



FOOD

Wine Therapy

*What makes the wines of San Patrignano so distinctive?
It's not just the grapes*

BY CORBY KUMMER

The views of the inviting green hills around San Patrignano—a village above Rimini, the Adriatic seaside resort made famous by native son Federico Fellini in *Amarcord*—are as splendid as those from any Italian winery. The tiny republic of San Marino, improbably perched at the top of a cone-shaped mountain, rises in the distance, just three miles away. As if the manicured vineyards weren't decorative enough, there is the building where the grapes arrive for sorting and crushing. At other wineries, grapes are crushed in a parking lot that doubles as a loading dock during harvest time. At San Patrignano the crushing area is a pavilion, with majestic open ironwork cathedral-like arches

on all four sides framing the gorgeous views. The adjacent winery is large and impressive, its bright and frescoed cellar containing a glassed-in tasting room that looks like something out of a James Bond movie. But the pavilion is glorious, giving great dignity to the manual labor involved in raising and picking grapes.

Those grapes are Sangiovese, famous in Tuscan Chianti but also native to the town's region of Emilia-Romagna, which is known for its rich cuisine (Bologna is the capital). One of the wines for which San Patrignano has become known, *Avi*, is a pure expression of Sangiovese: it has notes of spice, leather, and tobacco, and a slight smokiness; it is full bodied, making it suitable for drinking with many

kinds of pastas and grilled meat or fish. Montepiolo, the winery's blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Cabernet Franc, costs less than many Italian wines of the same quality.

San Patrignano's supervising winemaker, Riccardo Cotarella, is a cult figure; the wines he has worked on are celebrated so often by Robert M. Parker Jr. that wineries in search of a consultant-magician to lift them to international fame vie for his services. Yet Cotarella has never charged San Patrignano for his winemaking skills.

The big difference between San Patrignano and other wines is not the quality or the price, or even the beautiful views. It's something hinted at in the legend that appears on the bottle: WINE IS PLEASURE AND HEALTH. DRINK WITH SOBRIETY. The 1,800 residents of San Patrignano are all recovering drug addicts, who live in what is Italy's largest treatment community for an average of between three and four years. Cotarella considers himself part of the San Patrignano family—a

FIVE NOTEWORTHY SANGIOVESES

Percarlo, San Giusto a Rentennano.

The Martini di Cigala family makes what the authority Burton Anderson has called "the most virile pure Sangiovese," made in the hills near Siena.

Castello di Ama, Chianti Classico.

Managing Director Lorenza Sebasti and the winemaker Marco Pallanti have long stood for quality and stubborn individuality; all of their wines are worth trying (and their olive oil is too).

Riecine, Chianti Classico. This British-founded vineyard, originally part of the famous Badia a Coltibuono estate, has for more than thirty years produced exemplary Chiantis, now under the direction of the winemaker and co-owner Sean O'Callaghan.

Fattoria Paradiso, Sangiovese di Romagna. The variety of Sangiovese raised at San Patrignano, this one made by well-established and respected winemakers nearby, the Pezzi family of Bertinoro.

Avi, San Patrignano. San Patrignano's big-deal all-Sangiovese wine, a consistent award winner. Its Noi, a blend of Sangiovese, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Merlot, is versatile enough to be a weeknight wine.



family that, after twenty-eight years of existence, includes 14,000 graduates.

Winemaking at San Patrignano is a form of rehabilitative therapy, one of numerous trades taught and practiced at the highest level in a country that could fairly be called the world's artisanal treasury. The pavilion is so grand because during the harvest more than 700 of the residents come together in the joyous shared activity of crushing grapes. And the beauty at every turn—the landscape, the pavilion, the workshops where the ironwork was forged and furniture crafted and upholstery hand-blocked—is part of the therapy too.

San Patrignano is a firmly well-ordered realm. On a recent early-summer evening its head, Andrea Muccioli, took me around the winery (whose pavilion he

designed) and several of the workshops. We began in the store, near the entrance—San Patrignano, known to almost every Italian, is open to the public for tours. The hand-crafted furniture, wallpaper, and fabrics on display are impressive for their workmanship, clean design, and comparatively low prices and are available to designers around the world. (Several of the techniques have all but vanished, even in Italy.) When the community was just starting, in the early 1980s, Renzo Mongiardino, an internationally famous decorator, brought in his valued craftsmen to teach San Patrignano residents forgotten skills, such as stenciling and waxing paper to look like parquet; artisans who fear that their knowledge will die with them continue to donate teaching time. (For information about ordering San Patrignano products go to www.sanpatrignano.org.)

The prices are reasonable because the labor is free—as is drug treatment at San Patrignano. The sale of wine, which is a significant revenue producer, and other goods accounts for about half the

annual budget of 25 million euros; the rest comes from donations. All the residents (the term used at San Patrignano is *ragazzi*, which translates as "kids") learn new trades soon after they begin their stay.

As he showed me around, Muccioli was jocular with the blacksmiths, and in general displayed the big-brother attitude he says he feels toward everyone at San Patrignano. But even as he gave and accepted the hugs and backrubs that nurses and aides at the large health-care clinic pressed on him, his demeanor was somber, watchful, authoritarian. Andrea was fourteen and his younger brother, Giacomo, twelve when they first shared their home with a recovering addict. Their parents, Vincenzo and Antonietta, owned a hotel in Rimini and ran an informal free clinic two nights a week at their weekend farm, practicing alternative medicines such as homeopathy and acupuncture. The couple turned that farm into a residential treatment facility, and over the years they developed vocational training and rules for group

living that produced noteworthy results. Today San Patrignano claims that more than 70 percent of its graduates remain drug-free for three years after leaving the community.

From the beginning, San Patrignano has been controversial. Vincenzo Muccioli worked outside the state system and made his own rules, many of which were harsher than those of the country's usual drug treatments. He attracted broad support, including from the right; an oil family named Moratti, for instance, is a principal backer. The funding Muccioli attracted helped him to expand the complex on a grand scale (it now covers about 624 acres, four times its original size). He was criticized for living an imperial life in which he was the unchallenged dictator. During the 1980s residents complained of maltreatment and abusive punishment bordering on torture, and San Patrignano was the target of investigations for a series of scandals. The scandals—and especially Muccioli's alliance with right-wing politicians who shared his view that drug laws and punishments should be harsher, along the lines of the American model—made Muccioli a target for criticism.

In 1994, Andrea, after training as a lawyer and traveling extensively, decided to return to live full-time to San Patrignano. In 1995 his father died, at age sixty-one, putting the program's very survival in question. "The idea was that the flag will fall if you don't hold it up," Andrea told me. "I found myself near the flag, and people said, 'Take it.' I did, and had to hope people would follow." Barely thirty, he assumed leadership of the center, with the fund-raising help of Giacomo, who had trained and practiced as a veterinarian before returning to live and work at San Patrignano. Andrea stabilized and expanded the community. The brothers strengthened the community's ties with various social-service agencies and with donors (a group of supporters, Friends of San Patrignano, held its first U.S. fund-raiser, an auction, in New York last year), and the center continues to thrive.

But it still has fervent critics. Andrea advocates harsh drug laws as staunchly as his father did, and has appeared with Silvio Berlusconi in calling for them. He

THE AMERICAN VERSION

The closest American analogue to San Patrignano is the Delancey Street Foundation, close by the Bay Bridge along San Francisco's Embarcadero. Ever since the two communities discovered each other, like long-lost twins, through an international conference, they have developed links, including an exchange program. Delancey Street is right in the middle of the city, on what is now prime property but wasn't when residents took out contractor licenses and taught themselves construction to build a new home. Like San Patrignano, the complex is very beautiful—400,000 square feet of buildings that look like a fantasy of Italian villas. Its 500 residents, most of them repeat criminals facing long sentences and given this last chance by state courts, stay at least two years.

Mimi Silbert, Delancey Street's charismatic, mouthy, mountain-moving founder, has for thirty-five years won over neighbors, judges, banks, zoning bureaus, and licensing agencies to create what she calls the "Harvard of the underclass," with vocational training and education required for all residents. Numerous affiliated businesses (moving, chauffeuring) pay much of the budget. Silbert told me that, like Muccioli, she must daily turn down more requests to enter the community than she can accept. "How do they know about us? How do the people next door to us know about BMWs and goat cheese? It's word on the street."

Delancey Street may not make wine, but it does operate an airy and lovely café/bookshop and a very popular restaurant. Word has brought many neighbors to the restaurant, which serves comfort food from, as Silbert says, everyone's grandmother. So aside from her own grandmother's matzo ball soup, options include homestyle Greek food and admired burgers and sweet-potato pie. The outdoor dining and the stunning views of the bay help too.

Delancey Street Restaurant
600 Embarcadero (at Brannan)
San Francisco, Calif.
415-512-5179

is opposed to the legalization of marijuana, a sometime pet cause of the left, and has been instrumental in forming a network of 200 rehabilitation centers that oppose any drug legalization.

Vincenzo Muccioli had a passion for dog and horse training, both long-time components of drug rehabilitation. (San Patrignano is best known outside Italy for raising show-jumping horses and holding international competitions.) Andrea Muccioli's passion is wine. It was he who called in Cotarella to try improving a grape that had a distinguished history in the region but had seldom been grown quite so close to the sea. Cotarella had had great success facing similar climatic challenges, and he readily agreed to try making a world-class Sangiovese wine once he saw the landscape.

Even though the Sangiovese grape is a "wild animal," as Muccioli describes it—unpredictable in its first weeks of vinification, when winemakers need to make important decisions about when to stop fermentation and where and how long to store new wine—he wanted to restore it to the region. He also wanted to pay homage to his father by using a native grape: the wine name *Avi* comes from "a Vincenzo," and is also Italian for "ancestors." (The wine's label design is donated every year by a different artist.) Though its first two vintages were not all the men had hoped for, *Avi* has lately been a consistent winner of Italy's prestigious Tre Bicchieri ("Three Glasses") award. Piero Selvaggio, owner of the Valentino restaurants in Santa Monica and Las Vegas, and one of the country's most respected authorities on Italian wine, has long offered several San Patrignano wines on his list. He told me that he finds them "much more elegant and interesting than other Sangioveses."

During my tour I was shown a large, nearly finished restaurant on a hill above the winery, where visitors will be able to eat the food that the residents of San Patrignano produce: the cured meats San Patrignano makes from its own pigs; the *piadina*, griddle-cooked flatbread that is a hallmark of Romagna, and which arrived, freshly made, every ten minutes while I was having dinner with Muccioli

in the enormous refectory; and the cheeses, one of which, *squacquerone*, a fresh cow's-milk cheese in the shape of a high wheel of Camembert but white and squishy, is faint-inducingly good.

During meals at San Patrignano, the discipline is strict. Residents cook and serve one another; the rotating serving staff's gender ratio—70 percent male to 30 percent female—mirrors that of the community. After the group is seated, at long picnic tables, a handclap sounds and everyone rises for a minute of prayer (the community has no religious affiliation, although a priest comes to say Mass on Sundays). At the end of the meal diners stand again at a signal, as if responding to a rifle shot. The discipline and the constant emphasis on groups, Muccioli told me, is aimed at freeing residents from their history of thinking only of themselves and their own needs. Residents do all their work in teams, and they start out living in dorms, where they need to make group decisions about evening activities; after a year, spouses and children may join them in houses San Patrignano has built for families.

Many of the alliances formed at San Patrignano are lifelong. When I visited, on a Friday, the theater and lecture hall were being readied for seven marriages that would take place that weekend, some between current residents but most between graduates, who come back often to visit what was in some cases the first functional family they were part of.

As for the question Americans, but not Italians, immediately ask: Yes, residents may drink a glass of wine with lunch and with dinner (and may smoke up to ten cigarettes a day). Despite his hard stance on drugs like marijuana, Andrea Muccioli says his program is in tune with the ancient Mediterranean culture of enjoying wine as an adjunct to a meal—and besides, alcohol is very seldom the chief problem for any resident. The San Patrignano journey, he says, is toward autonomy and dignity, so that residents "won't be considered fragile and sick the rest of their lives." Responsibly drinking—as well as making—wine is considered an integral part of that journey. ▀

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