

# Italy, Tuscany, Maremma Toscana: A Spotlight on Ciliegiolo

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25th Aug 2022 | The Wine Advocate (/articles/the-wine-advocate) | August 2022 Week 4 (/articles/the-wine-advocate?issue=L2vRLWrYCSEe2yrZQ)

This article is a sidebar to a more comprehensive report I wrote on Maremma Toscana DOC located in the southwest corner of Tuscany. You can read that piece **here** (<https://www.robertparker.com/articles/YnoDjeLRhSM5jWhDY>).

While tasting samples at the Consorzio Tutela Vini della Maremma Toscana in June of this year in Grosseto, the red wines made with Ciliegiolo immediately stood out thanks to their racy ruby colors, wild fruit flavors, bright intensity and approachable tannins. Albeit simple and streamlined, these wines offer punchy, lifted aromas and lots of electricity and energy.

I fell in love with Ciliegiolo and am adding this variety to my other Italian grape crushes Carricante, Greco, Biancolella, Schiava, Freisa and Pelaverga.

I am perennially in search of W.I.R.W.T.D (wines I really want to drink) with the real foods I adore most made with fresh garden ingredients, lean meats and fish and exotic flavors borrowed from Mexico, Thailand and Morocco among others. There are so many full-bodied, 95-point-and-up red wines to pair with hearty steak and potatoes, but those are pairings for big occasions or après-ski situations. The wines I really want to drink with friends or while stirring pots of pasta sauce in the kitchen show moderate alcohol, fresh acidity, minerality, elegant fruit weight and polished length.

They are wines for a healthy lifestyle in an (almost) post-pandemic world with climate change in full swing, a looming energy crisis and a terrible war in Ukraine. They are wines of austerity for sure, but also of comfort, intellect and meaning.



*The Ciliegiolo grape before veraison*

Ciliegiolo fits the bill. This report contains 26 reviews of samples made with this little-known Italian indigenous grape. Named after the Italian word for “cherry,” Ciliegiolo is considered a minor variety and was traditionally used as a blending agent along with Canaiolo, Colorino and others in Chianti Classico.

But Ciliegiolo is coming into its own in Maremma Toscana and is one of the grapes with the highest growth rate in the area along with Vermentino. In fact, almost 58% of all Ciliegiolo planted in Italy is in the province of Grosseto. It loves the heat of the Tuscan Coast, proximity to the sea and the complex mineral matrix and soils of the area.





*Edoardo Ventimiglia and Carla Benini of Sassotonto in Sorano, Tuscany*

My highest scores went to a winery called Sassotondo located in Sorano not far from Pitigliano ("Piti-city" as Edoardo and Carla call it) built on a buttress of tuffaceous rock surrounded by Etruscan archeological sites, caves and underground tunnels.



This couple (he is a documentary filmmaker from Rome, and she is an agronomist from Trentino) is fully focused on Ciliegiolo and makes seven expressions of the grape. Arguably no one believes in Ciliegiolo more than they do.





The Sassotonto cellars are carved deep underground in soft tuff rock made of lithified volcanic ash. “Tufo” is the name of the stone in Italian, not to be confused with the English “tufa” that is made of limestone and is found in hot springs.

The entire area is of volcanic origin with ashy soils created by pyroclastic blasts from the Vulsini volcanic complex. Nearby Lake Bolsena fills an ancient caldera.



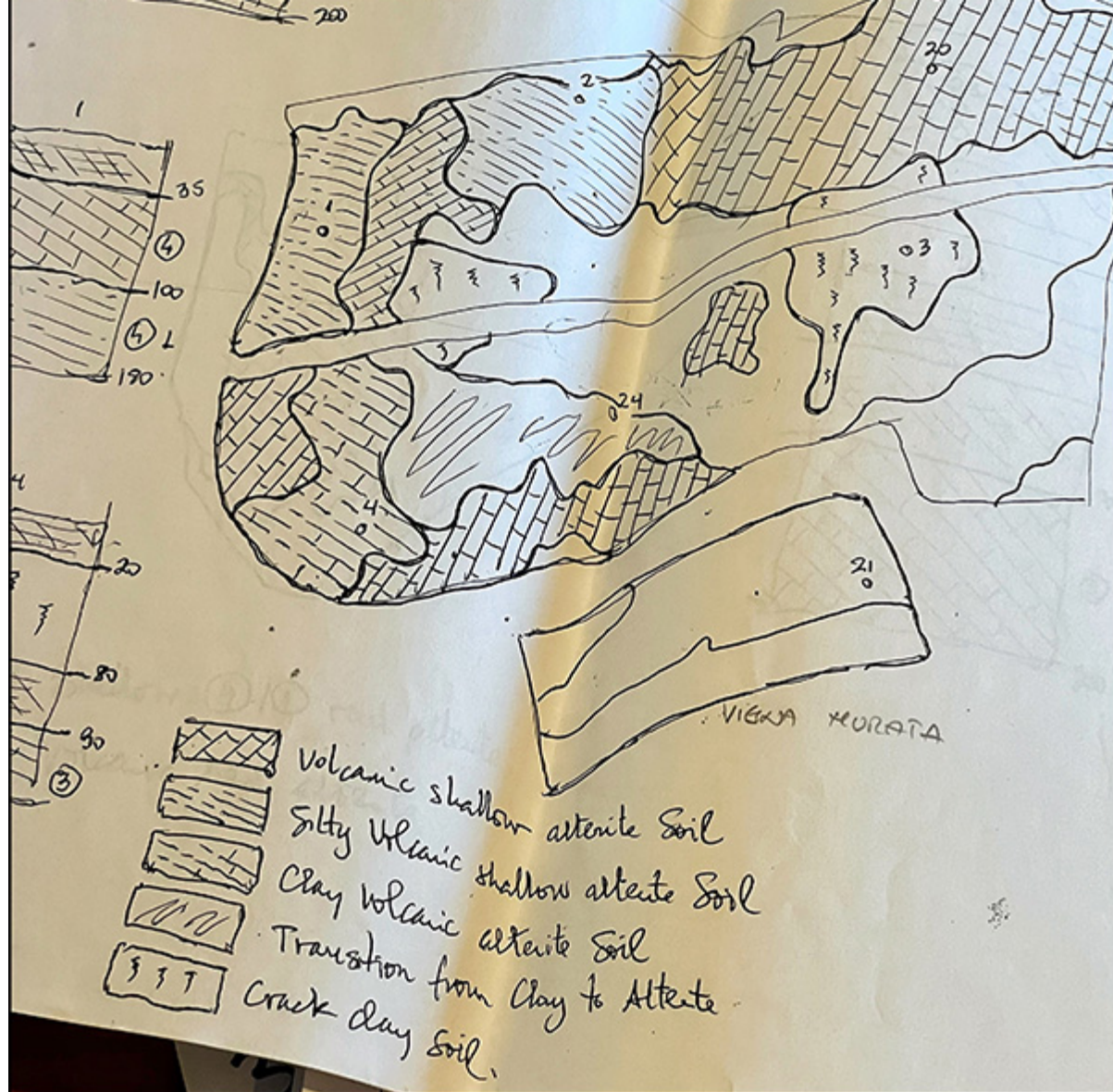


Sassotondo's most important vineyard is called San Lorenzo, and it is located on top of the bluff that faces Pitigliano. The soils (pictured above) are dusty and fine with compressed tuff rock. The estate covers 72 hectares, with 13 hectares of vines. They farm according to biodynamic and organic protocols (and have been certified organic since 1994, even before the first harvest in 1997).



Edoardo and Carla called upon their friend and winemaker Attilio Pagli when deciding what grapes to plant. Later, they also worked with soil expert Pedro Parra to map out the various micro-terroirs on their property. The feedback they received further convinced them that Ciliegiole would thrive in this unique part of Tuscany with its geological anomalies.

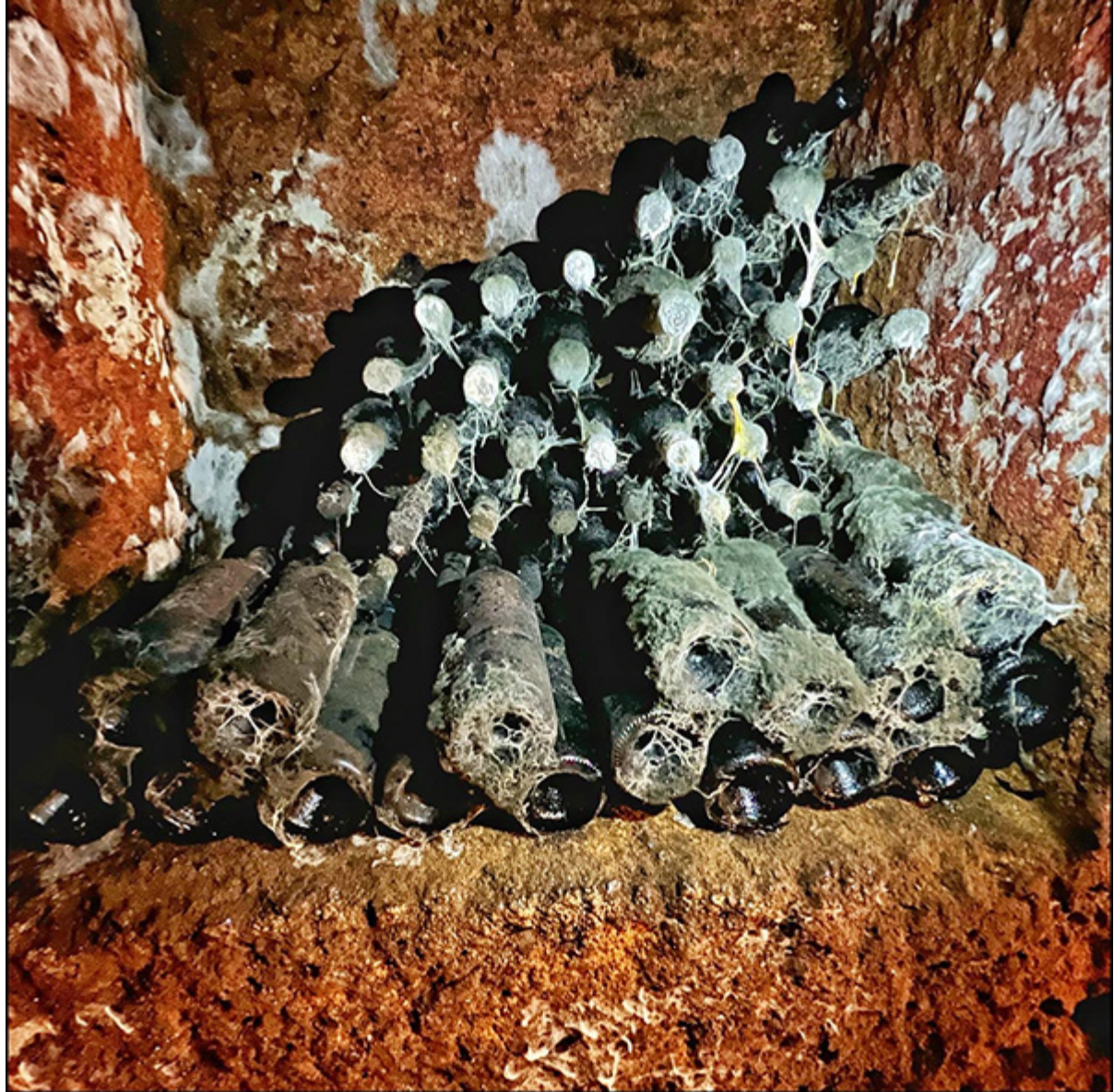




Sassotondo produces a Cilieggiolo rosé called Lady Marmalade, an entry-level red that only sees stainless steel. They produce a Cilieggiolo with partial whole cluster called Monte Calvo and another version that is aged in amphorae called Poggio Pinzo. San Lorenzo is the estate's top wine, and I completed a mini vertical with the 2019, 2018, 2017, 2016 and 2015 vintages reviewed here.

They make terrific white wines, including the Bianco di Pitigliano Isolina and the whites Numero Sei and Numero Dieci that both see some measure of extended skin maceration. Their red blend Tuforosso (a blend of Sangiovese, Merlot and Teroldego) was not produced in 2021 because spring frost reduced yields.





Not only has this tasting experience turned me on to Ciliegiolo, I am convinced that Pitigliano offers untapped winemaking potential and, with focus and hard work, could one day become one of Italy's greatest wine territories.

I'll raise a glass of Ciliegiolo to that.

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Vintage	Wines	RP
2019	Sassotondo Maremma Toscana Ciliegiolo San Lorenzo	95+
2015	Sassotondo Maremma Toscana Ciliegiolo San Lorenzo	95
2019	Sassotondo Maremma Toscana Ciliegiolo Poggio Pinzo	94
2017	Sassotondo Maremma Toscana Ciliegiolo San Lorenzo	94
2016	Sassotondo Maremma Toscana Ciliegiolo San Lorenzo	93



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[\(/articles/YnoDjeLRhSM5jWhDY\)](/articles/YnoDjeLRhSM5jWhDY)

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