

Tuscany's Mediterranean Wine Road

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Driving 12 miles south into the Maremma region, stop at the medieval hilltop town of Suvereto for a stroll through history, with commanding views of the surrounding valleys, eastern mountains, and the Tyrrhenian Sea. Perched on a forested 300-foot high hill, the town is built of rock and brick, with narrow alleys, steep, worn staircases, and well-preserved ancient buildings, the oldest dating back to the 8th century. The local forests of cork oaks (*Sughera* in Italian and



A stone stairway in Suvereto, worn by centuries of passing pedestrians

Suvero in the local dialect) gave the town its name. If you continue down the backside of the hill, you'll come to Gualdo del Re, one of a dozen *agriturismos* in the Val di Cornia DOC, where you can stay on the winery property in a luxurious one or two bedroom apartment with a private pool. Various packages include breakfast and a wine tasting dinner in their restaurant, as well as a tour and tasting in the wine cellar and a guided walk among the vineyards.

The winemaker is Barbara Tamburini, who consults with 24 wineries in Italy, as well as one in California. The style of her red wines is "international," by which I mean that the grapes are picked very ripe, the wines achieve at least 14% alcohol, and they're aged in mostly new French oak. They're plush, fruity wines with mass appeal. Tamburini is known as a Merlot specialist, and yet I far prefer her Cabernet Sauvignon, labeled as Federico Primo. What it may lack in nuance, it makes up for in intensity and complexity, with jammy blackberry fruit, chocolate and spice notes. The Gualdo del Re Sangiovese is also richer and more powerful than you might expect from a Tuscan Sangiovese. Most of the wines are 100% varietal. The exceptions are three wines sold under the Eliseo label. Eliseo Rosso, is an elegant blend of 80% Sangiovese and 20% Canaiolo Nero. Eliseo Bianco is a blend of three Tuscan varieties (Trebiano, Malvasia and Clairette), which delivers a pleasing dry white for everyday drinking. Eliseo Rosato is a fragrant and well-structured dry rosé made from a 50/50 blend of Sangiovese and Merlot. The other whites are not to be dismissed, including Valentina, a 100% Vermentino, which shows excellent intensity of floral, citrus and mineral character with silky texture and crisp acidity — just the ticket on a hot summer's day by the pool. Strale is 100% Pinot Bianco which, though barrel fermented, shows little barrel character. Lastly, Amansio is 100% Aleatico made in the Passito style for a sweet dessert wine with hints of raspberry and golden raisin character mixed with subtle floral notes.