



Hortulus Gardens

presents

Tuscany's Magnificent Gardens

A Horticultural Journey with Master Gardener *Ed Blondin*
September 20th – 26th, 2011

Tuesday, September 20th

Florence - Siena

The Florence airport is where we meet master gardener, Ed Blondin of Hortulus Gardens, then we are off to the magical city of Siena.

En-route from Florence to Siena, we will pause for lunch at a charming vista in the hills south of Florence for our first taste of Tuscan fare and a glimpse of things to come.

In Siena, check in and get settled into our new home, the *Palazzo Ravizza*, a 17th century palazzo in the center of the city. Make sure to take a look at the picturesque garden. The Palazzo Ravizza is one of the very few hotels that boasts such conveniences and being located within the city walls, and within easy walking distance to all the major attractions, including the best shopping in Siena. (www.palazzoravizza.it)

Before dinner, gather in the garden of the hotel to meet our local expert, the extraordinary Jonathan Radford. (www.jonathanradfordgardens.com) Jonathan has extensive knowledge and experience in garden design, renovation and creation, in both Italy and England. Past and current projects include head gardener and design consultant at ancient palaces, castles, monasteries, and churches. His work also includes formal gardens, extensive fine lawn areas, wild flower meadows, vegetable gardens, olive groves, and orchards. We are quite privileged to have Jonathan join us for the next several days sharing his keen insight and vision, in addition to guiding us through the finest gardens in Tuscany. With Ed and Jonathan leading the way, we are certain to cultivate garden knowledge!

A warm welcome dinner awaits us this evening at one of Siena's fine restaurants. **L, D**

Wednesday, September 21st *Villa Cetinale – Organic Farm
-Siena*

Villa Cetinale is a 16th century villa in the Ancaiano district near Siena. Designed by the architect Carlo Fontana, the villa was built in the 1600s by Cardinal Flavio Chigi for Pope Alexander VII. The gardens at Villa Cetinale are renowned as being amongst the most beautiful in Italy. With the villa's history, its gardens and the statues found throughout the property, Cetinale has been photographed and written about extensively, and this morning we have a private visit. (www.villacetinale.com)

This morning we also have a very special treat just for us, as Jonathan brings us to one of his most recent projects, that of a privately-owned Tuscan organic farm. Situated in the stunning hills near Siena, Jonathan's signature ecological theme is reflected in a low maintenance, Italian gravel garden. This garden requires very little water and maintenance, and will underline the true ecological and Italian nature of the farm. Aromatic herbs are planted in large swathes and will ultimately be sold as part of the farm's organic food range. An orchard with a wide range of antique Tuscan fruit varieties is being established along with a rich wildflower meadow to provide the farm with organic compost. Here we see a very new, private garden, just completed by Jonathan. Best of all, we meet the owners for a discussion about the garden, their vision, and the steps required to bring it to fruition.

Returning back to Siena, lunch will feature delicious Tuscan specialties and Chianti wines in an easy-going, colorful ambiance.

Ochre in color, gothic in construction, Siena serpentine its majestic way around and on top of three hills in the heart of Tuscany. Palaces abound, cathedral bells ring, and tiny cobble-stoned streets all lead their way to the unforgettable Il Campo, praised as Italy's most remarkable piazza. Populated with bubbling fountains and secret gardens, Siena is a medley of romance, gastronomy, and mystery painted on a backdrop of Medieval mastery.

This afternoon we are privileged to have our own local guide lead us through an adventurous walking tour of this captivating university city.

Dinner tonight is on your own, with so many choices just steps from our hotel, including a vast array of charming local *osterias*, warm and friendly *trattorias*, and refined *ristorantes*.

B, L

Thursday, September 22nd

*Palazzo Cervini – Palazzo
Piccolomini – La Foce - Siena*

This morning brings us to one of Jonathan's most cherished projects, that of *Palazzo Cervini*. As this is a private property, we are honored and privileged to have Jonathan guide us through this most interesting and historical masterpiece! *Palazzo Cervini* comprises of a Renaissance palazzo, hermitage and romantic church, the construction of which was commissioned in 1539 by *Pope Marcello II*. The direct descendants of Pope Marcello II, Count and Countess Cervini commissioned Jonathan in 2001 to renovate and re-design various areas of the estate. The first of these was a charming Renaissance courtyard, tucked away behind the hermitage. The courtyard was once used by the famous *Camaldolese* order of monks who inhabited the hermitage in the 1500's.

Therefore, Jonathan chose to create a chic yet humble Mediterranean gravel garden with a psychic garden feel. The garden was designed using the ecologica garden system and requires minimal water and maintenance. Although clearly a Mediterranean style garden, the garden is situated at an altitude of 900m (2,700 ft) above sea level, on a dormant volcano and is subject to cold winter temperatures. Therefore, he chose to incorporate an English country garden feel, using Mediterranean and nordic plants, planted using *Gertrude Jekyll's* planting techniques, hence the English influence. A garden of this kind, although clearly Italian in its styling, is easily suited to cooler climates and can therefore easily be re-created in the UK, Germany or the US. Here, with Jonathan and Ed, we explore every aspect of this truly unique property!

After our explorations of Palazzo Cervini, lunch will be an authentic countryside affair in the characteristic village of *Vivo d'Orcia*, Jonathan's home town.

This afternoon brings us to two of Tuscany's most stunning gardens. The first is in the village of Pienza and the garden is at the *Palazzo Piccolomini*, the first example of Renaissance architecture and home of *Pope Pius II*, where Jonathan and Ed lead us through the palazzo and its hanging gardens. (www.palazzopiccolominipienza.it) On the ground floor of the palazzo, a square-shaped garden bound by walls with a well in the middle, is the first hanging garden of the Renaissance. This situation lends this place a symbolic, architectural and blissful value, one of harmonious life amidst nature. Pienza itself is a captivating village and home of Tuscany's famous *pecorino* cheese, where we can stop for a sample of this delectable treat.

The property of *La Foce* lies on the hills overlooking the *Val d'Orcia*, a beautiful and miraculously intact valley in Southern Tuscany. La Foce was originally built at the end of the 15th century as a wayside tavern, but soon became the centre of an estate belonging to the great Hospital of Santa Maria della Scala in Siena. In 1924 it was bought by *Antonio and Iris Origo* and turned into their comfortable home, from where they farmed and developed the land. At this time, the main buildings were restructured and a large garden was created. The garden was conceived to enhance the Renaissance house and expand the spectacular view over the valley of the Orcia and the Amiata mountain. The harmony between buildings, garden and nature makes La Foce an ideal example of Tuscany's architectural and cultural evolution in the 20th century.

The garden grew gradually between 1925 and 1939. The house is surrounded by a formal Italian garden, which is divided into geometrical 'rooms' by box hedges with lemon trees in terracotta pots. Travertine stairs lead to the rose garden and a winding wisteria-covered pergola bordered by lavender hedge. Gentle informal terraces climb up the hill, where cherry trees, pines and cypresses grow among wild broom, thyme and rosemary, and a long cypress avenue leads to a 17th-century stone statue. Through the wood, a path joins the garden and the family cemetery. (www.lafoce.com)

Visit the beautiful gardens here at La Foce, with Jonathan our personal guide, of course!

Did I mention our dinner with the Contessa? Tonight we are welcomed by Contessa Francesca Fumi Gambi Gado to her home just outside Siena for a gracious dinner. Francesca, being a famed art historian and wonderful gardener, offers us the opportunity this evening to explore and discuss the strong connection between the two. **B, L, D**

Friday, September 23rd

*Villa di Monaciano –
Borgo Scopeto – Radda-in-Chianti*

This morning we visit the beautiful and unique grounds of *Villa di Monaciano*. The villa and its garden are the heart of the Monaciano estate rising high on a hilltop that dominates the Tuscan Chianti countryside. A drawing dating from 1835 attests to the fact that there was a garden annex to the Villa in the eighteenth century. However, it was during the 1850's, when the building was completely modified by the nobleman *Alessandro Pucci Sansedoni*, that a romantic garden was constructed in the innovative spirit of the styles pervading Florence at the time. The garden was designed as a place of both contemplation and relaxation, ensuring that spectacular and extraordinary aspects be highlighted. The most noteworthy are: the heated green house, the Lemon house, the Aviary, the Water Lily Pond, Venus's Grotto, the temple, water fountains and other wonders interspersed with flowering hedges, forests and pathways. All of these remain today for us to visit and appreciate. (www.monaciano.com)

Our midday adventure and lunch brings us to the *Borgo Scopeto* in the Chianti countryside. Borgo Scopeto is an estate covering 503 hectares (1,243 acres), at an altitude of between 350 and 420 metres (1,148 and 1,377 feet) above sea level, prevalently on clayey-marly rocks, with arenaceous elements bonded with limestone. Some 70 hectares (166 acres) of the estate are currently planted with grape vines, olive trees cover 50 hectares (123 acres), buildings of the "Borgo" and other rural constructions cover a surface area of 6 hectares, while the remaining 350 hectares are woodland. The most interesting part of the "Borgo", comprising noble residences with elegant gardens and numerous buildings once used for crafts and rural work, dates back to the Middle Ages and also boasts a wealth of architectural and artistic testimony from various later periods. (www.borgoscopeto.com)

It is here at Borgo Scopeto that we meet famous local author, *Dario Castagno*. Dario will guide us around this 1,000 year old property, now a renovated Tuscan "resort", in the Chianti countryside. Here we are welcomed for lunch and learn the culture of the Chianti area, discovering the history, traditions and endless rivalries that for centuries have characterized this unique corner of Tuscany.

After lunch we transfer to the medieval hilltop village of Radda-in-Chianti, and the *Relais Vignale*, our home for the next three nights. The hotel is in the center of the village and offers fantastic views over the hills and vineyards, also featuring a lovely pool and beautiful terraces. (www.vignale.it)

Late this afternoon and evening are yours to enjoy our new home, with free time to explore, shop, and discover dinner on your own. **B, L**

Saturday, September 24th *Greve-in-Chianti - Vignamaggio*

This morning we enjoy the scenic drive to Greve-in-Chianti, to explore its city center and colorful Saturday morning market. Taste the freshest produce just hand-picked from private gardens that morning, smell the yards of *salumi*, admire the green and black olive tapenade, and indulge in the savory local cheeses. The market offers a great shopping experience for souvenirs to bring home.

Lunch will be yours to discover by sampling the offerings at the market or at one of Greve's reasonably priced restaurants or trattorias.

After lunch we visit the nearby *Villa Vignamaggio* to discover a remarkable Renaissance villa that was the birthplace of Mona Lisa, or *La Gioconda* in Italian. This spectacular villa and its resplendent gardens were featured in Kenneth Branagh's 1992 film *Much Ado About Nothing*. Although the villa is private, we shall tour its gardens, then taste the estate's award-winning Riserva, Chianti Classico, Super-Tuscan wines, and olive oil. (www.vignamaggio.it)

Dinner this evening brings us together at one of the local restaurants in Radda, or among the surrounding countryside. **B, D**

Sunday, September 25th

Volpaia – Radda-in-Chianti

Enjoy the morning leisurely on your own. Relax on the terrace sipping coffee and taking in the peaceful view; or stroll through the village while everything comes alive in preparation for another glorious autumn day.

Later this morning, we visit the nearby scenic village of Volpaia. Just before lunch we discover what makes Volpaia such a famous landmark on Italy's culinary map. The answer is simple, and essential to the success of many typical recipes including great salad dressing: vinegar. Volpaia is the only community in Tuscany presently licensed to make vinegar. By law, winemaking facilities must be located some distance from those making vinegar. To make the best vinegar one must start with a great wine, and transform it slowly. That way its components, and its perfumes, will remain in the vinegar. Volpaia's red and white vinegars are aged in barrels, just like the best wines. The vinegar absorbs noble tannins from these oak barrels that infuse the bouquet with extraordinary elegance. Then the vinegars are given a final treatment, they are infused with natural flavors. The final vinegars are numbered from one to five: 1 Herbs; 2 Spices; 3 Kitchen Garden; 4 Flowers; 5 Fresh. These vinegars are rarely found in America but we will have the chance to purchase them in easy-to-bring-back-home sizes.

Lunch is enjoyed in the village of Volpaia, at a very special restaurant on the main square. Relax on the stunning terrace with expansive views over the vineyards and olive groves; feast on home-made pasta, ribollita, and local seasoned meats.

Our farewell dinner together will be at a special *agriturismo* just outside of Radda-in-Chianti. We are welcomed by the "locally famous" *Gioia Milani*, who will have prepared for us an authentic dinner comprised of ingredients produced directly on her farm! This is truly a special treat and a meal we're sure to remember as we raise our glasses and toast to a wonderful week together, singing the praises of *Bella Toscana!* **B, L, D**

Monday, September 26th

Florence

After breakfast, transfer back to the Florence airport for the return trip to America. **B**



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Name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____ **State** _____ **ZIP** _____

Phone _____ **Cell Phone** _____ **E-Mail** _____

*\$3,695 per person, double occupancy.
Single Supplement is \$700*

Deposit of \$500 per person is required to reserve your place. (Space is limited)
Personal checks accepted. Make Checks payable to:

Villas and Vines
PO Box 131
62 Wall Street
Douglas, MI 49406

Final payment is due by July 22, 2011 (60 days prior)

This tour includes all hotels, ground transportation, bi-lingual tour guide, activities, meals, and wines as outlined in the program. Air is NOT included to/from Italy.

*CANCELLATION: If cancelled up to 60 days prior, there is a \$500 cancellation fee. If cancelled between 60 – 30 days prior, the penalty is 50% of the total cost of the trip. The trip is non-refundable if cancelled within 30 days of departure.
Trip cancellation insurance is strongly recommended.*

*Please return this form with the \$500 per person deposit to:
Villas and Vines, PO Box 131, 62 Wall Street, Douglas Michigan 49406
If you have any questions at all, please feel free to contact Villas and Vines at
(800) 593-6350 or david@villasandvines.com*



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