

## Paradise in Tuscany

This time we have decided! Janie and I love our hectic jobs, our city on the east coast, its people, its bustle, its frenetic activity, its versatile climate ... but we now need a rest and some calm. A new honeymoon trip is all we need! We've been several times to Europe and liked the atmosphere, but always went to big cities: Paris, London, Rome. This time we wanted to get to the countryside in a place where we could experience calm, beauty, history, good food ... and hopefully wine. Search the web, see travel blogs, look up good travel guides is easy, choosing is more difficult ... but after several "last picks" our heart is taken away by a beautiful picture from the heart of Tuscany. Rolling hills, grapes in the foreground, an old beautiful villa in the background ... the caption mentions Greve in Chianti which we immediately Google up to discover a wine producing region of Tuscany between Sienna and Florence (30 miles apart) truffled with small towns like San Gimignano, Volterra and Momteriggioni and small hamlets like Volpaia and Montefioralle.



Dates are set for mid-September, a couple of meetings are brought forward, Karen Brown's and Alastair Sawdays guidebooks are reviewed, TripAdvisor is questioned: we have chosen and reserved an "historical" room in a small charm hotel close to Panzano in Chianti : an old family house named Hotel Villa le Barone ([www.villalebarone.com](http://www.villalebarone.com)) , managed its owners. From there the distances are short to the major cities of Tuscany together with plenty of local attractive car drives to little known places in the countryside.

Arrived safely in Pisa, rented a car and set our destination to Panzano in Chianti where we arrive 2 hours later through a windy narrow road and beautiful landscapes of olive trees, hills and typical red tiled



ancient houses. Could believe that a colorist created the landscape, made the cypress alignments, meadows and vines . On the way a few beautiful villages perched on hills.

Villa le Barone is a nice view on an old abbey: San mansion with authentic welcome, we are comforted English. Our room is on the top air conditioned, with a lovely and wi-fi works perfectly so that mail you my impressions!



**Our room at Villa le Barone**

surprise: a beautiful Leolino, an old furniture, warm that we can speak floor of the Villa, view on the hills I can immediately

In a couple of hours a real Tuscan dinner will be serve on the terrace and we are quite hungry and eager to taste thea good bottle of Chianti wine!

After an excellent dinner and a very quiet night where silence was only broken by a little owl probably nesting under the tiles of the roof, we are all set for a day of local discovery.

We had heard of Dario Cecchini, the famous butcher of Panzano and decide after breakfast to walk to his shop where we find him behind his elevated marble counter, with a large apron, a red shirt and a big smile reciting poetry, greeting friends, offering small bits of local specialties to his visitors as well as large glasses of wine. Lots of atmosphere and fun. Dario Cecchini also has three restaurants in Panzano and we decide to visit one of them (Officina della Bistecca) tomorrow night.

At Cecchini's and at Villa le Barone we have had our first acquaintance with Chianti wine: The flavor profile of Sangiovese is fruity, with moderate natural acidity and an assertive and robust body, the colours is red emerald. And we love it. We would like tis afternoon to visit a winery and reception at Vulla le Barone promptly organizes one at Molino di Grace, a stone's throw away from the hotel.

Il Molino di Grace (the 'Grace's windmill '), located just south of Panzano, in the heart of Tuscany's prestigious Chianti Classico region, produces critically acclaimed Tuscan wines that are true to both tradition and terroir. The winery is named after the Grace family as well as the historic 19th century windmill located on the property and is anchored by the bold sculpture standing tall in front of the cantina which is illustrated on the Il Molino di Grace wine label. Greeted like friends we tour the winery being explained meanwhile the vinification processes. We get thirsty seeing so many barriques and finally end up in a room with a beautiful vies and the prestige bottles of Molino di Grace: tasting begins with the basic Chianti Classico, then a 4 years



**Dario Cecchini at work**



**Molino di Grace winery**

old Riserva which we love (we are going to ask for some of it for dinner at Villa le Barone), but the best of the best is their Super Tuscan appropriately named Gratus (It's one of the highlight wines of our trip!).

This first day in Chianti has been magical: Villa le Barone is a constant surprise with astounding views, colors, mediterranean odors and a very special and gentle atmosphere; the visit to Dario Cecchini's butcher shop uncovers a universe of tastes (I note that we have to improve our eating standards omce we get back home ... forget delivered sushis!); the wine tasting at Molino di Grace has revealed the gentle elegance of a well managed winery together with astounding wines (note to myself: ask Janie to drive and recommend her not to taste too much wine!).

We are now set for a beautiful week: Floremce, Sienna, San Gimignano, Volterra ... here we com!