

## SPANNOCCHIA INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

Fall 2011

Volume 10, Issue 3

# Il Pennato



### Table of Contents

Aleta Storch	2
Sarah Russell	3
Cody Badaracca	4-5
Courtenay Evans	6
Natalie Concillo	7
The End	8

## Yes, it Really is this Beautiful by Katie Phelan, Education Director

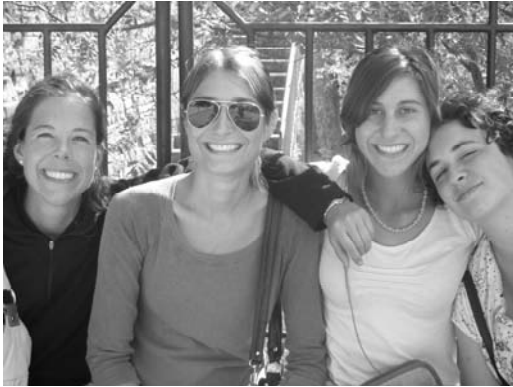
There's a reason why so many visitors to Spannocchia return home with a shot similar to the one above. Perspective.

Brunelleschi would have you know that perspective allows the viewer to more accurately, or realistically, appreciate an image as a reproduction of the actual thing as originally seen through the eyes of the artist. Got that? Good, because then he'd probably go on to tell you about Euclidean laws of geometric optics. But I won't.

One of the things that struck me about the interns who wrote pieces or submitted photos for this issue is how they employed perspective in order to share their experiences at Spannocchia with others. Not perspective in the Brunelleschian understanding of the term, with lines and angles and all the rest, but a type of perspective that none-the-less allowed each of them portray where they were, what they saw, and how they felt. They returned home; they considered things; they wrote a few words and sent me some files. They had known the beauty of Spannocchia and I think they did a good job of articulating it. Even the most objective of them all (Mr. Cody Badaracca), uses perspective in a way that's more Brunelleschi than Cimabue.

It's true that we are all subject to our own realities; that we experience things differently and formulate our own understanding of things based, primarily, on our own experience. As adults, we are perfectly capable, and indeed required, to construct our own realities.

And so, majority rules in this issue of Il Pennato. If Kiyomi's picture of Sarah on page 3 is an accurate portrayal of the interns' reality this Fall then, yes, it really is this beautiful.



## A Tutto Fare Entry by Aleta Storch

You really cannot fully appreciate wine in all of its glory until you have been knee-deep in an oak barrel, inhaling its toxic, fermentative by-product, while simultaneously filling buckets with grape skins and seeds which will eventually be used for the semi-lethal Grappa.

Picture three Americans (myself, Cody, and Natalie) in rubber boots and oversized rubber gloves, trying desperately to understand their supervisor (Angelo) whose Italian sounds like it is being spoken with a potato in his mouth. This is how I remember the early days of Tutto Fare.

One morning, shortly after completion of the grape harvest, Angelo, with his typical look of confusion as to whether we understood a word he was saying, told me that I needed to climb inside of the giant wooden barrel containing the remaining grape sludge. My first instinct was to laugh, assuming he was joking in his Italian *I-am-going-to-confuse-the-crap-out-of-you* sort of way. Lucky for me, it turns out, the smallest Tutto Fare gets to risk sudden death by grape sludge overdose. So, with some nervousness, and much excitement, I made my way into the depths of the barrel.

I was absolutely amazed by both how incredibly hot it was in there, and by my incapacity to breathe (sufficiently) once inside. All of the information I had let seep out of my brain once I passed microbiology and chemistry suddenly flooded my thoughts. Metabolism, fermentation, nitrogen cycle, and biodegradation suddenly made sense. Sort of. Then it hit me. The entire process of wine is really a matter of science. Even before we harvested the grapes Angelo brought us out to the vineyards to test them with a light spectrometer. Different organic products are added to the juice to speed up or slow down the transformation to wine. Bacterial infection of the wine is prevented by eliminating oxygen from the wine barrels. Each and every single step has some chemical process which determines the outcome of the wine. I guess this is something I knew before being knee deep in the barrel, but it was there that I truly understood that the simple glass of red stuff that I had made part of my Italian routine, is actually part of a complex living cycle. When I sit down to eat a meal, I try to appreciate where my food has come from, and I do my best to acknowledge the living things that have helped bring the food to my plate.

That night as I joined the crew for wine-on-the-terrace, I realized that I desperately needed to give a mental shout-out to the yeasty beasties, and other micro-organisms that aid in the production of my nightly glass of wine. Maybe it was a bit of a geek-out, but it felt like the right thing to do at that moment.

I never imagined that I (as a strict beer consumer in the US) could be interested in, and even enamored by wine. However, by seeing it as more than simply a product, and instead as an entire process, I gained an appreciation for the flavor, the smell, the color... and as Katie might put it, the "organoleptic properties" of wine itself.





## Scoring Pork by Sarah Russell

I could see a mild state of depression looming over my return to the States at what was supposed to be the most joyous time of year. From the moment I stepped into the airport in Florence, I felt the shock of culture and the subsequent drain of the energy and optimism for life that I had gained during my stay at Spannocchia. Although a Christmas with family and old friends was right around the corner, I felt a little less merry with every modern convenience I saw. As my mom pressed the button to open the door to the heated garage full of luxury gass-guzzlers, my heart quickly dropped with disappointment, then SLAM - it hit the ground with the thud of the door behind us. At that moment, I realized the real distance between here and Spannocchia was far greater than that of a 10-hour plane ride, and I longed to go back.

Rewind back to a few weeks ago...the early days of December had been the most magical, since I arrived in September. Life carried on just as it had with the interns; however, the gray skies blanketed a calm over the farm that welcomed the quiet tasks of feeding animals, stacking wood, and hanging laundry out to dry. The transformation room, on the other hand, kicked into high gear, as the temperatures dropped and the holiday market-goers pined for fresh meat and salumi. With my time at Spannocchia coming to an end, I cherished the sight of every strain of mold lining the salame, every whiff of peppery strutto applied to the prosciutti, and every taste of Cinta Senese meat, melting in my mouth and becoming deeper ingrained in my memory - and my newly acquired lovehandles - with every bite. Little did I know that I was, slowly but surely, developing an addiction, and would soon learn the weight of these brief, yet awe-inspiring, moments of pure bliss.



Fast forward to a few short days ago...I was still nursing an awful case of withdrawal (from Italy, that is), so I set out to cheer myself up by recreating a bit of Spannocchia at home. I planned a full-on Tuscan feast for a New Year's Eve dinner with family and friends. With the first, second, salad and dessert courses chosen, along with their necessary alcoholic accompaniments, my menu lacked one, very important course that no traditional Italian festa could be without: salumi. So, I hopped in the car and drove for an hour until I landed at the only deli in Michigan that I could trust to provide me with the top-quality meat for which I longed. Prior to my pork-filled days in the transformation room, I would instantaneously salivate at the thought of a salame sandwich on crusty farm bread from this Mecca of gourmet food; however, I was nervous that the same salame, this time around, would leave my recently refined taste buds feeling cheap and neglected. Although I was convinced that my penchant for the meats of a certain Tuscan heirloom breed would surely amount to my dissatisfaction with all others, these thoughts of hesitation soon drifted, as I caught a glimpse of a tray of samples near the meat counter. The speckled slices of Cacciatore salame transported me to the piazza in Sovicille, and the memory of my first trip to the market with Riccio. As I brought a piece up to my nose for a good sniff, the fat on the surface glistened in the light, and I could hear Katie defining its qualities as truly 'organoleptic.' My teeth tore through the flesh, presenting my tongue with a morsel of salt and peppery goodness, and I could instantly feel the blood resurge through my veins, my taste buds reawaken, and a rush of endorphins flooding my brain. With the giggle that erupted from my mom, I knew that the look of pure and unadulterated joy on my face had revealed it all: it was the fix for which my addiction yearned since its last dose weeks ago. The downright ecstasy that consumed me, in that brief yet powerful instance, revealed three things that Spannocchia had imparted to me: the ability to (1) let go of the past, (2) live in the moment, and (3) allow the incredible power of pork to overcome me.



## The Benefits of Hindsight...

...Are vastly overrated. Or maybe not overrated, but certainly not 20/20. The problem with hindsight is that it is usually tinged with one of two things: nostalgia or regret. Yes, people learn from the past and they carry those lessons forward, but to remember an event as clearly as if it was happening is impossible because people romanticize, they wail in anguish at missed opportunities, or they sigh in satisfaction about the good ol' days. Additionally, a particular event has a short shelf life. Unless you've got a photographic memory, the actual experience of an event is bound to decay over time, and all you're left with is an *impression*, which probably explains why people fill in the cracks with things like nostalgia, regret, and other emotions. All that's to say: hindsight, while valuable, is not perfect.

That's my caveat. This is a memoir essay, like those mandatory "What I did over summer break" essays that Elementary School teachers everywhere force upon unwilling students, only to derive short, choppy stories about camp, lakes, and maybe the occasional road trip, and how cool it was. It usually was really cool, and they usually did a lot of stuff and had fun.

So, let's call this "My time at Spannocchia, and what I've learned" and imagine some teacher is standing over me trying to browbeat some sort of worthwhile content out of my wine-laden head.

I went to Spannocchia. It was cool. We did a lot of stuff. It was fun. I learned a lot.

There. Done. *Basta*, as the Italians say.

However, as of yet, there is no one standing over me, and five sentences is not much of an essay. More importantly, I'd be doing a disservice to not only Spannocchia, but my time spent there, and what I learned. Now remember my caveat – nostalgia or regret. I have both, but I'm going to focus on nostalgia.

Firstly, I believe that every experience – whether good or ill at the time – ultimately benefits a person (that is, if it doesn't kill them). And secondly, nobody likes a Debbie Downer.

The notion of farming has been an aspiration of mine for a long time. I used to tell people half-jokingly that I want to grow a beard and start a pig farm in Louisiana. The joke is that I can't grow a beard. In my opinion, farming and land cultivation rank among the most natural and productive of human activities - we've been doing it for centuries as a species. I applied to Spannocchia to see if farming was something that I could physically endure, and see if it brought me the sense of gratification that I romantically associate with farming. And in a lot of ways, it did. It brought me a sense of gratification to simply be working with my hands, and to be outside in a beautiful setting; and physically, I endured. While I physically became tired, it was from natural exercise, and exercise with a purpose. I was *doing* something, whether it was lifting *cassette* of grapes into a tractor to be turned into wine, or gathering wood for the *caldaia* – the giant, wood-burning furnace that heats Spannocchia – I was being active, and I didn't have to pay a gym membership to do it. That in itself is gratifying, but moreover it makes a boy feel good knowing he's contributing to a sustainable system. He's a part of something bigger. Likewise, I learned at Spannocchia in a very organic manner – through *doing*. Trial and error. Figuring out what works best from people who have figured it out before, and then adapting it for myself. Finally – I met wonderful people. We eight interns of the 2011 Fall Session bonded wonderfully and connected as peers, as friends, and as workers. I made friends. It





Now again, the problem with hindsight is that it's never 20/20. Nostalgia or regret, remember? The problem with nostalgia is that one tends to gloss over unpleasant details, or the pain of something is lessened through the healing power of time. There was plenty of frustrating things I had to deal with at Spannocchia – namely a language barrier. It's hard to work effectively when you don't understand what you're supposed to be doing. If I had to do something over, it would be to study more Italian. Or learn how to read people's minds. Both would probably heighten my experience. Secondly, as great as sustainability is, it requires a willingness to work hard for minimal progress sometimes because you're using the resources at hand, and sometimes the resources at hand suck, frankly. However, I liken sustainability to the notion of self-sufficiency and the DIY ethic. All three terms imply living within one's means in an effective and moderate manner and having a willingness to adapt to a changing environment. That means not always having the best, but making the best of what you have. It's a shift in attitude – which is probably one of the underlying lessons that I've learned at Spannocchia: work with what you've got, don't think something new and shiny is going to fix the problem.



Like most people who come to Spannocchia, I came with specific goals in mind of what I wanted out of the experience, and I've achieved most of them: To do farm work? Check. To enjoy Italian food? Check. To learn Italian? A work in progress. To find truth, satisfaction, and figure out the rest of my life in three months? Well, there are some things I'm still working on. But I'm working with what I've got. And that's a mighty fine start.

So what did I do at Spannocchia? I found a start. I drank. I ate. I climbed olive trees and subsequently fell out of them. I made friends. I learned a lot. It was cool. We did stuff. We had fun.

-Cody Badaracca



## Some Thoughts by Courtenay Evans

Spannocchia, a sanctuary in a world of worry and excess, cannot simply be described by words; one must experience its true grandness. It is a place of simplicity engrossed in richness and a place of community embracing humility, giving and acceptance. A life-changing three months and these brief words will only explain just a tiny piece of what makes Spannocchia so extraordinary.



Dinner. My favorite part of the day. A time of enjoying Spannocchia wine and olive oil from the work of years past, eating the bounty from the day's harvest and appreciating the meats of those animals raised on the farm. The interaction with Francesca, Randall, Spannocchia residents (Katie, Carmen, Riccio, Daniela and Angelo), guests and fellow interns brought the day's activities to a full circle; appreciating the plenty on the table with the community who made it possible.

This idea of rich localness really hit home after spending a week in the transformation room. Grasping the importance of using every part of the animal and realizing nearly every ingredient used in the curing process originated from Spannocchia - lemons, garlic, bay leaves, juniper berries and rosemary - instilled a feeling of disbelief combined with hopefulness and optimism. Ancient traditions can, and still do exist in the age of our global food system.

In closing, each day in the garden we snacked on green beans as we picked. During the wine harvest? We ate many, many grapes straight from the vine. And during the olive harvest? Olive oil enjoyed directly from the press....minutes old. Need I say more?



## Journal Excerpts by Natalie Concillo

Excerpts from my journal over the three months in this intimate living and working community. A community where one doesn't see the fruits of their own labor, but rather benefits and survives from the work done by past inhabitants. And so the cycle continues . . .

“Vernacular architecture – designed by inhabitants in a way that responds to natural needs and conditions of the area.”

- Randall, historical tour of Spannocchia

October 5: How the vineyards look as I ride through them on the back of the tractor – breeze blowing through my hair as my feet brace my body against cassetta after cassetta full of grapes just harvested.



“In Italy, and certainly in Tuscany, nothing is wasted.”

- Katie, pasta class

October 16: I can see Siena when I sit underneath the oak tree past miles of green rolling hills underneath the blue sky. Last week my mind revolved around fire and wood. Tomorrow we start olives.

“Everything at Spannocchia is done with a nod towards tradition.”

- Katie, Cinta Senese tour and tasting

October 22: What is one thing you'll take back when this is over, Sarah asks me as we lie on the grass at noon, the midday sun beating down on our faces, warming and calming us outside the room where the slaughtered pigs are brought back, salumi made, meat stored. It smells like salt and fat. Conservation of food/place connection, artisanal production, and farms. More farms.

“In nature, the probability is always higher than what you need.”

- Andrea, apiculture class

November 7: The kitchen table filled with fresh ravioli and Carmen's fast speech. The vineyards turning red into yellow, green, brown. The leaves bleed red like my palm in the vendemmia when I was cut with the forbiche. Vino rosso like water. Better than water. Testing, controllando il vino nella cantina, the glass passed by a kneeling Angelo, siphon on the floor, plastic handled bucket half full. Autumn tie-dyed the chestnut leaves and made the ground green, quenched. Dinner in the villa under stone arches and carved bedrock. Bowls of candy cane striped raddichio and fresh pressed olive oil, opaque green. It rains olives on your head as you're grabbing branches under the upside-down chalice during harvest. Fresh roasted chestnuts on an open fire and hanging your clothes to dry, in the rain.

# Spannocchia

Località Spannocchia  
53012 Chiusdino (SI)  
Italia

Tel: (01139) 0577 752 61  
Fax: (01139) 0577 752 624

E-mail:  
internships@spannocchia.org  
www.spannocchia.org  
www.spannocchia.com

## Internship Mission Statement

*The Internship Program is dedicated to enriching the lives of young people by providing them with a unique educational experience on a community oriented farm in Tuscany, Italy. Tenuta di Spannocchia's 1100-acre pastoral estate serves as an active model for responsible stewardship through collective effort.*

A big thank you is due to everyone who shared their photos for this newsletter; Aleta, Natalie, Kiyomi, Jeff and Valeria, and Paul Avis.



Look how happy they all are!

**Clockwise from back left:**

Aleta Storch (Team Tutto),  
Natalie Concillo (Team Tutto),  
Cesare! (Not an intern, yet...),  
Sarah Russell (GSI),

Lauren Haddad (Team Animali),  
Cody Badaracca (Team Tutto),  
Kiyomi Gelber (Team Orto),  
Jorge Gaviria (Team Animali),  
Courtenay Evans (Team Orto).