



The vineyards at Clos Ste. Magdeleine.



A narrow passageway at Eze.

Barcelona to Rome

AN UNFORGETTABLE GASTRONIC AND WINE TASTING CRUISE

FOLLOWING THE 10-DAY TOUR through Spain, we met up with several other participants in our group for a voyage on *Crystal Serenity* from Barcelona to Spain. Our first stop was Palma de Mallorca. Although I have visited this city numerous times, it is one of my favorite Mediterranean ports. A tour of the island of Mallorca with a stop at Frédéric Chopin's villa and a visit to one of Europe's largest cathedrals is recommended; however, I take the "open" carriage train from Palma to the hilltop town of Sóller. The scenery en route is breathtaking in places and always memorable. There is also a small, but very interesting Picasso museum to visit before returning via train.

Our next port was Marseille, France. We left town immediately by van and journeyed to Cassis. There, we visited the famous Clos Ste. Magdeleine Winery for a tour and tasting of the great red wines produced from Grenache, Cinsault, and Mourvèdre, as well as the typical white wines of Cassis. Then, we had lunch at a fabulous restaurant on the edge of a Mediterranean bay. The scenery was great, the food divine, and the wine fine.

The following day we docked in Monaco and we went to the small seaside town of Mougins, France, where Picasso spent 20 years near the end of his life. Based on what we experienced in Mougins, I'd say he finished life in fine style. The town is delightful for walking with beautiful statues strategically placed. As was the case the day before, our lunch was spectacular with many courses accompanied by great wines. Before returning to Monaco, we visited the Île Saint-Honorat, where we were served Chardonnay and Syrah wines made by the monks on the island. We walked a half mile or so through a grove of 500-year-old olive trees. Eventually, we came upon a beautiful woman who was pouring the wine. Both the Chardonnay and Syrah wines were very enjoyable and made even more so in this bucolic setting. This was a great way to end our day's excursion.

The next day was the one I had looked forward to the most. We motored out of Monaco to one of the most famous districts in France—the Village of Eze. It is located on top of a small mountain at the edge of the Mediterranean. It is one of the most picturesque villages to walk through. After sitting

outside enjoying Champagne with the view of the sea, we journeyed back down the road to our next destination. Lunch was served outside under an awning which offered great views of the sea. This "Heaven on Earth" Cap Estellon on the Côte d'Azur was known during much of the last century as a home where famous American authors, e.g., Hemingway and Steinbeck, visited and was later converted to a small world-class hotel of 28 rooms and suites. Of all places I've been, this gets my vote as the best. Finally, I have a bona fide reason to play the lotto. If I win big, you'll know where to find me.



One of many statues found in Mougins, France.

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A wine tasting at Ile Saint Honorat in the seaside town of Mougins, France.



Wines tasted at Ornellaia Winery.



Lunch in Cassis, France, with the tour group.



An extraordinary pool at Cap Estellon.



A clever hearts of palm salad that resembles birds.



Wines tasted at Guado al Tasso Winery.

We had a fantastic 10-course meal (Michelin Star restaurant) with great Sancerre from Domaine Delaporte 2017 and Pommard 2016 by François Mikulski, both in magnums. The Sancerre was pale gold with green hints. It was very expressive with an intense, complex nose with notes of rhubarb, black currant, and kiwi. It was fresh on the palette, delicate, well-balanced with a clean finish, and went well with the amuse-bouche, the ravioli with pistachios, and the artistic gazpacho, as well as the hearts of palm salad with “birds” sculptured from cheese and vegetables. The Pommard was a perfect match with the loin of veal and vegetables, as well as with the chocolate dessert adorned with edible gold. It was one of the most ideal meals in perfect settings I’ve ever had.

After touring the grounds including the most attractive pool I’ve ever seen, we visited the inside, inspected one room, and were treated to fabulous piano music courtesy of the recent winner of the annual Japanese competition of young Japanese performers aged 30 and under. On our way out, we saw the two staff cars, a Bentley and an Audi A8 L. The general manager told me that although these cars “came with the room”, they were not used except to pick up and deliver guests to the Nice Airport. In essence, people lucky enough to find this place never left until their visit was finished.

We left for Livorno, Italy, and had a full day. The first stop was an old favorite, Ornellaia, one of the most famous Super Tuscans. Ornellaia’s grounds are spectacular and hint of the winery’s artistic orientation. After a tour of the winery, we were treated to a tasting of the current portfolio of Ornellaia’s wines, including the top wine Ornellaia, as well as second wine le Serre Nuove and third wine, LeVolte, the basic red Variezioni in Rosso and a white Poggio alle Gazze. All the wines were very enjoyable and two were unforgettable. Ornellaia, a towering blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Cabernet Franc and the Poggio alle Gazze, which is a blend of predominately Sauvignon Blanc, with smaller amounts of Vermentino, Viognier, and Verdicchio.

We went to a nearby restaurant for a lengthy and very good lunch served family style with virtually unlimited wines from the Bolgheri Region. To finish the day, we returned to an old favorite—Guado al Tasso, owned by my friend Piero Antinori. The estate is beautiful and the main wine, Guado al Tasso, is among the best from Bolgheri. We tasted the 2016 Guado al Tasso, as well as the 2016 Vermentino, and the 2017 Il Bruciato made from Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Syrah. These wines were accompanied by appropriate appetizers which made this a lasting memory from our week of great wine and food. À votre Santé! 🍷



PHOTO: THOMAS BALSAMO

Barrington resident Jim Bryant is pursuing his passion and love of wine as an international wine consultant. This follows a 30-year career in senior financial and general management positions at two Fortune 100 companies. He is the owner of James R. Bryant L.L.C.; contact him at profwino@comcast.net.

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