



VILLA LA MADONNA



THE LOVE STORY IN THE WALLS OF VILLA LA MADONNA

SEASON BY SEASON AT VILLA LA MADONNA

What *Pasta* dish are you?
Meet *Matteo Molino*
Happy Hour in Italian is called *Aperitivo*
Welcome to the Heart and Soul of *Villa La Madonna*
Bring a Piece of *Villa La Madonna* with you Home
The *Proud* Delicacies of *Piemonte*
Let's Hunt for *Truffles*

She entered the *Party* on a Horse and Ordered a Bottle of *Barolo*
How to Spend your *Time* at the Villa
Meeting with photographer *Annica Eklund*
Eklund Family's guide to *Milano*





This is the first issue of our newspaper Villa La Madonna Paper, printed in Milano May 2023, our way of connecting with you in a more personal way. In this issue you'll find guides to our hidden favorite spots, things to do at and outside the villa and of course a few gems to remember your stay by. But you'll also find personal stories, like the story of Marie and Björn, the couple who ran the villa in the turn of the century, (which you can read about on page 6) how their love made the villa blossom and the reason why Marie and her sister Annica bought the villa back in 2015. Another thing important to Villa La Madonna is the food, which is why we are so delighted to introduce you to our chef Valerica (on page 26) and a few of her iconic La Mama recipes to bring home with you (pages 27–29) in this issue of Villa La Madonna Paper. Something else that has not changed is when speaking of food one must of course speak of wine. Our eminent sommelier Josh has not only curated the wine list with great enthusiasm (read about this on page 40) he also gets together with one of Piemonte's most prestigious winemakers every year to create the Villa La Madonna x Mauro Molino Nebbiolo and Barolo, a collaboration the villa could not be more proud of (meet the Molino family together with Josh at pages 17–20).

With respect to the history of the old vineyard, the life of Villa La Madonna started just over 20 years ago with Marie Eklund and husband Björn. Björn used to run the old house as a simple bed and breakfast with a big focus on family and the local delicacies (read about this from page 30 and you'll feel like a local in no-time) and even though the old villa looks a lot different now compared to back then, really not much has changed in the philosophy of Madonna.

Since this story began, Villa La Madonna has changed owners two times, but once we, sisters Marie and Annica Eklund came back to the place that held so many dear memories we knew in our hearts what we had to do. Traveling the world for a decade, collecting details, feelings, and ambiance had become one of our most beloved things to do as sisters and with our families. We filed these impressions in a map of maybe's for years but the day we got the chance to repurchase the Villa La Madonna we knew this was meant to be. But like everything that's meant to be, once the decision was made, it was hard work in every line. Looking at it now though, every setback and the tough decision brought our family closer together just like it did 20 years ago. And so we cannot help to wonder, could it be that this was written in the stars? And if so, we hope that Villa La Madonna can continue to bring family and friends closer together over Piemontese food and wine for many years to come, just like Madonna has done for us.

With Love,
The Eklund Family and Extended Family





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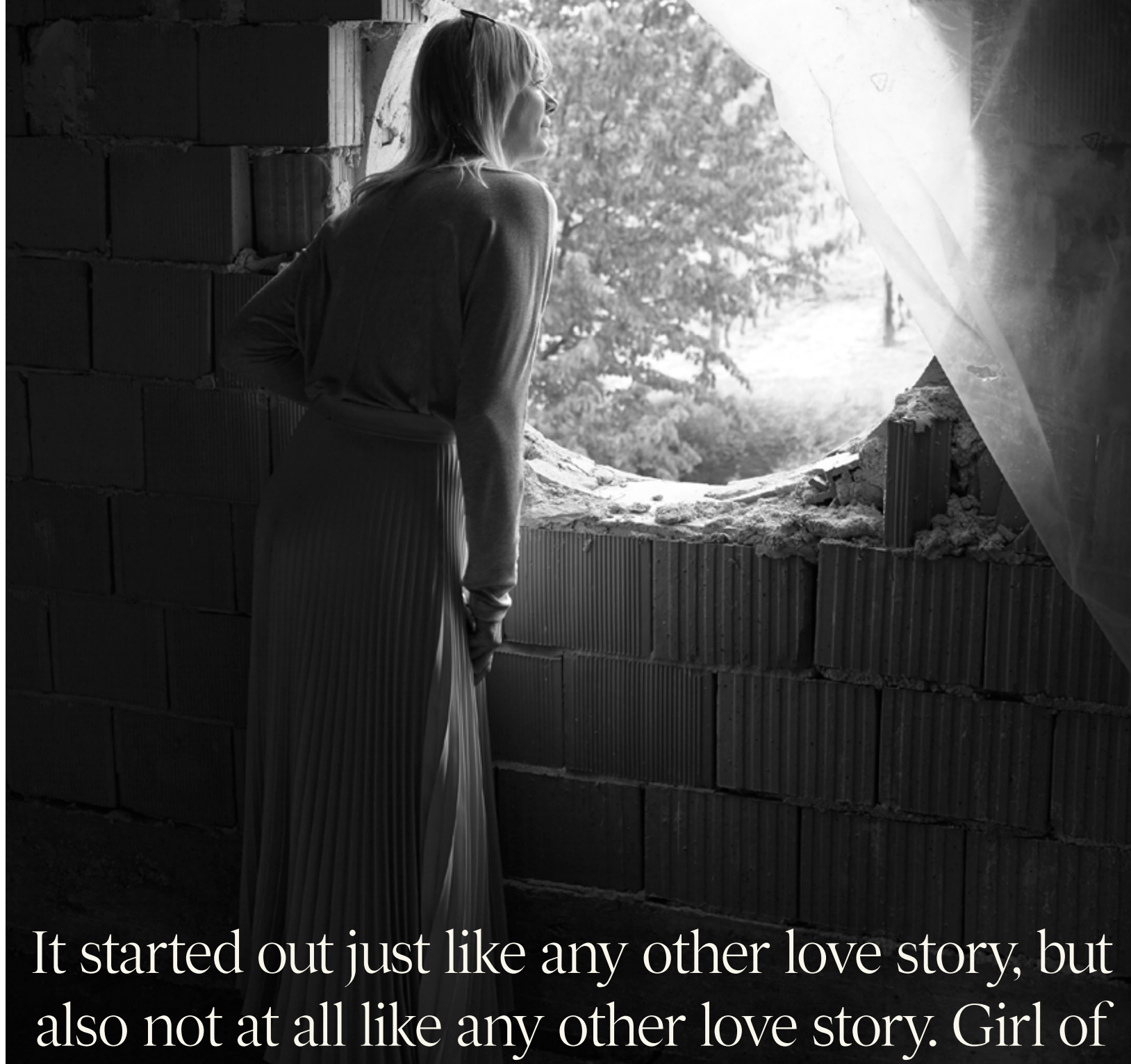
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THE LOVE STORY IN THE WALLS OF VILLA LA MADONNA



It started out just like any other love story, but also not at all like any other love story. Girl of course met boy and so on, but this meet cute was different from the very second *Björn* laid his eyes on *Marie*.



They were both so very far from home, more specifically on a train on the other side of the planet. They were not supposed to meet, in fact, if they had not, good chances are this paper that you are holding in your hand, in the hotel room you are sitting in right now, wouldn't exist.

So, they met each other for the very first time on this train, not going to the same destination but by chance, they found themselves in the same train carriage. It was the winter 1995 but in South Africa, the summer was in dusty bloom. Outside the large train window villages and deserts passed quickly, but on the train, against a backdrop of white linen cloths and wooden wall panels, time was standing still. The connection between the two of them was instant and if their chemistry could be bottled it could have been sold for countless amounts of money. But their ways parted and they never thought they'd see each other again. Of course they did, otherwise this story would end here, with a beautiful girl and a charming boy and their brief encounter on a train on the south coast of Africa.

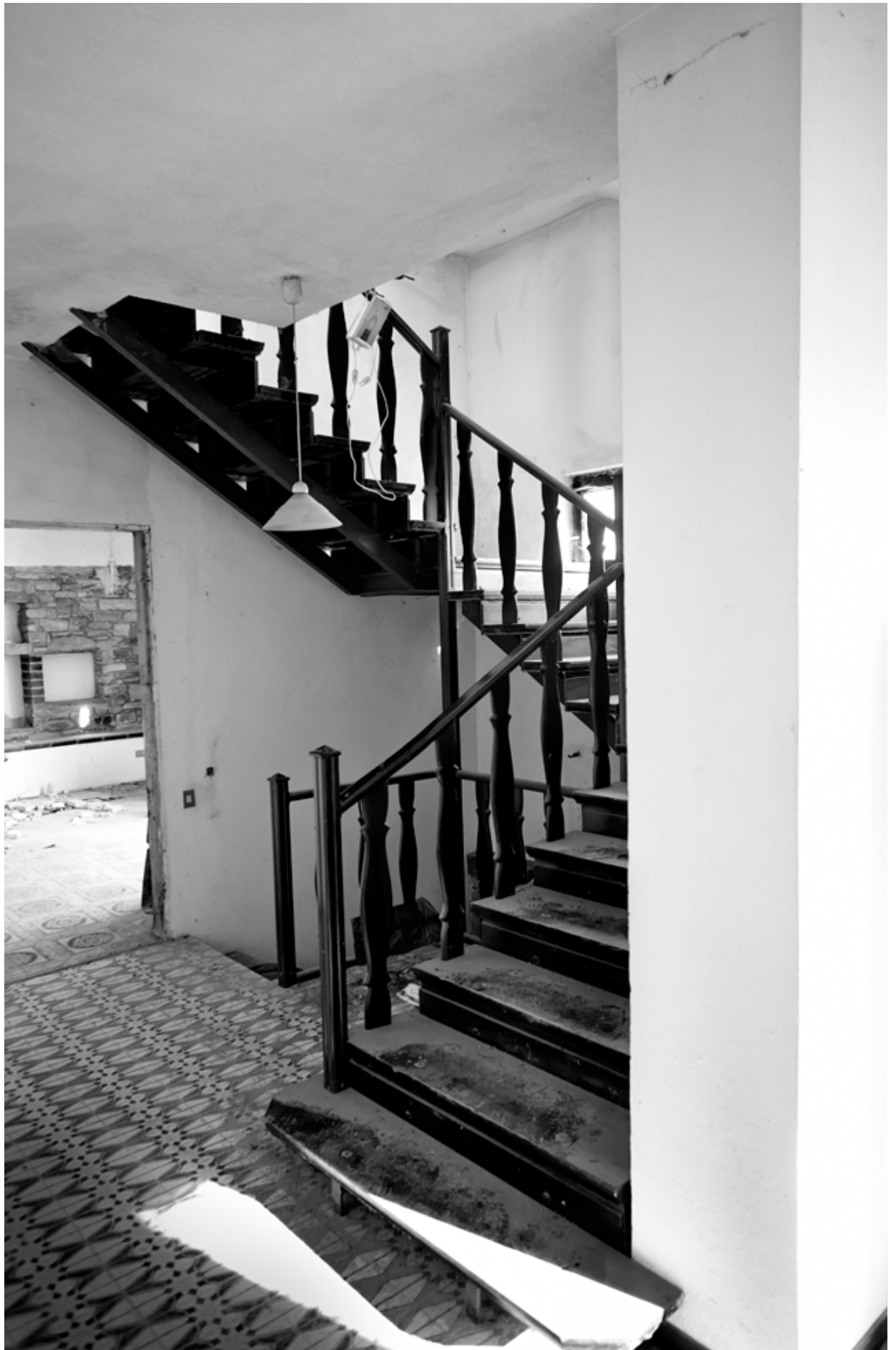
The next year, Marie and Björn met again on a tiny island in the Caribbean where one can only get to by boat, just like fate was their travel agency. When they, at last, met a summer night in a small fisherman's village in Sweden, this time also by accident, they could no longer deny that forces bigger than any of them individually, wanted them to give life together a try.

They celebrated their wedding at Villa La Madonna and by the coast in Portofino sometime later, with only a few family members and close friends present. By then, Björn had owned Villa La Madonna, only a simple but genuine bed and breakfast at the time, for many years. The newlyweds decided to build a house by the coast not far from Piemonte and to divide their time between the ocean house and the old farmer's house among the vines. Björn had by then already formed Villa La Madonna to the ultimate Italian picturesque escape in the countryside, with a big focus on family and local delicacies. Soon the family expanded and the Italian dream seemed to be a fact for Marie and Björn and their children Max and Liv. Days became months and years by the salt Mediterranean Ocean and among the

“The connection between the two of them was instant and if their chemistry could be bottled it could have been sold for countless amounts of money.”

leafy Piemontese vines.

But like all grand love stories, Marie and Björn's parting was just as sad as their love was magnificent. Sometimes things happen that not even something as big as true love can solve, and by the winter of 2008 Marie and the children moved back to Sweden and her hometown of Ulricehamn. Villa La Madonna was sold, and this too could have been the end of this story. But when Björn tragically passed away in 2014,



at his funeral, it came to the surface that Villa La Madonna was on the market again. Since Björn and Marie's left the old Piemontese villa, new owners had tried to reinvent it but eventually failed. What was now up for sale again was hardly the

family and food oasis it used to be, but still, a large part of their history remained in the walls.

Marie made up her mind, she had to at least try to get involved with Villa La Madonna for the sake of her family. This place where her children had lived a beautiful life with their late father before things ended. She could not do anything else but try to bring the villa back to life and make it a place for her kids to remember their father. But she knew she could not do it by her-

self and so she asked her younger sister Annica for help. This was a time when the sisters worked together intensely in an expansion phase for the family business, so Annica said no due to her own limitations. However it did not take long for her to change her mind. And just like anything else with the Eklund sisters, they usually find ways to make things work out.

By 2015 the renovations of Villa La Madonna were in full swing and both Annica and Marie had their worker's overalls on. Returning to Piemonte again after so many years, completing plans and renovations on her own but with ideas she and Björn had dreamed of together 15 years earlier was like closing the circle. Countless early mornings and late nights later, the vineyard was restored and refined with respect for the history and fulfilled with the potential that had always been there.

In spring 2016 Marie and Annica and their handpicked team, welcomed the first guests to their new Italian dream home. A casual luxury and effortless luxe oasis among the vines with a rich history of love, togetherness and family.







SEASON BY SEASON AT VILLA LA MADONNA



Piemonte is beautiful no
matter the season.

One of the reasons why the agriculture in this area is so rich, enabling the making of wine, the hunting for truffles and the cultivation of many famous Piemontese delicacies, is the wild change of seasons. Of course, every season has its seductress, you just have to know what to look for at any given time.

Villa La Madonna is open from March to November, which is why we count three seasons in a year.

MARCH: In March we prune and tie the vines. The landscape is still very austere but spring is knocking heavily on the door. A good sign of that is the wisteria blooming on the pergola above rooms 15 and 16. Our persimmon trees flower too, and also all the villa's pear trees.



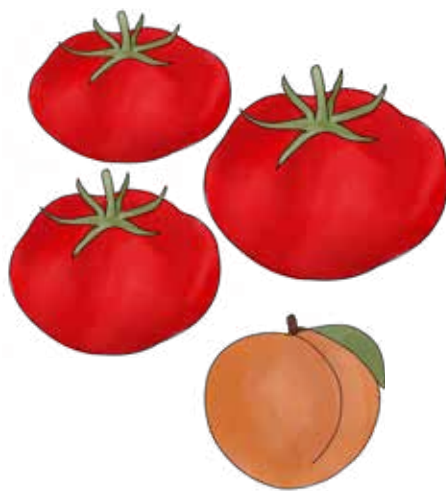
APRIL: In April the vines start budding. The first asparagus is harvested and morel mushrooms and peas come into season. The air is still cool, and we cook and enjoy delicate and nurturing dishes with the season's first fresh broccoli, spinach and arugula.



MAY: We start to tie up the ever-growing vines. The grapevines flower. Fava beans become available. May is also very special to the area since that's when the black truffle season officially begins. May is also when we release this year's edition of the Villa La Madonna rosé wine (a legit reason alone to come visit).



JUNE: June is the first month of summer here and also cherry season. The grapes have taken form and begin to get bigger. It's a very busy time in the vineyards. Two major players in Italian cuisine come into season - zucchini and eggplant. The pool is starting to heat up and become the most popular place to hang out at the villa (if you don't count the bar, that is).



JULY: Come July we are in the heart of our dear tomato season. Local farmers will start to harvest wheat. The peaches on the trees are ripe. Vittorio, our winemaker, already begins to look very tan. You can choose to beat the heat by the pool or perhaps in the cool wine cellar with an evening of wine tasting and nibbling on the local Robiola di Roccaveranno cheese.



“This also means that the white truffle has come into season and at Villa La Madonna we honor this through guided hunts.”

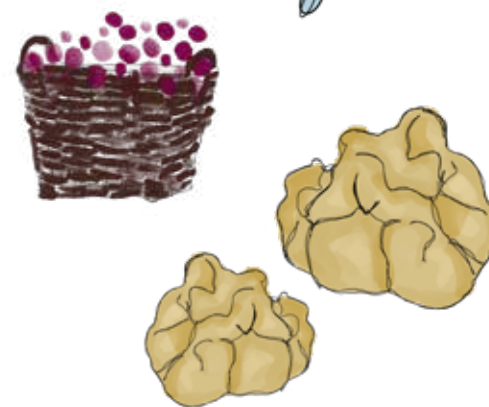
AUGUST: In August the vineyard slows down and the grapes begin to change color from green to red. The harvest is imminent. Caesar's Mushrooms (Ovuli in Italian) which are very sought after in this area, begin to come into season. Tomatoes, peaches and figs are still abundant in the kitchen.



SEPTEMBER: September is one of the busiest months as the grape harvest begins. At the hotel, we celebrate this with our harvest weekends and you can participate in the harvesting of the grapes. Nights become cooler this time of the year, a blessing after months of hot summer days. The corn is also harvested now and the first porcini mushrooms begin to appear in the forest as the black truffle becomes harder and harder to find.



OCTOBER: With the arrival of autumn in October and the changing of the leaves come the very foggy mornings that are typical to this part of the world. This also means that the white truffle has come into season and at Villa La Madonna we honor this through guided hunts. This is also the height of the porcini season. The grape harvest finishes with the Nebbiolo grape being the last to be harvested usually at the end of October. The end of the growing season is usually celebrated with long harvest lunches.



NOVEMBER: As the soil temperature continues to cool during November the quality of the truffle continues to increase. We heat up the fireplace in the evenings during the aperitivo hour for you to heat up in the company of a glass of wine. This is the quintessential season for the drinking of Barolo wine (again, reason alone to pay a visit). On occasion, we will have our very first snow at the end of November. The vineyard and the villa prepare to sleep until next spring when the cycle starts all over again.



WHAT PASTA DISH ARE YOU?



Forget all about fortune tellers that read your character, life, and future in old coffee grounds.

To understand what type of personality you truly are, just look at your plate of pasta.

Because, believe it or not, your favourite pasta dish is the answer to the true you, who you really are beneath all layers. Hungry for more? Take this quiz and be mindful of your next order at your preferred Italian restaurant.

Good morning sunshine, hope you slept well. Let's get started. When you wake up in the morning, what is the first thing you put on?

- A. My silk robe, of course. It matches my sheets and slippers.
- B. I go for the terrycloth robe, it has been in my family for generations.
- C. I slept in my cotton pyjamas, I don't need much more.

Your first drink of the day is important to you – it just sets the tone for today, no?

- A. It sure does! A glass of Barolo, please. Wait, you meant morning drink? I'll have an oat milk cappuccino with an extra shot and not too much foam, please.
- B. I'll have a cortado. What do you mean, regular milk? Is there any other?
- C. Black coffee and orange juice, as simple as that.

Next, it's up for the most important meal of the day! What are you having?

- A. I skip breakfast, it does not do anything for me.
- B. I have had one soft-boiled egg, two gluten-free toasts and a slice of cheese for breakfast for as long as I can remember.
- C. I am not capable of saying no to pancakes with syrup and fresh berries but I could also have a toast and be out the door.

Now you walk into your closet, it's time to choose today's outfit.

- A. I rarely know what to wear in the morning, so I wear it all. I like monograms, logos and bright colours. Less is more? Not in my world. I am more about more is more, you know.
- B. I have an outfit scheduled I make in Excel every Sunday the week before. I don't appreciate sartorial surprises.
- C. Walk into my closet? Please, I open a drawer at the most. I would describe my style as effortless.

What does your schedule look like today at Villa La Madonna?

- A. I'm really enjoying a free schedule here, after all, I am on vacation. I did yoga this morning, next up is a couple of hours at the pool, then I have a 60 minutes massage scheduled and after I've rested in the cold AC in my room I have booked the wine and cheese pairing experience. I just love to chill.
- B. After breakfast I'll take a walk, gotta get those 10K steps every day, and then I just thought I'd chill by the pool and have lunch in the shade. I am really looking forward to the Aperitivo tonight, I am dying to try the prized Robiola cheese.
- C. I would not call it schedule. I am going to lay on a sun bed every second I am not in the pool. Then lunch and eventually dinner, I guess?

Time flies! It's already your third day at the hotel – what's your status?

- A. Did you say the third day? It feels more like the third week, in a good way. I'm all relaxed and I know by heart the name of everyone working at the Villa.
- B. I have since arrival been on another clock than

CET. I am on the morning tea, lunch rosé, and Aperitivo clock.

- C. I am completely in the present, I've had every snack on the pool menu and now it's time for the drink menu.

So tell me, are you a Merenda type of person or more the Aperitivo type?

- A. I only drink Champagne and Barolo. And in the order listed. The time of the day isn't important.
- B. I'll have one Aperol Spritz with my Aperitivo for dinner, not more, not less.
- C. I can be both, as long as the company is good. Good company could also be my phone.

If you could describe yourself by using pasta, what would it be?

- A. I'm farfalle. I can identify as an emerging butterfly just waiting for a chance to spread my wings and take off. Oh, sorry, what was the question now again?
- B. What gluten-free pasta do you have? Well, I guess I'm spaghetti then.
- C. I like rigatoni, it just feels so open to any pasta sauce, you know? It's definitely the most easy-going pasta.

When Mario, the wine farmer turned opera singer comes by every summer week and sings, what song will get you dancing?

- A. Definitely the one with tu e fa l'americano, 'mericano, 'mericaoooo...
- B. Oh Sole Mio! Did you know that it was written back in 1989 already? My favorite version is Pavarotti's but Mario is doing a great job too.
- C. I love them all! But I love that I can sing along to Quando Quando Quando. At least the Quando-part.

You are getting dressed for dinner, what shoes are you picking?

- A. High heeled of course. I am choosing between my golden Gucci strappy heels and Prada pink slingbacks. I see every meal as a chance to dress up.
- B. Well, of course, I wear my dinner shoes. I brought sneakers, open shoes and dinner shoes. I don't understand what kind of question that is.
- C. You know what, I had high ambitions coming here, but my most worn shoes this vacation is the Villa La Madonna embroidered terry slippers and I am not even ashamed of it.

The last is a tricky one, but if you only could have one dolci for the rest of your life...

- A. It would be one scoop nocciola gelato, a single espresso and digestivo, per favore. The holy trinity since forever.
- B. I'll have a classic tiramisu and a small glass of Moscato d'Asti. It's the perfect way to end any evening.
- C. Oh tricky one, I guess it would have to be the semifreddo.

Congratulations, you have finished the quiz! Now it's time for the part where it judges you. Count your answers now, are you A, B or C?



Did you get mostly As? Well, you are Truffle Pasta.

Here we have the bon vivant who values all the luxuries in life. You are possibly intelligent, intuitive, graceful and old-school – people think you are wealthy, they just don't know how wealthy. Could be very or not at all. The raw power you radiate to others makes you look confident and intimidating at the same time, just as the excessive amount of raw truffle on your pasta sends mixed messages to the dinner guests around the table. Are you egocentric? Oh no, just the type of person who appreciates elegance paired with an unreasonable big glass of rich Barolo, the size of your new Chanel Jumbo Bag.



Did you say B a lot? You probably want to order Risotto (technically not a pasta but almost).

Did you say, no gluten, per favore? Then you're definitely the Risotto type. Risotto is simple and sophisticated in the best of combinations, just like your personality. You value the craftsmanship behind a carefully produced product. What people see in you is truly what they get; a fuss-free person that loves (and drinks) crispy, elegant white wine, dresses elegantly and well-thought-through - and loves when things are the way they are supposed to be. That's why you love risotto, there is basically only one way to make it or make it correctly anyways. Carnaroli rice, onion, garlic, stock and loads of Parmigiano. All ingredients must be very carefully selected to create that impressive and memorable result, just like you walking into a room of strangers. It's all in the details, right?



Did you end up with all the Cs? Spaghetti al Pomodoro is your go-to.

Your friends think you possess that easygoing personality, and you work hard to make them think so. But you know deep inside that you're quite a complicated person who always knows best. Does this ring a bell? Then you're for sure a pasta Pomodoro personality. The flowing shape of spaghetti means that you enjoy a carefree and relaxed existence. But the plain tomato sauce, the Pomodoro cooked in the right way that is, is not that plain but rather complex in execution and flavours, reflecting your not so straightforward and flattering part of your character. A Spaghetti al Pomodoro, though, is just as suitable for everyday life as it is for parties. It's the intention that counts, just like your attitude and approach to life. The cheese on top, however, you are fine with either Parmigiano or Burrata. Easygoing person, right?



MEET MATTEO MOLINO



Meet *Matteo Molino*, a second-generation winemaker at *Mauro Molino's* family estate in *La Morra*, sharing the history of the winery and its production with *Josh Eisenhauer*, Wine Director and Guest Relations Manager at *Villa La Madonna*.

It all started a few years ago with an idea of a partnership, which originates from the close friendship between these two creative minds. The winery's history dates back to 1982 when Matteo's father made his first Barolo from the Conca vineyard. Matteo and his sister Martina joined the family business in 2003 and 2007, respectively, and together they form the second generation of winemakers in the Molino family. Matteo's passion for winemaking started at a young age, as he followed his father during his work in the vineyards. He is now in charge of winemaking, while his sister is responsible for selling wine and accounting. Their family-run business is a testament to their passion for crafting wine and their commitment to the traditions of the region.

Today the estate produces Langhe Nebbiolo, a classic Barolo version, and different single vineyard Barolo, as well as Barbera and Dolcetto. Nebbiolo is the most important grape for the family, since Barolo, the most important wine denomination in the region, can only be made of only Nebbiolo grapes and in a small area of eleven communes. Matteo and his family take pride in exalting the terroir, expressing the difference between different types of terroir, altitude, and soil of each vineyard site.

Matteo's family collaborates with Villa La Madonna to create unique wines with original labels – every year a new one – designed by Annica Eklund, one of the co-owners of Villa La Madonna. Each vintage features original photography from Annica, photographs that guests can also find decorating the interiors of Villa La Madonna. This collaboration, today the sixth in a row, allows the two families to share their expertise and devotion and to co-create exceptional wines that reflect the terroir of the Langhe region.

Matteo and his team carefully select the grapes that will be used in the Villa La Madonna wines, ensuring that they are of the highest quality. The wines are then aged in oak barrels, allowing them to reach their full potential before being bottled. Matteo's dedication to winemaking is evident in every bottle produced at Mauro Molino's family estate. His expertise and knowledge of winemaking have earned him a reputation as one of the leading makers of wine in the region, and he continues to innovate and push the boundaries of traditional vinification.

Josh: For readers who may not know, could you just explain very briefly the types of wines your family produces?

Matteo: We are in the heart of the Barolo area and Barolo is one of the most important Italian wines. The denomination Barolo is always 100% Nebbiolo. As such, the Nebbiolo grape is the most important grape for us. We make Langhe Nebbiolo, a classic Barolo version and different single vineyard Barolo as well. The Langhe Neb-



winemaker have to be identifiable. So I really believe that the wine's style has to be recognized very easily. That is very important. But the most important thing is of course to exalt the different characteristics of the vintage because the terroir of Barolo is so unique. Especially in some vintages,

of past experience and collective knowledge. It's for that reason that I can say that in the past there were some more extremist ideas of Barolo making but in the future, there will be for me much more identity in the wine – that's the secret for the future. To celebrate much more the identity of the wine and the identity of the commune and the terroir.

Josh: Aside from Barolo do you have another favorite Italian wine?

Matteo: Italy is completely full and rich in different denominations so there are so many great Italian wines to discover. That is the beauty of Italy. Also, the Valley Bormida (where Villa La Madonna is located) has some small typical denominations. So it's very very interesting for me that the determinations at present and in the future can be even more interesting in Italy. I also always very much enjoy wine from Etna. Etna is an active volcano in Sicily. So we are talking about Sicily in a high altitude. In Sicily we usually think about heat and low altitude wines that can also make high elevation wine. The Nerello Mascalese grape in particular has some characteristics that can be very similar to Nebbiolo. So for me, I think we will drink more wine from Etna in particular in the future.

“It is really important to balance the hand of the wine maker and the vineyard's individual identity”

biolo is the fresher version that is very enjoyable also when the wine is young. We also make Barbera and Dolcetto which are the other two most important varieties in Piemonte but Nebbiolo and Barolo wine are certainly our ambassadors.

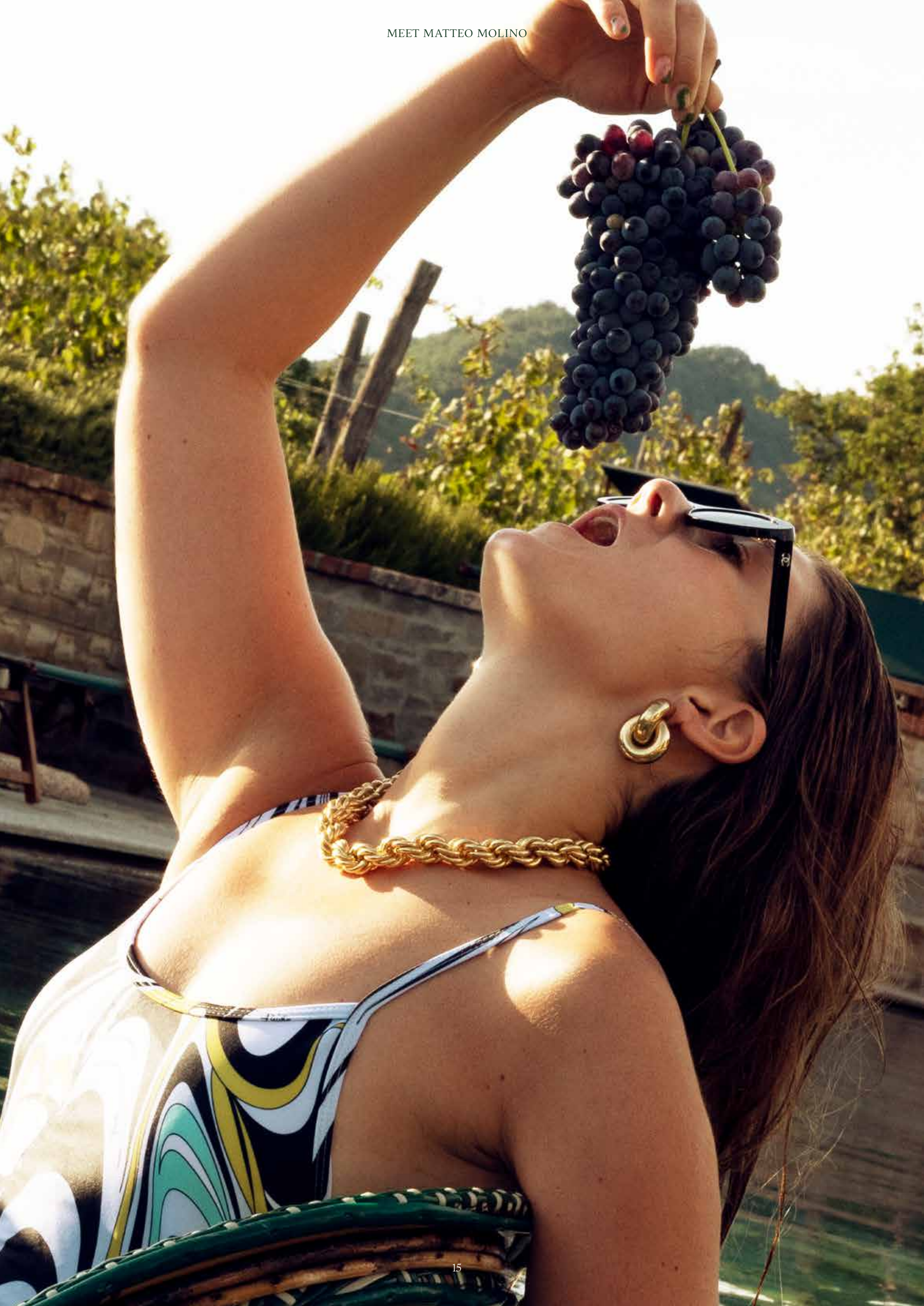
Josh: The growing season can be quite different from one year to another. How much does the growing season affect your goal as a winemaker? I guess what I am trying to ask is; is your goal to make a similar wine every year and how much does nature affect the wine you hope to produce with each changing season?

Matteo: That's a good question. Of course, the hand of the winemaker, and the style of the

as in 2019 for example, the characteristic of the different vineyards individually is expressed in a very noticeable way. So it is really important to balance the hand of the winemaker and the vineyard's individual identity.

Josh: What trends are you noticing in young winemakers and how will that affect the future of Barolo?

Matteo: This is an area that has a lot of “fermentation” and so there are many young winemakers and that's a very positive thing. I think the future of Barolo will be the past of Barolo. So, the future of Barolo will be more and more the product of a single vineyard, the result of the terroir, the result





HAPPY HOUR IN ITALIAN IS CALLED APERITIVO



HAPPY HOUR IN ITALIAN IS CALLED APERITIVO



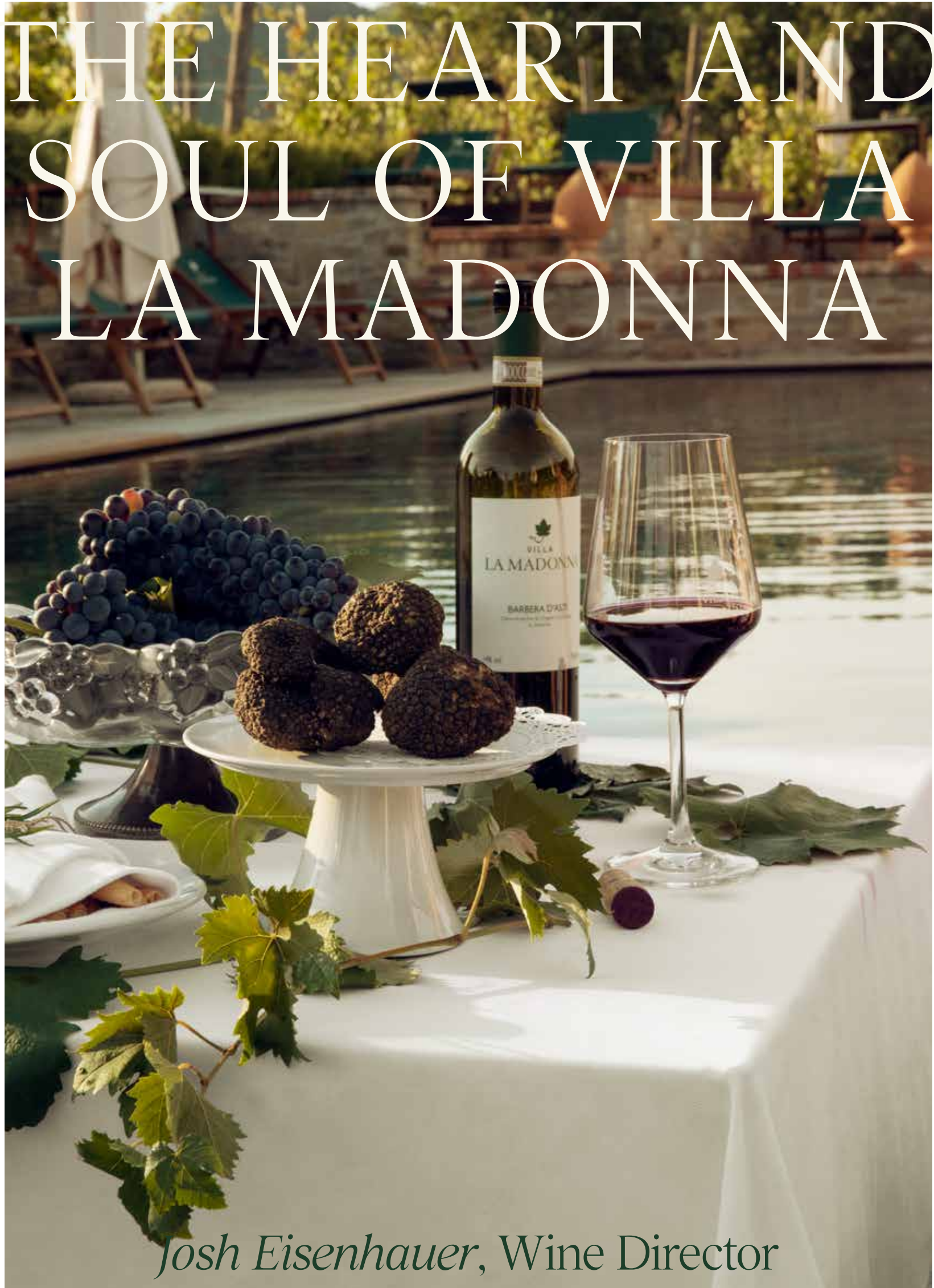








WELCOME TO THE HEART AND SOUL OF VILLA LA MADONNA



*Josh Eisenhauer, Wine Director
and Guest Relations Manager at
Villa La Madonna definitely knows
what he's talking about.*

”The Alba truffle that comes from this specific soil takes on a completely different smell and flavour. It’s the same reason that wines from this region are so famous, it’s the special combination of ingredients and soil that gives this completely different flavour profile. Why is it that when you smell Barolo it reminds you slightly of the truffle, and vice versa? That’s the soil speaking.”

Not only has he left behind a life and career as a sommelier at Michelin-star restaurants in New York. He is now also an Italian citizen and has adopted the lifestyle here to the point that he not only speaks Italian fluently but also masters the region’s own language, Piemontese. All this thanks to his lovely, Italian wife Sara. After falling in love with each other in NYC, she convinced him that he would likewise fall in love with Piemonte if they moved back together to settle

was born in Romania but moved to Torino for work in her early twenties. Hard to believe today, she is a self-trained cook turned line cook at a highly regarded restaurant in Piemonte, before transitioning to Villa La Madonna in 2018.

– Valerica had the *casalinga*, the traditional way of approaching things. As the hotel grew so did her areas of responsibility. Josh continues.

– Valerica’s roots together with Michele’s innovative thinking is a good combination.

”The fact that the town of Alba and its surrounding territories count as one of Italy’s highest concentrations of Michelin-starred restaurants sets the bar high”

down in the small Piemontese village of Monastero Bormida where she was born and raised. So they did, and ten years later they are still living and thriving in the same village, with Sara’s parents living just around the corner, cooking regional dishes with fresh vegetables picked from their very own garden.

Josh curates the wine cellar at Villa La Madonna. It’s filled to the brim with carefully selected bottles. The bottles are mainly from the area and from Italy but there are some great alternatives from some of the world’s most famous wine powerhouses, as you would expect from a wine cellar and restaurant with such a good reputation. The fact that the town of Alba and its surrounding territories count as one of Italy’s highest concentrations of Michelin-starred restaurants sets the bar high and Josh is always on his toes to be able to offer his guests the ultimate wine and food experience. As food and wine are so closely connected, even more so in this area, it is mission impossible to talk about the menu at Villa La Madonna without including the pairing of wines.

The Alba truffle that comes from this specific soil takes on a completely different smell and flavour. It’s the same reason that wines from this region are so famous, it’s the special combination of ingredients and soil that gives this completely different flavour profile. Why is it that when you smell Barolo it reminds you slightly of the truffle, and vice versa? That’s the soil speaking. The combination of climate and this special ancient maritime soil give birth to the warm, earthy flavour of everything that grows in this area.”

What’s actually cooking in the hotel’s kitchen turns out to be an exciting story that includes a motherly figure and a balancing act between tradition and innovation. Valerica, aka la Mama, is the Head Chef of Villa La Madonna. As the story goes, Annica Eklund, one of the owners, nicknamed Valerica La Mama due to Valerica being that motherly, matrimony figure for, not only her own son but for all the young staff members that seemed to find comfort in Valerica and saw the hotel’s kitchen as a comfort zone. Valerica

Josh is referring to Michele Avanzini the consultant that Villa La Madonna has just started a collaboration with to ”freshen up this season’s menu”, to put it in Josh’s own words. Because it’s not about a total makeover but a light consultancy that has so far resulted in some dishes on the menu that are inspired by Piemontese ingredients but are not sincerely traditional, for example, Carnaroli Risotto with stingning nettle and Carpaccio Di Nasello, a very interesting risotto with wild, spring nettles (so far traditional) topped with a fish carpaccio that creates an exciting umami taste.

Michele belongs to the new generation of Italian chefs. He grew up in Brescia, in the country’s northern parts, and started his career at a young age, cooking in northern Europe and at the 3-star Michelin restaurant Germanium in Copenhagen. His family had ties to a property in Roccaveranno, a secluded place located in the province of Asti. Eventually, Michele settled down there, in the old house with a pretty little kitchen, to start his own

”You don’t offer someone a drink and no snack.”

restaurant. Michele had a clear vision and intention to marry Piemontese tradition with innovation, offering a compressed menu of only two antipasti, two primi and two secondi.

– He’s doing as much work in the kitchen as in the garden, as he is cultivating as much as he can himself to be self-sufficient.

The traditional dishes of the region are even more so the heart and soul of the menu at Villa La Madonna, although Michele’s few innovative elements are a very important addition to the dining experience. To be correct, there are two specific cuisines known from Piemonte, la Cucina Monferrina (from Monferrato), la Cucina Langarola (from the Langhe area). It’s all about playing within a form. Such as the region’s most famous dish, the Agnolotti, a filled pasta. Even though it’s a set recipe, it offers some amount of flexibility and creativity. Usually, the filling

consists of two to three meat fillings, but where you can be slightly more experimental is with the vegetable component which is 50% or more of the filling. During winter, the Angolotti can be prepared with cabbage and broccoli, during spring with for example wild asparagus and for summer often with leafy greens. On the other hand, when it comes to the well-known ragu, you have all the ingredients available all year around so the recipe is set and doesn’t change much over the season – or depending on who’s in the kitchen. Even what type of pasta is served with what kind of sauce is set, and that is true for all pasta dishes – at least in Italy.

– What’s the vehicle for the ragu? Josh asks and tells us about the idea behind the perfect pasta to match a specific sauce.

– For the ragu, at Villa La Madonna, we use a tagliolini made with a huge percentage of egg – 30 egg yolks for every kilo of flour. That creates a fresh pasta that is very elastic, even when it’s cooked, so the ragu sauce sticks to the pasta, hence the tagliolini is a better vehicle.

Some dishes prepared at Villa La Madonna have been on the menu since the opening and will never go away. Actually, it’s quite the laundry list of savory and sweet dishes that you’ll always be able to order: the Vitello Tonnato, La Carne Cruda, the Angolotti al Sugo d’Arosto and Tagliolini al Ragu mentioned above, gnocchi and carnaroli risotti in seasonal variations and, for a satisfying end to a festive dinner, the classic dolci; Tiramisu, Panacotta and Bunet Piemontese, a northern Italian chocolate pudding to die for.

– Being a destination for international travelers, our guests also want food that is famous from Italy, so in addition we offer things that are not necessarily Piemontese, like Carbonara and Vongole.

What really brings excitement and newness to the menu are the seasonal changes, which can be quite dramatic since the kitchen at Villa La Madonna adapts to what local crops and ingredients are available at the moment. In springtime it’s just like the world is waking up and you’ll find asparagus, nettles, peas and other green things on the menu. During the summer months, the tomato plays the leading role, as does the truffle during the autumn, while the hearty gems in the winter months are the beets, the cavolo nero and cauliflower. Up to 90% of the ingredients used in the kitchen come from local, small farmers such as Vittorio, the hotel’s own wine farmer, who among other things, also cultivates fennel, hunts mushrooms and runs a chicken farm to ensure the production of high-quality eggs (for the tagliolini).

You don’t offer someone a drink and no snack.

That is true for both the Merenda, the afternoon coffee consisting of sweet snacks served together with the hot beverage, and the Aperitivo, the cultural ritual, dating as far back as the 1700s, of having drinks and appetisers in the early evening hours before dinner.

– In Italian homes, the aperitivo can be whatever they have of leftovers. Josh tells us, as we start digging into what is served in the late afternoons at Villa La Madonna to whet our appetite: homemade, heavenly focaccia and grissini together with a selection of local salami and cheeses. Everything is so good that Josh needs to remind us, with a twinkle in his eye, that this is not an Apericena (when you eat your fill of aperitivo and skip dinner) and that our table is ready with astonishing views overlooking the picturesque valley of Monastero Bormida and this evening’s, unforgettable sunset.



BRING A PIECE OF VILLA LA MADONNA WITH YOU HOME

By sharing three recipes with you, of some of the most sought-after and delicious dishes on the menu at *Villa La Madonna*, we invite you to bring home and indulge in the culinary delights of *Piemonte*.

Starting with our succulent *Melanzane alla Parmigiana*, continuing with our special *Agnolotti* pasta filled with meat and vegetables, and last but not least – no meal is complete without a decent dessert – our take on a classic tiramisu with its layers of coffee-soaked biscuits and rich mascarpone cream. Whether you're a food enthusiast or a curious traveller, these dishes are sure to leave you mesmerised.

Wishing you good luck in the kitchen!

Parmigiana di Melanzane

1.7 kg black eggplants
1 kg tomato purée (1 kg)
500 g of fior di latte mozzarella cheese
150 g of grated Parmigiano Reggiano DOP cheese
1 yellow onion
basil to taste
extra virgin olive oil to taste
black pepper to taste
fine salt to taste



To make the eggplant parmigiana, start with the sauce. Peel and chop the onion. Add enough olive oil to a pot to cover the bottom, and heat. Then add the onion to the pot. Let it brown for a couple of minutes, stirring often so it doesn't burn, then add the tomato purée.

Season with salt and add the basil leaves. Add a little water to the empty tomato purée container to rinse it, pouring the tomato water into the pot. Let this cook for 45–50 minutes over low heat. In the meantime, cut the fiordilatte cheese into small cubes, setting aside one piece that you'll use at the end.

Place the cheese cubes to drain in a colander positioned in a bowl, then cover with plastic wrap and set aside. This will allow the excess liquid to drain off. Now, turn to the eggplants, wash and trim them.

Cut them lengthwise into slices around 4–5 mm thick. Once sliced, fry the eggplant in peanut oil that's been heated to 170°C, immersing a few slices at a time. As soon as they've turned slightly golden, drain them on a tray lined with a paper towel.

If you run out of space on the tray, place more paper towels on top of the eggplant that are draining to create another layer with the newly fried eggplant. Lastly, move on to the assembly. Start by adding some of the tomato sauce to a 20x30 cm baking dish.

Form the first layer by arranging the fried eggplant slices in the dish, then spooning over more sauce, spreading it evenly, and sprinkling in cubes of fiordilatte.

Sprinkle with grated Parmigiano Reggiano cheese and some basil leaves. Start a new layer by adding more tomato sauce and fried eggplant slices, which should be arranged facing opposite directions.

Then add more cheese and basil leaves. Repeat these steps until you reach the last layer of eggplant, again adding sauce and the fiordilatte that you set aside, torn into pieces by hand. Finish off with grated Parmigiano cheese and bake in a conventional oven preheated to 200°C for around 30 minutes. When the eggplant parmigiana is finished baking, let it rest for 15–20 minutes before serving.



Agnolotti

FOR THE PASTA

500 g of flour
 11 yolks
 1 egg
 80-100 ml of cold water
 a little semolina

FOR THE STUFFING

1 carrot
 1 onion
 150 g of pork loin
 200 g of roast veal shoulder
 100 g of spinach
 200 g of green escarole
 4 eggs
 50 g of Parmigiano Reggiano
 20 g of butter
 50 ml of extra virgin olive oil
 salt and pepper

For the stuffing. Fry the diced carrot and onion in the oil. Add the pork loin, first browning it over high heat and then roasting it over low heat. Halfway through cooking, add the under-blade roast, the escarole and the spinach. Cover and cook for at least 2 hours. Let cool. In the meantime, reduce the cooking sauce, filter it and keep it aside in a small pan. Finely chop the meat. Add the eggs and grated parmesan to the mixture, season with salt and pepper.

For pasta. Sift the flour on a pastry board, create a hollow and put the egg yolks and water inside. Work vigorously until you have obtained a smooth and homogeneous dough. Cover it with a damp cloth and let it rest for about half an hour. After this time, remove a piece of it and pass it through the machine to make the pasta, starting from the highest thickness to get to the

lowest and thinnest one.

Once the strip of dough is ready, roll it out on the board and start placing small mounds of filling on one side of the strip, arranging them 2-3 cm apart. Cover with the flap of dough left free and make it adhere well. Using the toothed wheel, first cut along the length of the entire row of agnolotti obtained and then separate them individually. Now weld the agnolotti one by one with a pinch: the famous "plin". While waiting to cook them, arrange them on a cloth lightly dusted with semolina.

Boil the agnolotti in boiling salted water for about a minute and a half, drain and toss them in the roast sauce, kept aside, with the butter. You can serve them in a napkin or on a plate with a napkin, simply simmered in the beef broth and drained.

Tiramisu

750 g mascarpone cheese
 5 Eggs (260 g)
 259 g of Ladyfingers, Novellini
 120 g of sugar
 300 g of coffee



To make your tiramisu, prepare the coffee using a moka pot to get 300 g, then add sugar to taste (we add a teaspoonful) and leave it to cool in a large, shallow bowl. Separate the eggs, being careful to keep the whites totally free of yolk so that they will whip well. Beat the yolks with a hand mixer, adding half of the sugar. As soon as the mixture has turned light and foamy, and while the mixer is still running, add the mascarpone a little at a time.

Once all the mascarpone has been added, you'll have a dense, compact cream; set this aside. Clean the mixer well and move on to whipping the egg whites. Once they're foamy, pour in the remaining sugar a little at a time.

Whip the whites to stiff peaks; you'll know they're ready when you can turn the bowl upside down without the mixture moving. Take a spoonful of the whites and add it to the bowl with the mascarpone cream, then stir vigorously with a spatula to dilute the mixture. Next, add the rest of the egg whites little by little, folding them in by mixing very gently from the

bottom upwards.

The mascarpone cream is ready. Spread a heaping spoonful on the bottom of a glass baking dish measuring 20x30 cm, ensuring the entire base is covered. Now dip the ladyfingers into the cold coffee for a few seconds, first on one side and then on the other.

Then arrange the coffee-soaked ladyfingers in the dish, trying to position them all in one direction, to form a first layer of cookies. Add another layer of mascarpone cream and level it so the cookies are covered completely. Continue to add the coffee-soaked ladyfingers and cream in alternating layers, always levelling the surface of the cream.

Finally, transfer the remaining cream to a pastry bag with a 12mm plain tip and cover the entire surface of the tiramisu with dabs of cream. Sprinkle over the unsweetened cocoa powder and leave the tiramisu to set in the fridge for a couple of hours.



THE PROUD DELICACIES OF PIEMONTE

Today, the *Piemontese* town of *Alba* and its surrounding territories count one of Italy's highest concentrations of *Michelin*-starred restaurants. Perhaps it's due to global chefs' ever-growing appetite for the region's white truffles. Perhaps it's the magical morning and late-night fog – the *nebbia* – that hangs over the landscape's softly rolling hills and has given name to the region's icon grape, the *Nebbiolo* (that's one theory, at least!), the star of world-famous wines including *Barolo*, *Barbaresco* and *Barbera*, just to name a few. No matter what the reason, this northwestern part of Italy offers a range of incredible locally farmed and produced delicacies from nutty nuts and lean meat to Middle Ages cheese varieties and post-World War chocolate bread spreads. *Bienvenuto* and *buon appetito* gastro-tourists from around the world!



BLACK TRUFFLE

Since the white, Alba truffle isn't available the full season and the harvest is very limited, the black truffle is the type of truffle more often sold and served in Piemonte. Although, by law only harvested during certain periods, the black truffle is available for a longer period of the year and exists both as a summer truffle, called the Scorzone, and as a winter version. The price is less than the Alba truffle, but the taste is still one of the best, ideally paired with a high-quality, earthy and rich Barolo. Mythbuster: Are you also storing truffles in rice? It's ok to store your truffle in rice for a few hours before cooking for risotto, but do not leave fresh truffles for a longer time since the rice dehydrates the truffles at an alarming rate making them dry and brittle.

WHITE ALBA TRUFFLE

Any top chef in the world will tell you that the best white truffles hail from Alba. Hence, it's by no coincidence the white truffle is also called the Alba truffle, as the majority of all the white truffles sold originates from Alba in Piemonte. The Tuber Magnatum Pico (dear child has many names, as they say) grows only during fall in the area's particular ancient, maritime soil and in a unique symbiosis with the surrounding trees. This very sought-after species of truffle has been prized for centuries for its warm, earthy flavour. Thanks to Giacomo Morra, who in the 1930s conceived Alba's first truffle-selling company and his early efforts of championing the fungi and sending them as gifts to bold-faced names like Marilyn Monroe and Winston Churchill, the world came to love this little-known delicacy. Its superiority thanks to the completely unique flavour profile, in combination with the limited availability, is directly reflected in the ever-rising price at the yearly Fiera Internazionale del Tartufo Bianco d'Alba, the International Alba White Truffle Fair. Here, all corners of the world compete with, bid for bid, the most prestigious lots of selected specimens of the white truffle. For all types of truffles in Piemonte, dogs' noses are used for hunting, unlike in France where pigs do the rough work.

CARNAROLI RICE

Carnaroli rice is considered by many to be the best rice variety for risotto, due to its excellent capacity to absorb liquid and flavours. Carnaroli belongs to the same family as the most famous Arborio rice but has larger grains. A high natural starch content gives that classic creamy texture when cooked, while remaining firm in the inner core. For more than five centuries, rice in different varieties with Vialone and Lencino such side by side with Arborio and Carnaroli, has been "the queen crop of Piemonte" defining its eastern landscape and characterising its agricultural economy. Hopefully, that position will last for many more centuries to come, letting more and more people enjoy the perfect texture of a Piemontese risotto so often found on the menus in every part of the region.



HAZELNUTS

Hazelnuts are a true Piemontese delicacy and the star of many delicious, regional pastry recipes, such as the moist Torta di Nocciole and the cooling, creamy Gelato alla Nocciola. The pride of the landscape, the Piemonte P.G.I. hazelnuts (Piemonte Protected Geographical Indication hazelnuts, certified by the EU) are mainly grown in the hilly provinces of Cuneo, Asti and Alessandria. The hazelnut is the mineral-rich fruit of the hazel and the most prized variety is the Tonda Gentile Trilobata, also called Nocciola Piemonte IGP. By comparison, Piemontese hazelnuts are small, intensely sweet and nutty and are, because of this, acknowledged as the best in the world. Lucky us we don't have to limit so much our daily intake of these delicious nuts – 20 hazelnuts a day keeps the doctor away and promotes benefits for both your health and your mood!





NUTELLA

A section entirely dedicated to a sweet spread? Yes, you read that right! Back in the early 19th Century, Napoleon blocked cocoa imports from England and as a consequence, the price of chocolate skyrocketed. This scarcity forced Italian pastry chefs to think outside the box. Just after the Second World War innovative Piemontese pastry chef Pietro Ferrero came up with a brilliant idea and turned the tricky problem into a smart solution by creating a sweet paste made from the region's abundance of hazelnuts, sugar and only a small amount of the expensive cocoa. This relatively hard paste was called Pasta Gianduja and was cut into pieces and enjoyed with bread. A few years later he developed a spreadable variant called Supercrema. It wasn't until his son, Michele, further developed the recipe in 1964 into the spreadable hazelnut and cocoa cream we know today as Nutella. Look in the right places and you'll still be able to find the real deal, made with local hazelnuts.

FASSONA BEEF

Fassona beef is among Italy's most sought-after meats. This exceptionally lean meat, low in saturated fats and high in essential nutrients, is from the Fassona Piemontese breed, born and raised in the region of Piemonte. The cattle are renowned for their unique muscular structure (picture a cow that has been to the gym everyday of his life), which is the result of natural muscular hypertrophy, yielding high-quality meat that is distinguished by excellent texture, tenderness, juiciness, and a rich, sweet flavour. Often the fat content of Fassona does not reach one percent, which makes it perfect for raw consumption and dishes such as Carne Cruda all'Albese, carpaccio and tartar, although a perfectly cooked Fassona Beef Tagliata will make any meat lover's mouth water.



POLENTA

Once upon a time, polenta was primarily the poor man's food of northern Italy, due to the fact that for many farmers and people in the countryside, it was the only way for them to afford to eat their fill after a long day's work. A woman's expertise in the kitchen was, for a long period in history, judged by how good she was at making a great polenta. This despite the fact that polenta pudding, which only consists of coarse corn flour, water and salt, should be among the easiest things to prepare. But there were several things she had to respect to make everything right: maintaining an even and good speed of the fire under the large copper pot as well as stirring almost continuously for hours with a large wooden spoon to avoid the corn porridge from getting burnt. Today you can find copper pans with an automatic mixer at the local supermarket, facilitating the preparation of the local polenta dish called La Puccia alla Piemontese, locally made with a combination of cornmeal, butter, pork rinds, white beans, cabbage, and potatoes – or any other of the region's traditional polenta dishes.

ROBIOLA DI ROCCAVERANNO PDO

Sometime around the 3rd century BC, in the hills around Roccaverano – a small town located in Piemonte (just a 15 minute drive from the hotel) – a special cheese was born, the Robiola di Roccaverano PDO. The Romans, which later came to integrate Liguria, named the cheese rubeola, from the Latin word ruber, which indicates the colour acquired by the rind at the end of the ripening process. Robiola di Roccaverano PDO is a soft-ripened cheese made from 100% goat's or goat's/cow's/ewe's milk handcrafted exclusively in Roccaverano and in 18 municipalities located in the Langhe in the province of Asti and in the Alto Monferrato near Acqui Terme. Robiola can be eaten fresh, but its flavour is enhanced by a maturing process that can exceed one month. In some areas you'll find the cheese conserved in oil. Robiola is often used as an ingredient in the preparation of fillings for local Piemontese dishes such as pasta and savory flans.

BAROLO

There are wine and then there are Barolo. Made with 100% Nebbiolo grapes and produced within the Barolo district in Piemonte. Barolo is well known for high acid, high tannins and flavors of red fruits, dried herbs and flowers. Barolo in particular is famous for its complexity, firm texture and ability to improve with age. It's not called The King of Wines for no reason.



LET'S HUNT FOR TRUFFLES



The young day is misty, and the air is almost dripping still the sky seems clear. The morning fog watches over the valley like a hunter over its prey.



Piemonte knows all about this heavy mist, the locals call it Nebbiolo, just like the famous grape. According to the legend, it's the fog that makes the fine Nebbiolo grapes mature when they do, pushing them to hold on to the vines for a few

and enjoy it whilst you heat up from the morning walk from your room by the pool. Soft jazz is playing in the background and before you even have to ask, a steaming hot cappuccino comes your way. You lean back towards the deep green

decorated with fluffy hay bales. This will be your means of transport for today. The ride to the destination is approximately 20 minutes and just when you didn't think the fog could get any thicker, the old tractor breaks through it. Before you now are miles and miles of deep green valleys of vines and if you look closely towards the horizon you notice the white-covered mountains.

Vittorio, your designated tractor driver, parks the tractor on the edge of a vineyard and you begin the walk into the woods. The hike is light and nature seems to be holding its breath between the old trees. When you arrive at the glade in the forest, you see a table that has been prepared by Villa La Madonna, decorated with fall leaves, zucchini, focaccia, salami and wine. Perfect, you think to yourself, breakfast only takes you that far. A man that wasn't on the tractor appears and with him he has a curly brown dog. He explains the itinerary of today and your hunt for one of the world's most luxurious truffles, the white Alba truffle. The Alba truffle is one of the rarest because it grows only in certain areas and resists cultivation unlike black truffles. White truffles in Piemonte grow in symbiosis with certain trees, the important ones being oak, wil-

“The Alba truffle is one of the rarest because it grows only in certain areas and resists cultivation in contrast to black truffles.”

more weeks when the other grapes surrender. Those extra weeks on the vines make all the difference. Of course, we know there are a number of reasons that make the Nebbiolo grapes superior, but this morning, looking over the milky valley, wrapping your wool blazer tighter around your neck when the autumn wind hits you from behind, you are sure this tale is true.

In the Villa La Madonna dining room, breakfast is served. You get some of that freshly baked bread, local yogurt with the villa's homemade granola and a slice of Robiola, because when in Piemonte. You take your breakfast to the fireplace

velvet cushion and wonder if you should perhaps have put on another knitted sweater for today's adventures.

At 10AM you and your friends gather outside the entrance of the villa. You came back right on time, from running up to your room to get that extra knit, after all, feeling content with your choice. The leaves have started to fall from the trees painting the piazza in a rich yellow and burnt orange colour. After listening about the plans for the day, an Italian farmer shows up the only way one would imagine an Italian farmer showing up – on an old tractor with a trailer



“Just when you start to think your hunting luck isn’t with you today the dog takes a leap, stops by a tree and starts digging.”

low, popular and linden. Truffles can be thought of as subterranean mushrooms; they are fungi that appear when mycelium is seated in certain types of soil around certain types of trees. The difference between truffles and mushrooms is simply the fact that the truffles are growing underground and are therefore not visible. They do not call it a hunt for no reason, it turns out. The dog seems excited to get his work shift started, even though his compensation for the hard work won't be a truffle.

Truffles are found exclusively with dogs who can sense them under the ground in this area. In certain parts of the world, pigs are used, but in Piemonte it is illegal to use pigs because of their destructive nature. Unlike what people might think, most truffle hunters in Piemonte drive a Fiat Panda, and it's very hard to fit a pig into a Panda. You start walking uphill behind the man and his talented dog, after all, this dog is most likely to put your lunch on the table today. You

walk further and further into the woods and even though you are far behind the curly friend you can hear his nose work between the trees. Just when you start to think your hunting luck isn't with you today, the dog takes a leap, stops by a tree and starts digging. His owner stops him just in time, of course. In the soil, hardly visible, a big chunk of truffle appears. Your company starts to pick up their phones and cameras and suddenly there you have the most coveted truffle in all of Italy. The furry hero of the day is rewarded with a hotdog and seems pretty content.

With your prey of today, you all walk back to the tractor. Turns out you have been going around in circles all this time, waiting for the dog to sniff the truffle. But just as you prepare to go back to Villa La Madonna, Vittorio, the charming wine farmer driving the tractor invites you all home to his place for truffle pasta and his homemade wine. Who are you to say no to that? After all, it's been a pretty rough day in the Piemontese woods.

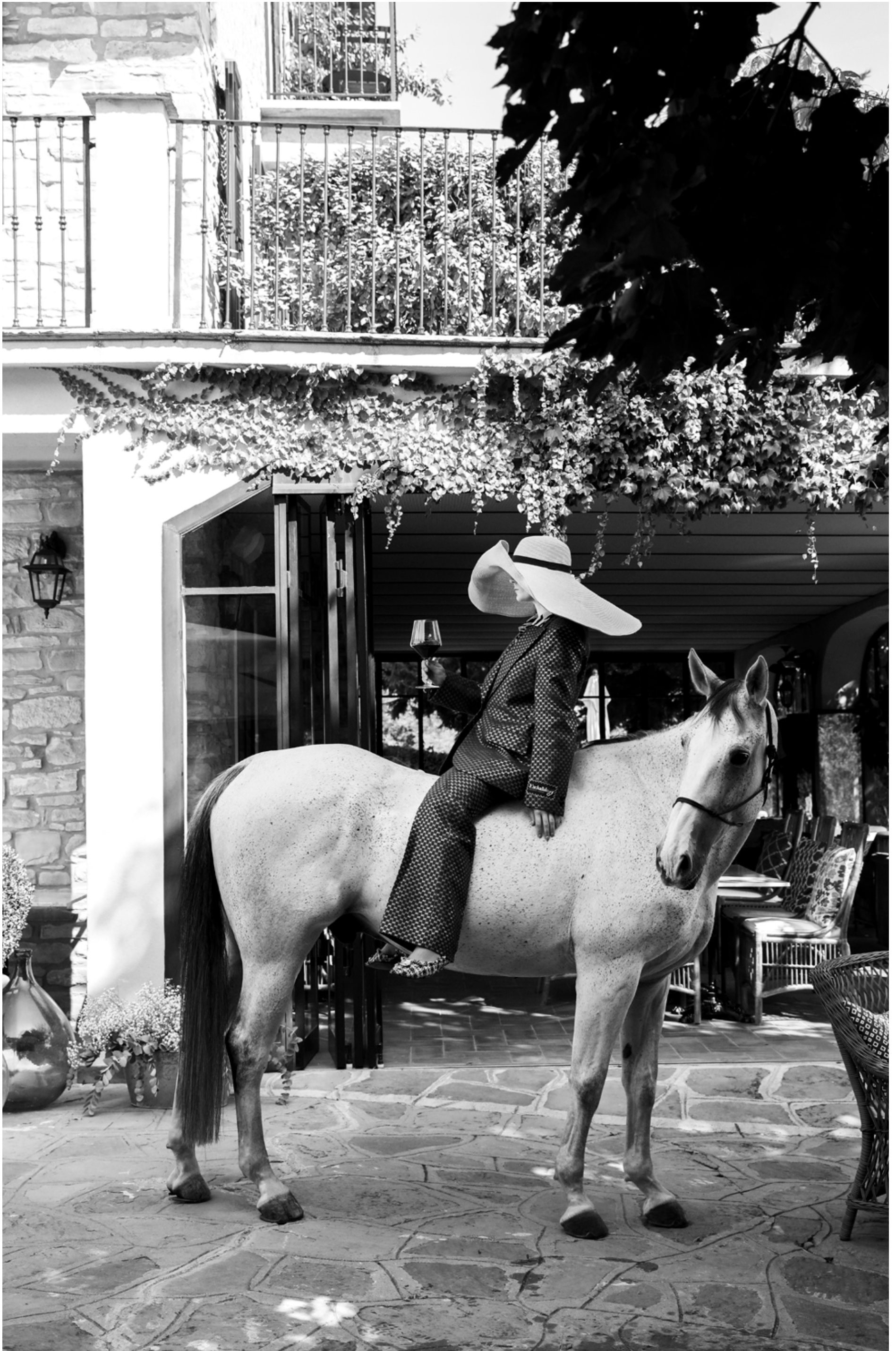


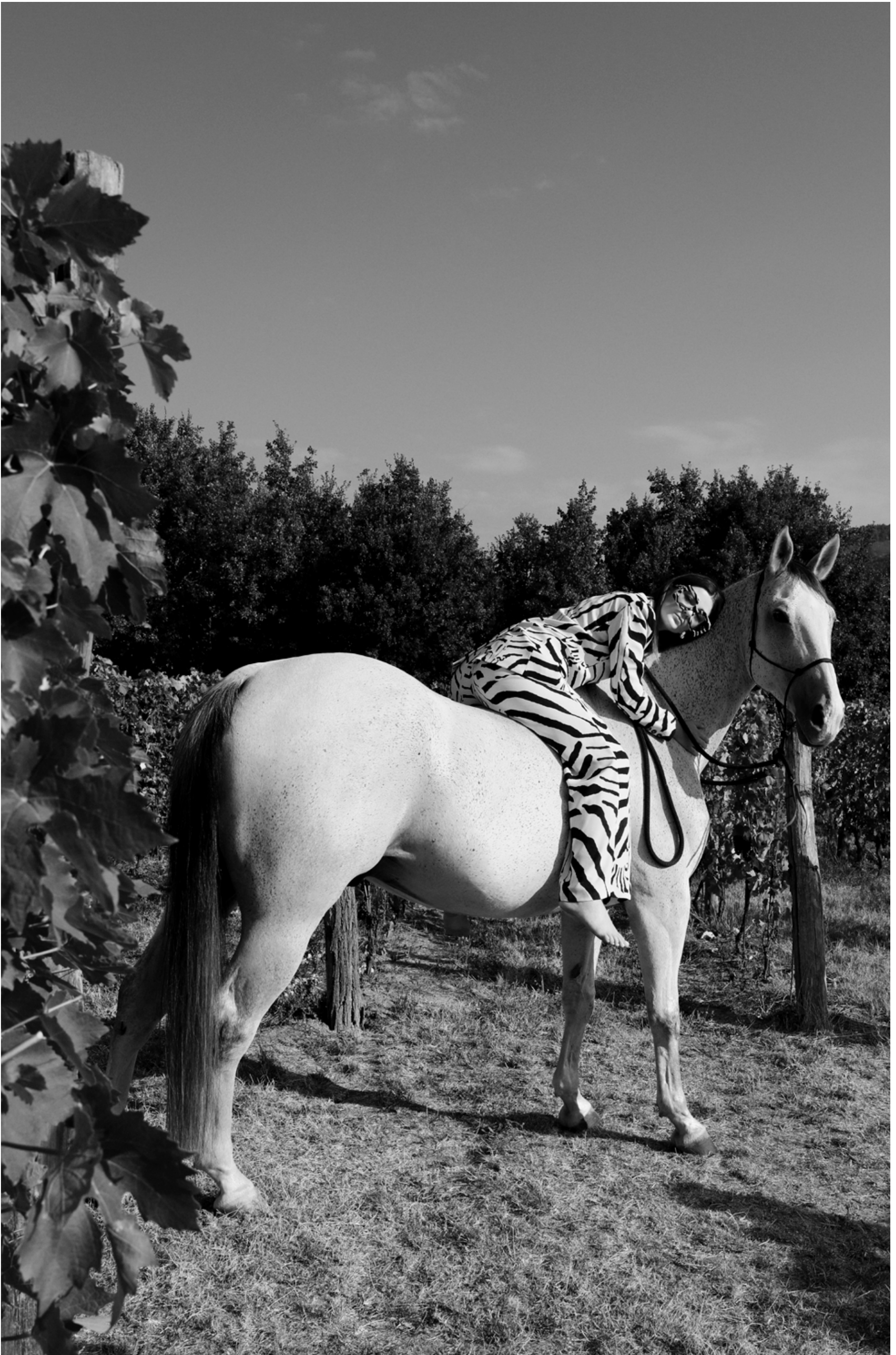
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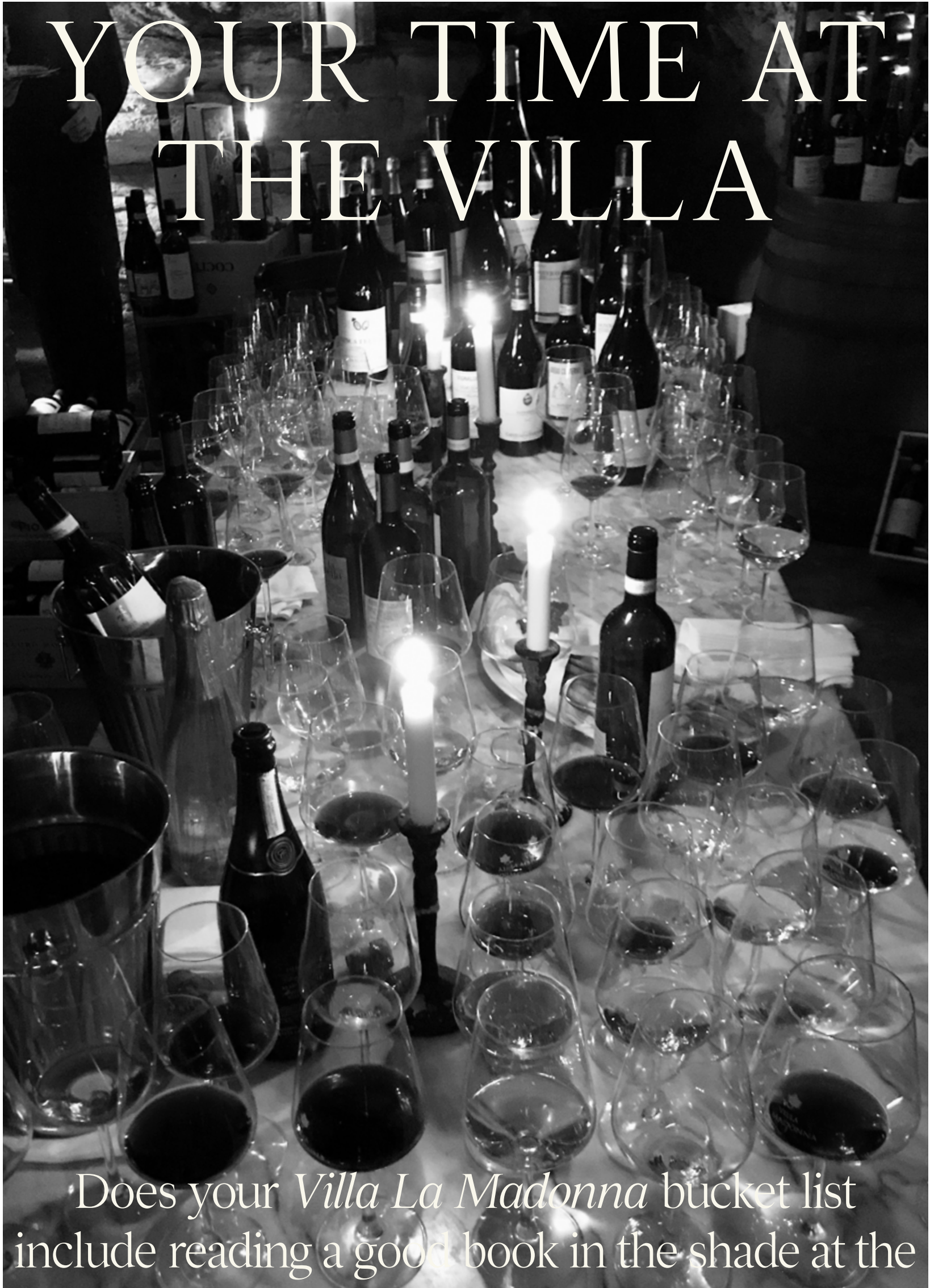


SHE ENTERED THE PARTY ON A HORSE AND ORDERED A BOTTLE OF BAROLO





HOW TO SPEND YOUR TIME AT THE VILLA



Does your *Villa La Madonna* bucket list include reading a good book in the shade at the

piazza, relaxing endless hours by the pool, exploring the Piemonte valleys and learning more about Italian wine?

“We may be biased but booking our wine cellar for a private tasting is just like a trip to Paris – never a bad idea.”

We've got you covered. Regardless of your preferences, there are so many different ways to spend your time at Villa La Madonna and the resort's stunning surroundings. Let us guide you through our offer and bear in mind: the staff are entirely at your disposal, ready to make your Piemontese dream come true.

If you are all about taking it easy at the villa

At Villa La Madonna we take pride in mastering the art of winding down and taking it easy. May we suggest...

The swimming pool is not only a waterhole (pun intended indeed) for guests in need of cooling down but also a great place to lounge with a board game and a drink. By the pool, you'll find board games such as Yatzy, cards and chess to keep you occupied long after the sun has set. Be aware of bad losers – but most of all bad winners!

A massage anyone? Villa La Madonna offer treatments of all kinds that will make even the most heated head and body calm and relaxed. Just as the receptionists and they'll help you out.

Yoga overlooking the vines. The best workout is the one that actually happens, aren't we right? Equipment like dumbbells and yoga mats are available for your convenience, or inconvenience, depending on how you look at it. However, the view of the surrounding valley is 100% satisfaction guaranteed.

Challenge your colleagues with boules and table tennis. Right above the vines, you'll find Villa La Madonna's much-appreciated and much-used boules and table tennis arena. Yes, we call it arena because of the competitive instinct people seem to get when entering the graveyard between the shading trees. Ask the staff for racquets and boules balls.

“Yes, we call it arena because of the competitive instinct people seem to get when entering the graveyard between the shading trees.”

Now this is not under the label “taking it that easy” but still worth mentioning. The areas around the Villa offer several trekking trails and bike tracks to explore for anyone with restless legs. No matter the distance, we assure you that the vistas will not disappoint. For those of you with a particularly adventurous personality, we offer private tours of the area with skillful guides to maximize your experience. Preferably make your reservation one day in advance so that we have time to prepare a tasteful picnic for you to bring with you. If you are a large group (friends, family members, colleagues etc) we're happy to arrange a generous picnic for you all at your resting point. Bikes are available at your disposal and if you want to go offroad we can arrange mountain bike rental.

No matter how you choose to spend your day, please plan to make it back to Aperitivo hour. Welcome to the Piazza at 6.30PM, 7 days a week.

The piazza is the heart and soul of the Villa. Here is where people gather in the morning for coffee, to read a book in the shade during noon, play cards post-lunch with a glass of Spumante, and most importantly, the hangout spot where all guests enjoy an aperitivo together before dinner. Aperitivo is to the Italians what shoes are for the rest of us – you could walk without them, but would you really want to?

Who said wine and food?

Besides our restaurant, the piazza, and the pool bar, (not to brag or anything) we are more than happy to do amazing, tailor-made arrangements for you, your family and friend and your company, both at the Villa and at locations owned by our close friends. How about...

“At a comfortable distance by car from Villa La Madonna you will reach the coast towns of Portofino, Rapallo, Santa Margherita and Alassio, just to name a few.”

A wine tasting in our wine cellar? We may be biased but booking our wine cellar for a private tasting is just like a trip to Paris – never a bad idea. The cellar dates back to the 17th Century making the atmosphere impossibly beautiful. Also, it's incredibly well curated by the Villa's own sommelier, Josh. Ask the receptionist for availability and price list.

A private lunch or dinner among the vines? We can arrange a private lunch or dinner among the vines for special occasions and celebrations. Underneath our large umbrellas, you and your company can enjoy a private event, with only the valley of the vines as the audience. You decide the menu and the music. We arrange it all at any time of the year although due to the weather changes over the season, we recommend dinner

for summer and lunch for autumn. Ask the receptionist for availability and price list.

Cheese and wine tasting. The area around Villa La Madonna is, as you probably know by now, famous for the wine and truffles, but it's also known for local varieties of cheese. Here you will find many small cheese makers living and producing according to old traditional methods. At the cheese and wine tasting event, you will get the chance to taste a selection of locally produced cheeses and learn more about their unique histories. The famous Robiola is one of them, most famous for winning the Cheese Olympics (it's true, we never lie about cheese). The cheese will of course be paired with wines from the area.

Bovio Restaurant La Morra, Ristorante Cacciatori, Ristorante Stazione Giardinetto ... These are a few favourite outside-the-Villa restaurants. If you wish to have a night in the town,

or more precisely an evening (or lunch for that matter), in one of the nearby villages, please let us know and we can make reservations and book a driver.

Don't miss out on this when you are here.

Although spending time by the pool can be just enough of an activity for a holiday, there are so many gems and highlights of Piemonte to experience. If you are eager to explore, please don't miss this.

The Piemontese slow food. It was here in Piemonte, in the little town of Bra, that the concept of “slow food” was born as a reaction to the world spinning too fast. Since 1986 this humble concept has guided chefs – amateurs as well as world-famous food artists – in the art of focusing on quality instead of quantity and making sure that all ingredients used when cooking are locally produced, with traditional methods. The rules

are many but the movement's mission stays the same: come together, relax and enjoy every bite the food on the plate in front of you, in the here and now.

A visit to Barolo. Not far from Villa La Madonna, you will find world-famous wine districts producing Barolo, Barbaresco, Barbera, Timorasso, and Alta Langa Spumante. The most famous of these wines is certainly, without any competition, Barolo. The king and queen of Italian wines and the wine of Italian kings and queens. The village of Barolo is less than one hour away from the Villa. According to your wishes, we arrange visits to these wonderful landscapes and well-known vineyards and their wine-tasting events.

Meet the ocean. Forget about the Riviera, the Ligurian coast is truly the most beautiful coastline in southern Europe. At a comfortable distance by car from Villa La Madonna you will reach the coast towns of Portofino, Rapallo, Santa Margherita and Alassio, just to name a few. All these places offer stunning views, great shopping and even greater food. With a rented boat you can adore the coastline from the turquoise water.

An activity for a cloudy day. Visit one of Italy's largest designer outlets with just over 230 stores and brands represented. Imagine Milano but with 50% off. Here you can find typically Italian fashion houses like Gucci, Prada, Valentino, Dolce & Gabbana as well as their French cousins Celine, Saint Laurent and Balenciaga. Ralph Lauren is a bargain and Adidas too. The outlet is located in Serravalle Scrivia, 60 km and about an hour's drive from Villa La Madonna.

The truffle market in Alba. During October and November, the truffle market in Alba is well worth a visit. The white Alba truffle is one of the most exclusive truffles in the world and its fan-base is global and gigantic. This is an event that we recommend to everyone visiting Piemonte at that time of the year. White truffle of some sort (fresh on a fried egg or a creamy pasta) paired with a glass of Barolo, is something everyone should experience at least once in their lives.



MEETING WITH PHOTOGRAPHER ANNICA EKLUND



Annica Eklund is not only co-founder of *Villa La Madonna* (daughter, sister, mother, wife, and hard-working entrepreneur, not to forget a major style icon), she has an evident weakness for photography, something she's revealing with her unexpectedly powerful and playful images decorating the walls of *Villa La Madonna*.



It's not an understatement to say that the photographs in the hotel are hanging loose – not literary but for sure philosophically. Each season Annica recomposes some of the images, changing the motif and/or the placement to create that desirable, eclectic feel that everyone (that has not a gallerist in the family) is jealous about. In that way, her photos make an interesting contrast to the hotel's more traditional Piedmontese architecture and interior decoration, and returning guests – there are many of them – are continuously surprised with new views to rest their eyes on. During this year's opening week at Villa La Madonna, we were fortunate enough to have a quick chat with Annica about her debut, her vision, and about the man standing behind this successful woman.

We understand that you grew up in a family of entrepreneurs, how did photography become your medium? What inspired you to pick up the camera?

– My sister Marie and I have always photographed a lot, from a very young age. When I started my first job at our family business Bolon, my role was actually to travel around Europe and take photographs of our references. In the meantime, my responsibilities changed and I

today, so I see it as a fantastic opportunity that I can combine my knowledge in imagery in all my roles in all my companies. In that way, I'm able to create relevant images that enhance and shape a contemporary and cool expression. I can happily say I feel I'm living and working in just the perfect context.

What formal training do you have as a photographer? How do you improve and develop your photography skills?

– I believe in passion and learning along the way. When me and my sister took over the reign at Bolon I had no specific education. I was in the same situation when I started working as a photographer. Then, of course, I don't know all the

and not be too anxious. I just go for it, and this I think has created my identity and recognition, which I believe is a very good thing.

What details do you enjoy focusing on in your work?

– The people I meet and to always seek and see both sides in a situation or a moment; depth and banality, sincerity and playfulness. I think a lot about the stimulus I feel in a certain moment when, by chance, a magical image is created that I did not plan or predict from the start.

In the Villa La Madonna Series - did you set out with the intention to create a series of pictures specifically adapted to the space? Can you tell us any stories behind these images?

– I believe it's the moment that creates the opportunity to take the perfect picture, so (except for my equipment) I always travel with my creative eye open to new perspectives!

The pictures hanging on the walls at Villa La Madonna are 99% taken at the location. My goal with the motifs was to contrast with the classic decor and surrounding environment to create an eclectic and modern vibe to the hotel. I also wanted there to be elements of recognition in the images, for my family and our guests. Therefore, you'll find images of both the hotel staff in fun contexts and my daughter with her friends and boyfriend in unexpected settings, in combination with wonderful landscape images and photos from the kitchen and the incredible wine cellar. I strive to always have the rooms feel alive with elements of surprise. For that to happen, it definitely helps to let go of anxiety and dare to be personal, and creative, and to trust your individual taste, even when it comes to hanging pictures on the walls. I live on new perspectives!

“I found my way back to photography and realized how nurturing and inspiring it was for me to work with the camera again and on that path, it all has continued.”

needed to put creativity aside and focus fully on the business part of the company. Sometime later I got an analog camera from my then-boyfriend and that was the start of a new era for me. I found my way back to photography and realized how nurturing and inspiring it was for me to work with the camera again and on that path, it all has continued.

How do you balance your three main engagements as Creative Director at Bolon, co-founder and owner of Villa La Madonna, and your passion for photography?

– A lot is about images and visual information

technical stuff but it's my creativity that gives expression to my visual form – and that is not something that you can only practice to master. I think creativity is something you have in you, that you can cultivate.

What do you think are the essential characteristics of a successful photographer? What do you think are your usps as a photographer?

– For me, it is daring to have my own creative and playful expression. I have the privilege of having photography as a second job (and hobby) besides my other professions. I think this situation helps me to be brave and not to overthink



EKLUND

FAMILY'S GUIDE TO MILANO



People who know *Italy* will tell you to skip *Milano*. People who know *Italy* well will tell you that whatever you do, do not skip *Milano*.



Da Giacomo



Pasticceria Marchesi



10 Corso Como

Well, we might not be Italians but we do know we would never skip a chance to say hi to one of our favorite cities in the world. It's easy to underestimate Milano and get carried away by Rome or Venice, but according to us, that's just a rookie mistake. Milano is the heart of Italian fashion and design – let us guide you to our favorites spots in this beautiful city.

Where to dine and drink

BAR BASSO - ALL AROUND THE CLOCK
The most beautiful (and iconic) bar in Milano. Spot local Milanese enjoying their first espresso of the day or enjoy one of the best Aperol Spritz you will ever taste. Believe us when we say it's a muststop when you are in Milano, both during the day and night.

Via Plinio 39

SALUMAIIO DI MONTENAPOLEONE FOR LUNCH

In the heart of Milano & inside a Renaissance courtyard, you find this hidden spot called Salumaio di Montenapoleone. It's the savanna of Milano, where all the chicest cats gather and sip a glass of Milanese history while they enjoy a plate full of refined Italian cuisine.

Via Santo Spirito, 10 - Via Gesù, 5, Palazzo Bagatti Valsecchi

DINNER AT DA GIACOMO

Entering Da Giacomo is like entering an old Italian movie. Everything is minty green and you are being welcomed in the door by slightly arrogant older men in white suits. They serve the best Spaghetti Vongole and limoncello in the city, so if you only have one night in Milano this is the place to eat.

Via Pasquale Sottocorno 6

COCKTAILS AT FOUR SEASON HOTEL

Just a stone's throw away from the busiest shopping street, Four Season serves a beautiful rose garden including chic tourists and business people. The drinks are great, but the cocktail of people is the real reason we come here.

Via Gesù 6-8

SOMETHING SWEET AT PASTICCERIA MARCHESI

Pasticceria Marchesi is one of Milano's oldest and finest pastry shops. It is considered a benchmark for the quality of its fresh patisserie, its signature chocolates, and its classic Milanese Panettone.



Dmag

Our favorite store is located in the beautiful Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II, and it's like a museum itself. But with eatable art.
Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II, Centro Storico

Where to shop

10 CORSO COMO

Multibrand store where the collection is hand-picked pieces from brands all around the world, well known as emerging designers. Not to be missed is their design & book department on one floor! Great source of inspiration.

Corso Como 10

BOYY BOUTIQUE

During Milano Design Week 2023, über cool Milano- and Bangkok-based accessories brand Boyy Boutique opened their Flagship store where they collaborated with Danish FOS on an evolving, unexpected retail space. A store that must be paid a visit!

Via Bagutta 9

DMAG

If you find designer brands exciting, then DMag's three stores are THE place to visit for you. All international high-luxury brands in one place, for



Bar Luce

at least 50% off. Google DMag and you will find all three stores located in the city center, but our favorite is the one on Via Bigli 4.

Via Bigli 4

Where to get inspiration

VILLA NECCHI

Recently most famous from "House of Gucci", Villa Necchi Campiglio is a historical Art Deco Villa and museum designed by Piero Portaluppi in the early 30s. Housing sensational works of art, where you can still immerse yourself in the glamorous world of Milano's interwar years.

Via Mozart 14

FONDAZIONE PRADA + BAR LUCE

In 2015, Fondazione Prada marked the center of contemporary art and culture in Milano. We love to come to this creative space to search for inspiration in the most unexpected versions, everything from concrete art pieces to old cinema movies. And we never leave without paying a visit to the Wes Anderson-designed Bar Luce, a 1950s-style Milanese café located next door that cannot be missed. Almost worth a visit only itself.

Largo Isarco 2, Morivione



A unique love story began on a train in South Africa, where Marie and Björn met by chance. Despite being from different places, they continued to cross paths around the world and eventually settled in *Villa La Madonna* in *Italy*. After the couple parted ways, tragedy struck when *Björn* passed away, and the villa was put up for sale. Determined to keep her family's memories alive, *Marie* decided to reclaim the villa and enlisted her sister *Annica*'s help. Despite initial hesitations, the sisters found a way to make it work.

By 2015 the renovations of *Villa La Madonna* were in full swing, based on the ideas *Marie* and *Björn* had dreamed of together 15 years earlier, and it was like closing the circle. Since the spring of 2016, the sisters have welcomed guests to their *Italian* dream home amidst the vines, sharing their story, togetherness and true love for this *Piemontese* paradise.

