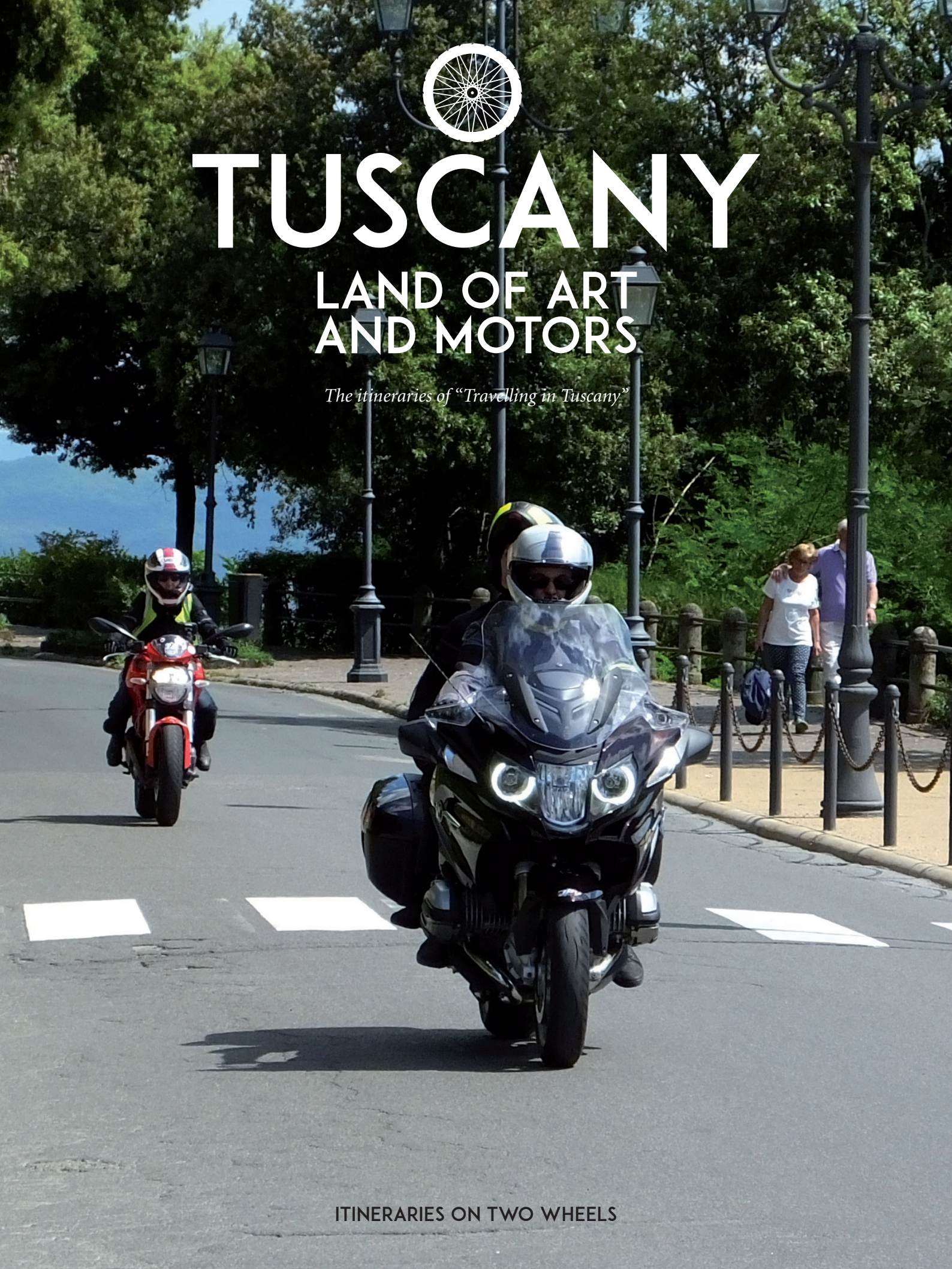




TUSCANY

LAND OF ART
AND MOTORS

The itineraries of "Travelling in Tuscany"



ITINERARIES ON TWO WHEELS



Volterra / Casole d'Elsa / Pomarance / Volterra

FIRST ITINERARY

The outline of ancient Volterra, the Etruscan Velathri, looms into view perched strategically on a hill lying at the confluence of the Val di Cecina and the Val d'Era.

This small town is a pearl of the province nestling in a splendid landscape. Its introverted preciousness, an amalgam of historical traditions that stretches back several millennia, arts and crafts linked to the manufacture of alabaster that are unique in the world, significant architectural and monumental works by important artists, a vague air of mystery that has inspired not a few legends right up to our own times (it is the setting for a part of the horror-fantasy vampire saga Twilight by the American Stephanie Meyer), can all be read in the interweaving of superimposed traces revealed to the traveller in the many layers of its urban structure.



f numerous stone works testify to the first settlements in the Neolithic period, it was the Etruscans in the 7th century BC who founded the first nucleus of the town on the hill of Volterra and began to build there in earnest in the 4th century. The great walls of over 7km in length presumably also enclosed farmland and pastures as resources in case of siege. Also in Roman times it played a significant role: as can be seen from the recent discoveries of the theatre and amphitheatre. In the 13th century, in the Age of the Communes, new walls would be built to replace the Etruscan ones.

Today, Volterra presents itself to our eyes with the characteristic appearance of a medieval town dominated by the yellow-grey colours of *panchino*, the building stone *par excellence* which we find employed in its walls and streets, its towers and mansions.

Restrictions on industrial and commercial development have saved it from dangerous building speculation, so that the modern city is almost completely enclosed within the 13th-century walls with its most important monuments. The Cathedral, dedicated to the Assumption, built around 1120 on top of the ancient church of Santa Maria. The Baptistery of San Giovanni built in the second half of the 13th century embellished by elegant alternating stripes of white and green stone. The Piazza dei Priori, on whose surface was planted, according to an ancient German custom, an elm, under which the elders and consuls gathered to legislate. The Palazzo dei Priori. The Medicean Fortress. The tower houses. Elegant Renaissance mansions including Palazzo Minucci (today Solaini) seat of the Pinacoteca Civica (art gallery) of Volterra, and Palazzo Incontri-Viti, from the names of the two families who owned it (Attilio Incontri had it built at the end of the 1500s,



Benedetto Giuseppe Viti bought it in 1850) which contains beautiful works in alabaster. In 1964, Luciano Visconti used its rooms to shoot *Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa* a film which won the Leone d'Oro at the Ven-



ice Film Festival. Volterra also features one of the most beautiful and best-preserved Etruscan arches, the famous Porta dell'Arco, which escaped the destruction ordered by the retreating German troops in WWII thanks to the initiative of the citizens who bricked it up making it unusable. A staircase of 251 steps leads from the centre of the town to the Doccia Gate built along with the walls of 1200 to defend an important spring. And there is much more to admire along the little cobbled streets or perhaps sharing with the *Volterrani* their traditional sunset Stroll over the Bridges which offers a breath-taking view of the Tuscan countryside as far as the sea or visiting the unmissable museums: the Guarnacci Etruscan Museum, the already-cited Pinacoteca Civica, the Museum of Sacred Art, and the Alabaster Ecomuseum.

CASOLE D'ELSA (SI)

A small town of Etruscan origin defined by beautiful walls of an ovoid shape lying a little above 400 meters on the back of a hill from where the view ranges over a post-





race of swine, the *Cinta Senese*, happily saved from extinction. However, there are plenty of woods of turkey and downy oaks too, as well as chestnut groves alternating with grasslands and clearings.

The name Casole seems to derive from the Latin *casula* “hut”. In the town you can visit the Collegiate Church of Santa Maria Assunta, the Church of San Niccolò and the Archaeological Museum and Collegiate, in addition to the Rocca Senese which is now the Town Hall.

Every year on the second Sunday of July, the Palio is run, a race that is “Roman-style” or “long”, not in a circle like that of Siena. The particularity of this race is that it takes place on a sloping track which makes it particularly challenging for both the horses and the jockeys. And that is not the only oddity: it seems in fact that in this Palio it was not the “*contrade*” – the neighbourhoods – that took part as in Siena, but “*fattorie*” i.e. farms, those same ones that the horses and jockeys came from. It is no coincidence that the saint it is historically dedicated to is Saint Isidore, the patron saint of farmers.

Finally, a last literary curiosity: here, to be precise in the hamlet of Graciano, Carlo Cassola set his novel *La ragazza di Bube*.

POMARANCE (PI)

Situated in the province of Pisa on the route from Volterra to Massa Marittima and the sea, and bor-

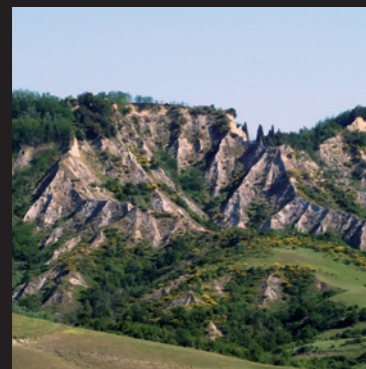


dering Casole Val di Cecina for 45 metres. We are among the hills of Volterra in the so-called “Valley of the Devil” in a landscape that is among the most evocative characterized by geysers and hot springs. The Sillana fortress, which the architect Giuliano da Sangallo restored in 1386 by intervening on a pre-existing structure, perfectly visible from a great distance, dominates from a strategic position its territory of lush woods and forests, including the remarkable Monterufoli forest with its beautiful springtime blooming of tulips, daffodils, and bluebells. Fallow deer, wild boars and wolves, several bird species, birds of prey, all find a home and security among its vegetation. The forest contains the “Villa of a Hundred Rooms” built on the ruins of an old medieval castle. Pomaranche is a geothermal resort *par excellence*, and the exploitation of the endogenous steam strongly marks its landscape with its metallic tangle of steam ducts. News on geothermal phenomena have come down to us from antiquity. The exploitation of geothermal energy for industrial purposes in the Larderello world centre and the historic site of geothermal energy (named in honour of the French engineer Francois Jacques De Larderel who promoted the exploitation in the 19th century) dates back to 1700 for the production of boric acid, while the production of electricity did not

happen until the first experiment of 1904. The Geothermal Museum of Larderello is open to visitors throughout the year and entrance is free. Further sites meriting a visit in Pomaranche are the Parish Church of San Giovanni Battista embellished by paintings of Cristofano Roncalli and Niccolò Cercignani, Piazza della Pretura, and the 19th-century mansions of Via Roncalli including Casa Bicchocci.

THE PALIO OF POMARANCE A UNIQUE EVENT OF ITS KIND IN THE WORLD.

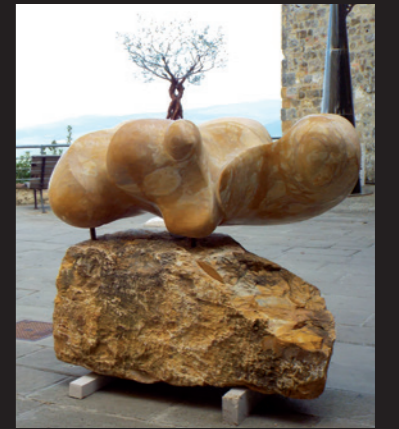
In homage to the Tuscan tradition, on the second Sunday of September also in Pomaranche a Palio takes place. Four districts participate in the contest: The Centre, Gelso, Marzocco and Paese Novo, who compete for the coveted standard. However, the way the contest is run is anything but traditional: no horses, no jockeys, no race, nothing of the usual equestrian competitions. The challenge between the districts is played out in theatrical performances! The old square known as the Piazzone turns into an open-air theatre, each district, starting from a free theme, stages the performance it has developed for which it has produced the scenery, costumes, tricks, and music.



ANYONE WHO TALKS OF VOLTERRA MENTIONS THE BALZE...

The famous “balze” are situated on the south-west of the Volterra hill. This phenomenon, the result of landslides and progressive erosion phenomena characteristic of clay soils, undeniably presents a spectacular outcome with a cutaway view of vertical walls originated by the collapse, characterized by the typical morphology with its crags.

card landscape of the surrounding Montagnola Senese. This territory between Casole d'Elsa, Monteriggioni, Siena, and Sovicille, inhabited since Etruscan and Roman times, constitutes a natural and historical heritage of inestimable value dotted with castles, mansions, villas, and gardens, but also peasant buildings, hermitages, parish churches, chapels and shrines linked to the presence of the Via Francigena, (the ancient medieval Pilgrim's way that united Canterbury to Rome and then on towards the ports of Puglia and the Holy Land. A real highway for cultural exchanges, but also commerce) and even grottoes due to the calcareous nature of the soil. The Montagnola Senese is a Site of Community Importance, a real paradise for lovers of nature and those who love to enjoy it in all its forms. An intricate maze of paths marked by the CAI ensures it is easy to visit. It is the evergreen and holm oaks that predominate. The holm oaks are the habitat in which survives an ancient



ANYONE WHO TALKS OF VOLTERRA MENTIONS ALABASTER...

The alabaster of Volterra, namely, the kind extracted at Castellina Marittima, is chalky alabaster. It formed through a long process of sedimentation and concentration of calcium sulphate contained in seawater that developed in the Miocene. The result is a white stone characterized by a soft consistency that makes it easily workable and therefore particularly adapted to the realization of complex ornamental patterns and detailed reproductions of the human face.

The Etruscans developed their elaboration of alabaster which they would stain with mineral substances or cover with thin sheets of gold. The most precious alabaster, the purest kind, was used to construct and decorate sarcophagi and cinerary urns whose technical excellence and artistic quality can be admired in the local Guarnacci Museum.

During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance this craft fell into decline to then resume in the 17th and, especially, the 18th and 19th centuries, when there was a real revival of Volterra's alabaster craftsmanship which attracted attention worldwide.

Volterra / Montecatini Val Di Cecina / Bolgheri
/ Castagneto Carducci / Volterra

SECOND ITINERARY

This second itinerary also seems to have been born deliberately to be travelled on two wheels.

It starts from the hills of Volterra to reach the sea of Tuscany at Castagneto Carducci, and then climbs up to Bolgheri. Anyone who arrives in this part of the Region cannot not take the long avenue of cypress trees that leads to this enchanting place. The roads inside are accessible only on foot but well worth it, while generous spaces are available to park our two-wheelers. Throughout the route, there are numerous points of great interest where it is possible to halt and take pictures to recall this holiday.

The km are not many but in each of them the traveller has the possibility to discover unique things that can only be admired in the land of Tuscany.





No problem as regards refuelling, there are many filling stations along the way. During this journey you will discover some of the best food and wine this wonderful region has been able to bring to unique levels over the course of time.

MONTECATINI VAL DI CECINA (PI)

Nestling in the so-called “Valley of the Devil” in the wooded landscape of the *Colline Metallifere*, just 16km from Volterra bordering Pomarance, up until the 11th century, this village was called *Monte Leone*. The castle of Montecatini, *Castrum Montis Leonis*, was built by the Belforti family around 960 when they came from Germany in the retinue of Emperor Otto I. Through the ancient gates and strolling through the narrow alleyways of the old centre we reach the beautiful *Piazza del Castello* overlooked by the *Church of San Biagio* from 1356 and the coeval *Palazzo Pretorio*. Inside the church, two niches above the choir hold two terracotta statues, the work of the *Della Robbia* family, depicting Saint Blaise and Saint Sebastian. The *Palazzo Pretorio* features a beautiful façade lightened by a portico with cross vaults and round arches on elegant Ionic columns. The entire town is dominated by the *Tower of the Belforti*, an 11th-century construction, with a quadrangular escarpment base, thick walls, and no battlements. At the end of the 1960s, it was bought by Emilio Jesi who entrusted its restoration to the rationalist architect and designer *Franco Albini*.

The economy and also the fame of Montecatini is linked to the mining of copper. Already practised by the Etruscans who forged utensils and furnishings from it, its period of maximum development arrived in the 19th



century and Montecatini Val di Cecina became the largest copper mine in Europe. Here was born the homonymous company Montecatini, one of the major European industrial groups, which later merged into Montedison. At the beginning of the 20th century, mining ceased and, in 1911, exploitation of deposits of rock salt began.

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MUSEUM OF THE MINES DOCUMENTATION CENTRE OF MONTECATINI

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Housed in the 14th-century *Palazzo Pretorio* this is part of a visit that includes the extraction site of *Caporciano* (between 1827 and 1907 the richest copper mine in Europe) with



Pozzo Alfredo, the entrance to the mine with the technical and administrative offices and the *Muraglione Dam*. In its various themed rooms, the Museum offers a glimpse of the wide range of underground resources that since antiquity have been exploited in Val di Cecina: the extraction of copper in the various mines, the eternal importance of rock salt, the elaboration of alabaster, mosaics obtained using chalcedony, a rich collection of minerals, and much more besides.

BOLGHERI (LI)

It is impossible to forget Carducci's poetic suggestion “*cypresses that run to Bolgheri from San Guido in double rows...*” Bolgheri (the name seems to derive from a military settlement of Bulgars who were allies of the Lombards) lies on the famous 5km-long *Viale dei Cipressi*, edged by tall cypress trees, that takes you from the *Via Aurelia* right up to the gates of the old town. Linked to Castagneto Carducci, it stands in the centre of the *Leghorn Maremma* on the last foothills of the *Colline Metallifere*. The *Della Gherardesca Counts* dominated the place since its foundation and had a castle



and a mansion here. The Castle, mentioned for the first time in a document of 1158, has endured fires, looting and remodelling over the course of the centuries. Today its red bricks bid welcome to the visitor who wishes to enjoy the pleasure of strolling among the characteristic houses in stone and brick and the characteristic craft workshops. Nature lovers will appreciate Bolgheri's *wildlife refuge*, 500 hectares between the *Ligurian Sea* and the *Tyrrhenian railway line*. In 1959, this was the first private-sector natural oasis in Italy and since 1968 has been protected by the *WWF*.

The Italian saying “In every town you visit you will find wonders of food and wine” is a certainty in our beautiful country, and the red wines of the Bolgheri area are famous and for the most part sport the “*Bolgheri DOC*” label.

CASTAGNETO CARDUCCI (LI)

This small town perches on the top of a hill dominated by the castle of the *Della Gherardesca Counts* and was once enclosed by walls of which the part facing the sea survives, and that together with the *Church of San Lorenzo* is the original nucleus of the old town. Around the castle, whose construction

dates back to the year One Thousand, the urban centre developed in a pattern of concentric rings. In *Via Carducci*, at numbers 2 and 59 respectively, are the *Carducci Museum Archive - Literary Park* and the small museum to the poet “*Casa Carducci*”. In 1907, the village decided to re-christen itself *Castagneto Carducci* to pay homage to the first Italian poet to receive the *Nobel Prize for Literature* in 1906. This year it is celebrating 110 years since the poet's death with a series of initiatives, starting from 8 March, aimed at enhancing lesser known and more intimate aspects of his life.



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