

Exploring Tuscan Wine Country By Fiat Cinquecento - Part 3

During a recent vacation I visited Tuscan wineries in a Fiat 500 car— known in Italy as a *cinquecento* (pronounced *CHINK-way CHEN-tow*). The word—rolling with alliteration—can apparently also add emphasis. The car is a mobile chunk of culture—compact and crammed with history, like the Italian Republic.

A Florentine winemaker named Paola, or *Paolina* (a diminutive or affectionate word form) drove us in her milk-white *cinquecento* (itself a diminutive and affectionate form of locomotion).



Fiat 500 ('cinquecento') in the Chianti region of Tuscany, Italy

We moved from Florence to the Montalcino hills and then to Chianti Classico, and then southward to Maremma, north again to near Pisa and returned to the Chianti Colli Fiorentini wine region outside of Florence.

The foray's common denominator was Sangiovese, a sort of Swiss Army knife of Tuscan grape varieties because it is both robust and versatile. 'A chameleon,' Paolina explained in her lilting Florentine accent. Wines made from Sangiovese can be earthy/tannic/fruity, or gritty/beefy/spicy or a myriad of other flashing combinations. If Sangiovese does not perform optimally, Tuscan winemakers sometimes tame any burly or tumbling characteristics by blending in juice from grape varieties common to France, whether typical of Bordeaux, Burgundy, Rhone or Jurançon.

The other common denominator was our Fiat 500 transport, a car model which ushered in the *dolce vita* (sweet life) of the 1960's in Italy and was built to replace a car named *topolino*, which means—really—Mickey Mouse. Apparently dexterous with creating optimistic car names, Fiat also once produced an open air version of the *cinquecento* for beachside cruising, named the Jolly. Our version, dashboard crammed with a child's stuffed pink octopus, appeared both sweet and jolly.

Since the late 1950's when the original Fiat 500 first rolled out along narrow bucolic roads, the engine and door hinges have moved back to front, the weight has about tripled and the sound system has transformed from no radio and the sound of outdoor crickets to having a 320 Watt 'audio experience' with 'high-definition touchscreen infotainment.' Simplicity begone.

We finished drinking frothy morning mugs of cappuccino and soon drove along Strada Provinciale del Brunello lined with cypress trees, green ridges, rolling roads and red tiled roofs beneath cloudless skies.

(...)

Other Tuscan Wines –

We also tasted various other Tuscan wines from different regions.

(...)

Società Agricola Bertinga. Volta di Bertinga. Toscana IGT. 2016. 93+ points.

100% Merlot from Gaiole in Chianti. Brisk and deep aromas of earth, wet bark, truffles and blackberries and black cherries. Sleek in the mouth, a quicksilver pulse of chestnuts and strawberries in a liquid flash, with delicate tannins. You need a second sip, and quick. Pair this with hummus and pecorino cheese, or even peach and strawberry dessert.