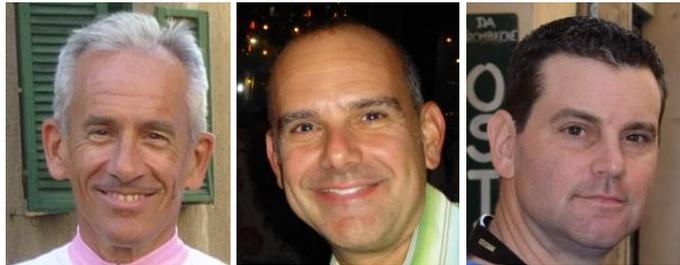




April 2016

*Benvenuti! Welcome to the **Cycle Bella Italia** newsletter. Enjoy a short visit to Tuscany through this newsletter, then join us on one of our upcoming week-long cycling tours. Experience the best of Italy in 2016!*

## **The Cycle Bella Italia Team**



**Joe**

**Eran**

**Eric**

Visit our website [www.cyclebellaitalia.com](http://www.cyclebellaitalia.com), give us a like on Facebook, and see our updates and posts on Instagram. We want to hear from you and please share us with your friends! To learn more about Cycle Bella Italia and our 2016 trips email us at: [info@cyclebellaitalia.com](mailto:info@cyclebellaitalia.com)

## **Our Trips in 2016**

Our 2016 trip dates are fast approaching. Everything is set with great cycling and off-bike activities arranged. Get in touch with us soon to reserve your trip— don't miss your chance to experience the best of Tuscany with Cycle Bella Italia. Special pricing for groups of 4 or more.



## Beautiful Tuscany

Tuscany is an agricultural region with countless ancient hilltop villages and the premier tourist cities of Florence and Siena. From our central location in Pienza, we'll enjoy the very best of Italian food, wine, culture and life.



### Focus on: Montalcino



Montalcino, just west of Pienza and south of Siena, is a beautiful hilltop village set in the breathtaking Val d'Orcia. The town is known all over the world for the production of Brunello wine - one of the world's best and most appreciated Italian wines. Montalcino has undergone very little change since the 16<sup>th</sup> Century.

The town is not just about Brunello wine - it is also very rich in artistic treasures. The historical center is dominated by the mighty and imposing Rocca or fortress built in 1361 to commemorate the independence of Montalcino from the domination of Siena. The fortress has remained practically intact since the Middle Ages and often becomes the special setting for festivals, concerts, and events. The views from the Rocca gallery are spectacular, stretching towards Monte Amiata, to the Crete to Siena and across all of the Val d' Orcia. From the fortress, there is a panorama of rolling hills dotted with flowers, ancient oak trees, olive groves, scenic cypress lined roads winding through abundant vineyards.

Other popular sites in the town include the clock tower in the Palazzo dei Priori, the city's town hall, the Piazza del Popolo with its characteristic Gothic loggia, and the churches of Sant' Agostino, Sant' Egidio and San Francesco.

## **Wine Talk – Chianti**



Chianti derives its name not from the Sangiovese grape used to make the wine, but from the region where it is made. The principal Chianti region stretches from the just south of Florence to Siena.

In order to be classified as a Chianti, the wine must be made from at least 80% Sangiovese grapes. While most Chiantis are 100% Sangiovese, some winemakers in the region like to blend the Sangiovese to soften the finished wine. The Sangiovese that forms the majority of the Chianti blend is a thin-skinned grape, so it makes translucent wines. In the glass, Sangiovese displays a ruby red color with flashes of bright burnt orange –a hue commonly associated with aged wines. Besides Sangiovese, Chianti wines may contain wine grapes like Canaiolo, Colorino, Cabernet Sauvignon and even Merlot.

The two most common versions of Chianti are Chianti and Chianti Classico. Classico is considered to be a bit more refined because it's produced from grapes harvested in the best vineyards of the region.

Chianti is very earthy and rustic, high in tannins with an aroma and taste of cherries and strawberries. Chianti is high in acidity which makes it go very well with food. While often paired with classic Italian foods, Chianti works well with all types of food.

## The Strade Bianche



No race has grown as prestigious as quickly as the Strade Bianche, which, while only in its tenth edition, is already one of the most sought-after wins among professional riders. The 200km race route includes over 50km of dirt roads, with the ‘strade bianche’ farm tracks and country lanes twisting through the Tuscan hills and vineyards. The Tuscan race has become a hotly contested event among riders known for one-day success, attracting stars such as Zdenek Stybar, Fabian Cancellara and Greg Van Avermaet, who have each won the event.

Strade Bianche is inspired by the cobbled *helligen* of the Tour of Flanders. In place of cobbles however, Strade Bianche has the white gravel roads from which the race draws its name. The race has traditionally started in Gaiole in the Chianti region, but since 2014, riders leave from San Gimignano only a short ride from our base in Pienza. There are no major climbs, but the course winds through Tuscany’s many hills on narrow roads and so the racers are constantly climbing and descending.

The difficulty of the course, combined with the various crashes and mechanical issues that befall riders on the gravel sections (also called *sterrati*), has almost always led to a rider going solo to victory. The final obstacle in the race is the climb to the finish in Siena. The hill, along with the narrow, Renaissance city streets, strings out the riders, thereby permitting only a very select group to head toward the finish in the Piazza del Campo. The picturesque Piazza also hosts the Palio, the bare-back horse race and spectacle contested in July and August of each year.

## From Our Shop

Featured this month is the Purist Cycle Bella Italia water bottle. When you use this bottle, you’ll notice the difference – a clean, clear taste.



*Arriverderci! A Presto.*