

Montecarlo Wine Tasting



On Valentine's Day our international group made its way to the Montecarlo countryside, about 20 minutes east of Lucca, to enjoy a wine-tasting lunch at the Fattoria Enzo Carmignani, property of Elena Carmignani. After passing through the fragrant *limonaia*, where the plants were still being sheltered while waiting for spring, we arrived in a room full of large steel vats and Elena began telling us about her winemaking life.

When still young, she decided to go to an important competition in Siena to present her own wines. At that time women were not well accepted in the business, but to everyone's surprise Elena's wine won first prize, and she decided to make this her life's work. We saw where she stored the wine in wooden barrels imported from France, and she explained that she sought out different kinds of wood depending on the variety of wine. From shadow into light, we then walked out into the hilly fields to see the young plants, that would become green and mature, to be harvested at the *vendemmia* in September.

Elena guided our tasting of several bottles and explained how they matched with different kinds of foods, and with the olive oil which is also a point of pride in Lucca. From a fresh fruity white wine, followed by the red *Theorema* (made as an experiment in mixing various varieties of grapes), some others, then the dessert wine *Aleatico*, we each had our favorites.

It was a short drive around the hill town of Montecarlo, known in the 1300s as *Vivinaia* (the wine road), to reach the giant oak. This tree is said to have inspired Collodi for the chapter in which Pinocchio is overcome by bandits who hang him from the tree head-down, so they can take the coins that spill from his pockets. (The original book written in 1883 has some rather aggressive undercurrents.)

Pleasantly dazed by the wine tasting, we engaged in some silliness and awe before returning to the real world.

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