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WINE THERAPY FEVER HITS TUSCANY. A MEDIEVAL CASTLE OFFERS A UNIQUE EXPERIENCE: SANGIOVESE-BASED BATHS, MASSAGES AND THERAPEUTIC TREATMENTS IN THE HEART OF THE CHIANTI REGION

The inevitable spread of the wine therapy trend that originated in the south of France just over a decade ago, arrived in the northern provinces of Italy quite a while ago. But only recently did the first resort begin to serve up a bit of vinoterapia in the wine capital of central Italy, Tuscany.

At the Castello di Spaltenna, in the heart of Tuscany's main wine region, Chianti (Gaiole in Chianti to be exact), a plethora of therapeutic and Sangiovese grape-based massages and treatments are offered at the medieval castle surrounded by the vineyards, olive orchards, and rolling hills ridged with cypress trees that are the defining landscapes of the territory. According to the young, enthusiastic, and well trained masseuses that perform all of the wine therapy treatments under the direction of Gabriella Rosolen, "the only recognized wine therapist in Tuscany", there are many reasons why one should try a grape-based massage or bath. Apart from their relaxing effects, there are two important therapeutic reasons: "Wine therapy, though not curative, tends to curb problems related to ageing because it contrasts the free radicals that draw from the skin... It is also suitable for circulation problems".

That wine has great therapeutic benefits is already a well known fact. Grapes contain numerous substances that are necessary for the skin's health and well-being, and are rich in vitamins A, B1, B2, PP, and C that are necessary to maintain the skin's integrity, as well as minerals, pectin, sugars, tannins, that have the tendency to retard the ageing process. Grapes are also rich in polyphenols, antioxidizing substances that create protection from free radicals that attack and damage skin cells.

For those who may prefer to abstain from wine-therapy treatments, there is the alternative of olive-oil based massages, baths, and cures. Treatments that are considered more adapted for those who suffer from dry skin.

And all of the products used during these treatments are made from the grape and olive oil-based materials produced in the vineyards and olive orchards that surround the 10th century complex of Spaltenna (www.spaltenna.it, ph. 0577/749269). There are even special treatments offered that coincide with agricultural events that occur throughout the seasons. An invigorating bath in freshly harvested Sangiovese grapes is definitely worth trying, but is only available during the grape harvest (vendemmia) in September.

Of course the best form of wine therapy - drinking it - is also offered at the restaurant located in the courtyard of the medieval fortress. A menu of modern renditions of local traditional cuisine is accompanied by a wine list from the cellar that is always stocked with between 450 - 500 different types of wine, assuring the satisfaction of all tastes. Restaurant Manager Giovanni Billia notes though that the majority of wines are from local producers and thus largely Sangiovese style Chiantis. "The particularity of this cellar is that 70% of the labels are from the Chianti area... a characteristic of this cellar because of the type of tourist that we have here, who asks to drink the wines from this territory".

So with all of these elements of wine combined, this could be the ideal place for a getaway, a place to unwind amidst the rolling hills of the Chianti that seem to be a land from a fairy tale, and a chance to try one of the latest trends in therapeutical rejuvenation. However, it should be remembered that no getaway is so well hidden, and no trend new enough that Vip's haven't already jumped on the scene. Between a wine bath and a glass of wine bumping into an American filmmaker or an Italian politician is not out of the question.

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