ITALY INSIDE & OUT



Inside Italy

MOLISE DOESN'T EXIST - OR DOES IT?

Inside Food

FOREST SCENTED LASAGNA

Inside Art

THE AMAZING PHOTOGRAPHY OF ALESSANDRO SPECO

Inside Style

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A LETTER
FROM THE EDITOR

The more I delve, the more I find. The more people I speak to the more fascinated I become! Someone asked me the other day if I plan all the issues out and know what I am going to do months in advance.

Well, I do try, but then I get really excited about a subject, a place, a person, that has been brought to my attention and I am off on another journey and can't wait to share it with you!

Whilst I was talking to someone about an art exhibition, they mentioned Molise and that started a whole new article, which you will find in Inside Italy.

When I was talking to our Book Editor, Wendy, she mentioned Alessandro Speca and his fabulous photography. Well, I just had to interview him!

I was chatting to Alessandro about Lambrettas and a whole new idea about the Ape came up!

You see how it goes!

But, the one thing I did want to talk about which was on the "plan" was Nabucco and in particular, the Slaves Chorus - it sends shivers down my spine just thinking about it.

I hope you enjoy this issue and as Guiseppe Verdi said

"You may have the universe if I may have Italy."
-Guiseppe Verdi

Elinor

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Cover photo: Alessandro Speco



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THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



Elinor Salter

Elinor has spent many years living and working in Italy. Her job as an international style consultant and personal shopper has led her to many areas of the Country and to meet lots of interesting characters, but her favourite place is still Lazio! She believes that everyone has a unique story to tell and wants to share those stories with you.



Francesca La Manna

Francesca is an Italian portrait, fashion and wedding photographer based in Rome, Italy. She picked up the camera ten years ago and what started as a hobby soon became her full time job.
Through her lens she creates beautiful, balanced, evocative pictures that reflect her idea of beauty.



Paola Versano

Pauola Vernsano is one half of the charismatic owners of Ora Italian Luxury.



Simon Fairfax

Guest contributor, Author Simon Fairfax, shares his love of wine and his favourites from the region of Sicily.

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



Luciano Coccia

Originally from Francavilla al Mare (Chieti), he has lived in Manoppello (Pescara) for years. Luciano began to cook just listening to the first precious lessons from his grandmother Dora.

“I like to do research and find traditional recipes, the original ones. When I can, I go to the house of friends who have grandmothers to see for myself how they make a dish, to rediscover the most authentic versions ".



Jamie Alessandro

Jamie is an Automotive engineer by training with a passion for all things cars. Having worked for some of the biggest automotive marques he also specialises in the acquisition of rare classic cars for private clients.



Wendy Ridolini

Wendy has been in Italy since 2009 and set up her publishing company, Sunflower Publishing in 2020. She has always loved reading, been fascinated by the use of language to express emotions and adores great stories in any genre. She is a book blogger and reviewer for books set in Italy.

This year, she is hosting creative writing retreats in a luxury farmhouse in Abruzzo for anyone who wants to write in one of the most beautiful regions of Italy.





INSIDE

ITALY

Molise

What I love about so many of the towns and regions in Italy is their innovation. They don't sit on their laurels and the glories of the past, but they also don't forget the past and their traditions. They also don't forget the hardships and struggles they have had along the way. Covid was the latest thing they had to cope with, along with the rest of the world it's true, but all the eyes of that world were on Italy at the beginning of the Pandemic and they were a model for us all. And now, I have to say, I have a feeling of pride for my adopted Country, at how they are surging ahead with new plans and different ways of doing things





Molise is one such place. Although, according to popular culture, Molise doesn't exist.The "Molise conspiracy", as it has come to be known, has exploded across Italy, spawning Facebook pages, shows, songs, even mugs and t-shirts! But, true to Italian form, the citizens of Molise have used this to their advantage and instead of being upset by the perceived denigration of their area, they have embraced it and very cleverly used it as their marketing tool.

Molise does of course exist. It is a small region in south-eastern Italy, bordering on the regions of Abruzzo, Puglia, Lazio and Campania and actually has a status equal to that of Tuscany, Lombardy or Piedmont. The region is building itself quite a reputation for not only existing, but also for its Art - quirky and different though it may be.

Take, for example, Rivento - a small village in Molise, which in a short space of time has become the world's capital of crochet! This was a project born out of an idea Lucia Santorelli had to cover the 365 steps of San Nicola, which links the square to the city centre, with a cloak of crochet. Bringing women of all ages together, this soon became the longest crochet carpet in the world!

The region is building itself quite a reputation for not only existing, but also for its Art - quirky and different though it may be.



Capital of Crochet

Uniting people from the community of all ages, this project soon started to bring people from all over the world and made Trivento the capital of crochet.

Another project soon took shape and this was the highest crocheted Christmas tree in the world! Standing in the piazza Fontana, the tree is made from 1300 crocheted squares of wool from all over Italy.

During August, artists from all over the world, as far as Mexico, descend on the town to decorate the steps with their own crocheted squares.

In other villages in Molise, the ancient art of weaving is still practised and jealously preserved. Only a few women are able to use the complicated loom, but they produce incredible works of art in the traditional method.

From that moment, the saint became patron of the village and protector of the earthquakes.

Between July and August, many of the villages in Molise celebrate the ancient traditions linked with wheat. Golden decorations are made with ears of the corn and braided straw.

On the 5th August each year, Roccavivara, in the Campobasso province, a parade of floats displaying the wheat, goes through the village in honour of the Sant'Emidio. This saint is considered the protector against earthquakes. The devotion toward this saint became stronger in Roccavivara than the rest of Molise, after an earthquake in 1805, where, according to legend, during the parade of the saint, a strong earthquake hit, but the houses in Roccavivara remained intact, whilst neighbouring villages suffered destruction. From that moment, the saint became patron of the village and protector from the earthquakes.

Since the Pandemic, the floats have been replaced by handmade wheat decorations on the houses and buildings of the town. A wheat braid of 310 metres long is another record for the region of Molise.



Up in the mountains of Molise is a village that is famous for its wonderful woods of silver fir, but also for stonemasonry.

Since the Middle Ages the village of Pescopennataro, founded in Norman times because of its strategic position to control the whole of the Sangro Valley, has produced master stonemasons.

Known as the “village of stone”, there has been a stonemasonry school there since 1700. Today, the Chiara Marinelli Civic Museum of Stone, tells the history of the area and the ancient traditions. The **Fountain of Piazza del Popolo** was in fact made in the mid-1700s using local stone by the master stonemason and designer Nicola De Lallo.

Molise has suffered over the years economically and politically. Many of the villages have seen the younger generations move away. But one village, Civitacampomarano has been doing something about it. Like its neighbours it has turned to art, but this time street art.

The tiny streets and small houses surround a large, mediaeval castle and one day, artist Alice Pasquini received an email asking her to head a project aimed at decorating the mediaeval village with murals, inspired by vintage photographs. That is how the festival of street art was born.

Called “Cvtà Street Fest” (Cvtà is the name of the village in the local dialect) every year artists from all over the world come to revitalise the old houses with murals.

Walking through the streets you come across works of art of all kinds in this open air art gallery.

So, as you can see, Molise truly does exist and more than that, it is becoming a living art gallery, the likes of which hasn’t been seen before.

Molise truly does exist!





INSIDE

ART

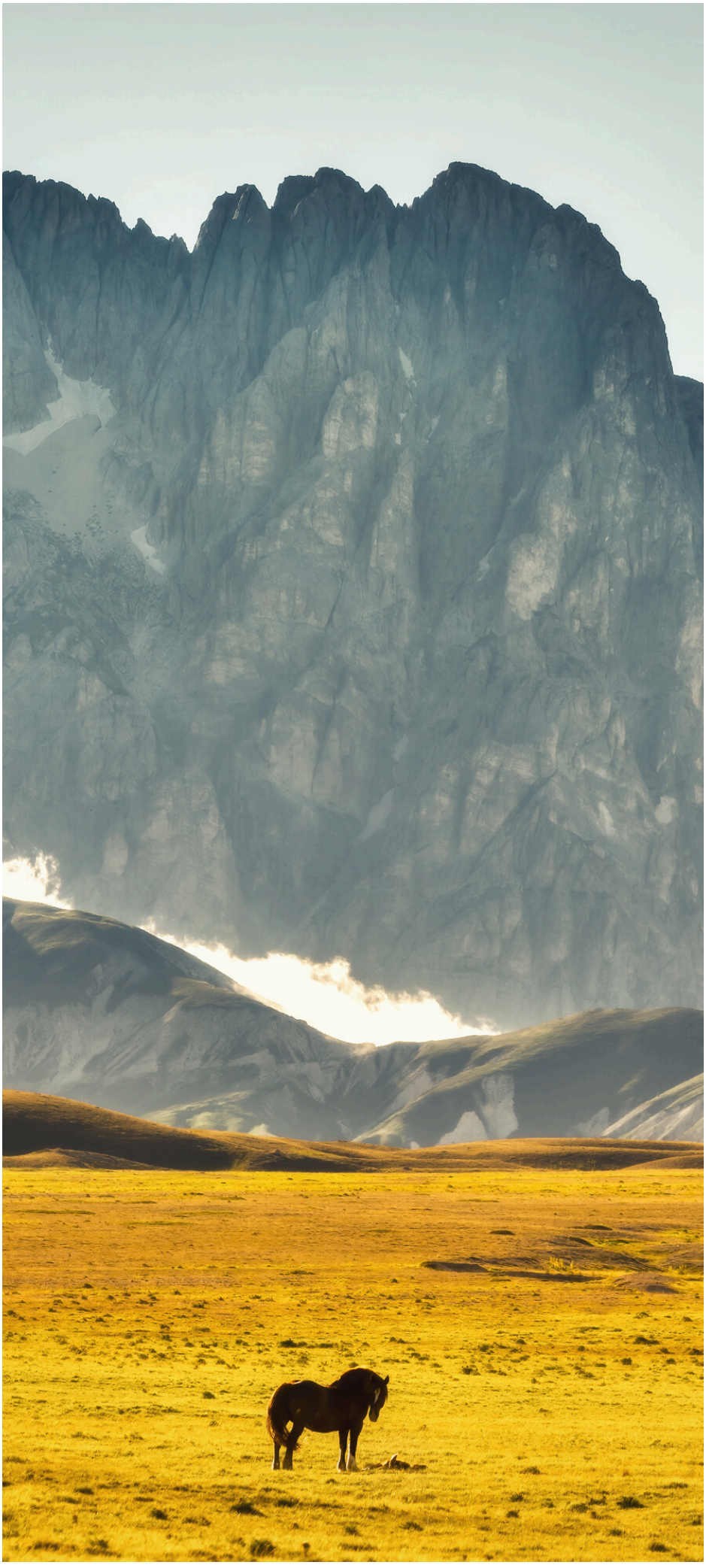
Alessandro Speca hadn't picked up a camera before 2020, but during Covid he found himself walking around the beautiful countryside in which he lives and started taking a camera with him.

The results are astounding.

He tours Abruzzo taking photos as he goes and has collated them all together in his first book.

We got together to find out all about this amazing journey.

"I got passionate, I started studying, I am passionate about perspectives and working with telephoto lenses. And then this wild, wild landscape, without human presence, became my field of research".



Tell us where you live.

I live in a small village called Garrufo, surrounded by hills and vineyards, which change colour with the changing of the seasons. It is a place to which I am very attached, although I have travelled a lot. I believe that roots are fundamental, they nourish you and represent your essence. Among other things, from the place where I live, every morning I can admire the sun rising from the sea and at the same time I can see the light that radiates, illuminates and gives a good morning to His Majesty the Gran Sasso, a symbol, a Milestone of our fantastic region: Abruzzo. I feel very lucky to have grown up in this Paradise.

Is this where your family comes from?

Yes, my family is from here. My father was born in the countryside, they were different times, my mother is from Nereto, another village nearby.

Have you always been a photographer?

No, absolutely! I have a Degree in Advertising Marketing and Corporate Communication, obtained in Teramo in 2010. I discovered Photography almost by chance, on a solitary trip to Iceland in 2015, even if I then waited another 5 years to buy a camera.



What inspires you in your work?

I am inspired by the possibility and the opportunity to express myself, that is my emotion, my instincts, my feelings through an image. Photography is almost a form of therapy and mental training for me. The camera is a means to be able to manifest one's inner feeling, what we hide in depth, in our Soul.

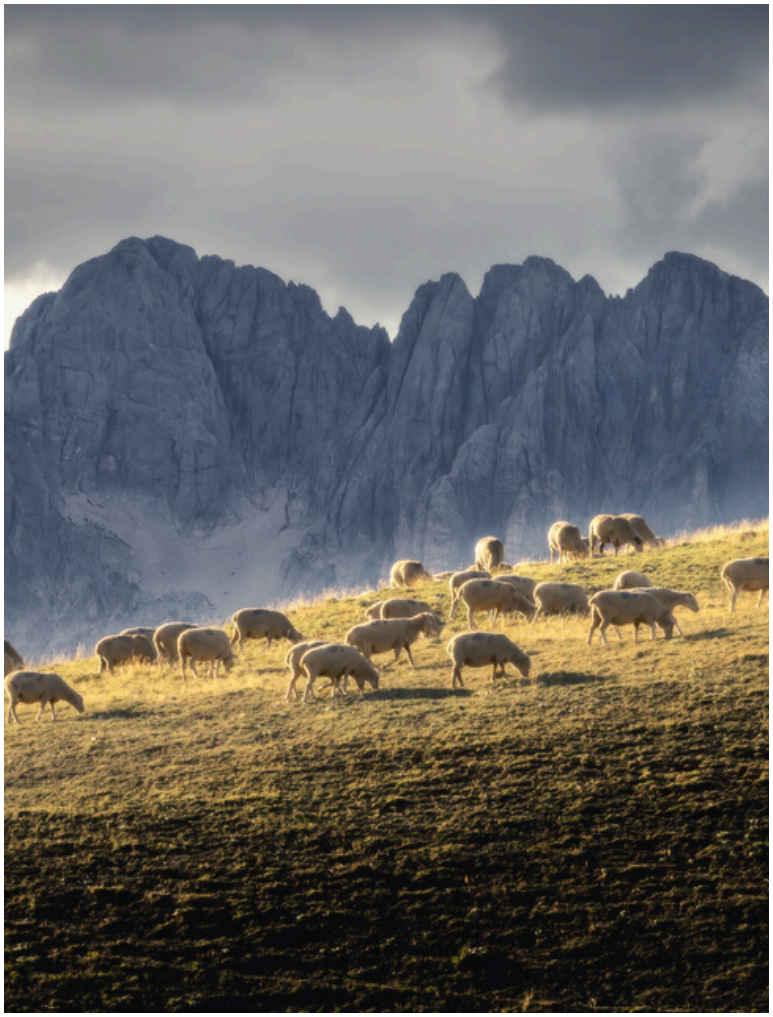
What kind of photography do you prefer?

I prefer landscape photography, nature and animals, everything where man cannot interfere.

Can you tell us about your new book?

My new and first book is called **SENSAZIONI D'ABRUZZO**; it is an emotional point of view on my first year and a half of photography in Abruzzo, on the places I saw, breathed and felt as part of me. I wanted to convey my very personal FEELINGS about Abruzzo and how I perceived it through the camera. The book contains about 100 photographs and is volume 1. I hope to do the second volume in a year. It is a story, which will have a sequel, a continuation.

I wanted to convey my very personal FEELINGS about Abruzzo







What is the most exciting thing you have photographed?

The flocks of Starlings, their dance in the sky, their twirls, I think are one of the most beautiful spectacles of Nature, I was delighted. I have lots of photos, some are contained in the book, others I hope to be able to use them in a book exclusively dedicated to them.

Then there is the birth of a small horse, a tremendously emotional moment that I photographed in Campo Imperatore, and that I included in the book. I believe that Nature has the gift of being able to express herself without the need for words, which is wonderful for me.

What are your future plans?

Studying photography, travelling, even outside Italy, and doing the second volume of my book SENSAZIONI D'ABRUZZO. All with a camera.

You have chosen 4 (or more!) Photos to share with us - what are they about?

They deal with nature, animals and moments that have generated strong emotions in me.

What is the one place in Italy that you would recommend people to visit and why?

Abruzzo, the region where I live, because it is full of places similar to diamonds, wonderful, pure and uncontaminated. I believe it is a paradise to discover. Obviously, I believe that Italy is all beautiful.



INSIDE FOOD
WITH LUCIANO COCCIA

Shall we go to “Funghi” tomorrow? So begins my friend on the phone every time he wants to see me to spend a day together. Living far away from me, it doesn't happen often, but when it does I can't wait for the time to come. He lives, lost in a tiny village surrounded by the woods at the foot of his majesty the Gran Sasso, while I live in the green hills, away from the cacophonous noise of the city and at the foot of the great mother Majella.

These two mountains are the rough skin of my region, Abruzzo, and have always watched over the destiny of its people. I always gladly accept the invitation and at the first light of dawn I am already at his house.

Regenerating myself in our dense forests, listening to the footsteps and voices of hidden animals, wandering like two hermits in search of inspiration is for me a moment of intense joy and well-being.

When we return we are always very hungry, undoubtedly stimulated by the intense and magical scent of mushrooms.

I remember once I made some puff pastry in advance to bring. I decided we would do a superb recipe together - forest-scented lasagna . Moreover, we cooked it in an old wood-burning oven, just outside the house. It is not easy to describe the emotion we felt when we brought the steaming pan with its heady scent to the table. We ate our fill and then sat comfortably in front of the fireplace.



Details

- Difficulty - easy
- Cost - moderate
- Preparation time - 45 minutes
- Cooking time - 15 minutes
- Portions - 4
- Cooking method - Oven

1 baking sheet
1 Mixer
2 pans
1 Cutting board

Ingredients

400 g lasagna sheet

450 g mushrooms (mixed clean)

100 g wild asparagus (cleaned)

300 g sausage

200 g mozzarella

100 g grated parmesan

Half a glass of dry white wine

500 ml bechamel Sauce

1 sprig of rosemary

1 bay leaf

1 clove garlic



Steps

The forest-scented lasagna is a unique, robust and succulent dish. Choose fresh and good quality mixed mushrooms. Alternatively, use frozen ones in the same quantity indicated. I prefer wild asparagus, much tastier.

Pour 2 tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil into the pan, add the bay leaf, the sprig of rosemary and the clove of garlic. Brown for 2/3 minutes and then remove them.

Cut the asparagus into small pieces and cook them in a pan over medium heat for 3/4 minutes. Remove them and set aside.

At this point, in the same pan, cook the mushrooms, cut into small pieces, for about 15 minutes. Season with salt. In the meantime, you can prepare the bechamel.

In the second pan, cook the skinned and crumbled sausage in a little oil. Halfway through cooking, pour in the white wine and let it evaporate. Cook it well, it must take on a nice color. Calculate at least ten minutes.

Take 2/3 tablespoons of mushrooms and blend them in the mixer.

Mix the mushroom puree with the hot bechamel. At this point you are ready to fill the forest-scented lasagna.

Put a thin layer of bechamel sauce on the bottom of the pan. Lay down a sheet of pasta, then a layer of mushrooms, a little asparagus, the chopped mozzarella and the sausage and finally a sprinkling of Parmesan cheese. Continue like this, layer by layer, until the end.

The last layer, let's say the lid, should only be sprinkled with bechamel and grated cheese. Bake at 180 degrees and cook for 15/20 minutes, or at least until it takes on a nice colour. Leave to cool out of the oven for a few minutes and serve at the table.

NOTE:
THE FOREST-SCENTED LASAGNA IS EVEN TASTIER AND MORE FRAGRANT IF THERE IS SOME PORCINI IN THE MUSHROOM MIX AND, IF YOU HAVE IT, SOME FRESH TRUFFLE FLAKES. ALTERNATIVELY, YOU CAN USE A GOOD TRUFFLE SAUCE TO ADD, AS YOU PREFER, TO THE BÉCHAMEL.

https://blog.giallozafferano.it/palettaegrembiule



INSIDE HISTORY

Tarquinius Superbus

By Elinor Salter

Those of you who know me will know of my deep and abiding love for the town of Tarquinia and I make no apologies for including it in this article on the history of Italy. There is so much to tell about this small town, some 40 miles north of Rome, that it could fill, and indeed has filled, whole books. It was the capital of the Etruscan world and the Etruscan tombs found in Tarquinia represent some of the best evidence of the great pre-Roman painting tradition in the Mediterranean and has given a huge insight into Etruscan civilization.



Corneto

The town of Tarquinia was originally called Corneto and is located on a hill overlooking the Marta River, a few miles from its mouth where the town had its harbour. From the Middle Ages to 1922 it was called "Corneto" (Cornetum).

The history of this mediaeval name was likely to have been because of the “cornel-tree”, a tree of hard wood, in which the area is very rich. The town was razed to the ground by the Saracens in the IXth century and the site was abandoned.

The inhabitants of the nearby town of Civitavecchia are still known as Saraceni by the locals!!

Corneto flourished in the XIIth and XIIIth centuries as at the time the Marta River, which flows from Lake Bolsena, was navigable which made Corneto an important trading post on the maritime route between northern and southern Italy.

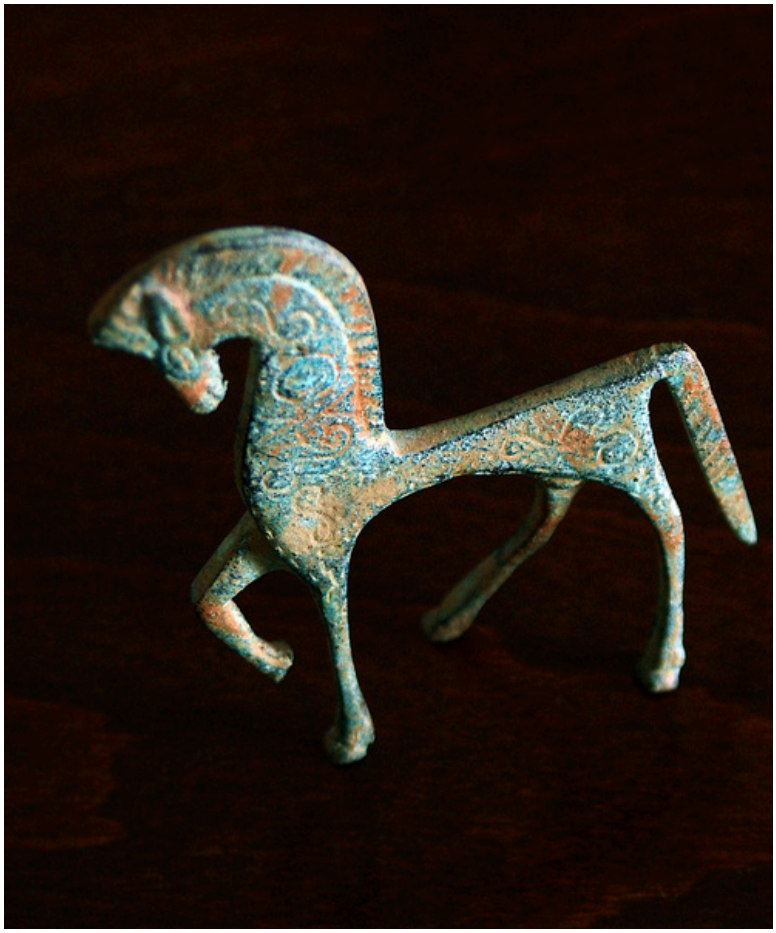
It was renamed from its original name of Corneto to Tarquinia in 1922 in memory of the Etruscan clan, the Tarquinii, who lived there in the 6th Century BC.

One of the most famous of this clan was Lucius Tarquinius Superbus ('Tarquin the Proud'). He was traditionally the seventh and last king of ancient Rome before it became a republic and reigned from 534 to 510 BCE. His rule was tyrannical, and following his exile after the infamous rape of Lucretia by his son Sextus, he joined forces with the Etruscan king Lars Porsenna who besieged Rome c. 508 BCE.

This was immortalised in the poem “Horatius on the bridge” by Thomas Babington McAulay, a British poet, politician, essayist, and historian, born in England in 1800.

“Lars Porsena of Clusium, by the Nine Gods he swore
That the great house of Tarquin should suffer wrong no more.”





An Etruscan Horse



The old port, Tarquinia

In the early 6th century BCE, Lars Porsena, one of the most powerful kings in Etruscan Italy, was asked by Tarquinius Superbus to help him take back Rome. Porsena sent a message to Rome saying they should receive Tarquinius as their king, but unsurprisingly the Romans refused, so he declared war on them.

Horatius Cocles ("Cyclops," so named because he had lost one of his eyes in the wars) was the keeper of the Gate of Rome. He stood in front of the bridge and held off the Etruscans until the Romans could put the bridge out of commission. Once that was accomplished, Horatius, in full armour and wounded by a spear to his buttocks, dived into the water and swam back to Rome.

After a protracted siege of the city, Lars Porsena captured Rome, but without sacking it. Tarquinius Superbus was to be the last of the kings of Rome.

There is still much evidence of the Etruscan world in Tarquinia, which runs side by side with the mediaeval history of the town - another story for another day!

The Etruscans

The Etruscans were a civilization that flourished in central-western Italy, between Tuscany and Lazio, from the 8th to the 3rd century BC. They predate the Romans and were an advanced civilization especially in the context of art and literature, but very little is known about them. They developed their own script, but it is the vibrant and graphic depictions on the walls of their burial tombs that is the most fascinating.

The Etruscan Tombs in Tarquinia

The necropolis of Tarquinia, also known as Monterozzi, is a strange and wonderful place. The site is a plain field with low mounds scattered all over it.
The tombs lie deep underground, accessed by steps down into the burial chambers. They look nondescript and uninteresting. But once down there, you are transported to another world! There are around 6000 tombs there, with 200 of them painted with beautiful frescoes, depicting the daily life of the Etruscans. There are pictures of dancers, fishermen and hunters from real everyday life, but there are also mythological scenes and some quite graphic x-rated portrayals!

I am not the only person to have been seduced by the beauty and authenticity of Tarquinia. Many authors and artists have made their homes there, either permanently or temporarily, including Augustus J. C. Hare

> *The view is most beautiful of the orange-coloured cliffs which are crowned by the towers of Corneto, and, beyond, of the wide expanse of blue sea with the beautiful headland of Monte Argentario, its neighbouring islets of Giglio and Giannutri, and, in the distance, Elba, and even Monte Cristo.*

Augustus J. C. Hare - Days Near Rome - 1875

and also D H Lawrence:-

> *We soon saw Tarquinia, its towers pricking up like antennae on the side of a low bluff of a hill, some few miles inland from the sea.*

David Herbert Lawrence - Etruscan Places - Published in 1932, but based on a visit made in April 1927.

> *We walk to the parapet, and suddenly are looking into one of the most delightful landscapes I have ever seen: as it were, into the very virginity of hilly green country. It is all wheat-green and soft and swooping, swooping down and up, and glowing with green newness, and no houses. Down goes the declivity below us, then swerving the curve and up again, to the neighbouring hill that faces in all its greenness and long-running immaculateness. Beyond, the hills ripple away to the mountains, and far in the distance stands a round peak that seems to have an enchanted city (Montefiascone) on its summit."* - D H Lawrence

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This fascinating, beautiful, tranquil town, that looks out regally over the sea, and seemingly cloaked by the verdant hills behind, is an unspoilt treasure in the heart of Lazio. Moving with the times, whilst keeping the authenticity of its past, it is one of Italy's best kept secrets. I am loath to let the secret out, but I know you will keep it to yourselves!



INSIDE THE ARTS

The Slaves Song - Nabucco

Nabucco has always held a fascination for me. It is one of my favourite operas, by one of my favourite composers. But more than that, the association it has with Italy and the Italian people is the main reason for my fascination.

Guiseppe Verdi composed the opera, Nabucco, in 1841 with the Italian Libretto, Temistocle Solera. Nabbucco, short for Nabucodonosor, or Nebuchadnezzar in English, is the story of Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon, and the Hebrews he has enslaved and then subsequently sent into exile.

Against this tumultuous background, Verdi also gives us a triangular love story involving the characters of Ismaele, Fenena, and Abigaille. It is a four-act opera that takes place in Jerusalem and Babylon in 583 B.C.

To my mind, the most beautiful piece of music in this opera is “Va, Pensiero”, otherwise known as the Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves. I am not alone in this! In fact, it is so well loved that it is usually performed twice, the second time as an encore.



Verdi is said to have drawn parallels between the Hebrews under the Assyrian rule and the Italians who were under Austrian rule in the mid-1800s. His audience clearly saw that too and after one performance at La Scala in 1842, some members of the audience shouted “Freedom for Italy”, identifying with the Hebrew slaves.

Just before Verdi composed Nabucco, he had suffered a failure with his work “Un Giordo di Regno” (King for a Day) and his wife and young children had died. He didn’t want to work on opera any more but Bartolomeo Merelli, the impresario of La Scala persuaded Verdi to look at a rejected libretto from another composer. Verdi hated it, but then the words “Va Pensiero, sull’ali dorate” stood out to him and his inspiration was struck. With his wife and children dead Verdi wrote this, in mourning and celebration of his lost family

The phrase “O my country so beautiful and lost,” reminded the Italians of what Austrian rule meant for the beloved Country. The chorus is based on Psalm 137, “By the rivers of Babylon” and the first line of the chorus, “Hasten, thought, on wings of gold” is the prelude to a heart-rending description of the land the Hebrews have left behind and struck a deep chord with the audiences of the day.

The song is so beloved by the Italians that it has been suggested on more than one occasion that it should become the National Anthem.

At his funeral procession through the streets of Milan, the bystanders spontaneously broke out into singing Va, pensiero. When Verdi was re-buried a month later, Toscanini conducted a chorus of eight hundred singing it. That must have been something to behold.

Italian Lyrics to "Va, Pensiero"

Va', pensiero, sull'ali dorate;
Va, ti posa sui clivi, sui colli,
ove olezzano tepide e molli
l'aure dolci del suolo natal!

Del Giordano le rive saluta,
di Sionne le torri atterrate...
Oh mia Patria sì bella e perduta!
O membranza sì cara e fatal!

Arpa d'or dei fatidici vati,
perché muta dal salice pendi?

Le memorie nel petto raccendi,
ci favella del tempo che fu!
O simile di Solima ai fati,
traggi un suono di crudo lamento;

O t'ispiri il Signore un concento
che ne infonda al patire virtù!

English Translation of "Va, Pensiero"

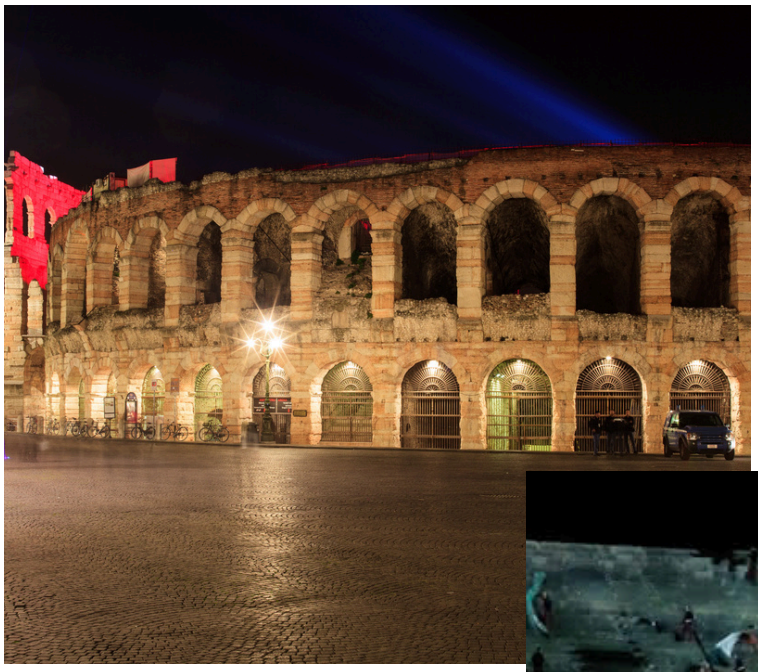
Go, thoughts, on golden wings;
Go, settle upon the slopes and hills,
where warm and soft and fragrant are
the breezes of our sweet native land!

Greet the banks of the Jordan,
the towers of Zion ...
Oh my country so beautiful and lost!
Or so dear yet unhappy!

Or harp of the prophetic seers,
why do you hang silent from the willows?

Rekindle the memories within our hearts,
tell us about the time that have gone by
Or similar to the fate of Solomon,
give a sound of lament;

Or let the Lord inspire a concert
That may give to endure our suffering.







INSIDE WINE

IN VINO VERITAS?

In this issue, we have asked a guest contributor to give us his view on his favourites Italian wines!

Simon Fairfax is an author and in both his series - "The Deal Series" - financial thrillers and "The "Sir James de Grispere, Kings Spy" - medieval faction feature one book in which the majority of the story is set in Italy. h

He has spent many years living and travelling around the country - and tasting the wines!

IN VINO VERITAS? - Well, that might be true and if you get someone drunk enough on wine, you will certainly know what they really think! However taking this one step further, the problem is that everyone's version of the truth is different and nowhere could this be more truthful than in their opinion of wine. Tastes differ so much and "one man's meat is another man's poison" as the saying goes.





This was highlighted at the weekend when we stayed with friends who are big Francophiles and their tastes in wine lean very heavily to the wine of that country. Me, well I have always enjoyed and favoured new world wines in particular South Africa, so when I am looking for an Italian wine I am influenced as most people are, by what they know and like.

With that in mind let's have a look at two of my favourites, one red and one white. Which of course brings us to the next perennial question of: 'What is your favourite wine?'

For me this is impossible to answer -right up there with what is your favourite film?- with the former it depends on the season and circumstances of food or not and with the second, it depends on my mood i.e. if you are feeling soft and romantic you don't want to see a "blow 'em" up thriller and vice versa.

I make no apologies for choosing the same region for my choice of both red and white and that is Sicily. The fabulously rich volcanic soil embodies the wines with everything I want and look for in a wine, be it red or white and here are my choices:

looking for an Italian wine I am influenced as most people are, by what they know and like.



The Red.

For me I like my reds, big and chewy bursting with fruit and flavour. This would of course be largely in the Autumn or Winter months with casseroles, red meats and cheese.
Nero d'Avola gives me everything I want, you can taste the rich soil and the strong fruit flavours- you'll get blackberries, black cherries or blackcurrants, with a bite of tobacco - according to your palate - is somehow intensified, with a slightly acidic overtone and strong tannins (yum) that bites through rich sauces and complements red meats and cheese. It is usually strong; around 14%. The hardest thing for me is letting it breathe, which bears dividends. Try - it's hard but try - and double decanting helps too.

Which brands or labels? Well there is a whole range but even the cheaper bottles still offer a good wine, that is very drinkable.

Fina Nero d'Avola produces a great wine, reasonably priced at about £13 a bottle with all the characteristics of the above.

Roccamora produces a range according to your budget from about £14 a bottle.
Though you don't need to spend tons to get a good bottle.

The White

Now of course you know that I am going to praise this for those long summer days, when for me at least, a red is too heavy and I just want to lie in a hammock and sip this delicious white all day.

Yes, of course, Grillo, not pronounced the French way but rolling the argh and sounding the 'o' at the end strongly, like number zero when telling someone your number: 01905.. Grrrrr ee lo!

This white for me is heaven, lots of acid fruit flavours and slight floral edge, but not too much to make it all perfumery - yuck! No, this is for me at least, slightly flinty as a finish. Again you can taste the volcanic influence and the acidic soil. It comes from the Marsala region on the western coastal plains. It will do well as an aperitivo or with all fish and pasta in creamy sauce.

Now I am about to commit heresy here, but I chill it down to almost freezing because I like my wine at 4degrees when I drink it so that it comes back up, but still well below the 12 degrees recommended -its summer for goodness sake, and hot!
On cost, well here you should get a decent bottle for about £14+ but don't get a cheap bottle, it is not worth the effort.
Try Tasca d'Almerita, (https://www.tascadalmerita.it/en/wine/grillo-mozia/)
lots of gentle fruit and zesty.
But make sure it's cold!
Enjoy them both!



INSIDE CARS

BY JAMIE ALESSANDRO



PIAGGIO -

THE WASP & THE BEE



HISTORY OF PIAGGIO & THE VESPA

Founded in 1882 by Rinaldo Piaggio, the company initially built much larger vehicles and equipment than the small 3 wheelers that the company is famous for. Its first foray into manufacturing was building railway locomotives before switching tack and catering to the military sector towards the end of the First World War. During this period, Piaggio became renowned for its aircraft as shown by the 21 world records they achieved between the years of 1937 to 1939. Soon after the death of Rinaldo in the early 1940s, Piaggio was manufacturing a wide range of products from trains, to aircraft, to doors for houses.



IIt wasn’t until after the end of the Second World War that Enrico (Rinaldo’s son) saw a gap in the market for affordable transport for the masses, especially as Europe rebuilt and economies were suffering. In 1946 Corradino D'Ascanio, an aeronautical engineer by training, was brought in to design Piaggio’s first motorcycle, the Vespa, which means “Wasp” in Italian. The design had to be suitable for anyone to ride, be able to safely carry a passenger (as well as a driver) and also to protect the passengers from dirt thrown up from the road. The popularity of the Vespa was immense, selling more than a million units within 10 years and leading to a new Italian verb being created in the Vespa’s honour “Vespare” - Meaning to ride around on a Vespa. Its rise to stardom was aided by pop culture at the time with Gregory Peck and Audrey Hepburn riding on one in “A Roman Holiday”, which romanticised the idea of cruising around a city on the simple scooter.

2 years after production of the Vespa scooter started, the Vespa car was released to market. The name of this product soon changed to the Piaggio Ape, another Italian for another flying insect, the “Bee”. The Ape, alongside the Vespa, has been in continuous production since its inception.



PIAGGIO APE

The first design iterations of the Ape were as an extent Vespa with no cab and loading bed on the back, turning the small scooter into something that could be repurposed for more utilitarian applications. The first Ape with a cab, the most instantly recognisable variant and the one in production today, wasn't released until 1964. The cab was introduced to protect the driver from the elements and to make it more comfortable for use all year round as a small commercial vehicle.

Like the Vespa, the Ape was an instant hit especially in urban locations where its low top speed didn't impact its ability to carry out tasks as a light commercial vehicle, whilst good low down torque and a small package meant that it suited the Italian hill town perfectly.

Whilst they are still used regularly all over Italy as small workhorses they have become the epitome of retro cool in places like the UK and can often been seen being used as small ice cream vans and mobile coffee shops at festivals and events to attract attention.

As I mentioned earlier you can still buy both the Ape and the Vespa brand new today or you can opt for a classic depending on your tastes. The Ape is obviously undeniably cool but unless you are planning to start your own novelty business in the UK or are planning on being a decorator in a quintessential Italian Hill town; the Vespa is the best place to start to get your slice of Italian motoring simplicity.

Personally I would always opt for the classic Vespa where possible as they just have something about them! However, the latest generation of retro styled Vespas come in a variety of trim types such as the Vesp "Pic Nic" featuring a picnic hamper and basket for a quirky day out. There are also featured collaborations with designers such as Dior for the Fashionistas amongst you and even an all electric version to help reduce your carbon footprint.

Either way, there is a Piaggio out there for everyone; a true Italian brand icon which is continuing to stay true to its roots today!

Book Review

by Wendy Ridolini

Lorenzo's Vest by Graham Hofmann

www.sunflowerpublishing.com



SUMMARY

Lorenzo's Vest offers an entertaining understanding of Italy and Italians as observed through the eyes of a straniero. It gives the reader, in just a few pages, a real insight into the Italy of the past, its history, its politics and its struggle to become a modern nation; questioning those who still suggest that true Italian nationhood has yet to be achieved. This insight extends to painting a vivid picture of life in Italy today, the exquisite joys to be absorbed, alongside the frustrations of experiencing life in the Green Heart of Italy, a truly wonderful part of the country.

Graham takes you by the hand as you join him on his journey as a Brit into the everyday world of Umbria. The journey vividly shows his day-to-day life as a part-time visitor, immersion into the local community, his experiences and the colourful characters that become friends on the way.

MY REVIEW:

I enjoyed this book. The author draws in the reader to share his experience of buying a house and living among locals in Colpalombo, a small hamlet in the province of Perugia. The author's excitement in his quest to build a life there is infectious but of course, there are hurdles and challenges, not least, the language. His observations of life are accurately described in an engaging and compelling way. He is very aware that his naïve and very British approach to life is destined to be tested to the hilt as he tries to get to grips with the somewhat beguiling and often mysterious complexities of Italian life, but he is ready and willing to embrace any cultural differences in an attempt to assimilate himself in the community. The transportative power of literature is no more evident than in this romantic and captivating view of life. The author's love affair with Italy is clearly evident. His sensuous descriptions of a relaxed and simpler way of life are nothing but appealing. A glass of wine in hand as the allure of the Italian countryside unfurls around you.

"IT IS THE COUNTLESS MEDIEVAL TOWNS AND VILLAGES, UNENDING FIELDS OF SUNFLOWERS, SITTING UNDER OLIVE TREES WITH NEIGHBOURS SIPPING ON RED WINE, THE SCENT OF WILD HERBS, THE GLOW OF FIREFLIES. DEEP BLUE SKIES AND AN ENDLESS SUPPLY OF HOT SUNNY DAYS."

Yet, this is an honest and frank account of his journey, physically and psychologically. Clearly, the author needs to understand something of Italian history in order to make sense of the present and he grapples with the paradox of the metaphorical lightness and darkness of Italy.

Even paradise has imperfections and flaws which the author examines in much detail. I commend the level of research done to give the reader some grasp and awareness of the quintessential and complex Italian DNA, which requires some explanation. The author discusses and debates at length all aspects – from the influence of the mafia on Italian society to fundamental catholic religious beliefs, from politics, corruption, sex before marriage to the Italian worldwide reputation of style, chic design and to the inherent principle in most Italians of 'bella figura' (making a good impression, self-respect and decency)

On a lighter note, the book has an abundance of insights into Italian culture and there are vivid descriptions of festivals and celebrations. Italians are passionate about life's pleasures, food being chief amongst them, but they are also creatures of tradition and habit.

When it comes to food, they are happiest when things are done right. The Italian philosophy of life starts at the table. Talking about food does not mean simply naming an ingredient, it means celebrating a rite.

There are also many charming and witty anecdotes. From wrestling with a bat which has flown in through the bedroom window, to attempting to buy some bathroom tiles. How could such a simple purchase go so wrong?
"The young man in the tile shop asks me for my tax code. I'm surprised I need it just to buy a few tiles. From the information I give him, he is able to find my fiscal code. It's official. I am recognised by Italian bureaucracy. Things were going so well until the total for the tiles came to €2500. This is the point that I realise something has gone drastically wrong with my measuring or something has been totally lost in my terrible Italian. Either I have chosen the most expensive tiles in Europe, or he has placed an order for enough tiles to tile the whole town of Colpalombo!"

Why I recommend this book

This weighty book delivers and to be honest, I do not even feel it needs photographs, quotes or poems at the beginning of each chapter. The well-researched material and experiences are delivered in a style coloured with humour and curiosity. For example, Ubaldo of Gubbio, Umbria, was a medieval bishop and is venerated as a saint by the Catholic Church. Saint Ubaldo Day is still celebrated at the Basilica of Sant'Ubaldo in his honour.

"The polenta fest, the fish fest, the spaghetti fest, the mushroom fest and the wild boar fest. Each festival lasts for at least a week with live music, food and drink each night."

"If you have a desire to meet Sant'Ubaldo in person, you can travel by road or by cable car. Well, the truth is that he's not looking so good. You could say he looks his age. This incredibly old man is mummified and encased in a glass casket for viewing. Feel free to take photographs but don't expect much of a smile from the dark, leathery, skeletal face of Ubaldo!"

Lorenzo's Vest is about understanding and respecting cultural differences, making connections and feeling accepted as part of the community. New experiences as an expat can positively change your mindset, values and beliefs, offering alternative ways to look at the world.

I completely get this book. As someone who purchased their own property in Abruzzo twenty-four hours after the L'Aquila earthquake, mentioned by the author. We devoured books written by anyone who had started a new life in Italy from Tim Parks to Annie Hawes and Helen Atlee.

Whether you are looking for a 'how to guide' to living in Italy or just a traveller seeking an authentic experience beyond the tourist track, this book makes sure you experience the real dolce vita in every way. It is more than just an account of life as an expat. It is a comprehensive and entertaining travel guide, it is well researched historical account of Italy, local areas as well as other regions. It delivers passion, enthusiasm, humour and ultimately acceptance. Reading about Italy, its towns, villages and traditions make people dream.

AUTHOR BIO:

From Roman Holiday to the Italian Job, Italy was an adventure. A land of pleasure, sunshine, song, blue sea and romance. Not forgetting the darker, mysterious face of Italy – the Mafia. With romantic images in his mind such as these, Graham visited Italy and returned to the UK with more than just an ordinary souvenir. He returned having bought a house In Umbria.

BOOK BLURB:

Published in 2022 by FeedaRead.com Paperback available on Amazon at £7.70



OUT OF THE BOX

Foody Facts:

Did you know there are more than 400 different pasta shapes in Italy! Each region in Italy has its own pasta shape and, confusingly, a different name for them.

The shapes are specifically designed to hold the sauce and there is a real art to putting the right sauce with the right type of pasta. So much so, there are schools over Italy teaching people the art of cooking with pasta.

Did you know?

13 of Shakespeare's 38 plays were set in Italy? For instance, In Julius Caesar he describes an African-style summer thunderstorm in Rome

Verona

'*In fair Verona, where we lay our scene*' - Romeo and Juliet

Padua

'*I come to wive it wealthily in Padua*'- The Taming of the Shrew

Venice

He set The Merchant of Venice and Othello in the city, 'What news on the Rialto?' - The Merchant of Venice

Out of the Box

SPAGHETTI CHAIR

FATTO BENE
http://fatto-bene.com/details?id=8

OUTDOOR WOVEN PVC RELAX ARMCHAIR, FIAM, GHEDI (BR), SINCE 1975

At the end of World War II, Francesco Favagrossa, a resourceful and brilliant young man, began to produce a two-wheeled means of transport, by recycling old military vehicles. Attentive to the needs of time, the "recovery" motorbikes were highly sought after and so he acquired a garage to expand his production.

Soon, his love for inventions in the mechanical field led him to a new challenge: the creation of folding seats specifically designed for free time. This was the 70s and the houses were beginning to be equipped with new furnishings to experience free time in a new and unconventional way.

Favagrossa bought a small company and thus began to design outdoor seating, interpreting the atmosphere of freedom of the time: no longer formal seats, but armchairs where you can lie down, and abandon yourself in the sun to read, sip a drink, chat.

His design intuitions led to the creation of hundreds of sketches and prototypes. The chair is experienced as a living, moving object: it must move, close, thus becoming a dynamic element, capable of relating to the body to offer maximum comfort.

In 1975, together with his son Ennio, he founded FIAM, giving life to a collection of outdoor chairs. Production continued at a fast pace, having in mind the need to supply products of the highest mechanical level: Favagrossa studied every detail, animated by the desire to create beautiful, resistant, functional objects.

The catalogue grew and the Spaghetti Chair made its appearance: having taken over the production from a small craftsman from Pavia, Favagrossa made improvements, giving life to the relaxation chair par excellence.

Cheerful and bright, the Spaghetti chair made its appearance in the garden, at the sea and in the mountains, becoming synonymous of outdoor living. The iconic colours – yellow, red, orange – contributed to the construction of the visual universe of the 70s.

FIAM uses aluminium or steel for the frame and PVC rods for the seat which, still today, are hand-woven by specialised craftsmen. By opening up to foreign markets, the company produces millions of pieces all over the world, developing numerous successes, such as the Fiesta armchair and the Amigo sun bed, and attracting the attention of customers such as IKEA, which over the 80s, began to market the Bitter stool, selling millions of pieces all over the world.

Today the company, continues its process of opening up to new markets, while maintaining "the desire to go to the essence of things and to design focusing on function and aesthetic cleanliness".





Photo: Italian Fairytale

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