest time.

Land
The most suitable land for the cultivation of vine is in the hills. Their exposure to the sun favours the various annual cycle of the vine and ensure constant ventilation for the vineyard which prevents stagnant pockets of humidity or hot air. The composition of the soil, or its “texture”, is formed by: stones and pebbles, sand, lime and clay.
The most suitable soil for cultivating vines are those of medium mixture or tending to “poor”, that is a mixture of the above components. In Tuscany there is an old proverb which farmers like to quote:
The vine says “Make me poor and I'll make you rich!”.

Growing and pruning vines
After the little cutting has been planted, man intervenes every year with an operation called pruning. There are two types of pruning: the first takes place when the vine is going and is called “growth pruning”. It is done in order to give the plant the right shape and structure for the production of grapes.
The second one is called “production pruning” and takes place every year after the leaves have fallen (end October) in order to renew the buds which will give grapes in the following harvest.

In Tuscany the main pruning system are SPURRED CORDON and GUYOT.
The pruning can be done by hand or by machine, but the main method is still manual pruning.
because it gives better results.

Nothing as yet has proved better than man’s experience and his skill in intervening from plant to plant.

**Ripening and harvest season**
The ripening of the grapes and the harvesting are the final fundamental events in the annual cycle and as all the other operation they are undertaken with great care.
The grape is made of: peel, pulp and pips. Each grape contains all the indispensable substances for it to ripen such as sugars and acids. The important factors in enology are sugar content, acidity and the polyphenols.

These components determine the ripeness of the grape and the relationship between them helps to determine the right moment for harvesting. At the beginning there is in the grapes a high content of acids, a low sugar content and small amount of colouring substances; as time goes by and the grapes fatten this parameter is reversed. The changing of the colour is a fundamental factor and can be seen when the skin gradually acquires a different hue, from green the grapes change to a violet blue. It is a gradual process and as the colour changes the sugar content starts rising. The technicians who check vineyards undertake a series of chemical test, to establish the best moment for harvesting, but at times the wines-makers common sense is also useful as well as the good luck of favourable weather. For varieties such as Sangiovese, the harvest takes places between the end of September and the first fortnight of October. The red grapes varieties (Merlot, Cabernet, Syrah) can be more precocious or slower ripening compared to Sangiovese.
The main centre of production of sugar and organic components is in the leaves (B). The sugar is then used by the tips (A) for the growth; by the bunches (C) for development and deposit; by the perennial organs (D) trunk and branches; by the roots (E) as reserves.

Enology

Vinification of red wines
When the grapes are picked they are taken to the winery where all the various basic operations take place for the wine to end in bottle.
The bunches are gathered in small cases where they are kept whole; the grapes are then emptied into the de-stemmer and crushed before being put into the stainless steel vats for fermentation at a controlled temperature of 28°C.

The fermenting process is caused by yeasts; these are small organisms that transform sugar into alcohol. During the fermentation the colouring of the most takes place. Inside the skins there are anthocyanes, substances that cause the colouring in red wines and tannins responsible for preserving it, which gradually pass from the skins into the must. These two components are part of the polyphenolic substances.

The combination of anthocyanes and tannins, with time, generates complex molecules which determine (not on their own) the structure of wines and the changing of colour with ageing. In order to extract the colour from the skins and to give oxygen to the yeasts, the contents of the vats are pumped up regularly and the amount of time this operation is repeated varies according to the conditions of the grapes or the particular year and can be done either in an open or a closed vat.
This process consist in taking the liquid from the bottom of the vat to the top from where it drops wetting the floating skins uniformly. The actual fermentation lasts from 5 to seven days but the wine stays together with the skins a little longer so as to enhance the extraction of polyphenolic substances. The whole process of fermentation and post-fermentation takes about fifteen days on average. Some estates prefer a longer maceration period with the skins. At the end of the alcoholic fermentation the liquid is separated from the skins which are sent to the distillery while the liquid is poured into another vat where the malolactic fermentation, caused by bacteria, reduces the acidity transforming malic acid (a strong acid) into lactic acid (a week acid), thus making the wine softer. This fermentation can also be done in wooden containers.

**Wine and Wood**

**Ageing**
This is the most important phase for the maturing of a great Tuscan wine. The choice of the type of barrel and its size is fundamental.
There are various types of wooden containers, we shall only consider the ones most commonly used.
The oak with which barrels are made can be of French origin or it can come from Slavonia or from North America. French oak comes from various wooden regions: Allier, Nevers, Tronçais, Vosges and Limousin, all of which are of excellent quality but have different characteristics.
The size of the container is another fundamental aspect. Should one chose a barrique or the classic barrel?
This depends on the type of wine which one wants to obtain. Barriques are little containers of 225 litres: the wine which matures inside it will have a greater oxygenation and more pronounced aroma of wood.
Barrels which can be of 15 hl capacity or larger, give a slower oxygenation and more measured amount of wood aroma.
Usually wine is put into wood around November and can stay from a few months to a few years. The amount of ageing depends on the type of wine. For example Brunello spends two to three years in wood.
During this time the wine-maker decants the wine at intervals to eliminate the dregs which are deposited at the bottom of the barrel. Much more frequently the barrels have to be topped up so that they always remain full.

*Why is it so important to have wine aged in wood?*
It enables all the process of oxygenation and causes the combination of polyphenols responsible for the colour and the structure of wine. Moreover the tannins exuded from the wood to the wine enrich its body and give a toasted aroma of vanilla which constitutes the bouquet of the wine.

**Bottling and sales**
Once the maturing of the wine in wood is finished, it is racked, blended and finally bottled. This period when it is kept in bottles is called refining. It is important because the wine rests and evolves for a few months until it is ready to be sold.
In V.Q.P.R.D. wines, the refining in bottles is often obligatory for a few months (for example: Brunello di Montalcino).
During this period of refining the bottles have to be kept lying horizontally in the dark, at a temperature which varies from 13°C to 15°C.
The last operation left is the packaging, after which the wine is put on the market.

Tuscan DOCG wines

There are six DOCG wines in Tuscany, five of which are red and one white. Tuscany is a region renowned for its wines and it is precisely here that the first Italian DOC wines were born and with time and the efforts of the producers together with the fame and prestige of the wines, they became DOCG:
This term means denomination of controlled and guaranteed origin and all the wines that have this designation are regulated by production rules which guarantee their quality.

Chianti Classico (Docg from 1980)
This area boasts some of the most beautiful landscapes. It lies between the provinces of Siena and Florence. Most of the estate go far back into history, what with castles, old monasteries, abbey and avenues of cypresses and age old ilexes. Even the ultra-modern wineries have been built to look as if they belong in the landscape.
The classical Chianti root-stocks include Sangiovese, black Cannaiolo, Trebbiano and Malvasia in varying percentages according to the modified and it is now possible to use only Sangiovese grapes. To be Chianti Classico, the wine must have aged for 6 months in wooden cask; for the Riserva 1 years are needed.

Chianti (Docg from 1984)
The Chianti DOCG area comprises the provinces of Florence, Siena, Pisa and Arezzo. It is the most extensive denomination and is divided in seven sub-districts. The regulations and production are similar to the Chianti Classico ones except for the period of ageing in barrels which is shorter for Chianti wines.

Brunello di Montalcino (Docg from 1980)
This wine is produced in Montalcino, a hill-top town considered by everyone the stronghold of enology, perched between the valleys of the Orcia, the Asso and the Ombrone rivers. Brunello was one of the first Italian DOCG wines. To make it the regulation require 100% Sangiovese grapes. This is a particular variety called “Sangiovese grosso” or “Sangiovese Brunello”. Brunello is put on the market five years after the grapes are harvested, and the Brunello Riserva one year after that. The rules prescribe a minimum of tow years in wooden barrels and 4 monts of ageing in bottles.

Vino Nobile di Montepulciano (Docg from 1980)
Vino Nobile di Montepulciano is also produced in the Province of Siena. The town which give it its name is on a hill at about 600 meters above the sea level between the Valdichiana and the Umbria border.
The root-stock of this DOCG comprises the type of Sangiovese called “Prugnolo Gentile” as well as Canaiolo nero; other varieties of red grapes as well as some white ones are also allowed but in small percentages.

Vino Nobile is aged in wooden casks for 26 months before it can be sold, the RISERVA must age for a minimum of 36 months in barrels.

**Carmignano (Docg from 1982)**
The production area of this DOCG wine is near Florence in the province of Prato. The denomination area covers only the hilly lands. In this wine, apart from Sangiovese which always predominates, there is also Canaiolo, Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc. Carmignano undergoes an average ageing of 12 months in barrels or barriques, while the RISERVA must spend at least 35 months in wood.

**Vernaccia di San Gimignano (Docg from 1987)**
The only white DOCG wine in Tuscany, Vernaccia is produced in San Gimignano, an ancient town in the Val d’Elsa about 30 Km from Siena.
It was among the first DOC wines and is now one of the most appreciated Tuscan products.

**Principles of wine tasting**

Tasting wine or tasting any other food consists in activating at least three of the senses with which we are endowed: sight, smell and taste. All three together enable us to understand and appreciate what we are tasting.

How does a tasting begin and how does it proceed?
First one should observe the product that is to be tasted, if there are several wines one starts with them. The glass, a transparent crystal wine-glass, should be oval with a thin stem to help the tasting.

The most important thing before the tasting is concentration which enables one to taste in the best way possible.

**Organoleptic Analyses**
There are parameters to be followed in a tasting: one starts with a visual examination, then an olfactory one and lastly a palate tasting. In the visual examination the important factors are: limpidity, colour and tone and, in the case of sparkling wines, also effervescence. In the olfactory examination the important factors are: intensity of aroma, persistence and the description of all the aromas which one can smell; these could be flowery, fruity, jam-like, spicy or of many other kinds. In the tasting examination the important factors are: smoothness or roughness of the wine, its body and structure, balance and persistence.

Final conclusions: here the harmony is important as well as the wine’s level of evolution and a comprehensive judgement of the product tasted.
Moment of analysis | Way of perception used | Aspects of the wine considered
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Visual examination | Sight | Limpidity, Colour, Fluidity, Effervescence
Olfactory examination | Smell | Intensity, Persistence, Smell quality, Description and recognition
Taste examination astringency (Tannin content) | Taste | Softness (smoothness), Acidity (freshness), Sapidity, Bitterness
| Touch | Pseudo-heat (alcohol content), Pungency (carbon dioxide), Temperature, Consistency

**The most popular grape varieties in Tuscany**

**Cabernet**
This variety is divided into Cabernet Franc and Sauvignon, the latter is better known and more widely cultivated in Italy.
Of French origin it is the prince of the Bordeaux area and is one of the most widely spread varieties in the world. It arrived at the end of the 19th century in Piedmont and then spread to the rest of Italy with excellent results.
It is a variety that marries extremely well with Sangiovese: in Tuscany there are several wines with these two root-stocks.
In Italy Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon are not often used together with the exception of Sassicaia.

**Sangiovese**
This is the Tuscan root-stock prince. Its origin is in fact in our land. There are two type here, one with larger grapes (Sangiovese Brunello, Prugnolo Gentile) the other with smaller ones.
It is one of the oldest root-stocks in Italy and perhaps the most widely spread. It ripens during the first half of October.
Some of the most famous wines produced with these grapes: Brunello di Montalcino, Vino Nobile di Montepulciano and Chianti Classico.

**Merlot**
This is a French redroot-stock which comes from the Gironde (Bordeaux).
Together with Cabernet it makes the classic blend of the best French wines. It has been cultivated in Italy since 1880, from the north its use has spread to all the regions. Today it is vinified on its own as well as with other local grapes (for example with Sangiovese). The cluster is of average size, the grapes are plentiful and small. The Merlot grapes can produce both ready to drink and long ageing wines, ruby red in colour, pleasant to the palate, round and velvety.

**Vernaccia**
This is an old white root-stock which has always been used in San Gimignano. From the archives it results that already in 1276 a wine with the same name was used for commercial exchanges or for presents to rich princes. The calcareous soil and the mild climate with rare episodes of great temperature excursion give a vigorous and long lasting wine, which is powerful and well structured. The cluster is large and elongated, the grape is of average size, with a variable colour from green-yellow to amber, and is very resistant to parasites. The production is constant and abundant.

**Trebbiano Toscano**
This root-stock belongs to the large Trebbiano family and is widely used in central Italy, thanks to its high production and its resistance to diseases, although it does have quite a high acidity and it is not very aromatic. In the past it was included in many production regulation for red wines (for example for Chianti). Today it is no longer used as a variety for blending in red wines. In Tuscany it is also used for making Vin Santo, together with Malvasia. The cluster is large and elongated, the grape is of average size and green-yellow in colour, the leaf is medium-large.

**Malvasia del Chianti**
Root-stock with very old origin, from Grace and the Agean Islands, used all over the Mediterranean and in California. The wine produced from this variety is sweet and golden in colour. Today in Italy it is used for the production of Vin Santo, or pure, while up until 15/20 years ago it was used in the Chianti wine to soften its characteristics. The cluster is large, long and compact. The grape is of medium size, golden yellow in colour, the leaf is medium-large.
Our programs for 2012

Shared Wine Tours

- Chianti wine tour on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays
- Montalcino wine tour on Tuesdays
- Montepulciano wine tour on Wednesdays
- Chianti & Vernaccia di San Gimignano wine tour on Fridays
- Castles of Chianti wine tour on Mondays and Saturdays

For more details take a look at our websites www.italyandwine.net & www.tuscanwinetour.net

Useful Information

Recommended Restaurants

La Cucina del Garga - Via San Zanobi 33 – Florence Ph. +39 055475286
La Giostra - Via Borgo Pinti 12/r – Florence Ph. +39 055241341
Il Cibreo - Via del Verrocchio, 4/R Firenze Ph. +39 0552341100 Sunday, Monday closed
Buca Lapi - Via del Trebbio, 1/R Firenze Ph. +39 055213768 Sunday closed
Latini - Via Palchetti 6r Florence Ph. +39 055 210916
Cavolo Nero - Via dell’Ardiglione, 22 Ph. +39 055294744 Sunday closed
Osteria de’ Benci - Via dei Benci 13r Florence Ph. +39 055 2344923
Sostanza - Via del Porcellana 25r Florence Ph. +39 055 212691
Il Guscio – Via dell’Orto, 49 Ph. +39 055224421