

VAL D'ORCIA



Sweet round-shaped hills, changing colour according to the season, low valleys along the Orcia river, parish churches and restored farms here and there, often hiding in a forest of cypresses. Such are the characteristics making the charm of Val d'Orcia incomparable, an extraordinary synthesis between nature, art and deeply rooted traditions. This beautiful area of Tuscany is under the authority of the Val d'Orcia Park, instituted to maintain and develop the heritage of a region to promote its typical produce.



The fertile countryside of Val d'Orcia, cultivated with respect and wisdom, produces excellent wines, olive oil and high quality cereals. The landscape is deeply marked by man's intervention aiming to enrich the natural beauty with subtle religious and civilian works of art. It is difficult to explain with words the serene charm emanating from the lands of Val d'Orcia in the spring, when the hills turn green, in the summer when the yellow colour of sunflowers and wheat fields dominates the area, in the beautiful fragrance of a variety of plants. In the south of Bagno Vignoni, olive groves, vineyards and cultivated fields are replaced by a Mediterranean bushland while in the Mount Amiata area opens out a thick forest of chestnut and beech groves.



Mother Nature, especially generous with the Val d'Orcia's people, did not forget to create thermal springs for rest and care. The Via Francigena goes through Val d'Orcia near the small village of **Bagno Vignoni**, visited by famous people and pilgrims. Already inhabited in the Etruscan period, the Val d'Orcia keeps architectural vestiges from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. In **San Quirico** places to visit are the Collegiata, the Palazzo Chigi Zondadari and the Horti Leonini, whereas in **Castiglione d'Orcia** the Rocca degli Aldobrandeschi is worth visiting.



In fact, the whole territory of the Val d'Orcia can be regarded as a museum in the open air with all sorts of architectural and artistic works disseminated in the beautiful countryside. The major attractions are fortified villages, parish churches and farms in the heart of a breathtaking scenery. For instance, it is recommended to visit places like the village of **Monticchiello**, surrounded by 13th century walls, and those of **Corsignano** and **Castelluccio**, in the vicinity of splendid Renaissance villas, built by the noble families of the time to find rest there during hot summers.

Val d'Orcia - UNESCO World Heritage Site



Since 2004, Val d'Orcia has been one of the Italian sites inserted in the UNESCO world heritage list. The territory of Castiglione d'Orcia represents one of the major features of its landscape. Val d'Orcia is an exceptional example of the way the Renaissance used this type of landscape as an esthetically ideal background for a “good government”, a landscape celebrated by Sienese Renaissance painters. Present in some descriptions of landscape where people are depicted as living in harmony with nature, the pictures of the Val d'Orcia have deeply influenced the development of landscape philosophy, proving the UNESCO decision to be right.



GASTRONOMY and TYPICAL PRODUCE

In addition to its landscape and precious historic and artistic heritage, Val d'Orcia offers a myriad of gastronomic opportunities. The cult of the good table is deeply rooted in the culture of the Val d'Orcia where the link between territory and agriculture creates exceptional genuine products. This is a land where agricultural production is distinguished by a label certifying its origin according to strict criteria attesting its quality. The “Val d'Orcia” labels are found on **honey** jars, **extravirgin olive oil** and **wine** bottles, on **pecorino** cheese and on **saffron** sachets.

The **pecorino** and other cheeses of this area taste good because of the aromatic herbs growing in the pastures where the cattle graze freely. Since 1999, to certify the quality of the local wines, the label **DOC Val d'Orcia** has been given to the *Rosso*, the *Novello*, the *Bianco* and the *Vinsanto*. On the hills surrounding Castiglione and San Quirico, olive trees are still cultivated in the traditional way, allowing to get an **extravirgin olive oil** which is among the best in Tuscany, with excellent organoleptic and nutritive characteristics. In a jar of honey, one can gather the many aromas of the plants growing in the meadows of the Val d'Orcia, like acacia, arbutus berries, chestnut or pine. The culture of **saffron** corresponds to an old tradition, abandoned for long years but recently reintroduced. Precious and very costly, saffron flourishes in November, it is then grilled and reduced in powder: to obtain one kilo of this very special spice, it is necessary to use **150.000 saffron stigmas**.

Near **Mount Amiata**, food is based on **game, truffles** and excellent **porcini mushrooms**. Sausage lovers will appreciate very good **hams, pork** or **wild-boar sausages, salamis** and **finocchiona**, while meat lovers will enjoy eating a beautiful **bistecca di Cinta Senese**. The pigs of Cinta Senese have been saved from extinction thanks to the passion of a few isolated cattle breeders and the pork meat is growing in fame because of its excellent quality. The pigs bred in the Siena countryside have a dark robe with white stripes and their meat is used to make salamis and sausages which are irresistible when cooked on a charcoal grill. On the dining-tables of the Val d'Orcia you find **soups, crostini, casseroles, roasts** and **home-made pasta, fried vegetables and meat** allowing to appreciate the local olive oil; with these exquisite dishes prepared with no haste you have to drink the local wines. In the summertime, the best way to discover the delicacies of the Val d'Orcia traditional gastronomy is to move from one village to another and enjoy the food festivals where it is easy to eat well without spending too much.



A TOUR IN VAL D'ORCIA

A visit of Val d'Orcia starts with **SAN QUIRICO**. Situated along the Via Francigena, this village was already a well-known destination for travellers and pilgrims in the Middle Ages. It still presents all the characteristics of a medieval village, with its 15th century walls and its fourteen towers. Outstanding in the heart of the historic centre we find the magnificent Romanesque **Collegiata**, built between the 12th and the 13th century with two impressive Romanesque portals decorated with bas-reliefs and sculptures. Inside there is a beautiful triptych by Sano di Pietro representing a *Madonna col bambino in trono e quattro santi*. Behind the Collegiata stands the Palazzo Chigi, an elegant building from the 17th century enriched by murals in the Roman style and there is also the ex-Palazzo Pretorio, with four medieval buildings. This is where the Visitors Centre of the Park of Val d'Orcia is located today. The winding via Poliziano is worthy of a stroll, lined by well maintained small medieval houses; it leads to the Porta dei Cappuccini, a polygonal dungeon almost intact. Near the Porta Nuova are situated the Horti Leonini, a well cared and lovely Italian garden, dated from the mid 1500s.

The Collegiata

Coming in from the north-west, on via Dante Alighieri (old Via Francigena or Romea) which divides the old village in half, we find the **Chiesa Collegiata** (12th century), dedicated to **St Quirico** and **St Giuditta**, with a beautiful portal dominating the main street of the village.



The church has been mentioned in archival documents since the 8th century but its present structure goes back to the 12th-13th centuries. The oldest part is the façade and especially its biggest portal. This façade is decorated by small arches and a Gothic rose-window. The magnificent Romanesque portal from the 12th century is preceded by a prothyron with an arch supported by columns standing on two lionesses. Inside the porch, there are five columns on the left hand side and five on the right, their capitals are decorated with animals and acanthus leaves. In the architrave is sculpted a bas-relief representing the fight between two monsters. In the centre of the lunette, the sculpture of a presumed effigy of San Damaso could, in fact, be identified as the representation of San Quirico.

In the second half of the 13th century works of enlargement were done with the adjunction of a transept and two lateral portals along the Via Francigena, on the right hand side of the Collegiata where there are two gemed windows. One of the side portal, in the Lombard style from the 13th century, is surmounted by a prothyron supported by two caryatids standing on lions. It is probably dated to 1288 and is attributed to **Giovanni Pisano** who was at that time (1287-1288) involved in the building of the Duomo in Siena. On the portal, an inscription in Gothic letters says “**Iohes**”, which could be interpreted as Pisano’s name or as a record of the old name of the church dedicated to St Quirico and St John the Baptist. A third Gothic portal from 1298 is found on the right hand side of the cross of the transept, a work by Lotto (referred to in an inscription on the architrave) who must have been responsible for the building of the transept; the portal presents a mix of Gothic and Romanesque features.

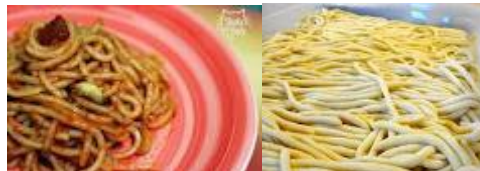
Inside, the church is in the shape of a Latin cross with three apses, the nave is covered by wooden trusses and the arms of the transept by cross vaults. On the left side of the third archway there is the **tomb of Count Enrico di Nassau** (who died in San Quirico in 1415). In the left arm of the transept we can see a triptych by **Sano di Pietro** (1406-1481); in the apse a choir in inlaid wood is attributed to the artist from Siena **Antonio Barili**; these marquetry pieces were originally made for the Duomo of Siena and then acquired by the Chigi family. The end part of the church was completely altered when the apse was demolished in 1653 and a choir built. The campanile was also rebuilt between 1798 and 1806.



Next to the Collegiata stands the imposing **Palazzo Chigi Zondadari** (17th century), a vestige of the feudal past of the village; it is a severe stone building – such a contrast to the rather charming poverty of the surroundings.



Proceeding along the Corso we reach the **Piazza della Libertà**, where stands in the centre the **Chiesa di S. Francesco**, or **Chiesa della Madonna** because it keeps the *Madonna di Vitaleta* by **Andrea della Robbia**. From a corner of the square we get access to the **Horti Leonini**, an **Italian garden** which is a real jewel **from the 16th century**. Geometrical beds of box hedge lead to a high loggia set in a small wood of holm oaks. In the high part of the garden are the remains of the Torre del Cassero (which was 39 m high), destroyed during the German retreat in 1944. At the end of the via Dante Alighieri, we find the little church of Santa Maria Assunta, from the 11th-12th centuries, constructed with Romanesque forms and Lombard influence. Opening out of the left side, its robust portal was built with materials coming from the Abbey of Sant'Antimo. The semicircular apses are softened by a window crowned with small arches.



In San Quirico you will enjoy eating excellent “*picci*”, a type of home-made pasta, the best chicken “*in scottiglia*” of the Val d’Orcia and, when in season, delicious snails cooked in sauce. In the surroundings of San Quirico, it is advised to visit the **Rocca d’Orcia**, a small and well maintained medieval village, dominated by the **Rocca di Tentennano**, from the 11th century, from where one can enjoy superb panoramas on Val d’Orcia. In the centre of the square of Rocca d’Orcia stands an admirable **water tank** built seven hundred years ago, to serve the needs of the castle.

BAGNO VIGNONI



From San Quirico we can reach **Bagno Vignoni**, a lovely thermal spa village, already known in Roman times and which became more important in the Middle Ages, thanks to the extraordinary properties of its waters. The **delightful little village** is gathered around a **sulphurous water pool** which used to be the old thermal centre. The water gushes out from a depth of 1000 metres at a temperature of 52 degrees. Rich in magnesium sulfate and in calcium sulfate, it is excellent to treat bone diseases and affections of the mucous membranes. Bagno Vignoni waters are also a panacea for the skin; **Lorenzo the Magnificent** and **St Catherine of Siena** took advantage of their qualities.



The name of this old village derives from **Vignoni**, a castle already known in the 11th century; its remains on the hill still dominate the village. The use of thermal waters since the Roman times is attested by several archeological pieces gathered in the Chigi collection, in the National Archeological Museum of Siena. In the 12th century and until the end of the 13th century, the “**Bagno**” was under the authority of the Tignosi family, lords of Tentennano, today Rocca d’Orcia. At the beginning of the 14th century, Bagno Vignoni and the neighbouring villages and castles fell under the domination of the Salimbeni family, from Siena, until 1417 when Attendolo Sforza, Antonia Salimbeni’s second husband, sold it to Siena. Despite the many war

episodes, devastations and fires which happened in Val d'Orcia during the Middle Ages, the look of Bagno Vignoni has practically not changed.



The village is developed along an esplanade, situated halfway between the hill of Vignoni and the abrupt gorges of the river Orcia, around a large rectangular pool where the waters gush out, recalling the way the ancient Roman baths were. Houses and shops are located around the pool as well as the church of **San Giovanni Battista**, where it is now possible to see a fragment of the restored fresco representing *Cristo risorto*, attributed to **Ventura Salimbeni**, and which was found before in the chapel of **Santa Caterina**. In the past, the waters used to flow under an arched bridge to reach the spa installations and then they also supplied a number of mills located on the steep slope going down towards the river. Today it is possible to visit this site thanks to a clean-up of the area recently done by the municipality of San Quirico d'Orcia (Parco dei mulini).



CASTIGLIONE D'ORCIA

Virtually situated on the northern side of Mount Amiata, **Castiglione d'Orcia** keeps the characteristics of an old castle, dominated by the ruins of the powerful **Rocca Aldobrandesca**. Located on the top of hills not far from the Cassia road, Castiglione d'Orcia is a small centre focusing mainly on agriculture and handicraft. Already existing in the first decades of the 8th century, Castiglione d'Orcia was initially the property of the **Aldobrandeschi** family and was the cause of a dispute with the Abbey San Salvatore; it became a free village but later it was conquered by Siena. The present Castiglione, at the foot of the imposing **Rocca degli Aldobrandeschi**, has kept its medieval look with **picturesque and characteristics spots**: dedicated to the painter **Lorenzo di Pietro** or **Vecchietta** (born here in 1492), the main square where stands the **Palazzo Comunale** is totally paved with river pebbles geometrically subdivided in the shape of bricks. In the centre of the square there is a 17th century fountain in travertine. The church of the **Santi Stefano e Degna** is the most interesting religious building; the 16th century frescoes which decorated the walls, an artwork by **Simone Martini** and **Lorenzetti**, are now kept at the *Soprintendenza*, in Siena. The church of **Santa Maria Maddalena** from the 13th century is worth visiting. From the park of the Rocca Aldobrandesca, we see the whole village and a good part of the valley. Stronghold belonging to the Abbey of San Salvatore, the **Rocca a Tentennano** is now part of the municipality. When the Abbey started to lose power, the castle became property of the Tignosi family, Aldobrandeschi's vassals, and was finally conquered by Siena. La Rocca, where Catherine of Siena stayed, has been restored and can be visited.



BAGNI SAN FILIPPO

The big limestone incrustations of the **Fosso Bianco** (white ditch) near **Bagni San Filippo** are a remarkable natural characteristic. This place is also famous for its alkaline and sulphurous waters, gushing out from travertine rocks at a temperature between 25 and 52 degrees. At an altitude of 524 metres, Servite monks have made a chapel in the cave where **San Filippo Benizi**, who helped the recovery of many sick people, is thought to have lived. It is a very suggestive place with white limestone sediments and hot waterfalls close to the village. The “Fosso Bianco” is also called the “Fosso dell'Acqua Bianca”. The “Balena Bianca” (white whale) is a mountain torrent with hyperthermal waters. Going through the woods outside the village, the visitor will have to choose between enjoying the sulphurous waters gushing out of the rocks of the “Fosso Bianco” or walking across the small bridge to immerse into the white mud pool of the “Balena Bianca”.

The village is named after **Filippo Benizi**, a prior of the Florentine Order of the **Servi di Maria**, who took refuge there to escape from the papal election during the conclave held in Viterbo in 1296. Nevertheless, Bagni San Filippo was already known as a thermal centre in the Roman times and it is during the 16th century that Cosimo de' Medici decided to restore the baths, quoted in Machiavelli's “**Mandragola**”. Visitors wishing to stay in Bagni San Filippo to relax will be able to enjoy the new hotel linked to the spa installations: “**Nuove Terme San Filippo**”, where they will find a swimming-pool and a waterfall at a temperature of 37 degrees.



PIENZA

Pienza is a stunning village of the Val d'Orcia, sitting on a hill at an altitude of 490 m. Situated at 50 km from Siena, it can be reached with the Cassia road in the direction of San Quirico d'Orcia. In 1996, Pienza was included in the **UNESCO** world heritage list. Originally named Corsignano, it got its present appearance according to the will of **Pope Pius II**, **Enea Silvio Piccolomini**, and thanks to the work of **Bernardo Gambarelli** called **Rossellino**. Pius II was born in Corsignano-Pienza in 1405 and when he became pope he decided to embellish his native village. He went there in 1462 at a time when works were well underway and he renamed it Pienza. When Pius II died, in August 1464, the construction works were not yet finished and they were abandoned. This is how Pienza became, even not fully completed, **the unique example of a 15th century town built following pre-established plans**. The most important buildings are situated on the Piazza Pio II; they are the Cathedral, the Palazzo Piccolomini, the Palazzo Comunale, the Palazzo Vescovile and the Palazzo Ammanati.



Pienza is located at a **wonderful place dominating the Val d'Orcia** where you can discover **splendid panoramas** when you take a **walk around the walls**. Two spots are remarkable: the part of the walk going **to the cathedral where you dominate the Val d'Orcia** and the part near the two circular dungeons where you can enjoy a **beautiful panorama on the valley of the torrent Tresa** and the village of Monticchiello.



The monumental centre of Pienza is **Piazza Pio II**, an example of the utopic ideal city planned by **humanist architects** in the 15th century. Following geometrical principles which are harmoniously articulated, the square presents the main buildings of the village: the **Duomo**, the **Palazzo Vescovile**, the **Palazzo Piccolomini**, the **Palazzo Comunale**, the **Palazzo Ammannati** and a beautiful **well in travertine stone** from the 15th century.



La Cattedrale dell'Assunta

The façade of the Cathedral **Our Lady of the Assumption**, which was built between 1459 and 1462, is outstanding. While the rest of the building is made in tuff, the façade is in travertine stone with a double order of columns and three portals. In the big tympanum we can see Pius II's coat of arms. The inside, wide and

luminous, has three naves of the same height, divided by tetrastyle columns with capitals and cornices. It is decorated with artworks commissioned by Pius II to the greatest Sieneese artists at that time and which were done between 1461 and 1463. We find in the right hand side nave a *Madonna col bambino e i Ss. Antonio Abate, Bernardo, Francesco e Sabina* by **Giovanni di Paolo**; in the first chapel, a *Madonna col Bambino e Santi*, by **Matteo di Giovanni**; in the second chapel, there is a beautiful altar with an altar frontal in travertine about the Holy Sacrament by **Rossellino**. In the central chapel we can see a beautiful choir in the Gothic style from 1462. In the fourth chapel there is **Lorenzo Vecchietta**'s masterpiece: *Assunzione della Vergine tra i Ss Caterina, Callisto, Pio I e Agata*; in the fifth chapel: *Madonna con Bambino fra i Ss. Giacomo, Filippo, Anna e Maddalena*, di Sano di Pietro. And finally in the left hand side nave we see a *Madonna in trono tra i Ss. Nicola, Martino, Agostino e Girolamo*, di Matteo di Giovanni.

Palazzo Piccolomini



On the right hand side of the Duomo stands the **Palazzo Piccolomini**, the most important palace of Pienza, a masterpiece by Rossellino; it is square-shaped with flat bosses and pillars in the Tuscan style and two rows of gemeled windows. Inside the palace, there is a **beautiful square courtyard** with a loggia and a hanging garden offering beautiful panoramic views on Val d'Orcia. Near the palace stands a 15th century well, with two columns topped with capitals.

Palazzo Vescovile



On the left hand side of the Duomo we find the **Palazzo Vescovile** or **Borgia**, restructured in the 15th century by Cardinal Rodrigo Borgia (future Pope Alexander VI) who was given the pre-existing Gothic building by Pius II. The sobre façade has a fine portal, two rows of windows in the shape of a Guelph cross and the family coat of arms on the edge. The **Museo Diocesano** is now located there, keeping many works by **Pietro Lorenzetti**, **Segna di Bonaventura** and **Pius II's famous cope**, made in England in the 14th century. There are also important works from the Renaissance period by **Lorenzo Vecchietta**, from **Sodoma's workshop** and various Flamish tapestries and enlightened manuscripts.

Palazzo Comunale



On the other side of the square stands the **Palazzo Comunale** with its Ionic archway, built according to **Rossellino**'s design in travertine and embellished by four gemeled windows and a crenellated brick tower.

Panorama

From the apse of the cathedral, decorated with elegant trefoil windows in the Gothic style, we can enjoy a splendid panorama on Val d'Orcia, Mount Cetona, Radicofani and Mount Amiata.



Corso Rossellino



The Corso was the main street of the medieval village, connecting the two main entrances, the Porta al Prato and the Porta al Ciglio. Back then it represented the monumental axis of the town planned in the Renaissance era, lined by the cardinals and papal courtiers' palaces. In front of Palazzo Piccolomini the Palazzo Ammannati stands out as it is a remarkable 15th century building, erected for Cardinal Giacomo Ammannati. It is constituted of two different buildings, the one on the left hand side raised up as a tower with two rows of Guelph cross windows. At the corner of via Condotti we find a charming little 14th century palace, with Gothic gemeled windows at the first floor, which once belonged to Salomone Piccolomini. On the left stands the 13th century Gothic church of **San Francesco**, which has a beautifully decorated apse and keeps remains of 14th century paintings. Almost at the end of the Corso, on the west side, there is the **Porta al Prato**, from the 14th century. Turning left, we find a small public garden and the beautiful **Passeggiata di Santa Caterina**, a pedestrian avenue providing **magnificent panoramas** and from where we can reach the **Seminario Vescovile**, not far from the small **church of St Catherine**. Close by there are the **ruins of an old hermitage**, dug in the sandstone where hermits lived from the 10th to the 18th century.

Back on **Piazza Pio II**, we take the other section of Corso Rossellino. At number 30 we find the palace of French Cardinal **Jean Jouffroy**, bishop of Arras; among other old houses, we also find at number 38 the **Palazzo Simonelli** where lived **Cardinal Gonzaga**, dated from the 15th century with three Guelph windows on the first floor. Further on we arrive at the **Porta del Ciglio** or *al Morello*, with a brick arch.



There are several small grocery shops on Corso Rossellino offering mainly the *pecorino di Pienza*. As Naples is famous for its "street of Christmas mangers", Pienza is renowned for its "*pecorino street*". Pienza cheese can tell a nice story of meetings and cultural mixes. Initially, the visitor will feel a bit confused by the number of types and shapes of the same cheese, but will end up tasting with admiration all sorts of *pecorini freschi, semi-stagionati* or *stagionati*.

The *pecorino di Pienza* is an excellent type of cheese made from ewe's milk (the ewes graze freely in meadows covered with intensely perfumed grass, mint or radicle, which will influence the flavour of the raw material) and with vegetal curds creating the sweetly spicy flavour (called “*callio*” or “*cardo*”), which will influence the various organoleptic elements at the end of maturation.

The *pecorino fresco* is characterized by a maturation of thirty days, its taste is sweet and delicate and its crust is half-hard. The *semi-stagionato* one has two months maturation, the crust is covered with tomato purée and oil to give it a reddish colour and an even sweeter and aromatic flavour. If maturation goes beyond two months (and up to four) we get a *pecorino stagionato*.

PIEVE DI CORSIGNANO



Less than one kilometre away, the road taken coming out from the Porta del Ciglio emerges in a field scenery where you find the **Pieve di Corsignano**, dedicated to St Vito and St Modesto. The church, already mentioned in documents in 714, is a Romanesque building made with blocks of tuff and it was restored in 1925. It presents a simple façade with a double sided roof and a decorated portal; a truncated campanile in the shape of a cylinder stands next to it; on the right hand side, another portal shows an architrave with bas-reliefs ornaments. The inside has three naves, divided by big pillars and irregular arches, with a cover of exposed beams. A Romanesque capital supports the baptismal font in stone where Pius II and maybe Pius III were baptized.

MONTICCHIELLO



After following a road for 6 kms, winding between hills which offer beautiful views on Pienza, you arrive at **Monticchiello**, at an altitude of 546 m, located on a small hill where you can find remains of the demolished old walls with lowered down towers and a dungeon dated 1256. In July, on the square San Martino, people can enjoy some performances of the “Teatro povero” during which the village inhabitants become actors of scenes inspired by historical facts. The **Chiesa di San Leonardo e Cristoforo** dates from the 13th century with a Gothic façade equipped with a portal and a rose-window; inside we can see 14th century frescoes from the Siena school.

MONTEPULCIANO

Situated on a panoramic position dominating the Chiana plain, this little town is full of charm with its noble Renaissance look. Its geographic position influenced its history. It is located at the crossing of two important regional routes (from Chiusi to Arezzo, from south to north, and from the Val d'Orcia to the Valdichiana and Trasimeno from east to west). Its location was also strategic, being on the border of various zones where powerful cities exercised their influence, like Orvieto, Perugia, Siena and Florence. These elements helped Montepulciano to gain wealth and such power in the early Middle Ages that it became a coveted prey. Its own autonomy depended on its alliances with the bigger cities fighting endlessly against each other. Its entry within the “**Stato Fiorentino**”, after 1511, marked its importance, reflected in the majestic style of its public and private buildings, of the Piazza Grande and the restructuring of the **Palazzo Comunale** by the Florentine architect **Michelozzo**. In 1561, it included bishopric headquarters and was distinguished as a “**città**”. To celebrate its new economic and political power, the city started a renovation program with the contribution of major architects like **Antonio da Sangallo il Vecchio**, **Baldassarre Peruzzi** and **Vignola**. The 19th century is characterized by the draining of the Valdichiana, the opening of a railway line in the valley (1844), the growth of the town allowing it to become the administrative centre of the area, and by the consecutive move of commercial and productive activities towards the plain zones.



Montepulciano is built along a narrow calcareous ridge, 605 metres above the sea level. It is circled by walls and fortifications planned by **Antonio da Sangallo il Vecchio in 1500, commissioned by Cosimo I**. The little town is mainly known for its imposing **Renaissance palaces**, the **elegant beauty of its churches** and for its “**Vino Nobile**”, one of the most internationally appreciated Tuscan wines. The urban centre is developed along a street which leads to the main square: **Piazza Grande**, at the top of the hill.

When you arrive in Montepulciano, you drive up a beautiful road lined with trees to reach the **Giardini di Poggiofanti** near the powerful Medicean stronghold of the **Fortezza da Basso o di Poggiofanti**, designed by **Antonio da Sangallo il Vecchio** after 1511. Then you find the **Chiesa di Sant'Agnese**, the patron saint of Montepulciano, who died in 1317. On its modern façade (1926) there is a Gothic portal. The interior, which has a single nave, was modified many times until the 17th century and then totally renovated in the 18th century. Many artworks of this period can be seen there, among them is the monument above the altar where St Agnes' body is kept, by Giuseppe Manzuoli.



An avenue leads to the **Porta al Prato**, the main historical access to the town, restored in 1956 to repair damage caused by WWII; inside, in vaulted rooms, you find an *enoteca*. Past the door, through via di Gracciano you get into the Corso, the main street, then you find the **via delle Cantine**, a vault-covered street, with a **suggestive and intact medieval aspect**. In an open space stands the **colonna del Marzocco**, symbol

of the Florentine authority which replaced the Siena she-wolf in 1511. The lion was made by sculptor Sarrocchi (1856). Facing the column is the **Palazzo Avignonesi**, attributed to **Vignola**, dated from the 16th century; its architecture is definitely from the late Renaissance period. Near the palace stands the lovely Baroque church of **San Bernardo**, built by the Jesuit brother **Andrea Pozzo**. In front of Palazzo Avignonesi stands the **Palazzo Tarugi**, with its embossed lower level, and also dated from the late Renaissance period. Many other palaces in the area are evocative of the Renaissance times: the **Palazzo Cocconi-Del Pecora**, by **Antonio da Sangallo the Elder**, the **Palazzo Buccelli** with its base decorated with parts of Etruscan cinerary urns and stones covered with Etruscan and Latin inscriptions.



Then you find yourself in front of the **Chiesa di Sant'Agostino**, one of the most interesting buildings in **Montepulciano**. The façade was built at the beginning of the 15th century by the architect **Michelozzo Michelozzi** (1396-1472). The artist, who worked with Brunelleschi and Donatello, gave simple and elegant forms to the bottom part of the façade. The splayed portal is topped at the second level by a lunette surmounted by a jagged tympan and supported by two fine towers in the Gothic style which is also the style used for the niches in the second row of the façade. It is possible that the other part of the façade was completed by another artist who used patterns of the Renaissance style. The interior, renovated in the 18th century, has a single nave. The artworks to admire here are: on the first altar on the right hand side: the *Resurrezione di Lazzaro* by **Alessandro Allori**; on the second one: *San Bernardino da Siena* by **Giovanni di Paolo**; on the high altar, a *Crocifisso ligneo policromo* by **Antonio da Sangallo** (currently under renovation) and on the third altar on the left hand side: the *Crocifissione con la Madonna e la Maddalena* by **Lorenzo di Credi**.

In front of the church stands the tower where the characteristic **Pulcinella** (16th century) strikes the bell every hour. In the same street you find on the left hand side the **Palazzo Buratti-Bellarmino**, with F. Zuccari's frescoes in the atrium.



Past the **arco della Gavina**, you find the archways of the **Logge del grano**, built in 1570 following **Ippolito Scalza**'s design, and now the seat of a bank. Proceeding along the street you see the **Palazzo Cervini** built by **Antonio da Sangallo il Vecchio**, the **Palazzo Egidi** then **Cagnoni**, attributed to **Vignola**. You then find the **Collegio Vescovile** turned into the **Palazzo di Giustizia**, which started to be built by the Jesuits in 1630. Next to it stands the **Chiesa del Gesù**, constructed following **Andrea Pozzo**'s plans in the 17th century. The façade is unfinished, the inside beautiful and elegant. You continue walking to via dell'Oppio up to via Poliziano where, on the left hand side, at number 1 stands **Agnolo Poliziano**'s house, the renowned poet was born in Montepulciano on 14 June 1454.

The **Chiesa di S. Maria dei Servi** is nearby. It is a church which was built in the 16th century, with a beautiful portal and small ogival arches along the roof. The inside, with a single nave, was totally restructured following **Andrea Pozzo**'s plans, including a sumptuous stucco decoration in the Baroque style; in addition to various 17th century paintings, we can also see a fresco from the 14th century Siena school: the *Madonna di Santoreggia*.



On the right hand side of the church, the street goes around the **Fortezza**, built in the 8th century and rebuilt by the Sienese in the 13th century; it was destroyed several times again and finally restored in the 16th century by **Antonio da Sangallo il Vecchio**. You end up on **Piazza Grande**, the **monumental centre of Montepulciano** and one of the most beautiful squares found in a medium sized town, representative of a noble splendour through glorious historic monuments. The square is surrounded by important buildings: the **Duomo**, the **Palazzo Comunale**, the **Palazzo del Monte Cantucci**, the **Palazzo Nobili-Tarugi**, and the **Palazzo del Capitano del Popolo**.

The Duomo



The Duomo presents an unfinished façade; on its left hand side, the Campanile, also unfinished, is dated 15th century. The Duomo is situated where before stood an old parish church which must have looked inadequate and poor when beautiful palaces were built in the Piazza Grande and the nearby streets. The demolition of the old sacristy started in 1583 and after many discussions **Bartolomeo Ammannati**'s project for its reconstruction was finally accepted in 1588. Nevertheless, the works started several years later and the architect died. In 1593, **Ippolito Scalza** was summoned from Orvieto. He was a sculptor and an architect who totally revised the project. Building works started in 1594 and ended in 1680 and the church was then consecrated. The large gabled façade presents a staircase and three portals with three windows. The interior, in the shape of a Latin cross, has three naves, divided by arches supported by pillars and with a cupola at the intersection of the naves. The structures are simple and vast. Chapels open out in the lateral naves. In the first chapel on the left hand side, there is a beautiful baptismal font by **Giovanni Agostino** (15th century) and on the wall a work in glazed terracotta: the *Annunciazione e Santi*, by **Andrea della Robbia**, with an elegant marble bas-relief: *Madonna col Bambino*, by **Benedetto da Maiano**; on the sides we find two statues depicting *San Pietro* and *San Giovanni Battista*, by **Tino di Camaino**.



In the third chapel on the left hand side, we can admire a painting of *San Sebastiano* by **Andra del Sarto**. **On the high altar** there is the **monumental polyptych** by **Taddeo di Bartolo** (1401), a painter from Siena born in 1362 and who died in 1422. In Padova, he was in touch with Altichiero, one of Giotto's disciples, and he was also influenced by other painters from northern Italy like Giovanni da Milano and Barnaba da Modena. This work is the richest and the most famous by Taddeo. In the centre it represents *l'Assunzione della Vergine tra Santi e Sante*; on the top in the centre there is the *Incoronazione*; on the side: *l'Annunciazione*; on the pillars are found various figures of saints. On the sides of the high altar, two statues which are part of the **Aragazzi** monument represent **Strength** and **Justice**, or **Science** and **Faith**. On the right hand side of the high altar, against a pillar, we can see *S. Bartolomeo benediciente* which according to

the ideal reconstruction of the Aragazzi monument, should have been above the funeral bed to face the deceased. In the sacristy is kept a project for the façade of the Duomo and the reconstruction of the Aragazzi sepulchre by Emanuele Marcucci.



The Palazzo Comunale

On the left hand side of the Duomo stands the austere and massive 3 floor building of the **Palazzo Comunale**, surmounted by a beautiful tower, from the 14th century and recalling the look of the **Palazzo della Signoria** in Florence. It is a sobre and dense building, with Guelphs crenelles and solid corbels, according to plans attributed to **Michelozzo**. From the tower you can enjoy a **beautiful and vast panorama**, especially on a clear day.



Palazzo del Monte – Contucci

In front of the Palazzo Communale stands the beautiful **Palazzo del Monte**, nowadays **Contucci**, started in 1510 by **Antonio da Sangallo the Elder** for Cardinal **Antonio del Monte** (coat of arms on the edge), who became pope as Jules III. The cardinal had various buildings demolished to create the space needed for the construction of his palace, quoted by Vasari as “*di bonissima gratia, lavorato e finito*”. The façade in travertine stone, with a large embossed portal, presents beautiful windows on a *marcapiano* cornice and surmounted by a triangular tympanum supported by columns.



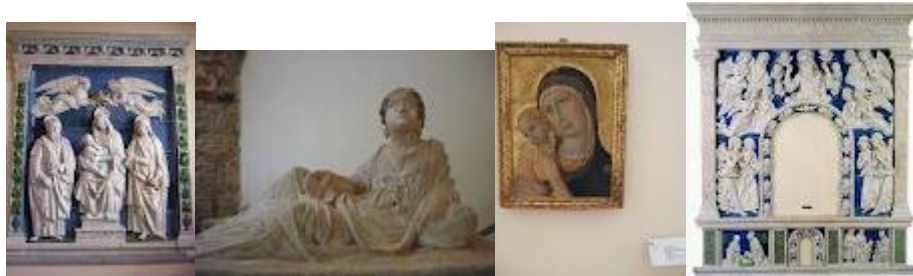
Palazzo Nobili-Tarugi

In front of the Duomo is the severe **Palazzo Nobili**, nowadays **Tarugi**, attributed to **Antonio da Sangallo il Vecchio**. The loggia, which is now blind, used to match the columns of the lowest floor. The windows set on short shelves are topped by a curvilinear pediment. The noble portal is decorated with a semicircular arch.



Palazzo del Capitano del Popolo

In a corner of the square, on the side of the via Ricci, the Palace of the Captain of the People, built in the Middle Ages and renovated, presents beautiful 14th century Gothic forms. It is where you now find the headquarters of the “**Consorzio del Vino Nobile**” including an *enoteca*. The **Pozzo dei Griffi e dei Leoni** stands in front of it. Dated 1520, this well, in the style of the late Renaissance period, is surmounted by two Ionic columns and an architrave decorated with the Medici coat of arms, supported by Florence’s lions and Montepulciano’s griffins. In the via Ricci, we find on the left hand side a building attributed to **Baldassarre Peruzzi** (16th century), the **Palazzo Ricci**, presenting an especially elegant façade, with a beautiful window cornice.



At number 10 via Ricci, inside the **Palazzo Neri-Orselli**, there is the **Museo Civico** and the **Pinacoteca Crociati** where a rich collection of 16th-18th century paintings are preserved (**Margaritone d’Arezzo**, **Bicci di Lorenzo**, artists from **Duccio’s** and **Filippino Lippi’s** workshops, from **Florentine painters close to Bronzino**, etc) and some **glazed terracotta works** by **Andrea della Robbia**.

Proceeding down the street, you find on the left hand side the **Cappella di S. Antonio**, or dei Cavalieri di S. Stefano. In the end, the **Palazzo Benincasa** displays on its main door a bust of **Gian Gastone dei Medici**. The street gets wider with a panoramic viewpoint. The **Chiesa di San Francesco**, previously dedicated to Santa Margherita, has kept on its façade the remains of a pulpit where **S. Bernardino** is said to have preached. The ogival portal is in the Gothic style. The inside with a single nave has lost its original appearance and the paintings above the altars are not really interesting. It is now used as an auditorium.



To the left of the church we discover **beautiful views on the hills** in the west of Montepulciano where the **Chiesa di San Biagio** emerges from the green landscape; it is a masterpiece by **Antonio da Sangallo il Vecchio**, a harmonious example of Renaissance architecture.



Chiesa di San Biagio

Once the visit of the town is completed, you can go down to the church San Biagio, an important creation of the Renaissance, inaugurated in 1529 by Pope Clement VII. It emerges totally isolated in the middle of the countryside. It was built on the remains of the old Pieve di San Biagio, where according to the tradition a picture of the Madonna had been seen moving her eyes. It is in the shape of a Greek cross, with four arms of equal length and is surmounted by a cupola. A semicircular sacristy was added in the south arm and two campaniles were built in the north side, one remaining unfinished. On all sides the first order is Doric with a seal of metopes and triglyphs; the second one presents an architrave and is surmounted by a tympan. The decorations on portals and windows are sober. The cupola is set on a drum divided by Ionic pilasters alternating with semicircular niches; the lantern at the top is thin and elegant.



The distinctive characteristics of the interior are the big arches and the classical elements of its decoration like the tympan, the metopes, the triglyphs and the niches where are set the altars, in supreme harmony with the slender cupola and its lantern. On the high altar we see a **magnificent altar screen in marble** by **Giannozzo** and **Lisandro Albertini** (1584) with four statues of saints by Ottaviano Lazzarini and, in the centre, a *Madonna col Bambino e San Francesco*. The frescoes representing the *Transito*, the *Assunzione* and the *Incoronazione della Madonna* are attributed to the **Zuccaris** (16th century).

On the left hand side of the church, the **Canonica di S. Biagio** is located; it is a lovely building from the end of the Renaissance period, according to a design by **Antonio da Sangallo the Elder** from 1595. The archways on two levels are constituted by five arches standing on Doric *paraste* for the bottom part and by small arches on Ionic pillars and small columns in the top part. In the front stands an elegant well, similar to the one in Piazza Grande, following a design by **Sangallo**.



THE “VINO NOBILE” AND THE OTHER WINES

Genuine **symbol** of Montepulciano, the **Vino Nobile** has become **one of the most prestigious wines in the world** and, being associated with tourism, it represents the main source of production not only in the municipality but also in the whole surrounding territory. This prestige is guaranteed by the **production of five millions of bottles handled by sixty-five wine farms**. The quality of the wine is attested by the many prizes received along the years. The first distinction as a DOC goes back to 12 July 1966; later, in 1980, the Noble Wine was distinguished with the label **DOCG: Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita**: it was in fact the first wine to be sold under this label, the most important in the Italian norms.



Why is the “Vino Nobile” a noble wine?

The nobility could go back to the 18th century when the word noble defined a high quality wine suited to the aristocrats who could afford to pay a higher price. Other explanations base the name on the fact that the wine was actually produced by noble people living in the region.

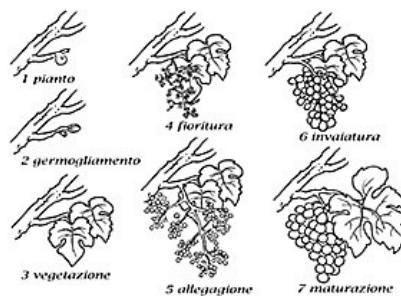
Vino Nobile di Montepulciano DOCG - Attribution DOCG: year 1980

Composition: 70% minimum of sangiovese grape (prugnolo gentile); up to 20% of canaiolo nero and 20% maximum of local grape variety authorised by the province of Siena.

Maturation: the Vino Nobile of Montepulciano needs at least 2 years maturation time from the month of January following the harvest, with a few options left to the producers:

- A) 24 months maturation in a wooden container
- B) 18 months minimum maturation in a wooden container but the rest of the time in another container
- C) 12 months minimum in a wooden container, then a minimum of 6 months in bottles and the rest of the time in other containers.

The Riserva: The Vino Nobile di Montepulciano Riserva needs at least 3 years maturation, including 6 months in bottles.



Rosso di Montepulciano DOC – Attribution DOC: year 1988

Grape variety: sangiovese (prugnolo gentile) minimum 70%, canaiolo nero up to 20%; and 20% maximum of local grape variety authorised by the province of Siena

Maturation: The Rosso di Montepulciano cannot be drunk before 1 March of the following year (with exceptions)



Vin Santo di Montepulciano DOC – Attribution DOC: year 1996 ; Vinsanto di Montepulciano and Vinsanto di Montepulciano Riserva

Grape variety: Malvasia bianca, Grechetto bianco (dit pulcinculo), Trebbiano toscano on their own or mixed up: 70% minimum with a possible maximum of 30 % of grapes *a bacca bianca* following the advice of the province of Siena. “Vinsanto di Montepulciano Occhio di Pernice”: sangiovese (prugnolo gentile) minimum 50% with other types of grapes authorised by the Province of Siena.

Maturation: Following the traditional method of winification with grape fermentation in wooden containers, with 300 litres capacity for the “Vinsanto di Montepulciano”; in small barrels with 125 litres capacity for the “Vinsanto di Montepulciano Riserva” and in barrels with a maximum capacity of 75 litres for the “Vinsanto di Montepulciano Occhio di Pernice”. The minimum ageing periods are set respectively to 3, 5 and 8 years.

