

# TASTES of **italia**

## 63 AUTHENTIC ITALIAN RECIPES

**FRESH FISH  
FOR  
SUMMER  
FEASTS**

**EAT LIKE  
A SICILIAN**

**5 EASY  
PASTAS**

**TASTES  
OF  
CAPRI**



Fresh Heirloom  
Tomatoes With  
Basil-Garlic  
Dressing  
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**GRILL  
A BETTER  
STEAK**  
CELEBRITY  
CHEFS DISH

SUMMER 2024

Display Until September 17, 2024



**PLUS: NEW RECIPES FOR**  
Great Salads and Sides, Blackberry Gelato,  
Calabrian Pizza, Limoncello Sorbet, Almond Peach Gelato

# SUMMER IN THE COUNTRY

BY LAUREN BIRMINGHAM PISCITELLI

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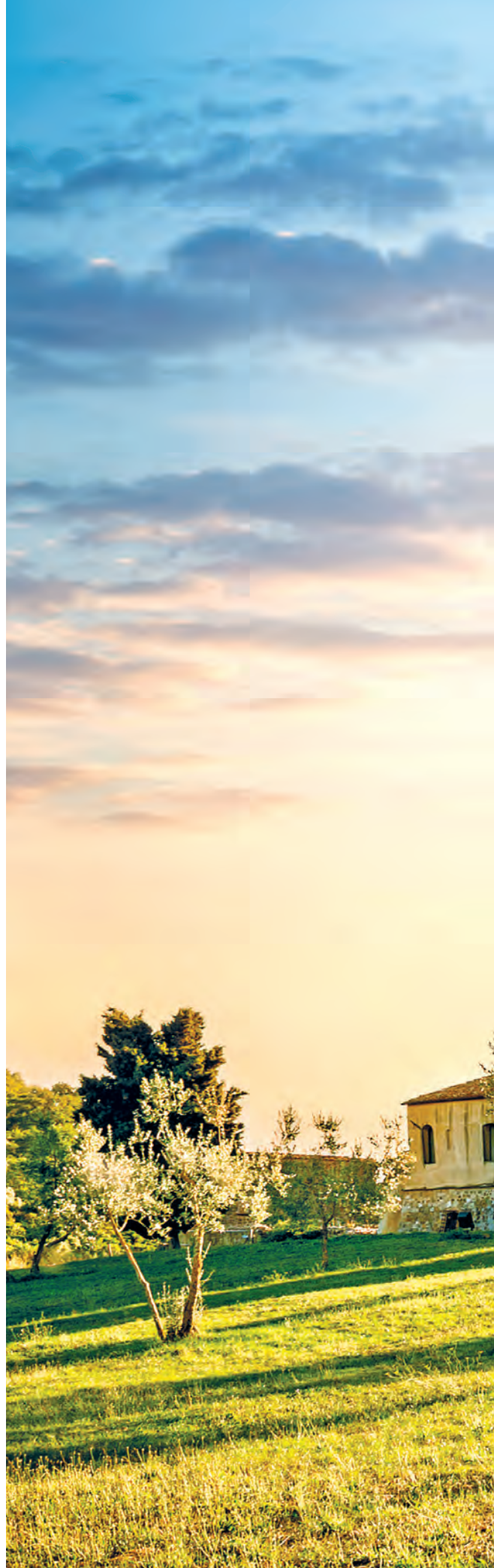
The drive along via SP-146 from Montepulciano to Montalcino is a gentle road that curves through Val d'Orcia, an expansive countryside in southern Tuscany that lies near the border of Umbria and on the slopes of Mont Amiata. It is alive with fields of yellow sunflowers, rolling fertile vineyards and silvery-green olive orchards. Centuries-old cypress trees pepper the landscape. Along the way, my husband, Rino, and I stop for a photo op in the natural beauty of this UNESCO Tuscan landscape.

The most picturesque stops along the way are the Cypresses of San Quirico d'Orcia, the Madonna di Vitaleta Chapel, I Cipressini farmhouse and Podere Terrapille. The latter is known as the Gladiator House where the Oscar-winning movie *Gladiator* with Russell Crowe was filmed.

We arrive at a stone façade built into a high wall. The sign reads "Montalcino 564 ALT mt," meaning Montalcino 564 meters altitude above sea level (a little over 1,843 feet). We cross the border into the land of Brunello di Montalcino, a beloved red wine that's known worldwide.

From Montalcino you can see across Val d'Orcia, a patchwork of evergreen landscape. A panoramic view showcases Mother Nature's best beauty. Sleepy farmhouses and vineyards dot the distance. Inside the village of Montalcino, artisan shops along the via Mazzini sell Italian linens, tablecloths, dinner napkins, table runners and fabric by the meter. An artisan cheese and salumi shop showcases fennel salumi and goat cheese aged under Sangiovese grape must, and offers complimentary tastings. The scent of panforte, a dark and dense Sienese cake made with almonds, candied orange, cinnamon, cloves, cardamon and honey, fills the air.

We stroll along via Giacomo Matteotti and visit Pianigiani, a minimalistic shop with a big collection of handcrafted leather goods. The Pianigiani family has been creating fine leather bags and belts for women, and wallets and shoes for men for centuries. There





Abbey of San'Antimo  
in Montalcino. Photo  
by Massimo Santi

## NATIVE SOIL



are infinite enotecas that offer wine tastings featuring the famed Brunello di Montalcino and inviting everyone in for a sip and swirl.

We visit the Fortezza di Montalcino, a military fortress, on the highest point of the town. The fortress, designed by Sieneese architects Mino Foresi and Domenico di Feo, has been constructed in the shape of a pentagon with four towers on each end. It's set on via Francigena, the pilgrimage route from England to Rome. Historians say the town dates to the Etruscans and Romans. Although there were many Sieneese and Florentine sieges during its history, the fortress and town were never conquered.

Inside the fortress, we visit a well-stocked wine emporium and tasting room restaurant where thousands of wine bottles cover all four walls spanning the floor to the ceiling. We experience one wine tasting and decide to visit the vineyards and cantinas in the countryside later in the day.

Next, we walk to the Piazza del Popolo, meaning square of the people, and the Palazzo Comunale, also called the Palazzo dei Priori, a 13th century building decorated with the coats-of-arms of governors who have been in office through time. There's also an ancient bell tower that defines the town's skyline. We continue to La Loggia, an open-area terrace covered under a vaulted ceiling built in the 14th century.

The Piazza del Popolo is charming and filled with small trattorias that serve traditional fare. There's the landmark

Caffe Fiaschetteria, dating back to 1888, where locals gather for conversation while dipping cantucci into glasses of Vin Santo, the blessed Tuscan wine. A museum and shop by the piazza showcase artisan paper goods, books and Montalcino-themed calendars. Must-sees are the Duomo, Cathedral of the Holy Savior, dedicated to San Salvatore built in the 14th century, and the Civic Diocesan Museum of Sacred Art located inside the former convent of Sant'Agostino. This museum houses one of the most precious collections of paintings and wooden sculptures from the Sieneese school.

Montalcino follows medieval design and tradition. It's divided into quarters called contrade, little districts: Borghetto, Travaglio, Pianello and Ruga. Each district has its own colors, songs and drum rhythms. Twice a year the residents of each district host an archery contest in the Fortezza, and participants dress in medieval costumes with ladies and lords representing each district.

The church bells ring at the top of the hour, and at 2 p.m. we enjoy lunch at a quaint restaurant with an open kitchen and a female chef, a rarity in a male-dominated field in Italy. Antipasto, a beautiful tricolor purple, white and green broccoli (charred and drizzled with extra virgin olive oil) is served. Tortelli follow. Handmade thin sheets of pasta stuffed with fresh ricotta and spinach served in a simple butter and sage are excellent. A plate of pappardelle and wild boar graces the table, too. Peposo, a peppery Tuscan stew with veal, is served in a copper pan. A plate of homemade sausage spiced with fennel and slow cooked in red wine is shared as a main.

The sommelier pours a bottle of Brunello di Montalcino into tall, large bowl glasses while ciaccino, a thin crispy Tuscan bread, is drizzled with extra virgin olive oil. This is not any olive oil, it's a limited edition one by Settimocielo, meaning seventh heaven, from the village. Organic and made in Montalcino, our lunch is buonissimo!

A note on Brunello di Montalcino:

- The Consorzio del Vino Brunello di Montalcino has a serious long list of rules and protocol that must be followed when making the prized wine. The most important, the Brunello di Montalcino, must be made from 100 percent Sangiovese grapes, and the date of the wine being put on the marketplace for sale must be January 1st of the fifth year after harvesting. During this time, the wine must be aged five years, two of which must take place in oak barrels. Brunello literally translates to little brown one, referring to the color of the grape.

- Brunello di Montalcino Tastings: Castiglion del Bosco offers a vertical tasting with six Brunello di Montalcino vintages served with local Pecorino cheese, bread, extra virgin olive oil and honey. The property is part of Rosewood and has an elite tasting room in Florence along the Arno River.

Lauren Birmingham Piscitelli is founder and owner of Cooking Vacations Italy which specializes in culinary tours, hands-on cooking classes and cultural adventures in Italy. [www.cooking-vacations.com](http://www.cooking-vacations.com); (617) 247-4112.



## PEPOSO VITELLO, MONTALCINO STYLE

Peppery Tuscan Veal Stew

- 1** pound veal, cut into 1½-inch chunks
- 3** mature fresh tomatoes
- 3** cloves garlic, or more to taste
- 1** tablespoon tomato paste
- 3** sage leaves, a branch of rosemary and 2 bay leaves
- Black pepper, to taste**
- Sea salt, to taste**
- Red wine, as needed**

Place the meat in a large shallow pan. Peel the tomatoes and remove the seeds (this helps take out the acidity). Squash the garlic flat, remove the inner stem, and add the garlic to the pan with the meat. Chop tomatoes into small pieces, then add to the pan. Add the tomato paste. Add the herbs, then salt and pepper, to taste. The name, peposo, translates to peppery, therefore be generous with the pepper.

Cover the ingredients with the red wine and cook slowly over low heat for about 6 hours. Add red wine as needed if it starts to dry. Stir every 20 minutes or so, adding wine as needed. When cooked, plate and serve.

Makes 4 servings.

One of many rolling vineyards in the region.  
Photo by Lauren Birmingham Piscitelli

