

## ITALY, TUSCANY, MAREMMA TOSCANA: VIVA VERMENTINO

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This is my first-ever report focused solely on the wines of Maremma Toscana, one of the youngest DOC appellations in Tuscany. This is a warm-climate viticulture area located in the southwest of the region across the entire province of Grosseto between the Tyrrhenian Sea and the slopes of Monte Amiata. In between those two points is a crazy convergence of unique geologies and micro-territories.

I visited the area in late June, although in truth I drive through the province of Grosseto once or twice per month on my various wine travels. It was nice to finally take the Grosseto Nord exit off the Via Aurelia to my destination at the Consorzio Tutela Vini della Maremma Toscana. There, I tasted just under 150 wines over two days with the help of the very knowledgeable Consorzio director Luca Pollini, to whom I owe an enormous debt of gratitude.



*Maremma is a wild and untamed corner of Tuscany with open spaces and nature reserves.*

The experience was illuminating, unexpectedly so, and I hope to make a report on Maremma Toscana a regular feature in my future coverage of Italy. I came away from the experience enriched on two fronts.

1. I realized how much I enjoy drinking Vermentino.
2. I realized how much I enjoy drinking Ciliegiolo.

Every journalist wants to find a scoop. Every wine writer wants to find the next up-and-coming wine. Despite my many years on the job and my familiarity with Italian wine, Maremma Toscana revealed delightful surprises and discoveries on those fronts.

Ciliegiolo, a native red grape that makes lively, medium-bodied wines to pair with the healthy foods and fresh ingredients that fit a realistic and wholesome diet, excited me so much that I decided to write a separate report specifically on that grape. You can read my “Spotlight on Ciliegiolo” [here](#).



*In 2020, Vermentino became the most-bottled grape in Maremma Toscana.*

Unlike Cilieggiolo, which I was largely unfamiliar with (especially when vinified as a monovarietal expression), I already had a healthy backlog of experience with Vermentino. However, I had no idea that this heat-loving white grape could produce such a versatile group of wines. This grape is also especially well suited to the way we drink wine today with vegetarian fare, fish and our favorite ethnic foods.

Indeed, Vermentino is booming along the Tuscan Coast, and vintners are determined to make sure it's not a flash in the pan or a passing trend.

Cilieggiolo and Vermentino are the two varieties growing fastest in terms of new planting. Bottled Vermentino grew 16.96% in 2021 over 2020. There are 914 hectares of the white grape in production today, compared to 138 hectares in 2006. Vermentino from the province of Grosseto accounts for half the Vermentino planted in Tuscany.

With roots in Anatolia, and passing through the Aegean Sea, Vermentino likely landed in Italy in Liguria. It spread across much of the Mediterranean basin, the South of France (where it is called Rolle), Corsica, Sardinia and Tuscany.

The late-ripening grape loves warm, dry climates and hillside exposures. But more than anything, it needs to be close to the seashore in order to show the best results, says Maremma Toscana Consorzio director Luca Pollini.

It shows tangy citrus and green overtones of lime, pear and unripe peach. It is fresh-tasting and nicely acidic, with pretty mineral notes that recall sea salt or crushed oyster shell.

A few solid names to watch out for are Tenuta Dodici, Terenzi, Rocca di Frassinello, Val delle Rose, Belguardo Mazzei, La Biagiola and Bruni.

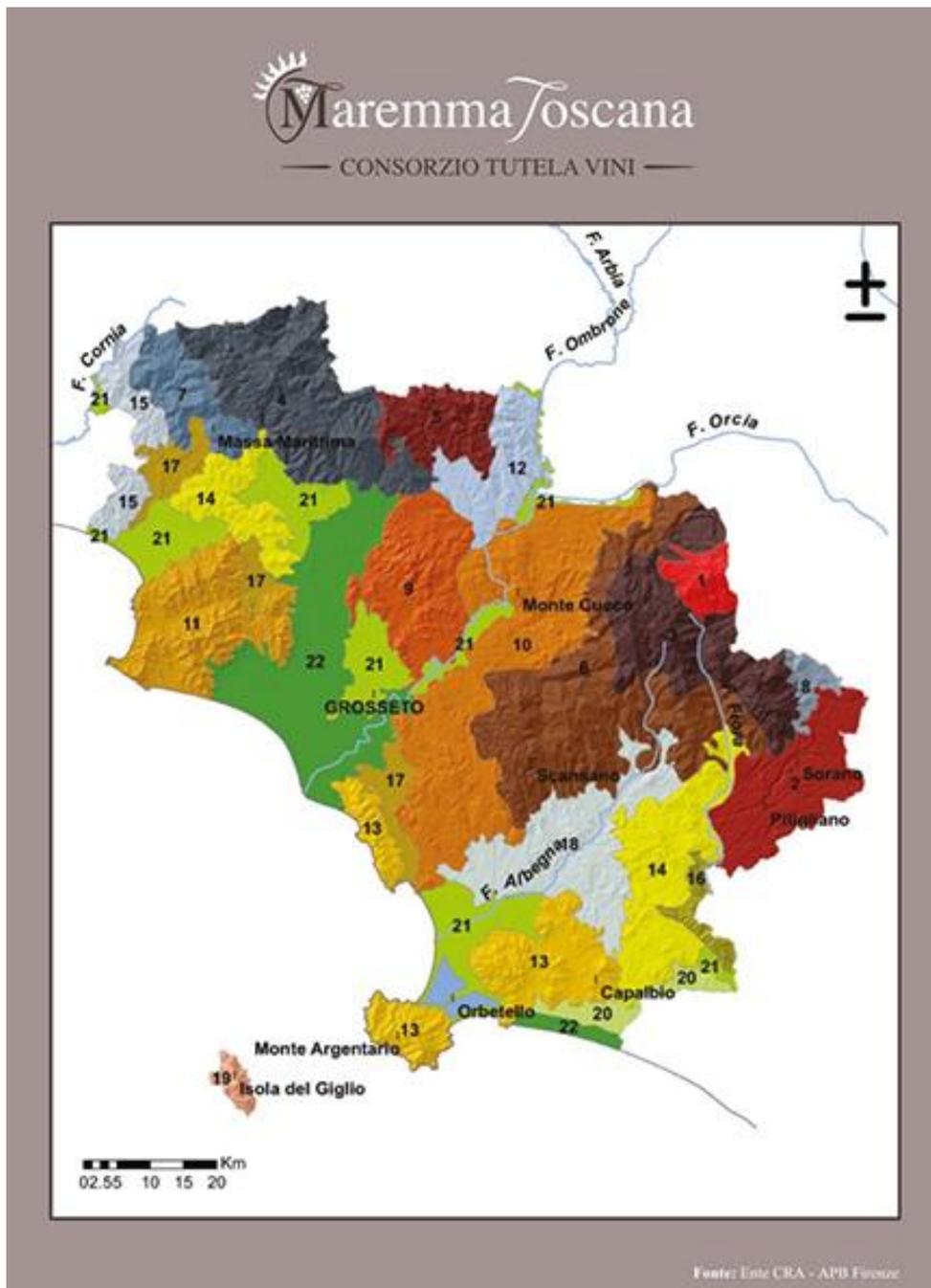
In fact, with any luck the Italian government will soon ratify a Maremma Toscana "Vermentino Superiore" denomination to highlight some of the best work being done with this grape. In the proposal, a Vermentino Superiore would be at least 95% Vermentino (blended possibly with, say, 5% Viognier).



*The whole Maremma Toscana Consorzio team, from left to right: lucky black cat, Sergio Bucci (Vignaioli del Morellino), Federica Mascheroni (Castelprile della Volpaia), Elisabetta Guicciardini (wife of Francesco Mazzei), Alessandro Gallo (Rocca di Montemassi), Luca Pollini (Consorzio Tutela Vini della Maremma Toscana), Edoardo Donato (Edoardo Donato), Andrea Daldin (Tenuta Sassoregale), yours truly, Francesco Mazzei (Belguardo Mazzei), Massimo Tuccio (I Vini di Maremma), Marco Bruni (Bruni) and Pericle Paciello (Rocca di Frassinello)*

This report also focuses on red wines made with Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Syrah, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot, Sangiovese and Alicante (or Grenache).

These wines offer some terrific value, especially when compared to the more-expensive blended reds in Bolgheri directly north of Grosseto. However, more work needs to be done to create a clear identity for the hearty red wines of Maremma Toscana.



The province of Grosseto (which makes the boundaries for Maremma Toscana DOC) is home to 9,066 hectares of vines, of which 2,364 hectares are in the DOC.

The Metalliferous Hills (or "metal-bearing hills") are found in the north of the appellation and see soils rich in minerals and metals. Monte Amiata is an extinct volcano that sees vines planted at higher elevations. Pitigliano and Sorano are part of the Vulsini volcanic complex with ash, tuff rock and volcanic soils.

Italy's "Silver Coast" is made up of the Argentario promontory and the Gulf of Follonica facing the Giglio Islands.

*(Banner image courtesy of Jennifer Burgess)*