



La Tavola Toscana

A Quarterly Newsletter from the *Tuscan Table*

Autumn Issue – Volume 1



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Welcome to the first release of La Tavola Toscana

La Tavola Toscana is a quarterly news letter from The Tuscan Table offering an exciting insight to the sights, smells and

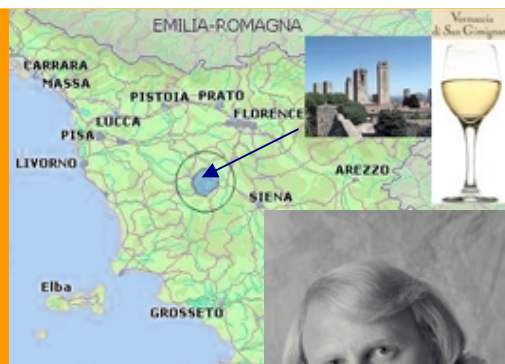
Location: In this inaugural issue of La Tavola Toscana we would like to bring you to the hill town of San Gimignano about 30 miles East of Florence.

The town commands a presence with its 13th century towers overseeing the Elsa Valley. San Gimignano is filled with more than 2,000 years of history as it was once the seat of a small Etruscan village, 200BC. This fortified settlement began its life as a town in the 10th century taking its name from the Holy Bishop of Modena, St. Gimignano.

San Gimignano prospered greatly during the Middle Ages due to the "Via Francigena," a well traveled trading and pilgrim route that crossed the Elsa Valley. Travelers and merchants brought many works of art and new wares to the area. The onslaught of new food items and cultural inspiration paved the way for many of the region's modern day culinary creations.

Although the great prosperity of the town, San Gimignano has experienced many years of strife due to the power struggle of two ruling families: the Ardinghelli family (Guelphs) and the Salvucci family (Ghibellines). Further hardship was brought to the town as the Black Death Plague drastically reduced its population.

In the following centuries San Gimignano overcame its decline and stimulated its citizens to continue the cultural, artistic and agricultural heritage that had once been the cornerstone of this prosperous valley.



Wine: Robert Bruno

Vernaccia di San Gimignano



Many Italians will say that the vino bianco, Vernaccia di San Gimignano is synonymous with the Elisa Valley. Vernaccia di San Gimignano was the first of Italy's wines to receive D.O.C. status and production is restricted to the hilly territory of the commune of Siena province. There are various white grape varieties known as "vernaccia" grown throughout Italy, a name related to the word "vernacular," implying a local or native vine.

Deeply rooted in Mediterranean history, the grape originates from the Etruscans and later was highly appreciated by was Pope Martin IV (1281-1285) as an accompaniment to his favorite saffron dish.

Tasting Notes: bright golden yellow in color; fine and penetrating odor; dry, fresh, balanced and lightly bitter flavor.

Specifics:

- Only hilly vineyards with good exposures and with soils consisting of yellow sand and sandy clay that are situated at altitudes not exceeding 500 meters above sea level are considered suitable.
- Max. yield of wine from grapes: 70%.
- Minimum alcohol level: 12%.

Parings with food: The color of Vernaccia suggests that it was made for a saffron dish; we suggest a light fish or veal to bring out the qualities in this wonderful wine.

From our Table to yours. Autumn Recipes in Tuscany

Please see our website for the full menu and recipes at www.tuscantable.com

Antipasto Toscano

- Crostini Erba e Carciofi Mascarpone-
Lou's Notes: This is a highlight of all my antipasti classes. Simply served on crostini, a Tuscan staple.

Il Primo Piatto

-Ribollita (Tuscan Bean Soup)-
Lou's Notes: This is a hearty winter vegetable soup that can be a meal in itself; it is a noted dish of Tuscany. It is best prepared a day in advance to allow all the flavors to marry.

Il Secondo Piatto

-Braised Veal with Saffron-
Lou's Notes: In the 13th century saffron was a typical product of San Gimignano and was dearer than servants or land. Its cultivation died out toward the middle of the 17th century and has recently rejuvenated.

Contorno

- Finocchi al forno-
Lou's Notes: Another favorite of my Tuscan classes. A Master Italian Chef taught me this combination.

I Formaggi Toscani

-Tuscan Cheeses-
Lou's Notes: I recall vividly a small Salumeria in San Gimignano, where I saw from the storefront window a basket of summer truffles. This lured me into a plethora of olfactory sensations and finally a mozzarella ovalini made with fresh summer truffles.

Il Dolce tipico

-Focaccia all'Uva-
Lou's Notes: We usually think of focaccia as a savory, but here is a version from Tuscany that is traditionally made in the fall during harvest season with freshly picked grapes and will please most dessert lovers.