

The manual of modern luxury

Robb Report

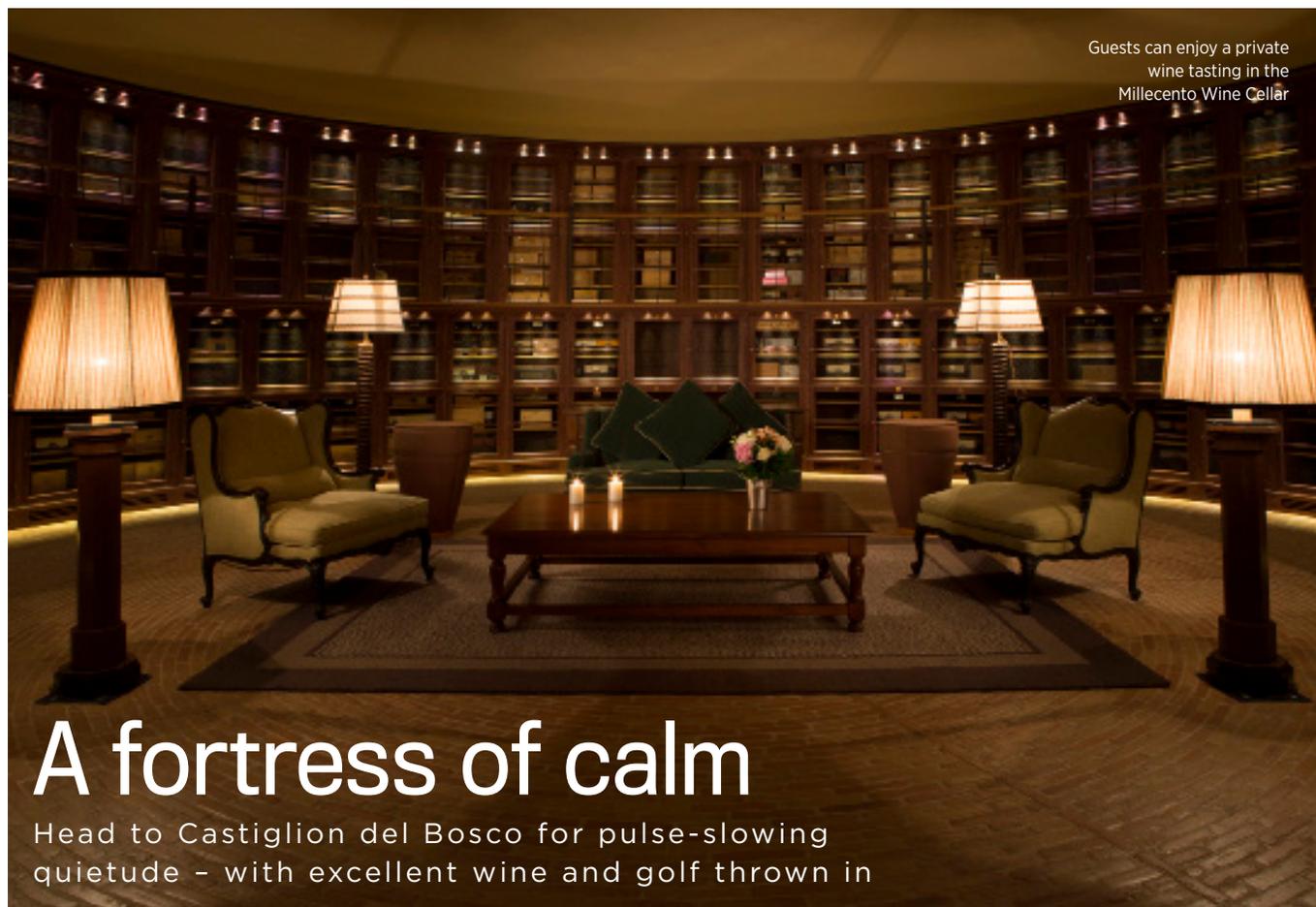
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Guests can enjoy a private wine tasting in the Millecento Wine Cellar



A fortress of calm

Head to Castiglion del Bosco for pulse-slowing quietude - with excellent wine and golf thrown in

Up in the dense woodlands that coat the higher of Tuscany's billowing hills, the air punctured only by the skylark's song and the scent of the cypress trees that dot the landscape like fossilised Roman sentries, life seems deliciously uncomplicated. The crowds that flock to Florence are far from here, and there's not so much as an echo of horn-hooting Vespa riders, nor a glimpse of side-street hawks touting leather goods and gelato. In their place are sleepy hilltop villages - some left to ruin, others alive but all but untouched by progress.

Of those villages once abandoned but recently revived is Castiglion del Bosco, which sits almost hidden from view in the UNESCO-listed Val d'Orcia Natural Park some 25 miles south of the terracotta roofs of Siena. In 2003, a 5000-acre plot surrounding the 12th century 'castle in the woods' was bought by Massimo Ferragamo, youngest son of fashion's Salvatore. He has since transformed it into a remote and oh-so-achingly classy hideaway for the oenophile, the golfer and pilgrims of calm.

The hotel at its heart is operated by Rosewood and offers 23 suites and 11 villas. Each is sumptuous, overseen by Massimo's wife Chiara who, using towering hardwood antiques and the region's rich ochre colour palette, has recreated something of what the life of

a local lord might have been like, many moons ago.

While such a lord may have enjoyed a bath perfumed by fresh lavender (as I did on arrival), it's less likely he will have had access to swimming pools, a spa or two restaurants, nor to Mrs Ferragamo's chi-chi boutique, which sits at the north end of the immaculate avenue that runs through the Borgo, the name taken from the word meaning an Italian medieval village.

While the hotel's charms would be enough of a draw in their own right - the T-bone steak cooked Fiorentina style and served in the Osteria la Canonica trattoria alone is worth the trip - Castiglion del Bosco is also the site of a winery of the same name. With over 60 hectares of vines growing Sangiovese grapes, it produces Brunello di Montalcino, one of the most powerful designations in contemporary winemaking. The most sought-after of its bottles are the numbered magnums inspired by the Chinese Zodiac, which retail for €1000 (around £865), but in only a few years tend to have increased in value by five times or more.

Lower in the valley is the estate's private golf club. The course, designed by prolific American course architect Tom Weiskopf, is reckoned to be one of Italy's finest tracks - a low bar in a

country not much taken with the game perhaps, but it would be highly regarded in many that are. Its 19 holes (there's a flick-of-the-wrists par 3 to finish, the 'Brunello hole', said to be for the settling of bets) take full advantage of the landscape's undulating topography, offering dramatic views every step of the way. The Club is strictly for member families and their guests only, although hotel guests (and the odd lucky reviewer) may receive an invitation to experience the course and clubhouse if they're interested in joining.

The course's management is adamant the membership will peak at 300, a similar figure to many of the world's most exclusive clubs, Augusta National, for example. From even a short distance, the spectacular Castiglion del Bosco is hard to pick out among its namesake trees. Make the journey, and you'll discover that's a fitting metaphor for such a rare find.

- ROBIN SWITHINBANK

The Club at Castiglion del Bosco is a private club for members, their families and guests.

For information about membership, please contact the general manager, David Waters, d.waters@castigliondelbosco.com. Rosewood Castiglion Del Bosco Hotel, Località, 53024 Castiglion del Bosco Montalcino (SI), Italy. rosewoodhotels.com