



WINE & SPIRITS

# Escape to Tuscany

by Baroness Sberi de Borchgrave

A YOUNG ENTREPRENEUR CREATES THE ULTIMATE WINE GETAWAY

Most of us eventually leave behind the youthful, careless joys of the summer months between school years—the exuberance of a junior year dig on an archeological site near the Sinai, otherworldly weeks on a New Zealand sheep station, a final summer spent thumbing a ride across Europe. But James Fantaci, who grew up between Manhattan and Bridgehampton, has turned his favorite summer vacation into a full-fledged vocation.

For nine summers into his college years, Fantaci traveled with his family to Tuscany where every year he spent three or four luxurious weeks in a revolving door of lush villas. The life of the old world landed gentry sat well with young Fantaci—the world-class wine, the lavish feasts fragrant with porcini and truffles. Between meals there were excursions to Florence and to the hill towns surrounding Siena (not to mention many long hours languishing by the pool under the Tuscan sun).

A few years back Fantaci decided to turn his fantasy summers into a package deal, fine-tuned to transport his guests to a Merchant Ivory version of Tuscany that his family had grown to love.

"I didn't want to just offer a villa," he explains, "but the complete villa experience. From the moment my guests arrive, I want them to feel totally swept away. I have cases of wine waiting for them. A cook is already preparing dinner. In many instances there's a concierge on hand to help plan local activities—excursions to wineries, cheese makers and into Florence."

Fantaci's Purple Fête—his Tuscan villa enterprise coyly named for the lingering residue on grape-stomping feet—was created with the wine-lover in mind. He equips all his villas with hand-made crystal grand cru glasses, which he had designed. He personally selects mixed cases of wine from his own collection. Options range from the extravagant "rare wine case" (featuring top flight Super Tuscans and Brunellos from the fabled '85, '88 and '90 vintages), the slightly more affordable "collector's case" (which might include a '97 Ciacci Brunello Pianroso or a '97 Caprai Sagrantino di Montefalco) or a "value case" offering novice drinkers a great primer on good value reds and whites from the region.

The fledgling business currently operates nine villas ranging from a modest two-person farmhouse (at \$2,500 a week) to a luxurious nine-bedroom estate (at \$13,000 a week). All the properties offer sweeping views, swimming pools and an on-premise cook. Fantaci plans to add more properties to his portfolio and to begin offering cooking classes, trips to the renowned Palio horse race and truffle hunting excursions.

"Each villa has its own character," he says. "We've got a 13th century restored monastery and a 17th century stone farmhouse. Many are stocked with Tuscan antiques. One of the properties has been in the same family for generations. Its owner is very generous with his time, offering wine and olive oil tastings at the villa." Fantaci won't talk about the celebrity clientele who've availed themselves of his services, but he does tell the story of one group of satisfied customers—a gaggle of New York women who came to the Tuscan countryside to "really escape." "They had so much good food and wine on hand," he says, "they never left the villa."



**Golden Glow** | One of the Tuscan villas (ABOVE) where guests of James Fantaci's company, Purple Fête, can enjoy a wine getaway with an emphasis on pampering. See Resources.

## PURPLE FÊTE ACCOMMODATIONS...

### VILLA GIUNCHETO

On a large estate, sleeps 12, full staff, views of the golden hills with Siena in the distance. Sauna, tennis and bocce courts.

### GEGGIANELLO

In a beautiful area of Chianti where *Stealing Beauty* was filmed, surrounded by wineries, a restored country home photographed for many magazines. Sleeps 10, large infinity pool, cook and groundskeeper.

### IL CASELLO

Near Siena, an elegantly restored five-bedroom farmhouse with breathtaking views onto terraced olive groves and fruit trees. Sits on a large private farm that produces olive oil and wine.

### BOSCARELLO

In the owner's family for generations, hilltop building dating from the 17th century overlooks other hill-top towns in Montalcino and Siena. Close to the wine estates in Brunello, full of Tuscan antiques, sleeps 16.

### IL PALAZZETTO

Seventeenth century stone farmhouse, sleeps 14.

just on the edge of Chianti and 10 minutes to Siena. Part of the estate makes wine, owner's daughter acts as concierge.

### VICO BASSO

Ten minutes from Siena, part of a working farm, a two-bedroom renovated farmhouse with a big stone fireplace, concierge. Lovely terrace for al fresco dining.

### IL CASOLARE

A quaint villa near Siena with spectacular views over nearby vineyards, a small stone house for a couple with elegant antiques and a covered veranda for outdoor dining.

### IL MONASTERO

Once a monastery, located in central Chianti near Greve, sleeps 20, full staff, large vanishing salt-water pool sided by a Moroccan tent. A grand residence done in eclectic style with original antiques.

### VILLA CASA DEI PIPISTRELLE

(New, still being restored) Close to Sovicile, a province of Siena, sleeps 10, concierge included, cook available.