

# Ambassador



National Italian American Foundation

Vol . 30, No.4 ▪ Summer 2019 ▪ [www.niaf.org](http://www.niaf.org)



## Summer Travel Issue!

Coastal Molise

Italy's Tricky Traffic Laws

Hidden Town of Todi

Matera Transformed

Grilling Italian

Amalfi Fishing Village of Cetara



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# Ambassador

The Publication of the National Italian American Foundation  
Vol. 30, No.4 ■ Summer ■ www.niaf.org

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*On the Cover:*  
With the announcement  
that Molise is NIAF's  
2019 Region of Honor,  
what could be more  
appropriate for the  
cover image of our  
Summer Travel issue  
than the medieval  
Molise seaside town  
of Termoli and one  
of its picturesque  
trabucchi mechanical  
fishing piers that are  
iconic of the region?  
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## From the NIAF Co-Chairs

Summer isn't the only reason our work is heating up at the National Italian American Foundation. As we approach the halfway mark in 2019, we are working harder than ever to preserve and promote our rich culture and heritage, to help educate and prepare the next generation of Italian American leaders, to serve as a voice for the Italian American community in the nation's capital, and to maintain and enhance ties between our country and Italy.

Through NIAF's far-reaching programs and educational initiatives, we are achieving the goals that are at the core of the Foundation's mission. Once again, on April 9, at the elegant Cipriani 42nd Street in New York City, NIAF hosted its annual New York Gala, where it officially announced the NIAF 2019 Region of Honor, Molise. An evening filled with spirited camaraderie, high-powered networking and Italian American pride, the sold-out Gala also recognized the achievements of three distinguished honorees while raising funds to support NIAF's scholarships, grants and other educational programs.

Spring was a busy season for NIAF's Public Policy program, with highlights including the NIAF Sixth Annual Mark Valente III Memorial Congressional Bocce Ball Tournament where the cordial competition attracted members of Congress from the Italian American Congressional Delegation and officials from the Italian Embassy; and NIAF's Summer Spritz Social on Capitol Hill that drew a crowd of young members of the Italian American Congressional Staff Association—an invaluable part of NIAF's youth initiative and Washington-area community.

In June, NIAF is sending 19 exceptional students on our 2019 Ambassador Peter F. Secchia Voyage of Discovery program to Molise, where they will engage in experiential learning throughout their first-ever trip to the *bel paese*. While there, they will meet with members of NIAF's Board of Directors during their 2019 Mission to Italy—a trip that will include a Board Meeting in Rome and travel to Molise where the delegation will confer with business and government dignitaries.

So much more is happening at NIAF and in our vibrant community! And you can read about it in the pages of this new Summer Travel issue of Ambassador magazine. As you enjoy this issue's stories and fine photography, please consider renewing or upgrading your NIAF membership. If you aren't a member, we welcome you to join us in building an everlasting bridge between those whose sacrifices made our lives in the United States possible and the future generations of Italian Americans.

On behalf of the NIAF Board of Directors and staff, we thank you for your continuing support of our important mission. Safe travels this summer.

Patricia de Stacy Harrison  
NIAF Co-chair

Gabriel A. Battista  
NIAF Co-chair

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# Reader Feedback

## *Taking Leonardo Personally*

In the story *Da Vinci and Me* (Spring 2019 Ambassador): I love the way in which all the respondents reinforced one another—as though we were all saying the same thing in different ways, different personal emphases out of which a consistent understanding of Leonardo emerges.

I personally thought Walter Isaacson gave the best answer—a great way to close your article. He conveyed important information about Leonardo's studies, especially of his specific interest in optics, in a manner modern readers can understand.

These are principal subjects in Leonardo's *Trattato della pittura* issued in 1651 and the text I published in a

modern scholarly edition last year with a team of Leonardo specialists. Francesca Fiorani's wonderful website ([www.treatiseonpainting.org](http://www.treatiseonpainting.org)) makes accessible via Internet nearly all of the pre-publication manuscript copies. My team studied these manuscripts (in the original) to track the transmission of Leonardo's recorded ideas over 130 years involving four generations of editors. Fiorani's digital project was a valuable research tool for us and facilitates countless other projects. Our publication makes the only version of Leonardo's treatise on painting known until the 19th century accessible to a modern audience by providing historical, intellectual and philological context.



In general, Leonardo specialists work in teams because the material has become so complicated, but at the same time each one of us is individually committed to Leonardo studies. And your article does a beautiful job of bringing that to the attention of a broad public in ways that will interest them and make them feel included.

— Claire Farago

Professor Emerita, University of Colorado Boulder  
Principal author of  
*The Fabrication of Leonardo da Vinci's Trattato della Pittura*  
Los Angeles, Calif.

## *Dante Mortet's Sculpting*

Thanks for that enjoyable visit to sculptor Dante Mortet's "hands-on" studio in Rome (*Dante's Celebrity Inferno*; Spring 2019 Ambassador). Like so much in your magazine, the story was both entertaining and educational.

— M. Rua  
New York, N.Y.



Jaillen Yehia

## *Side Dish Delicacy*

I loved Mary Ann Esposito's story *Stalking Asparagus* (Spring 2019 Ambassador), as I recently had the privilege of sampling the renowned white asparagus of the Veneto region. What a delicacy! I appreciated learning not just how to cook it but also a bit about its history and growing conditions. My daughter planted asparagus a few years ago in our garden in Washington state, and her patience is just now starting to show results.

— Paul Spadoni  
[www.paulspadoni.com](http://www.paulspadoni.com)  
Gig Harbor, Wash.



barmalini / Shutterstock

## CORRECTION

In the Spring 2019 issue of Ambassador, the story **Da Vinci and Me: Leonardo's Influence on Those Who Know Him Best** incorrectly listed the publication date of Claire Farago's anthology *Re-Reading Leonardo: The Treatise on Painting across Europe, 1500-1900*, which was published in 2009. It should have also included Farago's latest book, *The Fabrication of Leonardo da Vinci's Trattato della Pittura* (Brill Press, 2018), co-authored with Janis Bell, Carlo Vecce, and six other contributors. It is the first complete English translation and scholarly edition of Leonardo's treatise on painting published in 1651.

## We'd Love to Hear from You! Let us Know What You're Thinking!

Letters to the Editor may be e-mailed to [ambassador@niaf.org](mailto:ambassador@niaf.org) or mailed to Letters to the Editor, Ambassador Magazine, 1860 19th Street NW, Washington, DC 20009. Include your full name and address. Letters may be published and edited for length and clarity.

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# MOLISE

## ITALY'S MYSTERIOUS REGION

Introducing the  
NIAF 2019  
Region of Honor

By Gabriella Mileti  
NIAF Director of Special Programs

The spectacular Molise village of Bagnoli del Trigno

Nestled in the Apennine mountain range in central Italy and stretching along 22 miles of breathtaking Adriatic coast is the lesser known region of Molise, known for its rugged terrain, agriculture and isolated villages.

Italy's youngest region, Molise was originally part of the Abruzzo-Molise region but separated in 1963. Although it boasts a history that dates back to the Paleolithic Era, Molise is rather unknown not only to tourists but to Italians as well. In fact, the region is so often overlooked, the Molisani themselves have begun to call it "the region that doesn't exist." But, it's this unknown quality that gives Molise a mysterious allure that many of us have yet to discover—and, when we do, we will be left wanting more.

Molise's charm begins with its natural beauty. With the Apennine mountain range covering 55 percent

of the region, Molise is perfect for those who love the outdoors, whether it be skiing, hiking or camping, or for those who just want to get away and enjoy the quiet serenity of untouched majestic mountains. In fact, the Riserva Regionale Guardiaregia Campochiaro, under the protection of the World Wide Fund (WWF), encompasses caves, canyons and waterfalls. Take a walk and be led by the beautiful pathways while weaving up, down and along the hillsides where you'll undoubtedly spot local wildlife.

Speaking of wildlife, Molise is the site of a centuries-old custom that takes place between the regions of Puglia and Molise, the *transumanza*. This is a traditional trek of more than 200 miles that's traveled by shepherds and their animals (cows and sheep) to reach two different geographic and climatic regions twice a year: in autumn towards the warmer plains of

Puglia, and in the spring towards the cooler mountains of Molise that offer green and abundant pastures, specifically the area around Frosolone in the province of Isernia. The *transumanza* is an essential part of farming life in the region.

Thanks to the abundance of sheep in the region, Molise is home to some of the world's finest cheeses. Best known are the *caciocavallo* and *stracciata* cheeses, both produced in the area around Agnone. But, in Molise, you can also find the usual suspects of *fior di latte*, *mozzarella di bufala*, *pecorino* and *scamorza*, all locally produced and delicious.

Aside from the dairy aspect of Molise's agriculture, the region is a proud producer of durum wheat—perfect for pasta-making. The 107-year-old, family-owned, pasta company, La Molisana, calls Campobasso home, exports products





Top left: The small town of Fornelli is classified as one of the *Borghi più Belli d'Italia*, one of the most beautiful towns in Italy. Top right: Termoli beaches. Above: *caciocavallo* cheese

to 50 countries worldwide, offers private-label production services, and is Italy's fifth-largest pasta brand. Not bad for the country's second-smallest region!

And when you order that dish of pasta in Molise, make sure it's lamb ragù with *fusilli* or *cavatelli*, the two pasta shapes originally from Molise. At the base of the ragù will be the region's famed olive oil. Molise has quite its own production of the liquid gold. You probably have some from Molise in your kitchen and didn't even know it—Colavita! The family-owned and -operated international business is headquartered in Sant'Elia a Pianisi, located in the province of Campobasso.

Naturally, with a dish of pasta, you'll need a glass of wine. With its sun-drenched hills, Molise's climate makes it ideal for winemaking. Although wines from Molise date as far

back as 500 B.C., with influences coming from the Samnites, Etruscans and Romans, Molise wine is often overshadowed by its neighbors Abruzzo to the north and Puglia to the south. It wasn't until the 1980s that Molise finally gained three of its own vino DOCs—Biferno, and Pentro di Isernia and Tintilia. Although the DOC varieties represent a small portion of the region's wine production, some oenophiles expect Molise to develop into a recognized wine region. Until then, its wines are a bargain!

Besides the culinary aspects of the region, Molise has a proud history of skilled craftsmanship. In the ancient town of Agnone, perched atop a rocky hill that was once a stronghold of the early Samnite tribes, there's a bronze-casting legacy of more than 1,000 years that endures today. The people of Agnone are known for the art of casting fine Italian bronze bells.

The Fonderia Marinelli is Italy's oldest foundry. One of the oldest family businesses in the world, Fonderia Marinelli is still hand-making bells from start to finish, using the same tools, methods and process employed since 1339. The bells are so magnificent and prestigious that the foundry has been making church bells for the Vatican for centuries.

While still largely untouched by mass tourism, NIAF's 2019 Region of Honor, Molise, should be on your radar for an upcoming visit to *la bella Italia*! NIAF looks forward to visiting Molise this summer with the 2019 Ambassador Peter F. Secchia Voyage of Discovery Program and the NIAF Board of Directors' Mission to Italy. And NIAF will continue to celebrate Molise throughout the year, and especially honor it at our 44th Anniversary Gala Weekend in Washington, D.C., November 1-3. ▲



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# Unexpected Italy

a celebration of Italian culture

Scott Suchman



Keri Alkema as Tosca and Alan Held as Scarpia in WNO's *Tosca*

By Natalie Wulderk

This spring, the National Italian American Foundation donated \$10,000 to support the John F. Kennedy Center's *Unexpected Italy*, a series of performances that showcased the breadth and depth of Italy's artistic and cultural contributions to the world. The performances featured the National Symphony Orchestra (NSO) and the Washington National Opera (WNO), and took place from May 3 to June 1 in Washington, D.C., as well as one concert at Carnegie Hall in New York City. ►



The National Symphony Orchestra at Carnegie Hall





Carlo Piccolo

Kevin Strother, Jeanne (Abate) Allen, Aileen Carlucci, Robert Carlucci, Janet Donavon, Gabriel A. Battista, Bruce Harrison, Patricia de Stacy Harrison, Toni Gordon, Joseph Lonardo, and Tim McBride



Scott Suchman

Above: Riccardo Massi and Keri Alkema as Cavaradossi in WNO's *Tosca*

Above right: Italy's Ambassador Armando Varricchio; Kennedy Center President Deborah Rutter; National Symphony Orchestra musicians Nurit Bar-Josef, violin; Jae-Yeon (Jennifer) Kim, violin; Daniel Foster, viola; Loewi Lin, cello; Lucia Nosedà; Micaela Varricchio; and conductor Gianandrea Nosedà

Right: Italian conductor Gianandrea Nosedà, the National Symphony Orchestra's music director, addresses guests at Villa Firenze.



“*Unexpected Italy* was a celebration of Italy’s extraordinary artistic and cultural heritage, and I am pleased that the Foundation supported it,” said NIAF Vice Chair of Cultural Affairs Anita Bevacqua McBride who proposed NIAF’s participation. “The series of 12 exceptional performances was a wonderful way to promote Italy’s many significant contributions to our society.”

Italy’s Ambassador to the United States Armando Varricchio served as the honorary chair of the project and hosted a reception to launch the series at Villa Firenze, the Ambassador’s Residence, on April 26.

Warmly welcoming the guests, the Ambassador said, “This is truly a *primavera italiana*,” referring to the robust *Unexpected Italy* series as well as other Italian events and exhibits happening in Spring in Washington, D.C. The Ambassador briefed the audience on the extensive collaboration the project required, including a special thank you to NIAF Co-Chair Patricia de Stacy Harrison, for helping to make NIAF’s contribution possible.

Deborah Rutter, president of the Kennedy Center and NSO Musical Director Gianandrea Noseda also addressed the guests, expressing their appreciation of the Embassy of Italy, the Italian Cultural Institute and organizations such as NIAF for coming together to help make this impressive series possible.

During his remarks, Noseda explained that the month-long concert series not only celebrated Italian music, but also offered the American public an opportunity to experience lesser known as well as familiar aspects of Italian culture.

The series was comprehensive, showcasing opera, symphonic music, pop, jazz and folk ballads. Giacomo Puccini’s *Tosca* had widespread success during its performances from May 11-25. Rossini’s *Stabat Mater* and Liszt’s *Dante Symphony* were performed at the Kennedy Center, and at Carnegie Hall. Jazz singers Simona Molinari and Chiara Izzi, along with the jazz trio Doctor 3, captivated audiences at the Kennedy Center as well.

Pianist and composer Ludovico Einaudi and singer Mario Biondi gathered nationwide attention to their participation in the series. To be accessible to all audiences, the Kennedy Center offered four free Millennium Stage concerts as part of *Unexpected Italy*.

On May 22, to support *Unexpected Italy*, NIAF Chairpersons Patricia de Stacy Harrison and Gabriel A. Battista, along with other Board and da Vinci Council Members, attended that evening’s *Tosca* performance after enjoying a special Italian meal at the Kennedy Center’s Terrace Restaurant. The NIAF attendees enjoyed the beautiful evening and were moved by the performance of the famous Italian opera.

“We are thrilled that *Unexpected Italy* aligned with NIAF’s mission to promote Italian culture and heritage,” said Battista. “On behalf of the Foundation, I am extremely happy that we could financially support Gianandrea Noseda’s artistic vision as well as partner with one of our nation’s most important cultural institutions, the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.” ▲

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# Finding Italy in Rochester

Whether it's the best Italian restaurants, most popular festivals, or must-visit markets and museums, Italy's influences in America are everywhere. In NIAF on Location, our members and friends provide insider information on special places that make them feel more Italian in their own hometowns. This issue, NIAF's Government Affairs Manager Phillip Donofrio finds Italy in his hometown of Rochester, N.Y.

## What is the most Italian part of your city?

Traditionally, the west side of Rochester has been the epicenter of our Italian American community. In the 1860s, the first Italian immigrants settled in the corridor between Lyell Avenue and Jay Street, just west of the Genesee River. On June 2, during the city's Little Italy Street Festa, the City Council officially recognized the region along the Lyell Avenue corridor as Rochester's Little Italy Historic District.

But in the mid-20th century, the housing boom was in full swing, and large swaths of Italian Americans relocated to the suburbs. The suburb of Gates, due west of that Lyell-Jay corridor, became the most popular destination for these newly middle-class Rochesterians. A blue-collar town where, it seems, every other resident boasts Italian ancestry, Gates today plays host to some of Rochester's most important Italian cultural venues.

## What are your favorite Italian restaurants?

First is Mamma G's. Part of Mamma G's appeal is its inconspicuousness. Housed in a former Friendly's on a dull stretch of East Henrietta Road, it serves generous portions of authentic Italian fare of the *abruzzese* variety. The family-operated Mamma G's has already achieved cult status among local foodies despite having opened in 2015. The Troiano family

chef and matriarch, Gilda (aka "Mamma G") hails from Pescara. She makes a *pasta alla mugnaia* that gives new meaning to "comfort food."

More institution than restaurant, Giuseppe's was established in 1927 by the Chinappi family, who still owns and operates it. Located on Spencerport Road in Gates, Giuseppe's familial, everybody-knows-your-name aura is what makes it so sublime. After four generations of perfecting its recipes, Giuseppe's pizzas, parms and cannoli separate this perennial restaurant from the rest of the pack. And its Friday fish fry? A bonafide religious experience.

## Where do you go for Italian culture?

Another Gates institution, the Italian American Sport Club, is where Italian Americans of all ages learn to fall in love with their culture. The Sport Club regularly hosts nonna-inspired luncheons as well as bocce ball tournaments so competitive they might catch you off guard. Soccer is also held in high regard there; the Sport Club sponsors both adult and youth teams, and World Cup viewing parties for *gli Azzurri* (our beloved Italian national team) are always hot-blooded affairs.

## Where do you go to get hard to find Italian ingredients?

If you're in search of Italian imports, all roads lead to Olindo Cash &

Carry on Lyell Avenue. Although the average Rochesterian swears by hometown-favorite Wegman's for most gastronomic needs, Olindo offers an unmatched, rustic shopping experience. If it's edible and Italian, Olindo most likely has it. Aside from prepackaged and non-perishable Italian foods, Olindo's pasta and olive bars are a hit, and it may well be the only store in Rochester where you can find that sweetest of Sicilian fruits: the *ficodindia dell'etna*.

## What's the most Italian day of the year in your community?

Just a few years ago, rumors began swirling that an official Little Italy might be established in Gates. Town regulators begrudgingly quashed those plans. Now, plans for a Little Italy have been revived, appropriately, in the historic Lyell-Jay corridor where Rochester's *italianità* had its genesis.

To raise awareness for establishing Rochester's official Little Italy in the Lyell Avenue and Jay Street corridor, the Little Italy Association of Rochester has been hosting its Little Italy Festival there every June since 2017. The Festival brings together local Italian American vendors and performers, attracting large, eclectic crowds in one of downtown Rochester's most promising neighborhoods. As plans for Rochester's first true Little Italy continue to gain traction, so too has the buzz surrounding the Festival. ▲

Paul Brady Photography





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By Gabriella Mileti



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Nothing says summer in Italy more than a pink-striped puff-sleeves top for your littles of travelers. Embroidered with denim, tropical floral-print letters, this t-shirt will make your *bambina* the cutest in town. Crewcuts by J.Crew: \$34.50. [www.Nordstrom.com](http://www.Nordstrom.com)

### Toting La Dolce Vita

Jet off to the Mediterranean (or to your backyard) with this *Dolce Vita* handmade tote bag. Made of dwarf palm leaves, the red pom-pom trim adds a playful and stylish touch to the classic bag. Customization available. Made in Italy. Italian Summers: \$62. [www.ItalianSummers.com](http://www.ItalianSummers.com)



Are you making, marketing or selling fantastic products that are made in Italy or of interest to Italian Americans? Let us know so we can feature your product in Bottega NIAF! Contact [bottega@niah.org](mailto:bottega@niah.org).



### Organized Travel

Stay organized while you travel with this multi-purpose travel wallet. This tri-fold organizer is perfect for carrying your money, boarding pass, credit cards and passport, all in one stylish place. It's even complete with a RFID blocking shield for an extra layer of protection. Zoppen: \$14.99. [www.Amazon.com](http://www.Amazon.com)



### Hi Notes

Surprise someone with a handwritten note. And what better way than with these illustrated, whimsical, Italian American themed, 4-inch-by-6-inch, blank notecards by Los Angeles-based, Italian American artist Darrell Fusaro. Set of four: \$5.99. [www.DarrellFusaro.com/store/](http://www.DarrellFusaro.com/store/)



### Cook in Style

Be the best dressed chef in the neighborhood with this sophisticated vine-tomato apron with an Italian twist. Complete the look with matching oven mitt, potholder and a vibrant *mangia* kitchen towel. 100-percent cotton. Williams-Sonoma: Kitchen towel, \$5.99; Apron, \$19.99; Oven mitt and Potholder set, \$23.99. [www.Williams-Sonoma.com](http://www.Williams-Sonoma.com)



### Space Saver

Save room in your suitcase with a Turkish towel. Turkish towels are light and airy, making them easy to roll up in a tote bag and take on the go. Fast-absorbing and super soft, this towel is a must on your next beach vacation. And with all the space it saves in your suitcase, you'll have more room for souvenirs! 100-percent cotton. Cacala Pestemal Towel: \$23.90. [www.Amazon.com](http://www.Amazon.com)



### Waterproof Tech

If you plan on being by water this summer, protect your phone with a waterproof case! This triple seal design not only protects your phone as you swim but the high-quality material makes your touch-screen accessible—perfect for those Blue Grotto pictures! Ztoto Waterproof Phone Pouch set of two: \$9.99. [www.Amazon.com](http://www.Amazon.com)

WWW.CIFC





Paolo Romeo



Jeremy Ryan

## Walking La Serenissima

Growing up amid hundreds of books on Venetian history, in a family that has been Venetian since at least the 1700s, Luisella Romeo had perhaps no other future than to become a tour guide for her hometown of Venice.

Working professionally since 2000, Romeo has seen the negative consequences of mass tourism, but prefers to focus on the positives. “The act of traveling fosters peace because it helps people learn about different realities,” she says.

The way she counteracts the effects of 22 million visitors a year is by taking her clients on unusual itineraries, such as one focusing on Burano’s fishing to understand the lagoon, and by shining a light on the artisans who keep producing wonderful work despite increasing difficulties.

Romeo’s other special interests include the city’s Jewish history, essential to understanding how the Venice Republic became so powerful in the 16th century, and contemporary art, especially when applied to the social landscape of the city. “Working as a guide has been an extraordinary chance to be an intermediary for a city that can be presented in a thousand different ways,” says Romeo.



An active member of Best Venice Guides which promotes sustainable tourism, she is passionate about photographing her Venice. Find her photos on her blog at [www.seevenice.it](http://www.seevenice.it) and on Instagram at [www.instagram.com/luisella\\_romeo/](https://www.instagram.com/luisella_romeo/).

— *Silvia Donati*

## Raising Her Voice

With a soulful voice, singer-songwriter Sarah Potenza admits that she sings her songs to inspire people. “There’s comfort in failing, it helps you grow,” says Potenza, a semi-finalist on the eighth season (2015) of NBC’s *The Voice*.

The Rhode Island native and East Nashville resident traces her Italian roots to the region of Basilicata, and says that growing up in a big Italian house helped spur her creativity. “There is a passion, a zest that is in our blood. We are a very lively people and crave expression, an outlet,” she says. “Most people have a 1-10 range, I feel like I have 0-11.”

In 2016, Rolling Stone magazine praised her debut solo album, *Monster*. This March was eventful for Potenza’s rising career. Rolling Stone claimed she was one of the 30 best artists to watch at the music festival *South by Southwest*, held in Austin, Texas. She also released her second album, *Road to Rome*, with her guitar-playing and co-writing husband, Ian Crossman.



Potenza says her great-grandfather, Tommaso, arrived in America at Ellis Island in 1901. Her family’s history and Italian heritage have played a major role in her life and in her success in music. “Lots of passion, lots of personality,” she says. “We know how to yell, to speak our minds. All of that comes up in the performance.”

— *Robert Fanelli Bartus Jr.*

Ambassador’s Paesani department profiles in short form the lives of Italian Americans, Italians and others doing extraordinary things of interest to Italian Americans. Know someone who should be in Paesani? Send suggestions to [paesani@niaf.org](mailto:paesani@niaf.org).

# NIAF’s



## Early Detection

When CNN published an article in April that called medical procedures that use blood, saliva and urine to detect cancer the scientists’ “Holy Grail,” Dr. Lynn Sorbara saw both her life’s work and pet phrase broadcast worldwide.

As program director for the Cancer Biomarkers Research Group at the National Institutes of Health’s Division of Cancer Prevention, National Cancer Institute (NCI), in Bethesda, Md., Sorbara manages Biomarker Reference Laboratories research grants, coordinates early detection research for the Lung Collaborative Group, runs the new Consortium for Early Cancer Assessment Using Liquid Biopsy, and represents the NCI’s innovative molecular analysis technology programs.



Sorbara’s desire to find early cancer detection and treatment came from tragic personal loss in her close-knit, Italian American family in Queens, N.Y. She was 14 when her father died from bacterial meningitis.

“From that day on, I wanted to do something so other people wouldn’t be in that situation,” says Sorbara, whom the National Organization of Italian American Women honored in January at its annual “Three Wise Women” Epiphany celebration in Washington, D.C.

Sorbara credits *la famiglia* with fueling her persistent search for her “Holy Grail” in fighting cancer. Her maternal roots are Sicilian; her paternal roots are Calabrese. “All of the family traditions helped keep me grounded when I felt like this was never going to happen,” she says.

— Kirsten Keppel

## In His Footsteps

The first time Bruce Marchiano was cast in the role of Jesus was for the 1993 film *The Gospel According to Matthew*. “I was filled with excitement and, equally, the weight of remarkable responsibility,” recalls Marchiano, who says he found peace in Gospel study and prayer to portray Jesus’ compassion and loving kindness. Since then, he has played the role in 11 other film and TV productions, including *Alison’s Choice*, which he wrote and directed.

The California native, whose paternal grandparents emigrated from the Naples area of Campania, broke into the industry with a part in *Murder, She Wrote*. Besides acting, he has authored six books about Jesus and founded Marchiano Ministries—a nonprofit organization that serves the impoverished in South Africa.



Marchiano loves that his role as Jesus has drawn people to Christianity. Deeply moved by letters he has received, he says “I could write a book of the stories I’ve heard: people who were planning suicide; men returning to their wives and families; people turning from drugs; atheists turning to God. It’s all so breathtaking.”

Having learned to enjoy life and family from his dad, Marchiano says the gift of passionate Italian culture has influenced his exuberant performances. “My Italian heritage and the qualities I inherited from my Italian father deeply shaped both who I am...and my work as an actor representing Jesus,” he says. Visit [www.marchianoministries.com](http://www.marchianoministries.com).

— Christina Galeone

# Persons of Interest





Christian Galliani



## Best of Both Worlds

Inspiration from southern Italian ancestors, a master's degree in art history, and boundless passion for Italian food are combined in Danielle Oteri's *Feast on History* company, that gives travelers authentic, immersive and delicious experiences.

Stateside, she has created walking tours of Arthur Avenue in the Bronx, aka New York's Real Little Italy. "I grew up in Nyack, hearing stories of this neighborhood where my great-grandfather, who came from Naples, opened a *baccala* shop in 1918," Oteri says. Travelers praise her walks as "soulful insider experiences" featuring tastings at family-run shops, bakeries and restaurants.

Italy, inspired by her maternal grandmother, who came from the village of Capaccio in Campania. These adventures, based in an *agriturismo* owned by Oteri's cousins, combine cooking classes, wineries, off-the-beaten track villages, and UNESCO World Heritage sites.

"My grandmother would tell me how she loved playing in the shadow of the temples of Paestum, gathering pieces of ancient pottery," says Oteri. "Her stories stirred my childhood imagination, and now when I'm leading tours there...I have this amazing

feeling of my family history blending with something bigger—thousands of years of civilization...."

Visit: [www.feastonhistory.com](http://www.feastonhistory.com)

— Susan Van Allen



Christian Galliani

## Hold Your Horses

Father Anthony Dattilo of the St. Catherine of Siena parish in Cincinnati, Ohio, was standing in the Piazza del Campo in Siena in 2006 when he saw a boy running around with a *contrada* flag in his hand. "I immediately thought of staging something with the flags of Siena for our school," he says.

This year marked the 11th Palio di Siena celebration at the school. Dattilo bought a set of the flags that hang in its hallways. The students created posters commemorating each year's race, in the tradition of actual *palio* banners in Siena, held on July 2 and August 16.

During an annual assembly, the school holds drawings in which each grade selects a *contrada* (as in Siena, a section or neighborhood) to represent, and a rider, or *fantino*. Dattilo makes sure to include the Italian names as they go, such as *Onda* (wave), or *Torre* (tower). The riders, third-graders, strap a cardboard horse around a shoulder and do the running themselves.

They replicate a few other Siena traditions: blessing the horses during mass, doing a flag routine upon arrival, and running three times around the course.

Dattilo believes it's an experience they will remember the rest of their lives. No one yet has come back to tell him about seeing the race in Italy. "This is only our 11th year," he says. "I'm waiting for that to happen."

— Jan Angilella





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# SUMMER GRILLING GREATS

WITH ITALIAN FLARE

By Mary Ann Esposito

Mixed Grill (*spiedo misto*)

John Hession

During the lazy days of summer, the best way to cook anything in my opinion is outdoors on the grill. And nothing can't be grilled—from veggies to dessert.

Italians have adopted grilling (*alla griglia*) as one of their favorite modes of cooking. Their attitude is: use the freshest ingredients, keep the cooking treatment simple, and let the natural flavors of the food shine.

I have found that to be true in my travels in Italy. One year in Sicily during the fall artichoke season, I saw plenty of the prickly beauties tossed on really hot embers over a grill and grilled to smoky perfection with tinged edges. Field hands would sit on wooden benches and devoured them with their hands, dipping each leaf in extra virgin olive oil and dousing them with lemon juice.

In Naples, *pesce al cartoccio* (fish grilled in paper), with aromatic herbs, olives and slices of ripe tomatoes, was succulent and moist. In Florence, the only way to have a steak is *alla griglia*, as in *bistecca alla griglia*, charred on the outside but

hardly warmed on the inside. Don't ask for it well done (a mortal sin). The steak is cooked over an open flame and served drizzled with olive oil, a squirt of lemon juice and often topped with spicy arugula.

In my own kitchen, I try to adapt to Italian grilling practices as well, even using the grill for *crostini* (grilled bread) served topped with extra virgin olive oil and lots of cracked black pepper or really ripe garden-fresh tomatoes.

Even fresh fruit takes on great taste from the grill. Stone fruits like peaches, nectarines and apricots work best.

And short of having a genuine pizza oven in our backyard, necessary for that charred edge Neapolitan pizza I crave, I just let my grill become my pseudo pizza oven. I just place a pizza stone over the grate and heat the blazes out of it until I can slide the dough onto the stone and cook the pizza in just a few minutes.

So, don't sweat it this summer, go *al fresco* with cooking *alla griglia*.

AWW Photo Lab / Shutterstock



Before the Tuscans coined the word *bistecca* (from the English “beef-steak”) for a T-bone steak, it went by the name *carbonate*—literally “carbon steak,” since it was cooked over a charcoal fire. And if you are in Florence, you must order *bistecca alla fiorentina*, a signature dish.

What makes it so special? The breed of grayish-white Chianina cattle. The meat from these cows is low in fat and juicy, owing to the rich grasses that the cattle feed on. A true *bistecca* is served *al sangue*, meaning rare. It is charred on the outside but remains fairly raw inside.

Traditionally it was served with cannellini beans, another Tuscan specialty, but is also commonly served today with spicy arugula or other salad greens dressed with extra virgin olive oil and salt. The dish is often referred to on restaurant menus as *tagliata*, meaning cut into slices.

## Charcoal Grilled T-Bone Steak, Florence Style *Bistecca alla Fiorentina*

Serves 4

### Ingredients

- 2 cloves garlic, peeled
- 2 tablespoons fresh rosemary leaves
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1½ pound well-marbled T-bone steak, about 2 inches thick
- ½ cup red wine
- ¼ cup extra virgin olive oil
- 1 cup fresh arugula leaves

### Directions

- Fire up the grill; charcoal is best, but gas will do. Get it hot
- Meanwhile, mince the garlic, rosemary and salt together. Rub this mixture all over the steak and place it on the grill.
- Grill the steak until it is nicely browned on the outside and the internal temperature registers 125°F for medium rare.
- While the steak cooks, mix the wine and 2 tablespoons of the olive oil, and brush the steak as it cooks.
- In a bowl, toss the arugula, remaining olive oil and salt together.
- When the steak is ready, cut it into ¼ inch thick slices and place them on a platter.
- Top the steak with the arugula salad and serve.

Recipe from [www.ciaoitalia.com](http://www.ciaoitalia.com)



Paul Lally

Charcoal Grilled T-Bone Steak, Florence Style (*Bistecca alla Fiorentina*)

In Umbria, at La Stalla, a rustic outdoor ristorante, everything on the menu was cooked in the classic Umbrian style, *alla griglia*, grilled on an open fire. I sat under a grape arbor at a long picnic table covered with red-and-white-checked tablecloths and ordered *spiedo misto* (mixed grill). It was more than a wise choice because the other diners at the table were all locals and engaged me in a long conversation about the merits of Umbrian foods.

## Mixed Grill *Spiedo Misto*

Serves 8

### Ingredients

- 1 pound boneless pork loin
- 1 pound boneless beef or veal loin
- 1 pound skinless, boneless chicken thighs
- Coarse salt to taste
- Coarse ground black pepper to taste
- 3 cloves garlic, peeled and crushed
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh sage
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh rosemary needles
- ¼ cup olive oil
- 3 medium bell peppers (an assortment of red, green and yellow) cored, seeded, and cut into 2-inch squares
- ¼ cup dry white wine
- 4 thick slices pancetta cut into 1-inch squares
- Small bunch of fresh sage leaves

- ¾ pound sweet or hot Italian sausage, cut into chunks
- ½ cup fresh lemon juice
- Extra virgin olive oil

### Directions

- Cut the meats and chicken into 1-inch cubes. Season the pork with coarse salt and pepper and rub with the garlic. Season the beef or veal with salt and pepper and sprinkle with the sage. Season the chicken with salt and pepper and sprinkle with the rosemary. Set aside.
- In a sauté pan, heat the olive oil and cook the peppers until they are crisp-tender. Add the wine and cook until the liquid is reduced by about half. Thread metal skewers in this order: pork, bell pepper, chicken, pancetta, sage leaf, veal, bell pepper and sausage. Do not crowd too many pieces on the skewers.
- Place the skewers in a nonmetal dish large enough to hold them in a single layer and drizzle the lemon juice and olive oil over them. Let them marinate for several hours in the refrigerator, basting and turning them often.
- Heat the grill and lightly oil the grill rack. Remove the skewers from the marinade; place them on the grill, and baste with the marinade.
- Grill, turning and basting the skewers, until done to taste, about 8-12 minutes.

Recipe from *Ciao Italia (My Lifelong Food Adventures in Italy)* ➤



I took my inspiration for this grilled chicken from observing how fond Tuscans are of grilling everything, from the classic *bistecca alla fiorentina* to vegetables and poultry. In this recipe, the backbone is removed so the chicken lies flat on the grill. Known as spatchcocking, this allows the meat to cook and brown evenly.

## Grilled Chicken & Tuscan Herbs *Pollo alla Griglia e Erbe Toscane*

Serves 3 to 4

### Ingredients

- 2 cups fresh rosemary needles
- 1 cup sage leaves
- 4 large cloves garlic
- 2 teaspoons coarse salt
- One 4-5 pound chicken
- Juice of 2 lemons
- 3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

### Directions for the Herb Mixture

- Make a pile of the rosemary, sage, garlic and salt on a cutting board.
- Use a chef's knife and mince the ingredients.
- Spread the mixture on paper towels and allow it to dry overnight.
- Transfer the mixture to a jar and keep it in the refrigerator.
- Use it to rub on chicken and pork roasts. Mix it into sautéed vegetables and soups. It makes a great little culinary gift, too.

### Directions for the Chicken

- In a large casserole dish, combine the lemon juice and 2 tablespoons olive oil. Stir in cup of the herb mixture.
- Dry the chicken. Lay it back side up and using a kitchen scissors cut the backbone away. This will allow the chicken to cook evenly and brown nicely.
- Lay the chicken flat in the casserole dish and rub it all over with the marinade. Cover and refrigerate overnight.
- When ready to grill, remove chicken from marinade and place it on a preheated grill over indirect heat, breast side down.
- Grill until the internal temperature in the thickest part of breast meat reaches 165°F. Cut into pieces to serve.



Vegetables turn out succulent and full of flavor when cooked on the grill; just remember to cut them uniformly so they cook at about the same time. And don't get them too mushy; they should retain some al dente characteristics.

## Grilled Vegetables *Verdure alla Griglia*

Serves 4

### Ingredients

- 2 medium-size zucchini, cut into 1-inch rounds
- 2 medium eggplants cut into 1-inch rounds
- 1 red pepper cut into 1-inch long strips
- 1 yellow pepper cut into 1-inch long strips
- 1 onion quartered
- Pre-soaked rosemary skewers (optional)

### For the Marinade

- Salt to taste
- Black pepper to taste
- Juice of 2 limes
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- ¼ cup olive oil
- 2 tablespoons honey

### Directions

- Combine the marinade ingredients in a large bowl; add the vegetables and toss to coat them well.
- Thread them on skewers or presoaked long rosemary stems.
- Place on the grill, and grill until slightly charred.

Recipe from [www.ciaoitalia.com](http://www.ciaoitalia.com)

Left: Grilled Chicken with Tuscan Herbs (*Pollo alla Griglia alle Erbe Toscane*) served with Grilled Vegetables (*Verdure alla Griglia*). Below: Nectarines In Sweet Basil Syrup



Even fruit gets a taste over on the grill.

## Nectarines In Sweet Basil Syrup

Serves 4

### Ingredients

- ½ cup water
- ½ cup white wine
- Juice of one lemon
- 2 tablespoons honey
- ½ inch piece vanilla bean, split lengthwise and seeds scraped
- 4 ripe nectarines, pitted and cut in half and then into slices
- Small bunch fresh basil leaves

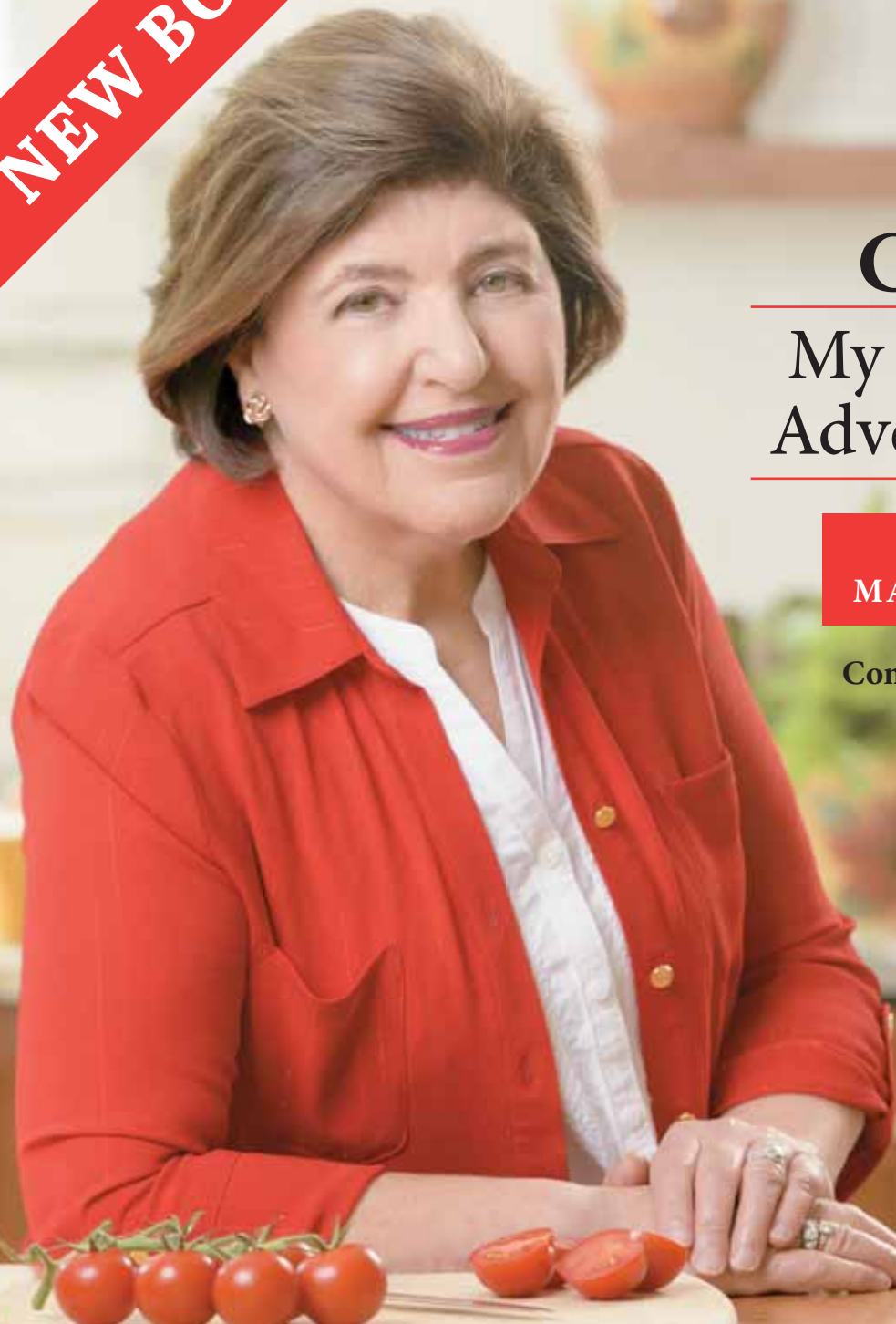
### Directions

- Pour the water into a medium-size saucepan. Stir in the lemon juice, 1 tablespoon honey, and the vanilla bean seeds.
- Bring to a boil and cook for 3 minutes.
- Lower the heat to simmer and add the nectarine slices and cook 1 minute.
- Turn off heat, add 3 or 4 basil leaves and allow the fruit to cool in liquid.
- Drain the nectarine slices and set aside.
- Reduce the liquid in the pan until half volume; and cool.
- Strain the liquid.
- To serve, spoon the slices into small dessert cups and pour some of the liquid over the fruit; garnish with fresh basil leaves.

Recipe from [www.ciaoitalia.com](http://www.ciaoitalia.com) ▲

**Brava, Mary Ann!** Mary Ann Esposito's blog *Ciao Italia* was ranked No. 3 recently by Good Tastes of Tuscany ([tuscany-cooking-class.com](http://tuscany-cooking-class.com)) of "Top Italian Food Bloggers You Should Follow." It praised Mary Ann's Blog as "a perfect companion" to her PBS-TV show, now heading into its 30th season. "Each blog post is accompanied by a video clip of Mary Ann Esposito guiding her followers through each recipe," the review said. "Her friendly demeanor and welcoming kitchen will tickle your taste buds..." Check out Mary Ann's Blog at [www.ciaoitalia.com/mary-anns-blog](http://www.ciaoitalia.com/mary-anns-blog).

**NEW BOOK**



# Ciao Italia

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## My Lifelong Food Adventures in Italy

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# termoli

## Molise's Coastal Treasure

Summer in Italy conjures up images of sparkling seas, vibrant umbrellas lined up in neat rows on wide sandy beaches, and bathers adorned with fashionable sunglasses. Along with the visuals come names of tourist-beloved destinations: Positano, Forte dei Marmi, Cefalu in Sicily.

*By Susan Van Allen*

Famous for its charming, medieval downtown, Termoli is perched on a rocky promontory





Few foreign tourists have heard about a jewel-of-a-beach village on the coast of Molise: Termoli. Here you'll discover an authentic Italian destination, complete with a preserved medieval town, lively port, excellent fish restaurants, and beaches that have been consistently awarded the Blue Flag by the European Union for their clean waters.

I was introduced to Termoli by my Molisani cousins, who live in the village of Vinchiatiuro, outside the city of Campobasso. On my first visit there with my sister, we met cousin Giacomo, who happened to be the mayor. He immediately called his wife, and soon the four of us were in his Fiat for a drive to lunch. In an hour, the road opened to a breathtaking panorama of Termoli. The experience was an enchanting springtime blur: castle, tower, *lungomare* opening up to beach and sea, and most memorably, an outstanding meal of fresh-caught fish.

Termoli had its heyday in the late Middle Ages, when Norman leader Frederick II of Swabia came through, with a vision to unite what's now Germany and Italy. To defend the area, he had extensive renovations made to Termoli's castle. Over the centuries, this towering limestone and sandstone structure, called the Svevo Castle, has become a popular spot for civil weddings and cultural events, as well as a symbol for the Molise coast.

From the same period, in the historic center, is the Romanesque Cathedral of Saint Mary of the Purification,



adorned with lions and griffins, a rose window, and sculpted columns. Termoli's two patron saints are honored here with their relics: Saint Basso, who brings good fortune to fishermen and protects all from dangers of the sea, and Saint Timothy, a disciple of Apostle Paul. A maze of narrow alleyways surrounds the cathedral, where one can get happily lost, surrounded by aromas of bakeries and seafood restaurants.

Fishing has long been the town's main business, and along with boats filling the port, you'll see a unique wooden structure at the end of a pier, called a *trabucco*. This ingenious contraption was created in the 18th-century, so instead of taking on unpredictable waters, fishermen could lower nets from arms attached to the pier's hut to get their catch.

When summertime comes to Termoli, life naturally revolves around the sea. Classic beach clubs fill up with vacationing Italians from Naples and Puglia, there are outdoor concerts and festivals, and a tranquil, cozy evening atmosphere, when it seems the whole town comes out for *una passeggiata*, a leisurely walk, and gelato.

"This is truly a timeless place where it seems that nothing has changed, it's simple and open," says Maria Laura Pace, a Termoli resident who customizes tours for visitors through her company, Moleasy. With her advice, along with my cousin's, Termoli's summer beach scene beckons. ➤





Renato Corradi

## EATING



Renato Corradi

Top: Termoli seaside at dusk; Above: Svevo Castle, at the entrance to the Termoli's old village

*Brodetto alla Termolese* (*U' bredette* in dialect) is what-to-order when dining in Termoli. This fish stew comes from a *cucina povera* tradition from centuries ago, when scraps of fish that weren't sold at the market would be combined and cooked in earthenware pots over an open fire. The recipe has been refined over the years, and now is composed of the catch of the day (such as mantis shrimp, mussels, clams, cuttlefish and sole), with sweet green and hot red pepper, to give a distinctive flavor.

Jane Wilkinson



Best places to *mangia bene*:

**Osteria Dentro Le Mura**—There is no menu at this Slow Food restaurant, that has earned a Michelin Guide listing for its simple preparations of fresh fish, and panoramic terrace. Antonio Terzano and his sommelier wife Lina run the establishment with warm, welcoming pride. ([www.osteriadentrolemura.it](http://www.osteriadentrolemura.it))

**Nicolino**—Since 1975, the Caruso family has welcomed guests to this elegant restaurant, located in front of the Castello Svevo. Along with traditional *brodetto*, their Calamari Ripieni in Purgaturio-stuffed calamari in bubbling tomato sauce, gets raves. ([www.ristorantenicolino.it](http://www.ristorantenicolino.it))

Jane Wilkinson



**Trattoria Tipica L'Opera**—A humble, family run trattoria tucked into an alley in the old town, that offers fresh fried fish, excellent pastas, and traditional *brodetto*. ([www.trattorialopera.com](http://www.trattorialopera.com))

**Eattico**—For a quick and delicious light dinner or snack, head to this popular street-food shop that serves panini stuffed with fresh fish. (Via Federico il di Svevia 21)

Jane Wilkinson







**BEACH CLUBS**

Termoli has a small public beach, but checking into a club will give you a much better experience, as you can rent umbrellas, beach beds, and enjoy the restaurants. Clubs to the south of the old town have more facilities for beach sports and wind surfing, while the north side is perfect for simply relaxing and enjoying a swim in the calm sea.

**Cala Sveva:** Located close to the castle on the north side, this club has an excellent restaurant, transforms into a disco at night, and is a popular spot for seaside weddings. (www.calasveva.it)

**Lido Tricheco:** Perfect for sporty types, with plenty of space for beach tennis, volleyball and soccer. The staff organizes aerobic classes, in the water and on the sand. Join the locals in the evenings here, when the restaurant serves excellent pizzas. (www.lidotricheco.it)

**SLEEPING**

**Santa Lucia:** A marvelous beachfront setting and classically styled rooms make this 4-star hotel a favorite. (santaluciahotel.it)

**Martur Resort:** This modern resort is great for families, with a pool and private beach. Along with hotel rooms, there are apartments with kitchen facilities. www.marturresort.com

The *Albergo Diffuso* (dispersed hotel) concept has taken off in Termoli. This style of accommodations was created in the 1980s in the region of Friuli Venezia. Rather than building a new structure, a “hotel” is created by renovating a group of buildings in a historic center. Staying in one of these *alberghi* immerses a traveler in the community, with a central reception and breakfast room nearby.

An excellent *Albergo Diffuso* in Termoli: **Residenza Sveva.** Guests love the spacious antique-styled rooms, views of the sea, and personal service that makes them feel embraced like family. (www.residenzasveva.com)

**SUMMER FESTIVALS**

**International Folklore Festival**  
*Late July*  
Groups from all over the world come to Termoli for a colorful weekend, performing their traditional dances. Shows take place in the stunning open air setting of the Scalinetta di Folklore—a wide staircase and landing that connects the port and the old town.

**San Basso**  
*August 3-5*  
A grand celebration of Termoli’s Patron Saint begins with a procession from the cathedral to the port, where the saint’s statue is sent on a boat ride, placed overnight at the fishermen’s market, and finally returned to the cathedral for a mass. Music, food, and fireworks surround the festivities.

**Incendio al Castello (Castle Fire)**  
*August 15*  
This festival re-enacts the 16th-century Saracen attack and burning of the Svevo Castle. It begins with costumed characters arriving by boat and parading to the castle, and culminates in a huge, dramatic light show. Music and food stalls at the port complete the party that goes on until the wee hours.

**Sagra di Pesce (Fish Festival)**  
*Late August*  
Celebrating Termoli’s fishing tradition, the town’s port fills with stands serving fried fish, bands, and a spectacular finale of fireworks.

More Info: [www.moleasy.org](http://www.moleasy.org) ▲

*Susan Van Allen is the author of 100 Places in Italy Every Woman Should Go. She also designs and hosts Golden Weeks in Italy: For Women Only, small group tours.*



Renato Conradi

Boat in the Trimiti Sea east of Termoli



# THE TOWN OF TODI

By Frank Van Riper

Photos © Goodman/Van Riper Photography

## A HIDDEN JEWEL IN THE CENTER OF ITALY

The struggle between these two strong-willed men (the Pope wants his lasting artistic legacy to be done fast; Michelangelo insists the work will be done when he says it's done) takes place in the heart of Rome, in the Vatican's glorious Sistine Chapel. Or does it?

In fact, director Carol Reed's opulent, Oscar-winning film, *The Agony and the Ecstasy* (1965), was shot nowhere near these two sites. A full-scale replica of the Sistine Chapel was built at the famed Cinecittà film studios on the outskirts of Rome to allow for unimpeded filming, not just of the Chapel interior but of Heston on his back painting his masterpiece on the chapel's vaulted ceiling.

And what of Rome itself as the Pope makes his triumphal entrance after yet another military victory? That would be the Piazza del Popolo, some 80 miles north of Rome, in the small yet stunning Umbrian hill town of Todi — a place that remains to this day one of Italy's, if not the world's, cultural and historic jewels that far too many tourists never have seen.

Rose Window  
at the  
Todi Cathedral





Charlton Heston as Michelangelo in *The Agony and the Ecstasy* scene filmed in Todi

Todi lies in the very center of Italy, near the middle of Umbria, Italy's only landlocked region and dubbed "the green heart of Italy." Todi's roots go back some 3,000 years to the early Umbri, then the Etruscans. It has clung to its historic past—Etruscan, Roman, Medieval, etc.—while also creating a simpatico, human-scale environment in which to live.

As Alexandra Hook, who moved to Todi with her family seven years ago from Atlanta, notes: "Todi has its own very special aspects [including] the high concentration of artists and artisans...the strong sense of community that permeates the town, incredible views...the depth of history, the small size (and concomitant accessibility to everything), the safety...and a relatively low cost of living. While individually, each of these could be found in various locales throughout the world, it is rare to find all of them together."

Certainly, what one finds in Todi is history, encircled by not one but three sets of ancient walls that have helped preserve the Medieval and Renaissance architecture there better than anywhere else in Italy.

Todi has one of central Italy's most photogenic piazzas. Nothing is showy about Piazza del Popolo; one guide calls it an understated serenity enclosed by the 13th-century Palazzo del Capitano and Palazzo dei Priori. Surveying it from one end is the minimalist façade and rose window



Dirtied up Piazza del Popolo in Todi staging as the 16th-century Rome for the filming of *The Agony and the Ecstasy*

of Todi's Romanesque Gothic Cathedral. The town's most photographed building is just downhill from its walls: the church of Santa Maria della Consolazione, designed by Cola da Caprarola (in the style of the great Renaissance architect Donato Bramante) and finished in 1607 after a century's work.

By itself, Consolazione may be worth a trip to Todi. A Renaissance-style pilgrimage church, it features an unusual centralized, symmetrical plan, surmounted by a monumental white dome. This design distinguishes Consolazione from the more common elongated basilica or Latin-cross designs of the Renaissance. The almost circular configuration of the church gives it both grandeur and intimacy, reminiscent of another great Italian church, La Chiesa di Santa Maria della Salute in Venice.

An interesting note about Consolazione: for many years, 12 niches in the first three apses of the church housed large statues of Christ's apostles. But, as we will learn, time and tectonic plates, have taken their toll.

The best view of Todi—and of its backdrop hills—is from the top of the 150-step bell tower of the church of San Fortunato, an imposing building that houses in its underground crypt the tomb of Jacopone of Todi (1230–1306). Nicknamed "God's Jester," Jacopone was a wandering Franciscan friar and outspoken opponent of money-loving Pope Boniface VIII. He also wrote lyrical poetry in the local dialect before Dante did in neighboring Tuscany. Jacopone is revered in Todi, not just for his gentle and, at times, politically incorrect nature, but also for the fact that he, not Dante, was the first to popularize eloquent poetry written in vernacular. ➤





Steps at San Fortunato



View from the Hotel Fonte Cesia



Piazza del Popolo

Todi, he says, “is one of those places you’ve never been and felt that you’ve come home...a place where you can walk to the butcher, the handmade pasta place, the green grocer...see people all the time.”

Recalling the first time he saw Todi, Badger says, “I was in Rome one day and we rented a car and drove up...it was in the fog, in November. I’m climbing up the hill toward the Porta Romana and got up above the fog and there was that Todi skyline with San Fortunato and the grey-stone homes spilling down the hill...everything but the choir of angels.”

By the end of the day, Doug and his late wife, Dawn, had visited a local realtor. “The second place I saw, I bought,” he says.

Author Patrizia Chen, a native Italian, moved to Todi some 30 years ago, dividing her time between Todi and New York. “There is a magic in Todi that you either feel it or you don’t feel it,” she says, adding that, as in many small towns, once the locals get to know you, a strong bond is created. “If I needed something, people would be around me in minutes.”

Chen says she and her Chinese-American husband are moving permanently to Todi, pulling up their longtime New York stakes.

So, it’s no wonder that Todi, with a permanent population of roughly 2,500 and another 14,000 in the surrounding commune, was dubbed *la città piu vivibile del mondo*—the most livable city in the world? [The

actual accolade from a University of Kentucky study described Todi as the world’s most “sustainable” city, for its sensible urban scale, but press accounts preferred a sexier adjective.]

Still, “livable” seems an appropriate description. I grew up in New York City, and the contrast between the Piazza del Popolo and, say, Times Square, is staggering. First, the Piazza is comparatively tiny (maybe a third the size of Venice’s Piazza San Marco) yet also elegant: a cleanly demarcated, traffic-free space surrounded by austere beautiful and ancient buildings, and one glorious cathedral. Unlike Times Square, Piazza del Popolo is never cacophonous, even during crisp fall evenings when its bars and cafes are packed with patrons enjoying the *al fresco* seating at the square’s edges. Another sign of Todi’s small size: whenever I am in the Piazza with locals, we invariably run into their friends or acquaintances taking the evening air in this clean, elegant setting. By contrast, back in 1965, when Todi starred in the movies, tons of soil had to be trucked in to the Piazza to cover its neat paving stones. And the elegant facades of its public buildings were papered over with dirt and mock ivy to properly “age” the setting.

A far more elegant “painting over” is viewable today, by special appointment, in the Casa Dipinta (“the painted house”), the Todi home of Irish-American artist Brian O’Doherty (aka Patrick Ireland) and his wife, art historian Barbara Novak. Over more



than 40 years, they have turned their cozy, multi-story home into a riot of primary colored walls and ceilings that works beautifully.

It has been described as a pyramid-shaped town, a fancy way of saying Todi is hilly as hell. Blame that on the eagle. According to legend, Todi was founded in 2707 B.C. by locals who initially planned to settle on level ground along the Tiber River. One day, so the story goes, while workers were eating their lunch, an eagle swooped down and grabbed the cloth on which they had set their food and deposited it atop a nearby hill. This was seen as a sign from the heavens and, according to legend, it soon was decided that Todi would be sited up the steep hill.

Steep, but with benefits. Notes Debbie Badger: "And then [there's] that stupid hill that I hate, but



Count Eugenio Pongelli tours visitors in his ancestral Pongelli Palace in Todi.

because I keep goin' up and down that hill, I don't get fat. I can eat all the pasta I want...drink all the wine we want, and I come home [to the States] four pounds thinner."

My wife Judy and I didn't seek out Todi before we fell in love with it more than a decade ago. We just were passing through, visiting our friends Doug and Debbie on our way to the farming town of Cannara, 25 miles north, where from a rented villa we led our annual fall Umbria Photo Workshops. Except for the great restaurants we enjoyed with our friends, we didn't give Todi much thought.

Only after our villa no longer was available, and we had to scramble for a new workshop center for the following fall, did we turn our eyes to Todi. Ultimately, we partnered with the family-run Hotel Fonte Cesia, a small, elegant and *molto simpatico* hotel just above the Piazza del Popolo. We've never looked back.

If this beautiful part of La Bel Paese seems charmed, it has also had its share of natural disasters. In the summer of 2016, a severe earthquake destroyed the town of Amatrice, less than 100 miles to the west. Still, fate seemed to smile even then. As Doug Badger recalls: "The earthquake struck in the middle of the night. Debbie said, 'What was that?' 'I think it was an earthquake,' I replied. Debbie: 'Make it stop.' Me: 'OK.' And we both went back to sleep."

Morning dawned with Todi intact. But not without at least one change.

"As I recall, it was a clock on our kitchen wall that had been making a



The author outside San Fortunato in Todi

loud buzzing sound before the quake," says Doug. "Afterward, no problem. Go figure." After Doug and Debbie returned to the States, the region was hit by another series of earthquakes. The statue of St. Bartholomew in Santa Maria della Consolazione toppled from its pedestal and was shattered. It has yet to be replaced, so statues of only 11 apostles stand in the church today.

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The church of Santa Maria della Consolazione



Fra Jacopone of Todi





Paul Spadoni

# IN THE ZONE

Steering Around Italy's ZTL  
Tricky Traffic Restrictions

**“Beware of pickpockets” cautions  
a recorded voice with an Italian accent on the automated  
vending machines selling train tickets in Italy. Too bad there  
aren't similar warnings when renting a car there:**

**“Beware of traffic cameras.”**

*By Paul Spadoni*



Paul Spadoni

Above: This Montecatini Alto ZTL sign is combined with the do-not-enter bar, so not only does it indicate a limited traffic zone, it's also a one-way street in the opposite direction.  
Right: A speed detector on a rural arterial entering Altopascio in Tuscany.



Italy has far and away the most traffic machines in Europe, according to Coyote, which describes itself as Europe's leading real-time traffic information service: "Italy has more than 7,043 fixed and mobile speed detectors on motorways, followed by France with 3,324 and Spain with 1,800." But it's not speed detectors that generate the most complaints from tourists and foreign drivers, but rather the huge number of fines issued to drivers who unwittingly steer into ZTL areas.

ZTL stands for *zona traffico limitato*, or limited traffic zone. It refers

to streets that are restricted for the benefit of pedestrians and bicyclists. Limiting traffic also reduces air and noise pollution, vastly improving the ambiance of Italy's historical city and town centers. Residents and commercial vehicles with special permits are allowed in ZTLs, but other cars are photographed by fixed cameras, their drivers issued fines by mail that vary by municipality, averaging around \$100—but sometimes exceeding \$200.

What can make matters even worse, many tourists lose their way and, unaware of the ZTL signs or what they mean, pass the traffic cam-

eras numerous times before exiting the zone—resulting in multiple fines. This happened to author and world traveler Brian H. Appleton, who received 11 tickets totaling more than \$1,000 during a two-week trip in the summer of 2007.

Another driver, from San Francisco, received multiple fines and posted this complaint on a TripAdvisor forum: "I spent a week in Bologna, Verona and Pisa in July 2016. In January 2017, I received a whopping seven tickets in the mail from the different municipalities...asking for payments for strange infractions that I don't ➤



Warning that a speed detector is ahead on the A11 Autostrada near Lucca.



Electronic signs in Rome confuse with an extra word many foreigners won't understand. If the sign says the *varco* ("way" or "passage") is active, the ZTL is active so don't go there. *Varco non attivo* means you can go.

Street and ZTL sign in medieval Tuscan village of Montalcino

A ZTL sign in Montecatini Alto. This signpost is tall enough that unfamiliar tourists might miss it, but it shows when unauthorized traffic is prohibited, and a current-time clock.



even understand. The total amount is over \$1,000, if you add the international wire transfer fees....”

Asking TripAdvisor users if the system seemed fair, he added: “To me this seems a total scam. I have requested proof from the website they provided on the notices and received no answer. All they responded is PAY. Also, they don’t accept credit cards, only wire transfers.... What would happen if I don’t pay?”

He received 48 answers that ranged from sympathetic to sarcastic. For the most part, people told him that the system is fair, that it preserves the cleanliness and tranquility of the ancient cities he visited, and that ignorance of the law is a poor excuse.

“If you wish to dispute the charges you can,” one respondent wrote. “You will need to go back to Italy to each municipality and explain why you broke the law but shouldn’t pay for it. Pay the fines or they will engage a collection agency and it will ruin your credit score.”

Many fined travelers question why they are charged twice for each violation, and why the ticket arrives months after the infraction. The answer is that the police must first contact the rental car agency to obtain the driver’s information; and, for this service, the agency charges the driver’s credit card an administrative fee ranging from \$30 to \$50 per incident. This is often the first indication that a ticket will be mailed, sometimes nearly a year later.

Some municipalities write the infraction letter in Italian and

require that payment be made using an International Bank Account Number (IBAN) transfer. This is a common and nearly costless method of electronic payment in Europe, but banks in the United States do not routinely use this system and may charge between \$40 to \$50 for an IBAN transfer. Small cities often contract to have the notification letters sent by European Municipality Outsourcing, which translates them into the language of the driver and offers the convenience of paying online by credit card. Oh, and, the police have 360 days from the date they receive a driver’s data to issue a fine. Domenico Gatto, chief of police in Montecatini Terme, a small Tuscan town between Florence and Lucca, says the best strategy is to study the rules before arriving in Italy. “It’s very important for foreigners to learn what the road signs mean in Italy, which are the same in all of Europe,” Gatto says. “This is not only to avoid fines but also for the sake of safety—to understand when one is approaching a dangerous intersection, a steep hill, a curve or a stop sign, for example.”

Gatto says his department issues 30,000 sanctions annually for a town with a population of 24,000. This high number is largely because Montecatini Terme, billed as Italy’s largest spa town, attracts 2 million visitors per year and has about 200 hotels. A high percentage of its traffic violations are committed by non-residents unfamiliar with local ZTLs.

Larger cities generate even more revenue from traffic tickets. The

Florentine, Florence’s English-language newspaper, reported in 2009 that its traffic police “issue approximately 1,253 tickets a day. The fines on these tickets bring about 52 million euro to city hall each year.”

Driving inside any medium or large city in Italy includes a risk of inadvertently entering a ZTL. Savvy travelers often book their accommodations in smaller towns and then take a taxi, train or bus into the busy larger cities.

Some ZTL regulations are active at all times,” Gatto explains, “and others only restrict traffic during certain hours....” Hours of enforcement are posted next to most signs, as are phone numbers if drivers have questions or need access for business purposes. ZTL rules don’t apply to handicapped drivers, but they must call or e-mail the local municipality to be put on a special list of exceptions.

Hotels within ZTL zones work with the police so that their clients don’t incur fines, adds Gatto. When guests check in, the hotel calls the police so the guest’s license number can be added to the list of vehicles authorized to enter the zone during their hotel stay.

The Ministero dei Trasporti lists all ZTLs and regulations online, although its website is difficult for foreigners to navigate. An easier solution, Gatto says, is to use a modern navigation aid such as global positioning systems, or GPS. In April 2018, for instance, Waze launched a new feature called “ZTL Pass” to help drivers avoid fines in Italy’s ZTL zones.

“Many GPS devices are updated to include where the ZTLs are located, and they can alert you that you’re about to enter a restricted area,” Gatto says. “I’ve seen this work with my own personal GPS and can recommend it for all drivers.”

Tour guide Elena Benvenuti, of Discover Lucca with Elena, points out that another unexpected expense can result from citations for illegal parking. “It’s important to know that parking spaces with blue lines on the pavement require payment,” she says. “You’ll need to look for a nearby meter box, make a payment, receive a permit and put it on your dashboard.



Paul Spadoni

Speed camera warning in Tuscany



Kristi Blokhin/Shutterstock.com

ZTL restriction sign in Rome's Rioni Monti neighborhood

Tatiana Popova / Shutterstock.com



Paul Spadoni

Comandante (Chief of Police)  
Domenico Gatto in his office  
in Montecatini Terme.

Police officers Mario Cotugno and Daniela Bochicchio advise a foreigner in a rental car who's uncertain about this ZTL. Since it was *non attiva*, the driver was allowed to proceed.



Paul Spadoni

You may need coins, but many meter boxes now allow credit cards.... Also, look at the hours on the meter box, because parking in blue area may be free in the evenings or on Sundays.”

White lines mean parking is free, but look at the time limits, Benvenuti says. “There could be a limit on the number of hours you can park in a white area. You might be required to set your parking disk—*disco orario*—to show what time you parked. If your rental car company didn’t equip your car with one, you can purchase one at a tobacco shop or service station.”

One of the most frequently asked questions on search engines and travel forums is “What will happen if I don’t pay my traffic ticket in Italy?”

Gatto acknowledges that while procedures are in place to collect from European residents, enforcing the fines on Americans and other foreigners is not as easy. The municipality will send out several notices, offering incentives for promptness and pen-

alties for late payments. If payment isn’t made, the debt is usually sold to a collection agency which aggressively pursues payment with phone calls and threats of legal action.

Mark Stonestreet of Gig Harbor, Wash., received four ZTL tickets; three in Milan as he circled in a round-about trying to determine the correct exit. He didn’t pay the fines, reasoning that “it’s not fair to give tickets to drivers who can’t read the signs or give three tickets for the same violation.”

When he received registered letters from the police, he refused to sign for them and they were returned. When he hadn’t received any more communications from Italy for many months, he thought the incident was behind him. But a collection agency began calling, sometimes multiple times a day, some days 15 minutes apart through the afternoon and evening. He usually didn’t answer. Occasionally, they left a voice-mail. Even after his wife answered one time and was told the agency would

take legal action and force her husband to appear before a federal magistrate, Stonestreet still refused to pay.

“Five years to the day of the first letter, the calls stopped,” he says. “We haven’t heard from anyone since... the courts or credit collectors. The next big test will be when we head back to Italy.”

There’s an old Italian proverb, “È meglio prevenire che curare,” which means “Prevention is better than cure.” Might be best to take Chief Gatto’s advice: Plan ahead, learn the laws, and respect them. ▲

*Paul Spadoni is a journalist who lives in Gig Harbor, Wash., and Montecarlo, Italy. He writes a blog called “Living (with) Abroad in Tuscany” and has published a book “An American Family in Italy: Living la Dolce Vita without Permission.” Visit his website: www.paulspadoni.com. His has received four traffic tickets in Italy—for speeding, parking, running a red light....and a ZTL violation.*

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# Transforming Matera

THE 2019 EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE IN BASILICATA

Story and Photos by Karen Haid

WWW.NIAF.ORG



Chiesa rupestre di San Pietro Barisano is the largest rupestrian church in Matera; its first rock structure below the floor dates from the 12th-13th century.

Personal integrity, cultural strength and a collective resilience are just a few of the characteristics that helped Matera survive its difficult past and come out the other side to be named the European Capital of Culture for 2019.

This fascinating city in Italy's southern region of Basilicata, wedged between Calabria, Campania and Puglia, is known the world over for its Sassi, ancient "stone" neighborhoods carved out of the rocky landscape. They were made famous as the set for such films as Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Il vangelo secondo Matteo* (*The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, 1964) and Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2003). Directors are captivated by Matera's unique landscape

and seek out the città dei sassi for its primitive beauty and anthropological interest. However, the spotlight was far from favorable back in 1945 when Matera leaped to the international stage with Carlo Levi's scathing condemnation of the poverty-stricken area in his memoir *Cristo si è fermato ad Eboli* (*Christ Stopped at Eboli*). The Sassi immediately became a *vergogna nazionale*.

But amazingly, in just over 70 years, Matera has gone from being a "national disgrace" to becoming an international tourist destination, designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and honored by the European Union for its cultural value.

The transformation of Matera is not a simple tale of neighborhood





Matera and the Gravina di Matera

rehabilitation. Its success isn't due to hipsters opening trendy restaurants. Rather, the credit belongs to the people, their culture and a more than 2,000-year thread of life in the historic Sassi district. Matera's story is one of adaptation, innovation and tradition.

Inhabitation of the area dates back to the Paleolithic Era. Remains of entrenched Neolithic villages have been discovered on the eastern cliff of the Gravina di Matera, the canyon along which the city is situated. With the development of metal tools, dwellings were dug out of the gorge's porous limestone, often generically referred to as *tufa*, and a community sprouted on the opposite bank, where the Sassi sit today. The blocks excavated from the caves were utilized for exterior construction.

In the early medieval period, monastic communities arrived from the East. Contributing to both the spiritual life and the area's urbanization, they created beautifully frescoed grotto churches. Several of these *chiese rupestri*, of which over 150 have been uncovered, still functioned as places of worship into the 20th century. Others were used as living quarters, stalls, and storage facilities, or had been abandoned.

The Sassi districts sit on the edge

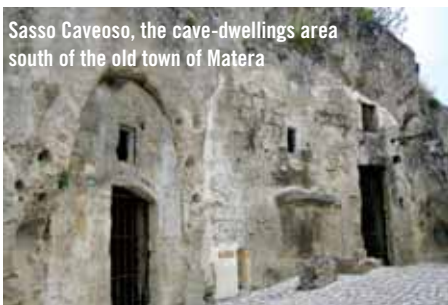
of a ravine and appear as a valley when viewed from Matera's upper level, known as "the Civita," the city's oldest institutional settlement. The Civita was once surrounded by a protective wall, its arched gateways still visible among the more conventional architecture on this strip of higher ground that divides the Barisano and Caveoso Sassi.

This central location is the site of a magnificent 13th-century cathedral whose tower still dominates the city skyline. The Duomo di Matera is one of many exquisite edifices constructed in the Civita and Piano districts. Visitors who only expect to see the Biblical starkness of the Sasso Caveoso neighborhood crowned by its evocative rock church dedicated to Maria de Idris are often surprised by the resplendent European architecture spanning from Romanesque to the Baroque.

The Sassi, themselves, are no less extraordinary. In fact, Matera's Sassi and Park of Rupestrian churches were honored by UNESCO in 1993 as "the most outstanding, intact example of a troglodyte settlement in the Mediterranean region, perfectly adapted to its terrain and ecosystem." The city's historic system of water collection, with its pioneering conservancy of this precious natural resource, was revolutionary for its time. ➤



One of Matera's *case grotte* (cave houses)



Sasso Caveoso, the cave-dwellings area south of the old town of Matera

The Chiesa della Madonna de Idris was carved into the face of the rock.





In addition to excavating living quarters, the Materani also dug a sophisticated network of tunnels and cisterns that branched like tree roots beneath the entire community. Many homes in the Sassi had their own cistern; others shared a neighborhood reservoir. They collected rainwater and funneled water from a nearby spring, as well as channeled water-courses for drainage and sewage. The system's largest cistern, the Palombaro Lungo, was built in the 19th century

and supplied water for the Piano, the Baroque section of the old town.

The architectural layout of the Sassi fostered social interaction. Homes faced onto small squares with shared cisterns and ovens. Numerous houses were designed with a lower-level cave serving as a warehouse and residential quarters fashioned from the excavated rock on the floors above.

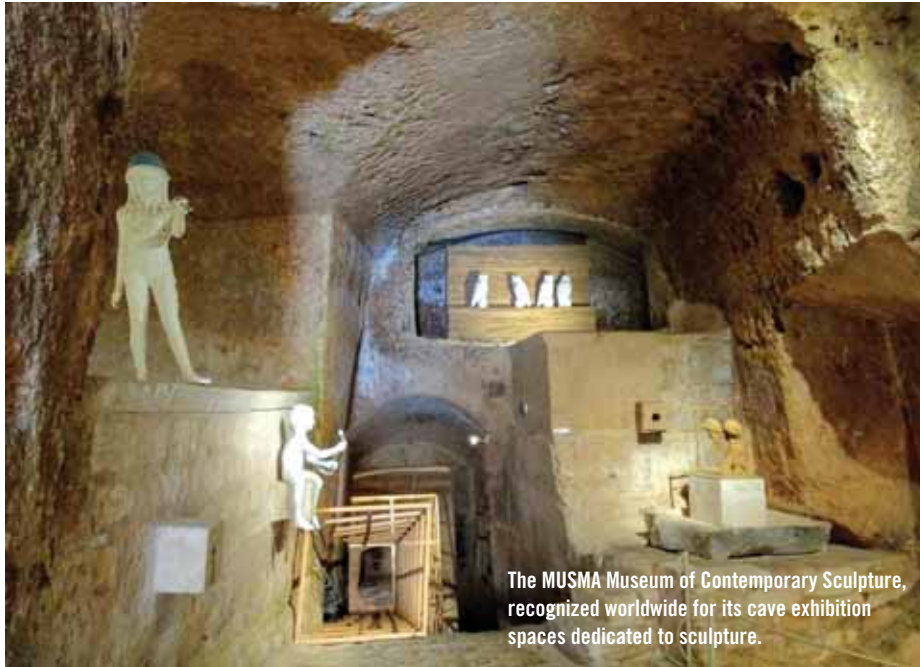
But living conditions began to decline from the 17th century onward. As the population increased, more people



The Cathedral of Matera was built in 1270

were forced to live in a space that couldn't accommodate them. Many were compelled to take up residence in grotto churches, animal shelters, storage caves and even cisterns.

By the time writer and social activist Carlo Levi compared the Sassi to "a schoolboy's idea of Dante's Inferno," and spoke of children begging in the streets, not for candy, but "with sorrowful insistence, for quinine," the crisis had passed its breaking point. The infant mortality rate was four times higher than the national average. Politicians could no longer ignore the city's abominable sanitation; in 1952, they responded to the humanitarian crisis with a law mandating the evacuation of the Sassi residents, more than 15,000 people, half the population of Matera.



The MUSMA Museum of Contemporary Sculpture, recognized worldwide for its cave exhibition spaces dedicated to sculpture.

## WHAT TO VISIT IN *Matera*

- **The Sassi:** Take a guided tour, then wander on your own and lose yourself in the maze of streets and staircases. Visit a *casa grotta* (cave house) to see how the inhabitants lived in a typical dwelling carved out of the rock, and step into the *chiese rupestre* (Rupestrian churches) to admire the frescos, some of which date back 1,000 years.
- **Churches in the Civita and Piano:** Start with the stately Romanesque cathedral, a focal point both visually and spiritually. It is home to Matera's patron saint, the Madonna della Bruna, whose festival is celebrated on July 2 every year. Not to be

missed are the Church of San Giovanni Battista, the first to be built outside the original city walls, and the Church of Purgatorio that admonishes with skulls and skeletons.

- **History and Art:** Trace the city's history through artifacts that range from the Paleolithic and Neolithic periods to Greek and Roman times in the National Archeological Museum Domenico Ridola. Then continue with medieval and modern art at the museum in Palazzo Lanfranchi, which features Carlo Levi's large mural *Lucania 1961*.

- **Casa Noha:** Encounter Matera's story of struggles and successes through

a multimedia presentation inside an historic residence.

- **Modern Art:** Immerse yourself in the dichotomy of contemporary art in the Sassi caves filled with works by sculptors of international repute at the MUSMA Museum of Contemporary Sculpture. And experience the Rupestrian Complex of the Madonna delle Virtù, underground churches and a convent with modern exhibitions in a space carved out of the rock.

- **Water Conservation:** Descend the steps from Piazza Vittorio Veneto to Palombaro Lungo, to see Matera's largest cistern and learn about the city's system of

Over the following years, new, modern quarters were built and people moved out of the Sassi neighborhoods. While the move must have been disconcerting for the elderly, the new accommodations were welcomed by large families who suffered in the humid, overcrowded cave dwellings that they shared with their animals, if they were lucky enough to possess a donkey and a few chickens.

The evacuation took place over two decades. During that time, the Sassi were kept alive by filmmakers and the residents' collective memories. Almost 50 films have capitalized on Matera's unique beauty. The Sassi were destined to be more than a backdrop, and determined Materani worked hard to show themselves and the world that the spontaneous architecture created in harmony with its natural surroundings was anything but a national shame. The Sassi were reevaluated and, in 1986, a law was passed to allow people to move back and breathe new life into the stone districts.

Some Materani longed to return to the old neighborhoods and the camaraderie of village life played out in the district's small squares. Several *case grotte* (cave houses) have been renovated



Sassi steps

water collection.

- **Murgia Materano Park:** Traverse the Gravina di Matera to the other side of the canyon, take a hike or guided walk through this archaeological park with remains of ancient settlements and numerous rupestrian churches. Soak up the view of Matera from this vantage point, by day and, particularly, atmospheric at dusk.
- **Crypt of the Original Sin:** Travel 14 kilometers outside of town to La Cripta del Peccato Originale, often referred to as the Sistine Chapel of Rupestrian art, to see the exquisite, 8th-9th-century frescos in Byzantine style depicting scenes from Genesis.

and function as cultural museums. Hotels, bed and breakfasts, bars, and restaurants offer the experience of sleeping and eating in the Sassi. Ironically, many lodgings boast luxury cave accommodations.

Historical and cultural offerings range from the splendid fresco paintings in the medieval *chiese rupestri* of the Sassi and its Murgia Materana Park to the area's ancient artifacts and classic European art in the museums of the Piano district. Repurposed Sassi real estate has also resulted in several evocative museums.

Matera is both a testament to survival and a manifestation of human achievement. Visitors come

from all over the world to admire the architecture and art, to enjoy traditional food, and to learn about and soak up the atmosphere. They wander through the maze of streets. By day, the sun bounces off the bright white walls, and voices fill the town as they have for millennia. At night, the Sassi sparkle like a life-size nativity scene every day of the year. ▲

*Karen Haid is the award-winning author of Calabria: The Other Italy and is currently working on a book about Basilicata. Join the virtual conversation on her blog or travel with her to Italy on her Calabria Cultural Tour! More information at [www.calabriatheotheritaly.com](http://www.calabriatheotheritaly.com).*



# Palazzo Mirto in Palermo

## THE LOST WORLD OF THE SICILIAN NOBILITY DISPLAYED

By Theresa Maggio  
Photos courtesy of the Mirto Museum Archive



The *Salone del Baldacchino*, so named for a canopy placed over the throne. Inset: The formal dining room.

Every time I entered the bland, cement Carrefour supermarket off Piazza Marina, I felt the eyes of the sumptuous Palazzo Mirto on my back. I had first visited Palermo's historic Filangeri Mansion in 1986 and left apoplectic at its aristocratic excesses bought on the backs of my farmer ancestors.

The Filangeri-Cutòs, a branch of the same family, had a palace and land in Santa Margherita di Belice, my ancestral town, where some people lived in caves and all my male ancestors back to 1699 had their profession registered as *villano*, which translates as “boor,” “lout” and “peasant.”

Even the wallpaper in Palazzo Mirto made me mad. That walk through tainted excess offended me but Professore LoMonaco, who taught me Italian and the feudal underpinnings of Sicilian culture, tut-tutted. Those were bygone days, he said, and Palazzo Mirto was an icon of an age and deserving of appreciation. Now nearly 30 years later, I'd been living for months just three blocks away and Palazzo Mirto taunted me to try again. So, one day I passed through the open gate with the double peep-hole mask, bought a ticket, took a breath and walked in.

Palazzo Mirto, one of Italy's finest house museums, stands just south of Piazza Marina. Built in the 13th century, the structure has undergone several remodels and today has a 19th-century look. The Filangeris followed the Norman conquerors to Sicily in 1072 and have lived in this palace since 1594, when Pietro Filangeri, count of San Marco, married its wealthy owner, Francesca de Spuches, and moved in.

In 1642, one of their descendants, Giuseppe De Filangeris y Spuches, became the first Prince of Mirto, a feudal estate near Messina, from which the palace takes its name. The Filangeris used this house to flaunt their class and underscore their power, according to the museum's website. In the 1600s, they acquired the right to exercise political, administrative, fiscal, military and judicial power over their subjects, my people, the louts with no power. This right was often purchased.

In 1982, the last heir, Lady Maria Concetta Lanza Filangeri di Mirto, gave the *palazzo* to the Sicilian regional government, in accordance with her late brother Stefano's will, on condition that everything be left as it was when they lived there,

A Turk, Scotsman, sheik, oriental lady and Englishman are hand-painted on 19th-century Neapolitan Nardone porcelain plates.





The Tapestry Room. Inset: *Salotto Rosa* or *Della Battaglia*, so named for the battle scene painted on one wall.

and that it be open to the public—a testament to the grandeur of their line. A perfect example of a Palermitan noble's residence, its décor spans the 17th to the 19th centuries.

Velvet ropes guide you through the luxurious house. The Filangeris were driven collectors of useless beauties. First thing you see is a glass cabinet of folding fans, once seen as a symbol of life which starts at a point and spreads with experience. Fans were also fashion accessories. One was cream-colored lace on blonde tortoise-shell ribs with diamonds on the guard studding the crown of Queen Margherita of Savoy, who once owned it. I stared, imagining it held artfully in a lady's pale hand.

On other glass shelves were silver snuff boxes, on the walls portraits of ancestors, in a cabinet the giant cloak clasps, behind glass panes the 56 porcelain dinner plates painted with upper-crust gentry dressed in their countries' traditional garb: a Scot in a kilt; a Turk in a turban; an Arab in white robes; an Englishman with a riding crop.

I entered a tiny children's theater – a raised stage and six chairs for an audience. On a mantel was a clock with snakes for hands. Above me a

Murano chandelier with glass cherubs bearing the Filangeri crest. The ground floor was used for official ceremonies and formal entertaining. Rooms follow one after another around a courtyard with a baroque fountain. I walked through them with a peasant's eye.

Here was a chinoiserie sitting room with red, gold and black-lacquered tables and chairs and padded silk-covered walls painted with Chinese gardens, pavilions and pagodas. Chinoiserie was a fad in the 1700s. In the hallways stood several tall, black-lacquered cabinets holding lockable drawers made of ebony and tortoise shell, strong boxes for Filangeri coins and jewels.

I came to a hall of lights, a delightful extension of rooms seen through a line of open doorways with a frilly Murano chandelier at the center of each. There was the Yellow Room with its showcase made of translucent tortoise shell. The fumoir, a smoking room whose walls were clad in Cordoba leather. In the *Salotto degli Arzezi* hung a giant embroidered tapestry that seemed painted but was woven of local silk. In the courtyard, a stepped fountain made the water sing.

In 1986, the *piano nobile* was closed but ➤



Part of the Filangeri's collection of pocket watches.





Rocaille fountain in interior courtyard; the stables below the living quarters; the library in the family's third-floor living quarters.



The lacy fan with a diamond-studded royal crown on its guard, and snuff boxes from the Filangeri collection.



now was open. On this upper floor, the family lived and entertained close friends. Here was a Christmas card from Prince Umberto, who would be Italy's last king. Two beeswax candles had melted in some summer's heat but were left as they were, a solid puddle. One dining room wall was lined with lighted shelves holding porcelain dinner plates, part of a 400-piece collection painted with all the birds known in 18th-century Europe, one bird per plate. On the floor, majolica tiles from Caltagirone.

In one library, all the books were bound in red leather and their titles embossed in gold: *The Dictionary of Physics and Chemistry*, *The Annals of Bridges*, *The History of Poland*. Many books were in French, which Sicilian aristocrats spoke among themselves. Overhead, a giant Murano chandelier blossomed with glass peonies in white, powder pink and green.

In the weapons room, two sturdy chairs with ashtrays built into in the arms for the men, beside two squat chairs for the wet nurses who nourished the noble spawn. A closet just for hats. In yet another library, I found titles in English, French, Italian and Russian. Zane Grey, Martha Mitchell,

Sigrid Unset, Cervantes, Milton. In the next room, an ornate portable altar. I asked an attendant, why portable? "So that a baptism, say, could take place in a prettier room," she said.

Then another room containing more snuff boxes and teacups, watches and clock faces.

The last leg of the self-guided tour took me down a few flights to exit through the stables. I counted 18 straight stalls. Each horse had its own wrought-iron hay basket, sculpted stone watering trough, carved wooden horse head over its stall and its name in a frame. There was Ion, Perrot... the rest have flaked off.

I walked out; rain had sheened the courtyard stones. That they had cared so for their horses warmed me some. The years had mellowed me, but hadn't changed my mind. I turned left out the gate and walked home through the Kalsa wondering how many bushels of grain or grapes it takes to buy one diamond-studded fan. ▲

*Theresa Maggio is the author of two books about Sicilian culture: Mattanza and The Stone Boudoir. Her third, about Palermo, is now seeking representation. Website: [www.theresamaggio.com](http://www.theresamaggio.com)*

# Savvy Traveling

By  
Frank Van Riper

## TIPS FOR YOUR NEXT TRIP TO ITALY AND ELSEWHERE

Few things are as exhilarating—or intimidating—as foreign travel, especially for the first time traveler. What can make touring Italy, or elsewhere abroad, so interesting—exposure to an ancient, different culture and customs, for example—

also can present a minefield of social and even legal pitfalls.

And don't forget the hassles of air travel. Simply getting there on time these days (with your luggage) can be an adventure.

Having spent more than a decade leading photo workshops in Italy, and drawing on the experience of globe-trotting colleagues and friends, here is a list of travel tips, hacks and time-saving suggestions for the next time you leave home:

• **Take direct flights if possible**, or leave at least more than an hour between connections. Cheaper though a flight may be with one or two stops, each stop increases your chance of missing a connection. I learned the hard way to factor in three hours between connecting flights, letting me laugh at most flight delays and weather hassles.



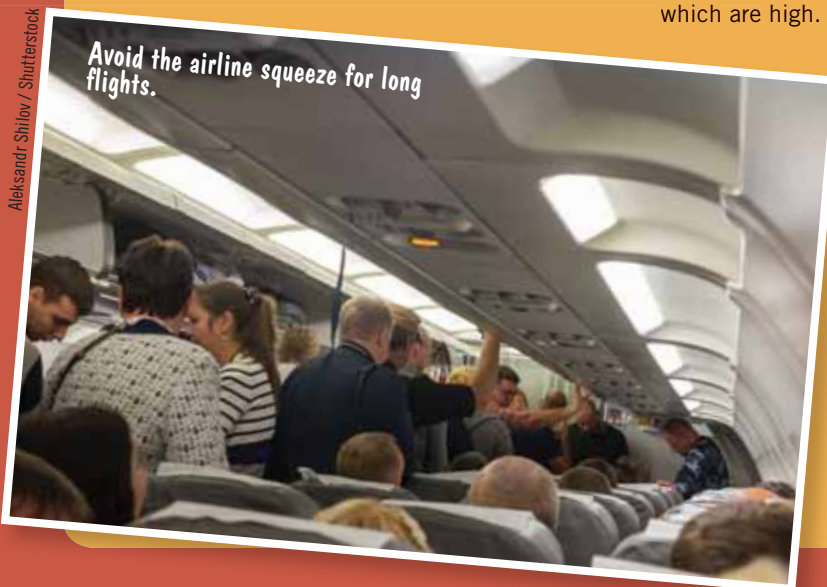
Frank Van Riper

• **Best airfares?** Go online, or use a pro. D.C. photographer Erica Wissolik advises: "When I'm buying a plane ticket, I'll start out

by setting up a Google flight alert to watch the price of my flight. You can see how prices fluctuate and which days are usually low and which are high. I can be flexible so I always

pick the days when flights are cheaper or likely to be less crowded."

Or, you can do what I do. Let a professional travel agent search for you. Over the years, I have avoided hours of eyestrain and agita staring at travel websites by letting my agent book for me. Travel agents get paid by the hotels, airlines, etc., so their cost to you, if anything, is minimal and well worth it. ▶



Aleksandr Shilov / Shutterstock





For frequent international fliers, Global Entry is a must.

- **Get Global Entry.** Arguably the best-kept secret of international travel, this TSA-run program allows “low-risk” travelers to whiz through security lines on departure and breeze through customs on return. It includes TSA Pre-check (shorter departure lines; no need to remove shoes) and lets you avoid interminable lines as you wait to clear customs when returning to the States. Cost is \$100 for five years and requires a background check and personal interview. The process can take months, so apply well before your departure date. Visit: [www.cbp.gov/travel/trusted-traveler-programs/global-entry](http://www.cbp.gov/travel/trusted-traveler-programs/global-entry).

Helps to know the chef: the author with Augusta Pardi at Pardi Vineyard, Montefalco



Frank Van Ripper

- **Banish jet lag.** Jet lag can take a toll if you have flown all night, then have to race for a connecting flight or a train to reach your final destination. That’s a lousy way to start a dream vacation. I now leave for my annual Umbria workshop a day early, so that when I land in Rome after an all-night flight, I hop a cab to a lovely airport hotel and take a long nap after an *al fresco* lunch of *cacio e pepe* and a glass or two of a good red. Next morning, after a leisurely breakfast, I take another cab to Roma Termini, and board any of several regional trains to Terni, the Umbrian hill town where we meet our driver for the week.

- **Yes, your seat is smaller.** Airlines have downsized seats and shoe-horned them together making flying a punishment. Options? You can see what you’re in for by going to sites like [seatguru.com](http://seatguru.com): [www.seatguru.com/charts/generalcharts.php](http://www.seatguru.com/charts/generalcharts.php). Or, pony up in advance for upgrades like Economy-Plus or Premium-Plus. I have found Economy-Plus on United, for instance, to be a comparative bargain for its wider seat and increased legroom. It’s not Biz Class by a long shot, but a huge improvement.

Validate your train tickets



frantic00 / Shutterstock

- **Tickets, passes and avoiding fines.** In Italy, and elsewhere, remember to validate your train ticket before boarding. It’s easy for Americans to forget this, and it can lead to fines or hassles. Validation machines are ubiquitous at stations; all you need do is insert your paper ticket into one end for a validating time stamp.

Another thing (of course, you’d never do this on purpose) is don’t try to beat the system by hopping a turnstile. In Venice, you might board a water bus (*vaporetto*) without paying, figuring no one is checking as you glide down the Grand Canal. Guess again. If you are nabbed by the dreaded *vaporetto* police, you’ll face a stiff fine that they will collect immediately—or escort you to an ATM to collect. Another tip: if you are in one place for several days, check out weekly travel passes for big savings.

Maybe get your 'salute' or 'cin' pronunciations right before the moment arrives.



Frank Van Ripper



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Try Airbnb for better deals

• **Hotel, apartment or villa rental?**

Airbnb has helped travelers be more selective, but as my friend Monica Kovacs Nathan notes, it pays to read the fine print. “Good experience in Rome, only so-so in Amsterdam.

“The key is to read reviews and try to get personal recommendations.... Important to assess the photos carefully (often the places look larger than they really are); read the description carefully (does the bathroom have a window and therefore ventilation?); and pay close attention to description of how many people the place “sleeps”...a place that sleeps four might only have one bedroom for two and a sofa bed for two. Washers are not common in Italy, and I have never seen a dryer, so for stays where you need to have laundry done, see if there is a *lavanderia* nearby?”

The upside, as Erica Wissolik notes, is that bargains can be found: “Since discovering Airbnb, I think it’s the best way to get a really awesome place in the middle of a neighborhood you want to stay in. For example, hotels in Knightsbridge London can be \$400-\$500 a night. An Airbnb in a high-end apt in the same neighborhood may be \$200-\$300 a night. I also like sites like Tablet hotels ([www.tablethotels.com](http://www.tablethotels.com)) for finding hipper hotels at good prices.”

• **Tipping: less is more.** The easiest way to be seen as a boorish American is to tip too much in bars and restaurants. In Italy, 10 percent is way generous—in fact, a few extra Euros added to the bill is fine, especially if a cover charge (*coperto*) or service charge (*servizio*) already has been added.



Frank Van Riper

Tourists at lunch in Orvieto. How much to tip?

• **The coffee conundrum:** Italians take their coffee seriously. After all, they more or less invented it, or at least refined it. Most Italians take their *caffè* standing at the bar and they down it quickly. No need to tip. But if you choose to sit down, leave some spare coins for your server.

Now, about that cappuccino. *Caffè latte* and other coffees served with steamed milk are fine for breakfast, maybe even at mid-day, but Italians never order these drinks during dinner. In fact, *un caffè* in Italy is a nice strong shot of espresso served in a real cup and saucer with a tiny spoon for stirring in sugar. Variations: a *doppio* espresso is twice as much of a good thing, and a *caffè corretto* is an espresso “corrected” with a little grappa or, say, anisette. Decaf is becoming more available; simply say *decaffeinato*. ▲



Frank Van Riper

Midday cappuccino at a Civita di Bagnoregio café

Regardless of how you get to your dream destination, the important thing is to relax and enjoy yourself once you arrive. In Italy, this tends not to be a problem. It is a country that reveres

the simple pleasures of life lived generously and to the full—and revels in sharing that pleasure with its visitors.

Buon Viaggio!





# Cetara

on the Amalfi Coast

Preserving Centuries-Old Fishing Traditions



*Story and Photography by Laura Thayer*

In a world that seems to move ever faster, thankfully places exist where time passes at a slower pace and traditions remain a part of daily life. Along the well-known Amalfi Coast, the little town of Cetara is one of those treasured places. Here, in this town of about 2,100 people, life has always centered around fishing.

**Fishermen pulling their boat ashore with Cetara's Torre di Cetara in the background**



Smaller fishing boats near Cetara's beach



While much of the hubbub of the Amalfi Coast passes Cetara by, it's nevertheless a town that in recent years has utilized its fishing traditions to firmly place it on the world map of gourmet destinations. All with the help of one of the most traditional local catches: anchovies.

Holding on tightly to its ties to the sea in one of the most picturesque settings on the Amalfi Coast, Cetara is nestled into a deep valley with lush mountain slopes rising high above. It sits in a relatively isolated area of the coastline just west of

Vietri sul Mare, the town famous for the Amalfi Coast's colorful ceramics. The mountains have always formed a natural barrier for the seaside village, which is protected on the eastern side by an imposing watchtower, called the Torre di Cetara, rising above the rocky coastline. Dating back to the 14th century, the watchtower now houses a museum dedicated to the town's history and local artists. It also boasts a fine view overlooking Cetara.

It's the beach that captures the eye no matter the viewpoint, strewn as it is

with colorful boats as if they washed ashore in a haphazard yet remarkably fetching way. While the boats claim space there year around, in the summer locals and travelers vie for their own space on the tiny beach with its romantic setting below the watchtower.

Just beyond the beach is the busy little port of Cetara, which is the heart of town. While strolling along the port, what stands out most are the fishing boats. Pleasure boats are tucked away in the port, but it is otherwise full of fishing boats that come in

all shapes and sizes, ranging from the traditional wooden boats painted in bright shades of red, blue, yellow and green, to larger boats piled high with nets and fishing gear.

The connection to the sea is strong in Cetara, dating back to the earliest records of the town. Even its name seems to stem from Latin (*cetaria*) and Greek (*ketèia*) words having to do with fishing. Maintaining its seaside traditions, the town still has one of the most active tuna fishing fleets in the Mediterranean. At the far end of the ➤

View of Cetara and its beach







Shop displays of *colatura di alici*, Cetara's traditional anchovy oil

harbor, you might spot the larger fishing boats used for catching tuna in the deep waters of the Mediterranean. Yet, Cetara is known above all for its *alici*, or anchovies, which are caught in the sea just off the Amalfi Coast.

These two specialties are prepared by local producers who take the tuna and anchovies and transform them into town's biggest sellers. Both are prepared in several ways, but typically preserved in oil and packed into jars. The most coveted local tradition is the creation of the *colatura di alici*, a dark amber-colored oil created

by pressing fresh anchovies. Generations of locals in Cetara have passed down family secrets for transforming the daily catch into this rich oil used to flavor traditional recipes in Cetara.

This prized oil is thought to be connected to *garum*, a fish sauce made in the ancient Roman town of Pompeii not far from the Amalfi Coast. It is a labor-intensive process in which fresh anchovies are filleted and then layered with salt in a wooden barrel, called a *terzigno*, and covered with a wooden disc that is pressed down with a weight. To produce true *colatura di alici*, the anchovies

must be caught along the Amalfi Coast from March to July, and prepared over the summer. Several months later, the barrel is punctured and the liquid is gathered. The intensely flavored fish oil is highly sought after for cooking on the Amalfi Coast and is now known around the world. It's a must for foodies visiting the Amalfi Coast. The menus in Cetara's restaurants showcase anchovies, tuna, and simple, delicious pasta dishes that highlight the oil's rich flavor.

A stroll through town reveals even more about Cetara's embedded fishing traditions. Not far from the

beach, in the town's center, the striking yellow and green diamond patterned dome of Cetara's largest church pokes above the jumble of houses. This is the Chiesa di San Pietro Apostolo (Church of St. Peter), dedicated to the town's patron saint. Even here, Cetara's ties to the sea are front and center. Set into the simple Neoclassical façade, the entrance to the church is through a set of modern bronze doors. Created in 2005 by Italian sculptor Battista Marello, the doors depict San Pietro and Sant'Andrea (St. Andrew) encircled by fishing nets and little fish. Look



Dome of Cetara's Chiesa di San Pietro Apostolo rising above the town's center

Bronze door at Chiesa di San Pietro Apostolo depicting San Pietro and Sant'Andrea with fishing nets and fish







The Festival of San Pietro in Cetara



View of Cetara and its beach

closely and you might see anchovies.

In a town with a long-standing fishing tradition, it's no surprise the locals hold such a deep bond to their patron saint. The brothers San Pietro and Sant'Andrea, both later apostles, were fishermen before leaving their nets behind to become disciples. (Down the coastline in Amalfi, the Cathedral of Sant'Andrea is dedicated to St. Peter's brother.) The devotion to San Pietro is still palpable today, especially when the town's faithful gather to celebrate San Pietro on June 29. As it's also the height of summer

on the Amalfi Coast, the streets and balconies of the town overflow with people crowding to see the religious procession pass by.

The star of the procession is a large wooden statue of San Pietro that is carried by a group of men through town and down to the beach. The saint is carried on a platform in the shape of an old wooden boat decked out with flowers. The statue tilts back and forth as the men walk in such a way to make it seem as if San Pietro's boat is bobbing to and fro through the crowds, like rocking on the gentle waves out at sea.

One of the most captivating moments of the procession takes place on the beach where the harbor is packed with little wooden fishing boats, tourist ferries and, of course, many larger fishing boats. They're waiting for the special dedication that takes place on the beach before San Pietro is taken back to the church where he will look over the town and its fishermen for another year.

The procession celebrating San Pietro perfectly captures the spirit of Cetara. Much like the *colatura di alici* tradition, everything comes back to the sea. Likewise, every

visit to this charming town seems to lead to the beach and the port, where life slows down, where you can treasure, even if just for a moment, Cetara's liveliness, its heart, and both its history and future. ▲

*Laura Thayer is a writer and photographer living on the Amalfi Coast since 2007. Her work has appeared in previous issues of Ambassador as well as Italia! magazine, the U.K.'s award-winning magazine on Italy. Her forthcoming guidebook Moon Amalfi Coast will be released in August 2019. Enjoy more of the Amalfi Coast lifestyle at her website: [www.ciaoamalfi.com](http://www.ciaoamalfi.com).*



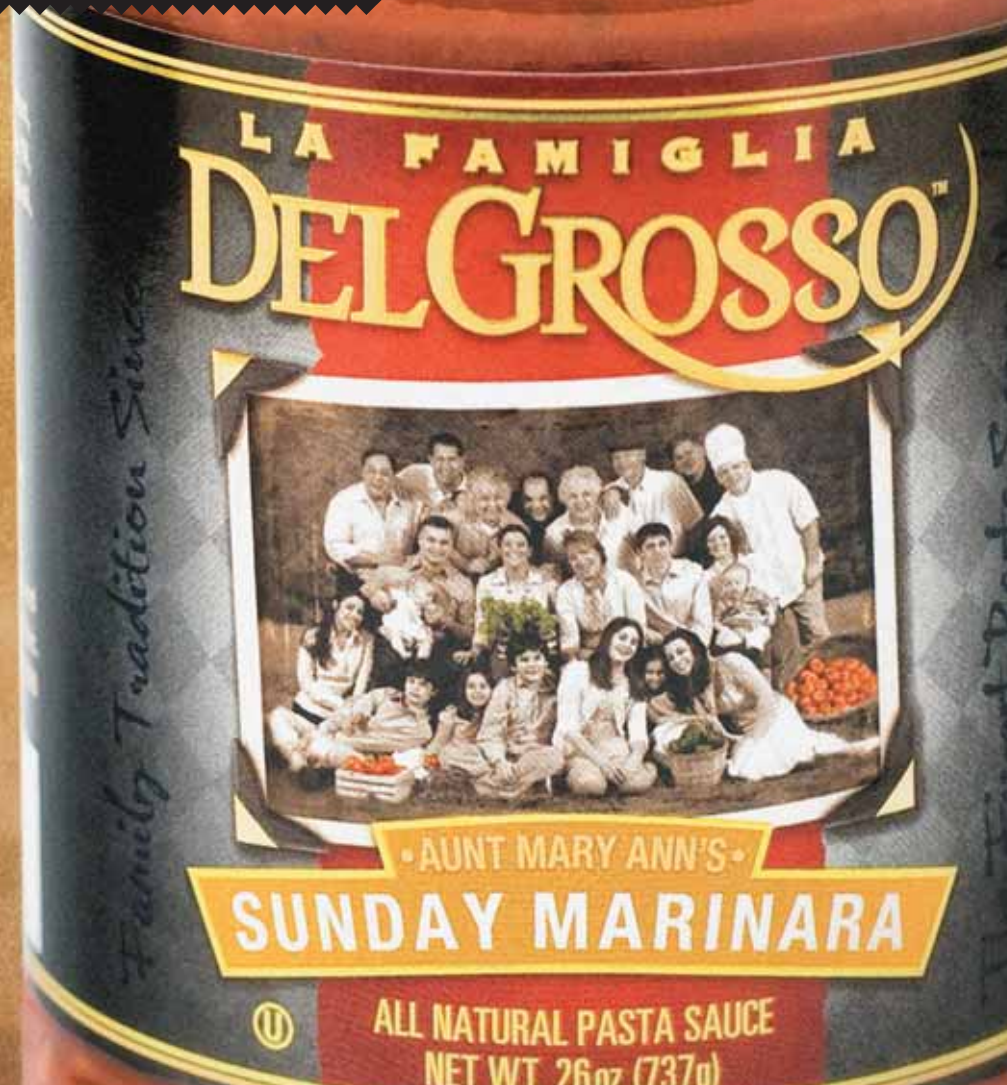


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The tasting's six Italian wines from the Wine Spectator's top 25 list for 2018.

# Tasting the **TOP** Shelf

By Dick Rosano

“That’s the way life is,” the bartender said of the wines at the tasting. We were discussing prices and scores, and which mattered most. “It all depends...” he said with his voice trailing off, hardly concealing his professional talent for evasion.

He’s right. Scores matter for wines, movies, dishwashers, and everything else. So does price, especially for transient pleasures like wine drinking.

“But, then,” the barkeep continued, “some pleasures are too precious to forego.” I think we were still talking about wine. Still, he was right again.

Decisions about buying wine must serve several masters – sometimes in the same person. There’s the practical self who wants bottles that could be opened on any given night, then there’s the romantic dreamer self who wants a splurge bottle or two.

## Wine Spectator’s Leading 2018 Italian Wines

*Wine Spectator* publishes its Top 100 each year and the January 2019 list (for the wines of 2018) proved how easily Italian wines can fill the top shelf of anyone’s wine collection. In fact, Italian wines came in 1st, 3rd, and 9th, and filled 6 of the top 15 spots and 9 of the top 25. We had the opportunity to taste through the best of the best from this list, six of its Italian wines that prominently featured Tuscan entries but included one from Piedmont. Here are the results of the tasting: ➤





Kobrand  
Kobrand



Produttori del Barbaresco



Produttori del Barbaresco



Kobrand

Clockwise from left: Sassicaia vats at San Guido; Priscilla Incisa della Rochetta, co-owner of Tenuta San Guido and daughter of Nicoló; Asili vineyard within the village of Barbaresco; Aldo Vacca, managing director of the Produttori del Barbaresco in Italy's Piemonte region; Nicoló Incisa della Rocchetta, director of Tenuta San Guido, producer of world-famous Tuscan Sassicaia wines.



**Tenuta San Guido**  
**2015 Sassicaia (\$245)**  
**(Wine Spectator rank: #1)**

The origins of this wine can be traced to the 1920s, when the Marchese Mario Incisa della Rocchetta first imagined it — an Italian wine made from Cabernet Sauvignon, the principal grape in French Bordeaux wines. From the 1940s through the 1960s, however, Sassicaia was considered too atypical to command attention among Italian wine connoisseurs. Later, consumers began to understand the need to age this magnificent wine and, in 1968, Sassicaia enjoyed a coming out that would rival a coronation. The result was brilliant, supple, velvety wines that stand among the classics every year.

**Tasting Notes:** Rich and focused, with black currant and black cherry aromas; notes of violet and soft spice laced throughout; flavors of plum and raspberry with an elegant whiff of tobacco smoke and oak.

**Score: 97 (importer: Kobrand)**

**Carpineto**  
**2013 Vino Nobile di**  
**Montepulciano Riserva (\$30)**  
**(Wine Spectator rank: #11)**

Giovanni Carlo Sacchet and Antonio Mario Zaccheo originally conceived of Carpineto in 1967 to fulfill their dream of producing the Chianti Classico that would reach international attention. As good as the Chianti from this property is, it was the Vino Nobile di Montepulciano Riserva that got mentioned in the *Wine Spectator* Top 100 list at #11. Made primarily from Sangiovese (70 percent) and rounded out with Canaiolo and other grapes, this wine offers exquisitely balanced fruit and earth accents.

**Tasting Notes:** Rich bouquet of violets, red cherry, currant and wet leather, ebullient fruit flavors with soft tannins, velvety textures, and hints of clove and cinnamon.

**Score: 95 (importer: Opici)**

**Produttori del Barbaresco**  
**2013 Barbaresco Rabaja**  
**Riserva (\$66)**  
**(Wine Spectator rank: #13)**

Produttori del Barbaresco has been wowing serious wine drinkers for decades. It is a cooperative of producers whose consistently high quality leaves no doubt about the singular prominence of Barbaresco in the Italian wine firmament.

Although *Wine Spectator* featured the vineyard-specific Rabaja Riserva, its popularity and the estate's long and storied reputation led to a run on supplies, making it impossible to track down. Yet, knowing the cooperative's incredible track record, we substituted the non-vineyard-specific bottling (\$42) for this tasting, another truly remarkable and rewarding wine.

**Tasting Notes:** First impression is of cherry, cranberry, flint and leather, followed by bright fruit flavors and a bit of smoke on finish. A supremely elegant wine with a long, silky finish.  
**Score: 93 (importer: Vias Imports)**

# VERTICAL BRUNELLO

Canalicchio di Sopra  
1995 Brunello di Montalcino



Don Oldenburg

Dominic Nocerino at Vinifera Imports has an entire portfolio of impressive wines, and he was anxious to share multiple vintages of the Canalicchio di Sopra Brunello di Montalcino. In addition to the 2013 that was reviewed by the *Wine Spectator* and in these pages, we had the opportunity to dive way back into some other vintages.

**Canalicchio di Sopra**  
**1995 Brunello di Montalcino**  
**(no market price available).**

Medium brick red color shows its age, but the aromas are still forward and redolent of dried cranberries and toast. Fruit flavors boast maturity of the wine, with a hint of tobacco, toast, and tar as accents on the back palate. Remarkably present and forward for a wine that is 24 years old. Proof that these wines should be aged.

**Score: 96**



Winebow



Produttori del Barbaresco

Clockwise from upper left: Detail from Asili, an historic vineyard in Barbaresco; harvest at San Felice vineyards; Renzo Cotarella, chief enologist and CEO at Marchesi Antinori; The Tenuta Tignanello estate, in the heart of the Chianti Classico; Barbaresco vineyards



Antinori



Antinori

**Canalicchio di Sopra**  
**2013 Brunello di Montalcino (\$79)**  
**(Wine Spectator rank: #15)**

The first bottle of Brunello produced at this property was the 1966 vintage, the vision of Primo Pacenti. Now, more than a half century later, the third generation of the family follows that vision, blending tradition and innovation to ensure that the wines of the estate continue to attract attention from serious wine consumers. (Some of the legendary wines from here are explored in the sidebar.)

**Tasting Notes:** Notes of cherry, cranberry and mineral on nose and palate. Well balanced, with hints of tobacco, spice and dark chocolate; richly textured.

**Score: 96 (importer: Vinifera Imports)**

**San Felice**  
**2016 Chianti Classico (\$17)**  
**(Wine Spectator rank: #19)**

There was a time in the 1970s and 1980s that innovative wineries were blending non-indigenous varieties into the wines they produced in Tuscany. Piero Antinori's Tignanello and Marchese Mario Incisa della Rocchetta's Sassicaia — both reviewed here — have been and still are historic examples of what can be accomplished with talented experimentation. But the indigenous grapes of the region were not forgotten, especially by estates like San Felice who foreswore foreign grapes in favor of varietals like Colorino and Pugnitello. The fabulous results of the wine leave little argument.

**Tasting Notes:** Pure fruit scents, including cherry and currant, soft textures, fruit flavors reminiscent of plums and black currant; accents of earth, black pepper and tobacco.  
**Score: 94 (importer: Winebow)**

**Antinori**  
**2015 Tignanello (\$135)**  
**(Wine Spectator rank: #24)**

It would be nearly impossible to find a list of the best Italian wines that didn't include Antinori's Tignanello or, for that matter, a number of the family's other show-stopping classics. As noted above, Tignanello was in the forefront of the drive to abandon the stuffy Italian labeling laws, a resistance movement that demanded freedom to blend with foreign grapes if wines could be made more interesting as a result. The first Tignanello — the 1971 vintage — paved the way for many more international styles to follow.

**Tasting Notes:** Immense in structure and body. First impression is of black currant and blackberry aromas and flavors highlighted by soft notes of lead pencil and herbs. Soft spice and a hint of leather bring out the intense red fruit flavors. **Score: 97 (importer: Ste. Michelle Wine Estates) ▲**

**Canalicchio di Sopra**  
**2012 Brunello di Montalcino**  
**Riserva (\$140).**

Fragrant and forward, featuring deep plum and cherry aromas accented by earth and smoke. A firm thread of acidity laces through the bounteous dark red fruit flavors on an elegant frame.  
**Score: 96**

Another sterling example of the wines from this estate is the **2017 Rosso di Montalcino (\$35)**. A medium-bodied version of the bigger Brunello, this wine offers a gentle touch of strawberry and cherry, well-balanced and elegant.  
**Score: 90**

*Dick Rosano's columns have appeared for many years in The Washington Post and other national publications. His novels are set in Italy and capture the beauty of the country, the flavors of the cuisine, and the history and traditions of the people. See his new novel, Vivaldi's Girls, or recently published works: A Death in Tuscany, The Secret of Altamura, A Love Lost in Positano, Hunting Truffles, or To Rome, With Love.*





Verida played by Verida Beitta Ahmed Deiche

# A Weighty film

Director Michela Occhipinti's  
*Flesh Out* Looks at West African  
Beauty Standards

By Maria Garcia

Beach scene from *Flesh Out*

Michela Occhipinti's skillfully directed debut feature is about a young Mauritanian woman preparing for her wedding. Unlike many American brides who diet before the ceremony, Verida (Verida Beitta Ahmed Deiche) awakens at dawn so that she can eat many times a day. The bridegroom her parents have chosen for her prefers obese women, so Verida submits to the traditional practice of *gavage* (forced feeding). In three months' time, she is expected to gain 45 pounds.

Photos courtesy of Vivo film and the Tribeca Film Festival

*Flesh Out* screened at the 2019 Tribeca Film Festival in New York City, where Occhipinti spoke with *Ambassador*. “A few years ago, I started seeing lines on my face, and I realized I was aging,” the Italian filmmaker says. She is tri-lingual, and speaks in English. “At first, I felt it was quite natural. Then, I started seeing the lines as ugly, and I thought: who says lines are ugly and no lines are beautiful? I started looking at other women, and noticing the implants and the botox, and the crazy diets to get into *those* pants, but who said you have to wear *those* pants?”

While pondering the ravages of aging, Occhipinti came across a story about *gavage* in an Italian magazine. She was at first repulsed by the tradition that is overseen by the bride’s mother.

The hypocrisy inherent in that judgment, in the writer-director’s mind, was quickly followed by a profound sense of irony. “What we Westerners do is the exactly same thing,” she observes. “Women are constantly trying to change what nature gave them. The difference is that rather than the thinness we call beauty, in Mauritania, it’s corpulence—it is both attractive and a sign of wealth.”

Initially, Occhipinti set out to make a feature-length documentary.

“During my research, I met many Mauritanian girls and women, all of whom had different stories,” Occhipinti says. “How could I get all of it in one documentary? It was one of those cases where if I had made a documentary, it would be less true or less realistic than a fictional film.”

*Flesh Out* begins with Verida meeting her friends in a café, and visiting her grandmother’s beauty shop where she works part-time. Although clad in an *abaya*, and a veiled head covering, Verida is an ordinary teenager. She listens to music, likes fashion, and dreams of being an actress. Her closest companion, Amal (Amal Saab Bouh Oumar), is a twice-married and twice-divorced woman who is applying for admission to a Cairo technical school. In the complex and stratified society of Mauritania, both Verida and Amal are distinguished as “white moors,” of Berber descent; they speak Hassaniya, a Mauritanian dialect of Arabic. Amal’s skin is slightly darker than Verida’s, and she bleaches it; in a country where the darker citizens, the “black moors,” are slaves, Amal’s skin is considered less attractive.

Occhipinti, who co-wrote her screenplay with Simona Coppini, has four other films to her credit, including

a 2010 feature-length documentary with Coppini, *Letters From the Desert (Eulogy to Slowness)*. Despite her many years in the industry, raising money for *Flesh Out* was difficult. “Funders wanted to know how a European woman could film this narrative,” she says. “I explained that I wanted to tell a story about something that I find in *my* society but in an antithetical way.” Occhipinti has roots in Tunisia and Algiers; her grandmother was French, and she lived in several African countries as a child.

*Flesh Out* is set in Nouakchott, the capital of Mauritania, where Occhipinti shot on location with a small crew that included female cinematographer Daria D’Antonio. The city is not a presence in the movie. “Life is mostly lived indoors because of the desert climate,” she explains, “but also while there is patriarchy in the society, the home is a matriarchy. It was important to film there.”

Occhipinti’s cast is comprised of amateurs, including Verida, who in real life submitted to *gavage* before her first marriage. Verida’s sister in the film is her actual sibling, and the star’s mother is portrayed by an aunt. “I needed a real family because I wanted them to interact in a natural way,” Occhipinti explains. ➤



Scene at Verida’s grandmother’s beauty shop



The filmmaker's unusual childhood gave her some appreciation for the challenges she would face as a white woman working in an African country, and an Islamic republic, but the lack of a Westernized filmmaking infrastructure in Mauritania posed other problems. Casting calls are uncommon, and



Filmmaker Michela Occhipinti

permits are required for filming outdoors, even with a handheld camera, which would not be the case in most Western countries.

Occhipinti's first meeting with Verida was serendipitous. "I was looking for a pair of eyes that could talk to me," she says. "I felt an immediate connection to her." Verida was on her second marriage, and had become a mother, by the time production began.

In the course of movie, Verida becomes disillusioned with *gavage*, at first because she is not gaining weight fast enough. "In that culture, kids are obedient, and Verida also loves

her mother and wants to please her," Occhipinti says.

After a few weeks, the dutiful daughter raises her voice when her mother awakens her too early in the day. "That is sure sign of rebellion," the filmmaker says, "and then her mother shows her the alternative if she resists." Verida is brought to a desert tent for girls who are equally conflicted about the ritual; there she sees them being tortured and forced to eat their own vomit.

While Mauritanian women are subject to arranged marriages as teenagers, it is customary for them to marry and divorce many times—and previously married women are prized brides. This implies a certain amount of sexual freedom, although that is an illusion: as in other Islamic countries, Mauritanian women, in addition to force-feeding, are widely subject to female genital mutilation. Sidi (Sidi Mohamed Chighaly), a young man who weighs Verida periodically, and reports back to the groom's family, grows to admire her. "He sees her suffering," Occhipinti says. "She is also flattered because Sidi likes her the way she is." Their friendship is forbidden, but they

find ways to see each other.

"There may not be complete freedom there," the filmmaker says, "but we are not free either." *Flesh Out* nevertheless takes a feminist stance, portraying *gavage* as a misogynistic practice. "I felt more free before making this film," Occhipinti says. "Freedom is a very complicated thing. I have questions now in my mind that I am not able to completely answer. It is too simple to say that we are free or they are not. Cultures are too nuanced for that."

While the movie has a decidedly equivocal ending, Occhipinti insists that is unintentional. "My idea was not that my film ends in a sad way," she says. "Whatever the audience thinks, I hope they will understand that Verida, in the last moment, is finally herself." ▲

*Maria Garcia is a New York City-based author, writer and frequent contributor to Ambassador magazine. Her reviews and feature articles also appear regularly in the Los Angeles Times and Cineaste. Her book, Cinematic Quests for Identity: The Hero's Encounter with the Beast, was published in 2015. Visit her Facebook page, MariaGarciaNYC.*



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# the Summer Italian American Reader



Casa San  
Domenico in Noto

*For our inaugural Summer Travel issue's books section, we have tossed the clichéd "beach reading" concept to the warm humid winds and instead are going knee deep into an eclectic mix of fiction, nonfiction and, simply, the fabulous. If we limited our summer reading to beach time alone, we'd be an illiterate lot of beach bums—which, yes, has a certain appeal, but not here and not now. One day, maybe.*

*So, take a look, beach or no beach. Some of these books are critically acclaimed and scribed by international renowned authors, while others await your discovery. They're all written by Italian American or Italian authors, or otherwise are of interest to Italian American readers.*

*Check out the book covers and the telling sentence or two that gives some idea of what you'll find inside each book's pages.*

*Buona lettura!*

— Don Oldenburg



Dimora delle Balze





## Magnificent Interiors Of Sicily: Val Di Noto

By Samuele Mazza  
Rizzoli International Publications  
244 pages; \$65 hardcover

*This book is a story told less with words than through a visual and aesthetic experience. It is a book that wants to express through images sensations that are hard to put into words.... It is a journey through the streets, alleys, and terraces, and through the homes, palaces, rural estates, and farmhouses brought back to splendor. Modernity has arrived here on tiptoes, always respectful of what it has found; it has insinuated itself into a centuries-old story impossible to erase.*



Casa Rachel in Noto

Once in a while, a book comes along that not only so charmingly captures the significance, essence and aesthetic value of a particular place, but proves so mesmerizing that you cannot resist picking it up again and again, to contemplate the exquisite photography, to reconsider the uplifting story of what happened there, over centuries and ongoing even today, that re-imagined a calamity-stricken Sicilian town into the vibrant, monumental city.

The fourth largest municipality in Italy, extending in southeast Sicily from the Iblean highlands to the Ionian Sea, Val di Noto is an area and city abundant with stunning landscapes and architectural wonders. From the start, the book establishes its photographic splendor with a show-stopper image of the Infiorata of Noto—the famous event in May that transforms the city and its stairways into a colossal flower garden. That's followed a few pages later with a striking photo of the city's architectural phenomenon the "Stone Garden." Both are just a hint of the visual spectacles to come.

But don't be so enamored by the photos to skip by the excellent overview of Noto by Richard Engel, chief foreign correspondent at NBC News, who first found Noto as a 16-year-old high schooler studying abroad and, a couple decades later, returned to find the city's rehab in full progress. "Noto is exaggerated. It is a strong taste," writes Engel, who returns there often. "After all these years Noto remains a magical place for me, a grand Baroque city in miniature perched on a hill."

But this book isn't a travelogue so much as an immersion that goes well beyond the tourist allure. Instead, it looks inside Noto's extraordinary homes and its idyllic country residences, farms and villas. Rebuilt largely in the late Baroque style in the early 18th century following the tragic 1693 earthquake that razed the area, and then hit by a modern-day earthquake, Noto's amazing rebirth is a testament to the inspiration, spirit and imagination that can transform and regenerate a devastated community.

The book is divided into two main sections—the Noblesse Oblige section opens doors to 16 remarkable villas and palazzos in Noto itself; and the Country

Freedom section visits 22 residences in the beautiful nearby rural areas.

In the city, start with Palazzo Nicolaci, in Noto's heart of the baroque. Considered one of the most beautiful residences in Sicily, the palazzo was completed in 1765 and, today, remains the picturesque town's most photographed building. Its Hotel Seven Rooms Villadorata was established in 2008 as a "maison de charme," a renewal of the place respecting its authenticity and original beauty. Also, within the city's ancient walls are inspired modern quarters and working spaces of artists: Step into the home and studio of the renowned Catanese artist Sergio Fiorentino. Once the old refectory of the Cistercian abbey whose earthquake-destroyed origins date to 1212 but rebuilt by 1749, it is now an open space setting for Fiorentino's large face paintings.

And, then, there's the rustic of Feudo del Castelluccio, in the bucolic countryside, where famous fashion designer Luisa Beccaria and her husband Lucio Bonaccorsi, whose ancestors were the Marquesses of Castelluccio, gave this manor new life.

Outside the city, amid Val di Noto's countryside steeped in the richness and beauty of olive groves, eucalyptus forests, and mountain pines, is an ongoing parallel renewal. Consider Dimora delle Balze, an elegant country house, surrounded by gardens, ancient columns and terraces, with numerous rooms inside whose frescoes date to the Risorgimento, it's charm, like so much of Noto's, harmonizing the traditional and the contemporary.

Besides brief introductions describing the locales, villas and houses in town and in the country, this magnificent coffee-table-sized book allows its sparkling, intriguing and eye-locking photography to speak for itself, forgoing even captions in most cases. An oversight? No, insight. Every photo demands attention to details—because there are so many wonderful details.

Whether you've never heard of Sicily's Val di Noto, or have never been there, Samuele Mazza's *Magnificent Interiors Of Sicily: Val Di Noto* not only informs you, it might change your upcoming itinerary.

— Don Oldenburg ➤





**La Passione:**  
**How Italy Seduced the World**  
 By Dianne Hales  
 Crown Archetype  
 320 pages; \$26 hardcover

*In a country awash in tangible delights, anyone can see, hear, touch, caress, sip, smell, and bite into la passione italiana.*

Following her bestselling *La Bella Lingua: My Love Affair with Italian, the World's Most Enchanting Language* and *Mona Lisa: A Life Discovered*, Dianne Hales takes a joyful deep dive into the great range of cultural gifts Italy has given to the world. As she sees it, *La Passione* is the driving force behind such wonders as ancient Roman temples, Renaissance masterpieces, opera, poetry, parmesan cheese, Venetian glass, and Ferraris.

Memoir and history lessons are masterfully blended, as Hales traverses the boot, encountering scholars, craftsmen and food artisans on her quest to discover fascinating backstories of Italian treasures.

It's a delight to follow in her footsteps, whether she's awestruck in Trapani at a traditional Easter procession or swooning over contemporary fashion designs at the Armani/Silos in Milan. Her chapters on Italy's beloved poets, artists, and composers include juicy biographical details—from the randy love life of Ovid, to Caravaggio's "devil be damned" exploits, and Verdi's tumultuous relationship with his muse, opera singer Giuseppina Strepponi.

Strepponi is one of many female

heroines Hales weaves into the text, telling stories of powerful women of Italy's past, such as painter Suora Nelli and Marchesa Giulia Colbert, "Mother of Barolo Wine." Adding deliciousness, she recounts visits to chocolate makers in Perugia, attics where balsamic vinegars are produced in Modena, and pasta, prosciutto and parmesan makers of Emilia Romagna.

Ultimately, *La Passione* is an abundant banquet of inspiration, connecting readers to Italy's authentic heart and soul.

— Susan Van Allen

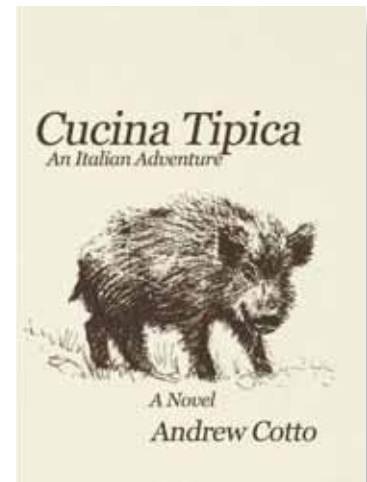
**Cucina Tipica:**  
**An Italian Adventure**  
 By Andrew Cotto  
 Black Rose Writing; 281 pages  
 \$19.95 paperback

*The metal box and its belongings were the only things Jacoby retained from the cottage. He gave the jewelry to Claire and kept the photograph to himself.*

Andrew Cotto's third novel, *Cucina Tipica: An Italian Adventure*, takes you on a savory Italian journey through Florence and its surroundings with delectable food, vino and beautiful scenery—sans recipes. Instead, the book itself is a recipe for adventure, featuring dispirited central character Jacoby Pines who hungers for a new life, good food and wine, and an answer. A former rock-band guitarist and fired PR consultant from New York City, Pines goes through his father's belongings after his death and finds a metal box that contains a photo of a mysterious woman.

Cotto writes: "The back of the photo read: Villa Floria-Zanobini, 1939."

What's Pines connection to the photo? You'll go on a non-stop, food-laced excursion to find the answer. From the moment Pines arrives in Italy with his fiancé, Claire, a freelance travel writer, the search is on—with engaging characters and intriguing scenarios. Paolo tends to the olive trees at Pines' rental villa and makes fantastic pizzas; Claire's cousin and fellow Brit, Dolores, a humorous character despises dullness. And Bill,



an ex-pat American who manages The Hotel Floria-Zanobini, plays a key role in the action—and also slow-cooks a flavorful *cinghiale* (boar) *ragù* for the *sagra*.

*Cucina Tipica* (typical cuisine) gives you the sense that Italy is calling, and you'll discover if Pines' heart belongs there, too. With fantastic writing, Cotto delivers a compelling contemporary adventure.

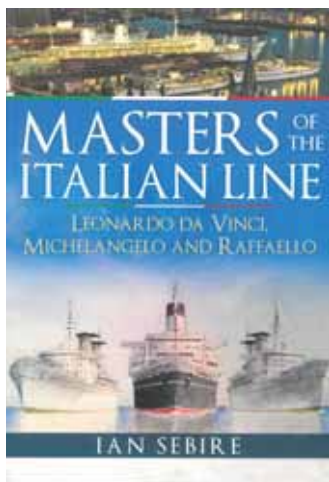
— Robert Fanelli Bartus Jr.

**Masters of the Italian Line:**  
**Leonardo Davinici, Michelangelo and Raffaello**  
 By Ian Sebire  
 Amberly Publishing  
 96 pages; \$24.95 paperback

*Releasing a multi-colored stream of balloons, dressed overall and with a reverberating serenade from all the ships whistles in the harbor, including Michelangelo, it was one of the most memorable send-offs the great port had ever witnessed.*

In his first book, *Masters of the Italian Line*, Ian Sebire demonstrates a vast knowledge and understanding of the history of "the great liners of the past." A regular contributor to the worldwide shipping magazines *Shipping Today and Yesterday* and *Seabreezes*, he is a respected expert on 20th-century oceanic liners. Sebire is also renowned for his artistic talent as a painter, with watercolor prints and greeting cards of famous ocean liners sold on maritime voyages of today.

The focus of this book is on the



onboard, Sebire examines every facet of these three Italian ships.

Throughout the history of transatlantic travel, advancements in technology, shipwrecks, engineering flaws, and a hope for a better life have lent to a fascinating tale of woe and celebration. From the shipwreck of the Andrea Doria to the final days of these three ships, *Masters of the Italian Line* tells a captivating episode from the larger history of transatlantic ocean liners.

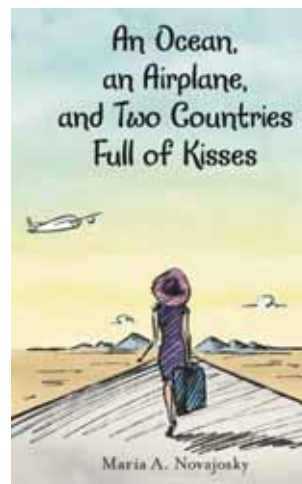
—Joseph Enzler

post-World War II era of luxury transatlantic oceanic cruise ships, and in particular the last three ship “builds” of the Italian line. It’s a detailed account of 20th-century oceanic liners, coupling historical perspective and intricate details with photos, paintings, and 1960s-era magazine advertisements, that makes for an informative and entertaining read. From explaining the complex engineering required for each ships’ construction, to recounting the experience of life

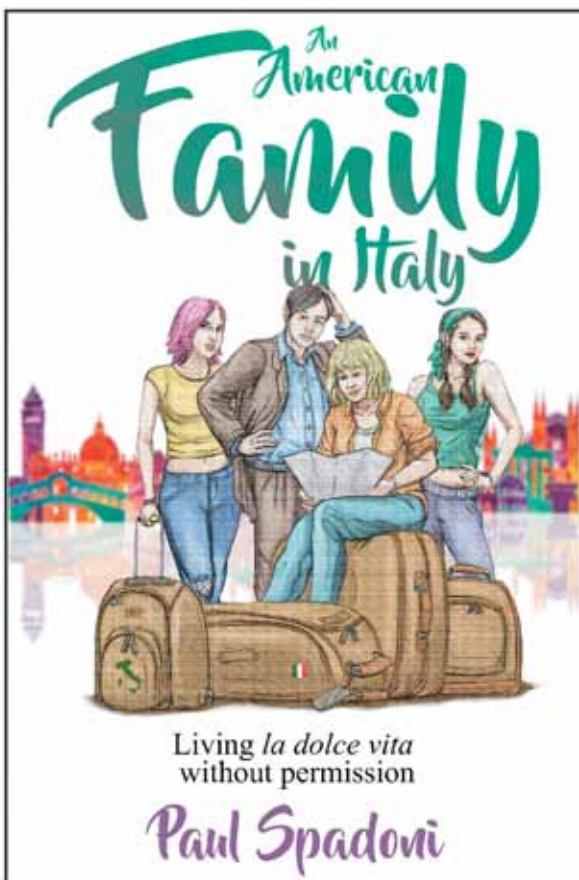
### AN OCEAN, AN AIRPLANE, AND TWO COUNTRIES FULL OF KISSES

By Maria A. Novajosky  
Lulu Publishing Services  
91 pages; \$13 paperback

*I could hear her voice in every word of each and every letter. Yes, still today, even after she’s been gone for so many years. Unlike photos which capture a single moment in time, written words are fluid. They move and travel and delve deeper into the soul.*



Maria A. Novajosky began life in Italy with her nonna, but in her adolescence, moved to the United States and found herself in Georgia. Despite living in the Deep South, so geographically and culturally far from their beloved Verona, she and her family continued many traditions they began in Italy, such as making home-cooked meals, attending Sunday mass, and, every week, reading a letter from Nonna. These letters allowed Maria and her family to feel at home. ➤



**CAUTION: Purchase may cause strong desire to book flight to Italy!**

“An American family spends a year in Italy—a dream, a disaster, laughter and tears, an unforgettable memory.”

—Maria Coletta McLean, author

“Anyone who has Italy in their blood should read this adventure. It will take you here vicariously until you have time to come in person.”

—Elena Benvenuti, Italian tour guide

“Wonderful humor about the pitfalls of uprooting your family to live in Italy make this a heartwarming joy to read.”

—Lizzie Harwood, author



In Italy, and even during breaks from school in the United States, Maria would go see Nonna and continue their adventures, seeing her first opera, making the treacherous drive out of Verona, and chatting with every person she and Nonna encountered. Nonna always found a way to nourish and love her family.

By the time Nonna passed away in 2006, Maria had amassed a large collection of her letters, recounting her daily activities and spreading bits of love to everyone. She always provided helpful pieces of advice, from keeping a clean house and facing challenges head-on, to cooking rich food and embracing wanderlust.

*An Ocean, an Airplane, and Two Countries Full of Kisses* recounts the Italian way of life through the eyes of a young girl who, guided by the loving advice and wisdom of her nonna, adjusts to a life-changing move. The author grows up to become a mother of three, a blogger about Italy and her Italian American life, and a guide of tours to Italy. Maria still lives in Geor-

gia, and her nonna's advice still lives on to teach something to every reader of this sweet book.

—Emily Curran

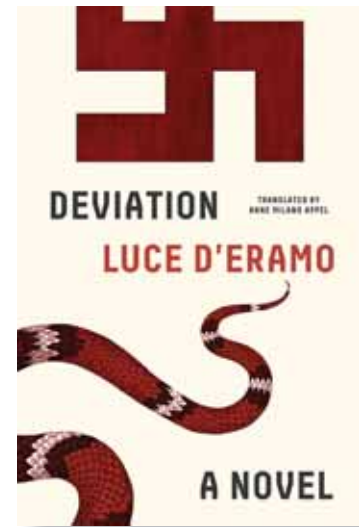
**Deviation: A Novel**

By Luce D'Eramo  
Translated by Anne Milano Appel  
Farrar, Strauss and Giroux;  
368 pages; \$27 hardcover

*A chestnut tumbles to the ground, its spines break, its husk splits open, the round, well-formed fruit emerges, smooth and firm. I too entered the world wearing a spiny outer shell; will I ever be able to shuck the husk of preconceptions under which I was hiding?*

A harrowing account of Nazi camps from the viewpoint of an Italian Fascist volunteer, *Deviation* chronicles Luce D'Eramo's naïve attempt as a teenager to disprove the horrors of labor camps during Hitler's Third Reich.

When D'Eramo leaves Northern Italy in February 1944, she hopes to free herself from the husks of her



stultifying yet privileged position as a Fascist bureaucrat's daughter. Instead, her beliefs get destroyed by unending hell in the Nazi nightmare. Voluntarily slipping into a group of deportees to Dachau, D'Eramo manages to escape in October 1944.

In February 1945, her life takes another tragic turn in Mainz, when a wall collapses on her as she rescues a family

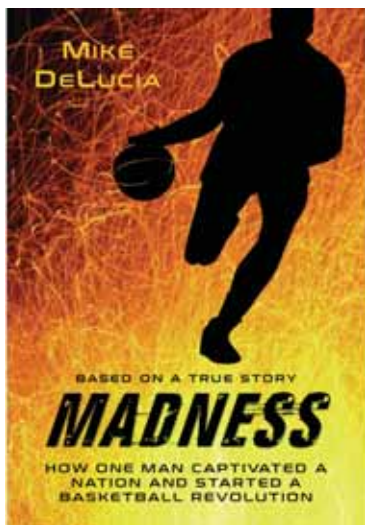
**“Dick Rosano stages mysteries with the insider knowledge, finesse and flare of the accomplished wine, food and travel writer he is. And it all happens in Italy!”**

**Secrets hidden from the Nazis in 1943 are sought by an art collector in modern-day Italy. Evil stalks those who try to reveal it.**

**The slain bodies of truffle hunters are showing up. An investigation finds that the multi-million dollar truffle harvest has been stolen.**

**A young man mourns the suspicious death of his grandfather while preparing to take the reins of his family's winery in Tuscany.**

**All books are available on Amazon.com and numerous other book outlets. For more information, visit [www.DickRosanoBooks.com](http://www.DickRosanoBooks.com).**



from a crumbled house. Paralyzed from the waist down, she faces personal horror after barely surviving evil.

A worldwide bestseller following its original publishing in Italian in 1979, *Deviation* includes a useful translator's introduction. From it, we learn the tale told in four non-linear parts is D'Eramo's attempt to free herself, psychically, if not physically, from the

prisons of both mind and body.

Readers interested in Holocaust literature, autobiographical fiction, and writing after trauma may withstand the twists of this unflinchingly painful, lucidly told, and unrelentingly honest story.

— Kirsten Keppel

### Madness: The Man Who Changed Basketball

By Mike DeLucia  
DeLucia; 157 pages  
\$10.99 paperback

*He practices his drills, day after day, and the days pile as high as that Russian Hill Street he dribbles up and down for years.*

If life is a little hectic and you're in the mood for a feel-good book, read Mike DeLucia's historical fiction novel *Madness: The Man Who Changed Basketball*. DeLucia's engaging writing will transport you to the 1920s-1930s and introduce you to one of the greatest players in the game that you

probably never heard of—Angelo “Hank” Luisetti.

Luisetti? Yes, the Galileo High School graduate changed and revolutionized the game by creating the running one-handed shot on San Francisco's playgrounds and gymnasiums. He was a three-time All-American at Stanford, and the first college player to score 50 points in a game.

DeLucia weaves a story about Luisetti's hoops-playing career with splendid storytelling. Although this novel's theme is about basketball, you'll get more. Pages flowing with Luisetti's love for the game and the love of his life, Connie. The relationship between him and his father, Stefano, who wanted to plan his son's future that didn't include basketball. A fantastic group of supporting characters, including players, coaches and family, plus some wonderful play-by-play descriptions, bring the action on the hardwood to your page-turning fingertips.

— Robert Fanelli Bartus Jr. ▶



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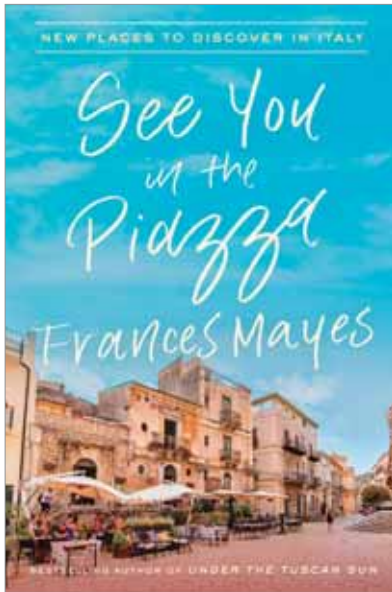
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**See You in the Piazza:**  
**New Places to Discover in Italy**  
 By Frances Mayes  
 Crown  
 410 pages; \$27 hardcover

*Is there a square inch of Tuscany that's unexplored? Yes. I constantly hear of towns I don't know. Hundreds of borghi remain out of sight. We've found that roaming the back roads yields pleasures equal to the delights of well-visited places because without preconception the sense of discovery intensifies.*

For those not traveling to Italy this summer, this book the perfect armchair travel experience as Mayes guides you through undiscovered gems of Italy providing an intimate view of the local charm and authentic daily life most overrun tourist spots have lost touch with.

Mayes embarks on a journey from Friuli to Sicily following the *Bandiere Arancioni*, Orange Flags, which are awarded to lesser known villages deemed especially attractive, historic and interesting. There are more than 200 flagged villages, which is what

Mayes and her husband aim to see, traveling to 13 of Italy's 20 regions. Mayes also partners with talented chefs she meets along the way to contribute contemporary Italian recipes to her book that readers can prepare at home.

She makes the unfamiliar familiar as she describes the food, wines, history and culture of each place with enthusiastically keen observations and humor that are rare to traditional guidebooks.

To emphasize the awestruck wonder of Italy's breathtaking landmarks and landscapes throughout *See You in the Piazza*, Mayes and her husband joke about being overtaken by the Florence syndrome, which is a condition involving dizziness and hypnotization allegedly occurring when individuals are exposed to objects of great beauty.

Mayes' descriptions may also inflict the Florence syndrome upon her readers, causing them to become hypnotized by the beauty described in this book to travel to Italy to experience places even most Italians have not yet discovered.

— Natalie Wulderk ▲

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Roma



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# MLB Play-by-Play: Behind the Scenes

By Wayne Randazzo

If you're a baseball fan, you may have thought to yourself what it would be like to work in the game. Maybe you've wondered about being an usher at the ballpark, a hot-dog vendor, the starting shortstop or one of the team's broadcasters. I'm here to share with you some of my experience as a radio play-by-play announcer for the New York Mets.

This year is my fifth year as a member of the Mets esteemed radio crew. After four years of hosting the pre- and post-game shows, and filling in on the play-by-play side, this is my first behind the mic for every Mets game.

I'm fortunate to share the booth with a few figures of Mets lore. My partner is Howie Rose, who has been a part of the Mets broadcast crew in one form or another since 1987, when I was three years old. He's much more than just the New York broadcasting icon I'm fortunate to sit next to during every game. Howie has become a mentor, a confidant and a friend. He has helped me become a better broadcaster, and I would not be where I am without his guidance.

Howie and I are flanked by a couple of other well-known figures among Mets fans. Ed Coleman is the pre-game show host—a role he held many years when the Mets flagship station was WFAN where he'd been since 1987. With the games now on WCBS-AM, Ed's back in the booth.

We would never even make it on the air without our producer and engineer Chris Majkowski, who hasn't missed a Mets regular season game since August 1993—a true Iron Man! When he started producing the games, the Mets radio team was Ford Frick, and award winner Bob Murphy, who was part of the first Mets announcer trio in 1962, and Gary Cohen, who is now the Mets television voice on SNY.

A typical 7:10 p.m. game time means getting to the ballpark in the 3-o'clock hour when the clubhouse is open for opportunities to chat with the players, which can also occur during batting practice. The Mets manager, Mickey Callaway, typically gives his thoughts around 4 p.m. That's the perfect time to catch up on the daily happenings around the ball club.

One thing that fans may not truly appreciate is the daily grind of a baseball season. It is an everyday sport with few exceptions. Things tend to change quickly for several players and the team itself, daily or weekly, so it's important to get that time around the manager.

Once those conversations are done, it's time to head back to the booth and finish the prep. Preparing for a broadcast is an evolving job, especially when the opponents change every few days. Being up to date on the opponent is as vital as knowing what's going on with



Alyssa Rose

Howie Rose, Wayne Randazzo and Chris Majkowski

Wayne Randazzo

the Mets. This pregame prep also includes writing the lineups in my book and reading through the game notes provided by each team's media relations department.

The greatest and perhaps most challenging thing about a baseball broadcast is filling time between pitches. Howie makes that easy. Arizona's Eduardo Escobar likes Brazilian steakhouses. So does Howie! Mention that, and there's some time hilariously spent. Keeping our conversations light and comfortable is a big part of our broadcasts. No reason to force anything; I think listeners appreciate our conversational tone.

Baseball lends itself to storytelling. For example, Mets first baseman Pete Alonso tied Mark McGwire's rookie homerun record through May 31 with 19. I used to call games for the Double-A Mobile BayBears in the Southern League. They had a first baseman in 2011 named Paul Goldschmidt, who is now a perennial All-Star for the St. Louis Cardinals. Drawing the comparison between Goldschmidt then and Alonso now helps listeners gain perspective of the promise Alonso has shown in the big leagues.

While the travel can be grueling, the reward of broadcasting through a Major League Baseball season is unlike any other. I hope this has allowed you to gain some insight on what life is like in a big league booth.

Also, if you have any catchphrase ideas, please send me a note! After each Mets win, Howie yelps, "Put it in the books!" ▲

*Wayne Randazzo is a play-by-play announcer for New York Mets broadcasts on WCBS Newsradio 880. He's also a freelance television play-by-play announcer for FS1, ESPN and Big Ten Network, and the longtime sports columnist for Ambassador magazine.*



Mark Flamini



## Big Time in the Big Apple! NIAF's New York Gala



NIAF International Relations Liaison Carlo Piccolo, Rachel Salerno, Board Member Robert Carlucci and his wife Aileen Carlucci



Photography by © Jason Isolini

The National Italian American Foundation returned to the elegant and historic Cipriani 42nd Street for its annual New York Gala on April 9, where guests mingled between sweeping archways and grand golden curtains in the heart of Manhattan.

Italian and Italian Americans from New York and around the world filled the room in the sold-out event making it a lively, high-energy, annual event it has evolved into. During the cocktail reception, guests, VIPs and honorees enjoyed Cipriani's famous Bellini cocktails while bidding on NIAF's silent-auction collections.

The evening was a family affair. All three honorees brought their immediate and extended families to the red carpet and spoke poignantly on the importance *la famiglia* has played in their success. This year's master of ceremonies, radio talk-show host, former *Saturday Night Live* cast member, and NIAF Celebrity Ambassador Joe Piscopo, welcomed guests and introduced Monsignor Jamie J. Gigantiello of Mary Queen of Heaven Church in Brooklyn, who reminded everyone that the evening was a celebration of shared heritage: "We come together tonight to celebrate as one big Italian family."

The gifted Italian American 10-year-

old singer Romina Perri sang beautiful and moving renditions of the national anthems of the United States and Italy, filling the audience with admiration and awe for the young performer.

New York Gala Dinner Chairman Gerard S. LaRocca, a member of NIAF's Board of Directors, and chief administrative officer, Americas at Barclays Capital, thanked the Foundation's New York Committee and the evening's sponsors for making the NIAF New York Gala into the vibrant institution it is today. He also made the much-anticipated announcement that the 2019 Region of Honor is Molise, which has "a rich history of art and age-old tradition."

During the exquisite, three-course meal, Piscopo introduced the evening's first honoree, Marylou Delfino Berk, senior vice president at the Lefrak Commercial Real Estate Company, who received The National Italian American Foundation Special Achievement Award in Real Estate. Berk thoughtfully left at every seat a quote about determination from Daisaku Ikeda: "The moment you resolve to be victorious, every nerve and fiber in your being will immediately orient itself toward your success."

Retired Judge Frank M. Ciuffani

received The National Italian American Foundation Special Award in Public Service for his service on the New Jersey Superior Court and 40 years on the bench and in private practice. Judge Ciuffani credited his success to the Italian American community: "I wouldn't be where I am today without the help of other Italian Americans."

Lorenzo Zurino, founder and CEO of The One Company, received The National Italian American Foundation Special Achievement Award for Young Entrepreneur for his accomplishments in promoting Italian businesses abroad. The 34-year-old entrepreneur from Sorrento, Italy, spoke about moving to the United States on his own when he was 23, and creating the American Dream for himself.

The evening concluded with a selection of decadent desserts, and a message from NIAF's Co-Chairs Gabriel A. Battista and Patricia de Stacy Harrison, who thanked the crowd for its continued support of the important work the organization does in preserving Italian American heritage and funding the future of our community through grants and scholarships.

— Natalie Wulderk





NIAF Celebrity Ambassador and Master of Ceremonies Joe Piscopo



New York Gala Chairman and NIAF Executive Vice President Gerard LaRocca



NIAF's Co-Chairs Gabriel A. Battista and Patricia de Stacy Harrison



NIAF Co-Chair Gabriel A. Battista



Honoree Lorenzo Zurino



NIAF Board Member Dr. Antonio Giordano and his wife Mina Massaro Giordano



Honoree Marylou Delfino Berk



Joe Piscopo with honoree Judge Frank M. Ciuffani



Salvatore Salibello, Alma Laias, NIAF Secretary Linda Carlozzi, and Giuseppe Di Fuccia



David Greco, owner of Mike's Deli, on Arthur Avenue in the Bronx, with honoree Lorenzo Zurino



Romina Perri



Tony Lo Bianco and wife Alyse





## Congressional Bocce Ball Tournament

For the first time in years, on May 15, NIAF's seventh annual Congressional Bocce Ball Tournament had beautiful weather. Held in memory of former Board Member Mark Valente III, the tournament featured eight teams of participants from NIAF, the Embassy of Italy and the Italian American Congressional Delegation.

Venable LLP hosted the event at its headquarters in the Nation's Capital, on its gorgeous rooftop bocce court with a panoramic view of the city. Members of Congress came together to enjoy the much beloved and fun Italian game that has become a yearly NIAF tradition.

At sunset, the final round was a nail biter as Jon-Thomas Vitale and Jon Vitale, who are NIAF members and both work for CDS—a Xerox Agency, challenged last year's winners Congressmen Bill Pascrell and Mike Doyle for the championship. For the second year in a row, the Congressional duo prevailed, winning the tournament. This year, they took home shiny trophies to commemorate the exciting evening.

— Natalie Wulderk

Photos by Don Oldenburg



Paul Besozzi and Congressman Mike Doyle

### Champions of the 2019 Congressional Bocce Ball Tournament:

Congressmen Mike Doyle and Bill Pascrell



Congressman Bill Pascrell and NIAF da Vinci Council Member Jeanne Allen



Perennial champion Congressman Bill Pascrell with NIAF Co-Chairs Patricia de Stacy Harrison and Gabriel A. Battista



Flaminia Sacchetto takes a turn.



Veneable LLP Cara Gray and Italian Embassy Congressional Affairs Liaison Maria Francesca Nespoli Carlberg



Italian Embassy Congressional affairs counselor Paolo Toschi and NIAF General Counsel Joseph Lonardo



Above: Outgoing President of the Italian American Congressional Staff Association Geoff Browning with IACSA member Meghan Badame and IACSA Vice President Aaron Bill



### NIAF Vice Chair Anita Bevacqua McBride, Claudia Valente, and NIAF Chair Patricia de Stacy Harrison



Ambassador



Italian Embassy First Counselor Domenico Bellatone and Stefano Itri



## Spritz Social on Capitol Hill

On May 23, the Italian American community on Capitol Hill enjoyed NIAF's Spritz Social, celebrating the Italian American Congressional Staff Association (IACSA) and honoring its founding President Geoff D'Errico Browning, who after 11 years of public service on the Hill is leaving to work for the International Committee of the Red Cross.

NIAF Board and da Vinci Council Members, Italian diplomats and Congressional staffers welcomed new IACSA members. John Calvelli and Anita Bevacqua McBride, the Co-Chairs of NIAF's Government Affairs Committee, gave heartfelt opening remarks on what it means to be an Italian American in public service. Calvelli thanked sponsor Wine & Spirits Wholesalers of America for its generous donation of the popular Italian cocktail for the reception.

McBride presented Browning with a NIAF medal in gratitude for growing the IACSA membership, visibility and impact since 2015 to more than 400 members today. Browning acknowledged that "the hardest part about leaving Capitol Hill is my role and membership in IACSA."

Photos by Don Oldenburg

— Natalie Wulderk



Lamberto Moruzzi and Paolo Toschi of the Italian Embassy with John Calvelli and Chris Berardini



John Calvelli, Geoff Browning, Anita Bevacqua McBride and Aaron Bill



Carla DiBlasio and David Giordano



NIAF Vice Chair Anita Bevacqua McBride and outgoing IACSA President Geoff Browning



Jackie Cahan and Samantha Stiles



NIAF Vice Chair John Calvelli addresses the Spritz crowd



Cooper Mullinax, Dan Ashworth and Elisabeth Conklin



In the grand dining room at the Park Savoy Estate



Honoree U.S. Attorney for the District of New Jersey Craig Carpenito

## NIAF's College Scholarships Night

On May 29, the National Italian American Foundation hosted a regional fundraising dinner in New Jersey. Guests gathered at the Park Savoy Estate in Florham Park, N.J., to honor U.S. Attorney for the District of New Jersey Craig Carpenito.

The elegant venue's gardens, terrace and idyllic pond was the setting for cocktails and aperitivo of cannelloni, gnocchi with creamy pesto, and classic meats, cheeses and caprese salad. During dinner in the grand dining room, Bill Palatucci, special counsel at Gibbons P.C., welcomed guests and introduced NIAF Board Members former congressman Mike Ferguson and NIAF Vice Chair John Calvelli, who explained NIAF's history and mission. "Whether you are Democrat or Republican," said Calvelli, "what brings us together at the end of the day is our Italian American heritage."

Former New Jersey Governor Chris Christie introduced Carpenito who received a standing ovation. "These days, we try not to be defined by our gender or nationality, but heritage is a big part of my identity," said Carpenito, who recalled growing up in New Jersey and visiting his Italian American grandparents in Bay Ridge and Staten Island. "It was not just your blood relatives, everyone in the neighborhood was your family."

Carpenito closed his remarks thanking NIAF and all the Italian Americans who helped him advance his career, before Ferguson and Calvelli, NIAF Board Members Phillip Rinaldi, Anthony DiSandro and Gerard LaRocca, and Palatucci joined Christie on stage to present Carpenito with the sleek, glass NIAF award.

— Natalie Wulderk

Photos by Jason Isolini



Bill Palatucci, Phillip Rinaldi, Anthony DiSandro, Gerard LaRocca, former governor Chris Christie, honoree Craig Carpenito, former congressman Mike Ferguson and John Calvelli



Peter J. Pizzi and Elizabeth A. Joyce from Walsh Pizzi O'Reilly Falanga LLP



Katie Mocco and Bart G. Mongelli from DeCotiis, FitzPatrick, Cole & Giblin, LLP





NIAF is offering the following special events in the coming months. For more information and updates on other events, visit [niaf.org](http://niaf.org).

**JULY 2019**

**NIAF Public Policy Congressional Dinner**

*Date:* July 11  
*Location:* RPM Italian Restaurant, Washington, D.C.  
*By Invitation Only*  
*Contact:* Phillip Donofrio at [pdonofrio@niaf.org](mailto:pdonofrio@niaf.org)

**VinOff**

*Date:* July 25  
*Location:* Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C.  
*By Invitation Only*  
*Contact:* Phillip Donofrio at [pdonofrio@niaf.org](mailto:pdonofrio@niaf.org)

**NOVEMBER 2019**

**NIAF 44th Anniversary Gala**

*Date:* November 1-2  
*Location:* Omni Shoreham Hotel  
*Contact:* Jerry Jones at [jerry@niaf.org](mailto:jerry@niaf.org)

**Alitalia Celebrates New DC-to-Rome Flights**

On May 2, Alitalia launched a new direct flight between Washington, D.C., and Rome! Celebrations took place at the ribbon cutting at the gate in Dulles Airport, where the first flight departed from D.C. to Rome, as well as the Embassy of Italy, where NIAF Board Members and the Italian Ambassador Armando Varricchio were in attendance.



J. David Buerk

Cutting the ribbon at Dulles International Airport: Vice President of Airline Business Development Yil Surehan, Ambassador Armando Varricchio, and Chief Business Officer of Alitalia Fabio Lazzerini



J. David Buerk

Ambassador Armando Varricchio, NIAF Co-Chair Gabriel Battista and Emiliana Limosani, Vice President Business Travel Sales & Commercial Partnerships of Alitalia



Andrea Bartlett

At the Alitalia Reception at the Embassy of Italy: NIAF Chairman Emeritus Joseph Del Raso, NIAF Vice Chair Anita Bevacqua McBride, Italy's Ambassador to the United States Armando Varricchio, NIAF Chair Gabriel Battista and NIAF General Counsel Joseph Lonardo



J. David Buerk



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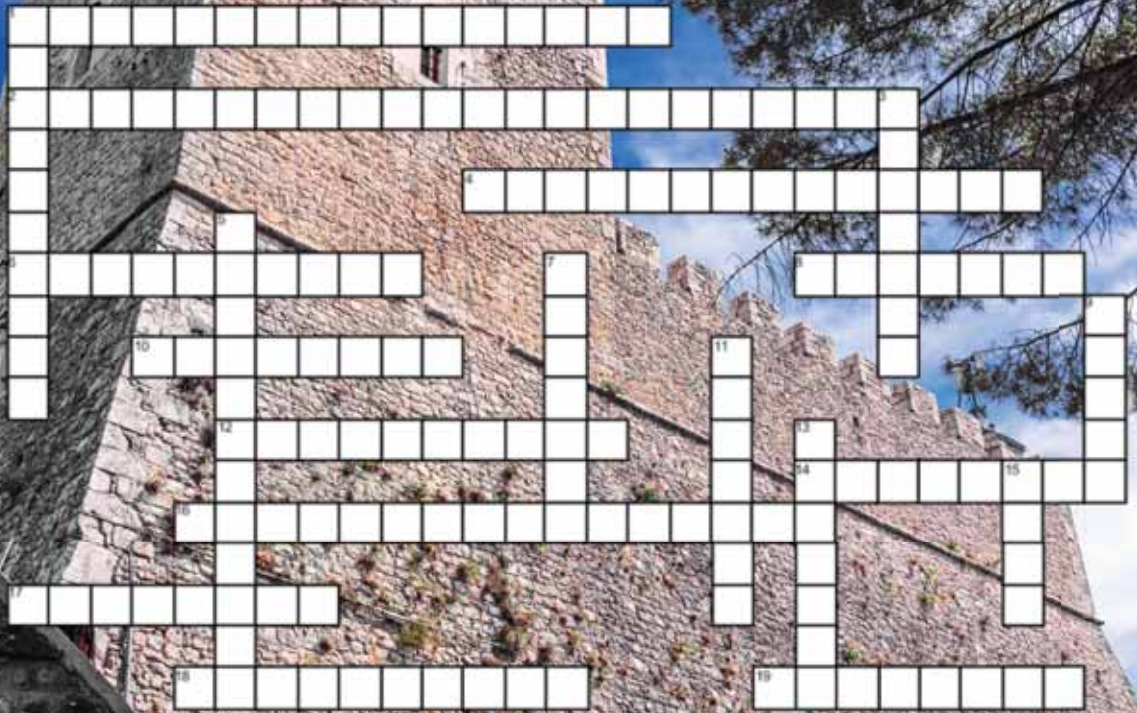
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# Region of MOLISE

Italian  
American  
Style



by Leon J. Radomile  
www.leonradomile.com

## ACROSS

1 Molise is home of one of the most popular ski resorts in the mountains of Central-Southern Italy. It has 40 kilometers of slopes at all levels, served by a mix of chair lifts and ski-lifts. Name the Molise ski resort.

2 This type of egg pasta dish is produced in Molise by an instrument devised there in 1890. The instrument resembles a guitar and effectively gives the pasta that unique look.

4 His grandparents emigrated from the town of Ferrazzano in Molise. Born in 1943, in Manhattan, he is a famous American actor, producer, and director. He is a recipient of two Oscars, a Golden Globe, the Cecil B DeMille Award, AFI Life Achievement Award, and the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

6 Born in Isernia in 1215, Saint Celestine V, whose birth name was Pietro Del Murrone, was pope of the Church of Rome for only five months, from July 5 to Dec. 13, 1294. Founder of the Celestine Order, he was the first pontiff to take what action?

8 Mutton and lamb are the meats of choice for Molise recipes. A favorite dish is stewed mutton with tomatoes and onions, flavored with rosemary and hot peppers. Can you name this dish?

10 People from Molise are called? (masculine plural)

12 This award-winning Italian American writer was born to Molisani parents in 1936 in New York City. His most notable works include *White Noise* (1985), *Libra* (1988), *Mao II* (1991), *Underworld* (1997) and *Cosmopolis* (2003). He has twice been a Pulitzer Prize winner and finalist, and has won the PEN/Faulkner Award. In 2013, he won the Library of Congress Prize for American Fiction. Identify this gifted novelist, short-story writer, playwright, screenwriter and essayist?

14 They were one of the first Italic tribes to inhabit the Molise region, but were eventually assimilated by the Romans and ceased to exist as a distinct people.

16 One of the main attractions of the capital city of Campobasso

is this fortress built in 1450 over earlier Lombard ruins by the local ruler Nicola II Monforte..

17 Hailing from Campobasso, this Italian light music singer and songwriter was popular in the 1960s and 1970s. Some of his most successful songs include *Malaga*, *Una Rotonda Sul Mare*, *Spaghetti a Detroit*, *Prima c'eri tu* and *Bella Bellissima*.

18 Antonio Di Pietro, Italian politician and lawyer from Molise, led a nationwide 1990s judicial investigation into political corruption in Italy. Identify these corruptions trials that translates in English to "clean hands."

19 Identify the ancient musical instrument, traditionally associated with Christmas carols, that is still made by hand by local artisans in the Molisani town of Scapoli?

## DOWN

1 What is the capital city of the region of Molise?

3 Until 1963, Molise was part of the region to its immediate north. When Molise's official regional status became effective in 1970,

it became the youngest region in Italy. Identify the region it had been part of.

5 Molise is the second smallest region in Italy. What region is the smallest?

7 Family owned since 1950, this Molisani family from western Pennsylvania promotes itself as offering the country's widest assortment of gourmet Italian foods. The brand name is also their family name.

9 Agnone is a commune in the province of Isernia, in Molise. Agnone is known for manufacturing what hollow objects, typically made of metal and having the shape of a deep inverted cup widening at the lip. They sound clear musical notes when struck by a swinging clapper inside.

11 The only river that's entirely located in Molise, it extends through the region for 100 kilometers. With headwaters on the northern side of the Matese Mountains, it empties into the Adriatic Sea near Termoli, and lends its name to the region's wine district. Name the river.

13 The two provinces that make

up the region of Molise were named after their respective provincial capitals. Campobasso is one of the two. What is the other?

15 Born in 1957, this graduate of the University of Naples is the current president of Molise and a professor at the University of Molise.

## SOLUTION

- ACROSS**
- 1 Campitello Matese  
2 Maccheroni alla Chitarra  
4 Robert De Niro Jr.  
6 Abduction  
8 Pezatta  
10 Molisani  
12 Don DeLillo  
14 Samnites  
16 Castello Montforte  
17 Fred Bongusto  
18 Manti Pulite  
19 Bagpipes (Zampogne)
- DOWN**
- 1 Campobasso  
3 Abruzzo  
5 Valle d'Aosta  
7 George Delallo  
9 Bells  
11 Biferno River  
13 Isernia  
15 Donato Toma  
14 Animal Rights  
15 Ornithopter

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