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DREAM OF ITALY

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Italy Meets Greece in a Corner of Calabria

Though January was merely days behind us almond trees were already in blossom. The wind was still chilly but the sun felt warm enough to melt *ricotta* as Giovanni and I drove through the winding roads up from the Ionian coast on a beautiful day in Calabria, at the toe of Italy's boot.

I was teaching English to Giovanni, a thirty-year-old pub owner in Reggio Calabria, and he was teaching me about life in southern Italy. During a lesson he told me about an amazing cultural anomaly just south of town. "I can take you there," he offered. In fact, it was new territory even for Giovanni, and so he had to stop for directions. An old woman in a black sweater and heavy wool skirt told Giovanni to look for a sign up

ahead. There was a sign, alright, but I wasn't able to read it — it was written in Greek. It announced our arrival in Galliciano.

We followed a mercilessly weaving road through rocky hills that became mountains overlooking a wide wash full of scattered stones. We passed a variety of trees: oaks, eucalyptus, olive, mimosa, and more almond trees exploding with white blossoms. Oranges and lemons glowed brightly in the sun.

And when we arrived in a small village tucked into the slope, we smelled *bergamot* — the lemon-like fruit unique to Calabria that gives Earl Grey Tea its essence. Whispering breezes carried the clanging of tin bells and bleats of

continued on page 4



Modern Art Among the Vines

You don't expect to see a masterpiece of contemporary art amid rows of choice vines in Italy's Piemonte region. That's exactly what you'll find, though, atop a hill just outside the town of La Morra — a tiny chapel, called the *Capella di Sol LeWitt* — David Tremlett, whose colorful abstract exterior might seem more at home in New York's Museum of Modern Art.

But to the workers who earn their living in the surrounding vineyards of the Langhe district, the area famous for the Nebbiolo grape found in Barolo, Barbaresco, Dolcetto and Barbera wines, this paradoxical structure is a tribute to the long winemaking tradition of this land.

Credit brothers Bruno and Marcello Ceretto — two of Italy's most prominent wine producers — and two contemporary artists, one American and one British, for envisioning the unlikely symmetry between modern art and the Langhe heritage of winemaking.

When the Cerettos purchased the surrounding vineyard in 1976, the chapel, though not old by Italian standards, was dangerously close to ruin. Santa Maria della Grazie, as it was known then, had been constructed in 1914 as a small church as well as a shelter for workers from the thunderstorms that occasionally pummel the hills and valleys of the Langhe. Never consecrated and rarely visited, the neglected chapel deteriorated from decades of exposure to the alternating hot

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Mountains cover 40% of Calabria.

Modern Art Among the Vines *continued from page 1*

summers and cold winters of the area. Its crumbling façade became a potential danger to the workers passing by on their way to the adjacent vineyards. Its demolition seemed imminent.

The decision to save the chapel was made, appropriately enough, over a glass of wine. In 1997, David Tremlett, an internationally acclaimed British artist who happened to have a passion for excellent wines, was visiting with the Cerettos after having participated in an exhibition of contemporary art at nearby *Castello di Barolo*. When Bruno Ceretto asked Tremlett what he should do with the chapel, the artist proposed transforming it into a symbol celebrating the vineyards, wines and people of the Langhe.

The Cerettos aren't strangers to the harmony between modern art and traditional culture. The architectural focal point of their winery *Bricco Rocche* is a large glass and steel sculpture, called *Il Cubo*. The family readily commissioned

Tremlett to restore and decorate the decaying chapel.

Tremlett immediately enlisted his friend, American artist Sol LeWitt, to assist with the project. LeWitt shared both Tremlett's passion for wine and his vision for a contemporary interpretation of the winemaking tradition.

"The two artists were conquered by the simplicity and respect of the tradition of my family and the people that live on those hills," Roberta Ceretto explains. She is the daughter of Bruno and, along with her brother and cousins, is now actively involved in running the family's wineries. "The philosophy at the base of the project with Sol and David was to create a place, unique and joyful as the chapel is, to share with the whole community, and we think that we reached this goal."

The exterior, designed and decorated by LeWitt, strikes you with its vibrant geometric forms — all painted in rich blue, green, yellow, orange or red and framed by the natural bricks of the chapel. Horizontal scallops evoke the surrounding hills of vineyards. Bold rectangles and vertical lines accentuate the chapel's architecture. The vivid colors express celebration.

Tremlett's contribution, the interior, captures the more spiritual nature of the winemaking tradition. On one large panel, tones of brown and green — the colors of the soil and vines — harmonize into one another. Opposite, a muted red gains intensity on another panel and suggests the maturing grapes. On the adjacent walls, white



The Barolo Chapel, before (above) and after (below).



melds into yellow and then into orange, and you sense the changing seasons and life-giving sun. At the far end of the chapel, a triangle of pale blue represents, perhaps, the nourishing rain. And overhead, the most fervent reds symbolize the pinnacle of the harvest — the deep-colored Barolo wine produced from the surrounding vineyards.

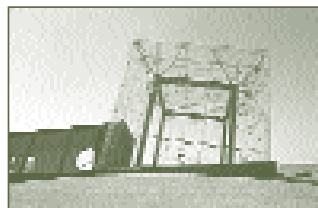
Perhaps as proof that for some people appreciation of contemporary art is an acquired taste, the chapel's makeover wasn't without its critics when it was completed in 1999. According to Roberta Ceretto, some of the locals considered it a bit too extravagant at first. But now, she assures, it has become accepted as a symbol for the Langhe. Like the wines it celebrates, the *Capella di Sol LeWitt* — David Tremlett is bold and one of a kind.

And if you doubt the artists' passion behind their creation, consider this: For their restoration of the chapel, they were paid with bottles of wine!

"Both LeWitt and Tremlett love wine, so we proposed to pay them simply in Barolo," Roberta says, "One bottle a week for the rest of their lives of *Barolo Bricco Rocche Brunate*. It's one of our best Barolos and the one that grows in the vineyard around the chapel." ♦

— Michael Slagle

Michael Slagle is a freelance writer residing in Fort Wayne, Indiana. He travels frequently to Italy and considers Piemonte one of the country's most "under-discovered" and rewarding tourist destinations.



Il Cubo

The Details

The *Capella di Sol LeWitt* — David Tremlett, sometimes known simply as the Barolo Chapel, is open daily. The Ceretto wineries occasionally sponsor concerts and other special events on the chapel's grounds.

Wine tastings and tours of the family's wineries are available by appointment only, Monday through Friday, and must be booked at least a week prior to your visit. For more information, call (39) 0173 282582 or visit www.ceretto.com



"Good wine is a good familiar creatu

Only the Best for ACADEMIA BARILLA

With its sleek, modern design and state-of-the-art technology, this cooking school might be found anywhere in the world. But the fact that it's in *Parma*, Italian and now European food capital, and that it's backed by one of the most recognizable brand names in Italy, makes all the difference. The dream child of the brothers behind Italy's most famous pasta, *Academia Barilla*, a cooking academy for professionals and enthusiasts alike, opened in April.

The school is part of the *Barilla Center*, a modern shopping and entertainment venue designed by *Rienzo Piano*, positioned just outside *Parma's* beautiful historic center. No expense has been spared. The head chef was given carte blanche in designing the 16 practice kitchens and handful of demonstration kitchens. He was told to buy only the best tools. He chose German knives, made by *Dick*, American mixers by *Kitchen Aid* and most

surprisingly, prosciutto cutters made by a Dutch manufacturer. The kitchens were designed with ergonomic styling; the flow of the kitchens follows the flow of the meals.



Safety is supreme at *Academia Barilla*. The knives and cutting boards are color-coded to keep vegetables and meats separate. Knives are put in special sterilization holders. The school's air system filters and circulates the air in such a way that even if every stove were to leak gas, the facility would remain safe.

There's a 90-seat auditorium, room for 20 students in a lecture/demonstration kitchen and generally 8 to 12 in participation classes. Classes are taught mainly in Italian, with about one-third of them offered in English. The school is actually equipped to accommodate speakers of any language with simultaneous translation services. While there are set dates and times for classes, *Barilla* is happy to set up private sessions on request. Some of the offerings in English include: Italian Rice, The World of Chocolate, The Art of Italian Entertaining, Cooking with Wild Mushrooms, Tasting the Italian Cheeses.

In conjunction with the launch of the school, *Barilla* has introduced a line of culinary staples under the *Academia Barilla* label. There's *Parmigiano* cheese and *prosciutto*. Five award-winning olive oils include two from *Sicily*. Perhaps the most interesting and expensive product is *Academia Barilla's* well-aged *Condimento*

Upcoming Courses in English

**Futurist Cuisine:
The Italian Futurist Movement**
September 17, 2004

Italian First Courses
September 13-14 or 21-22, 2004

Italian Holiday Menus
November 13-15 or 22-24, 2004

Balsamico selling for about 30€. At the moment these delicacies are only available at a store near the school.

Every corner of the *Barilla* facility seems to hold something intriguing. A 30,000-

volume gastronomic library will open later this summer. Under the library, there will be a wine cellar. There's a private restaurant for the students. There's even a wood oven for pizza making, a rarity for a cooking school. *Academia Barilla* combines the best of traditional culinary instruction with 21st century innovation. ♦

THE DETAILS

ACADEMIA BARILLA

Largo Piero Calamandrei, 3/A
Barilla Center
Parma
(39) 0521 264060
www.academiabarilla.com

GRAND HOTEL DE LA VILLE

Largo Piero Calamandrei, 11
(39) 0521 0304
www.grandhoteldelaville.it
This brand new, 5-star hotel offers 110 rooms just steps from *Academia Barilla*. If you attend the cooking school, ask about special rates at the hotel.

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re, if it be well used.” —Shakespeare



goats down from the slopes. "Welcome to *Magna Grecia*," Giovanni said.

More than seven centuries before the birth of Christ, southern Italy had yet to see the Romans. It was the Greeks who occupied the shores of Calabria and Eastern Sicily forming *Magna Grecia* or Great Greece. The area was home to such renowned characters as poet *Theocritus* and mathematician and inventor *Archimedes*, and it remained part of the Greek Empire until the Romans annexed it in the third century B.C.

The Romans brought their own settlements but remained respectful of the Greeks allowing them to maintain their own language and culture. In fact, in Rome, Greek was treated as a second language and the city maintained a sizeable Greek minority into the Christian era.

Local professor *Franco Mosino* has even argued that it was in fact the Western Greeks who developed the Greek alphabet and wrote *The Odyssey*. (Many geographical names in the area are prominent figures in the tale: the monster *Scylla* is now the town of *Scilla* overlooking the Strait of *Messina*, and *Aeolus*, keeper of the winds, gave his name to the *Aeolian Islands* just North of Sicily.)

While this was interesting to me on an academic level, it couldn't compare to the old man we found sitting with his legs crossed alongside a whitewashed wall sorting a burlap sack full of tiny olives in the sun. Giovanni greeted him and the man answered back. I didn't understand a word of it. "Calabrian dialect," Giovanni explained.

An Italian from the north wouldn't make heads or tails of it; to me it sounded more like Spanish in some ways. Giovanni asked him some questions, and although the man didn't smile, he raised himself up with some pride and exchanged a few more words that remained a blur to me. Giovanni's face brightened and he turned to me for my reaction. "Greek!" he cried.

Like curious children who come across a foreigner we rambled through a list of words. "How do you say 'water'?"

"*Nerò*." He replied in the local Greek.

Then we asked him about the local youth: What do they do? What do they like? What do they know of Greek? He said *neniti* ("nothing" in *Calabrese* dialect) and shook his head slowly the way an old man does who is too tired to really get worked up about something.

Picking through the Calabrian olives, his thick fingers were stained purple. He had a white moustache and wore a wool cap over his wiry white hair. His skin was tanned, and the wrinkles were large and smoothed, as if even they too had worked hard somehow.

"There is no work here for the young people." He pointed to a flawlessly constructed stone embankment that supported the next level of houses. "I built that wall. Forty years ago."

Gallicianò, in fact, isn't much more than a few terraces cut into the hillside and supported by yesteryear's back-

breaking labor of piling stones. The simple white or gray houses and their red-tiled roofs rest almost on top of each other and either share a wall with the neighbors or are separated by a small garden with perhaps a goat or two staring out through a gate.

In the center of town is a simple church, the placard out front written in Greek: *ΟΔΟΣ ΠΑΝΑΓΙΑΣ ΤΗΣ ΕΛΛΑΔΑΣ* *Dromo Patruna Ti Grecia*, which translates as "The Street of La Signora from Greece." There are just 80 people living in the village and surrounding area, down from 400 a few years ago, and not all of them speak Greek. The elderly and middle-aged speak Greek at home, but the children are left only with scraps of it.

Well into the last century, Gallicianò's pastoral life and lack of good roads kept the town and its language isolated from outsiders. Now, a few satellite dishes make it clear that the modern world has encroached on Gallicianò.

The Romans brought Latin to the land, and the Calabrian dialect of Italian eventually became the dominant local tongue. Even today most Calabrians, but especially the elderly, are "bilingual" choosing Calabrese over pure Italian at home. But Greek has hung on through it all, tucked into several remote towns; it even gained some strength when the Byzantine Empire took Calabria in the 6th century and brought the Neo-Hellenic language of Athens, a more recent form of Greek.

In fact, the Byzantines brought the name Calabria itself. *Tema tis Calavrias*, was the western outpost of the empire, so there is academic disagreement to the nature of the current language.



In 1861, 90% of Calabria's towns 1



There are words that allegedly go all the way back to the beginning of Magna Grecia, but the critical issue today is a possible ending.

"There used to be three teachers here, elementary teachers. There used to be a doctor. Now there's nothing. The young people don't want to learn anything. The only thing they want to learn is to drive," the old man told us.



Calabrian Greek survives primarily through an oral tradition, a language of shepherds and villagers, though some written examples survive, usually in Latin script. Nineteenth century folklorists transcribed local songs for posterity and more recently local writers have created original works that seek to preserve the language.

A week after visiting the village I met with Carmelo Giuseppe Nucera, the president of an organization called *Apodiafazzi* (www.apodiafazzi.com). The name means "the light before the dawn," appropriate for a group trying to spotlight Greco-Calabro culture.

Until Parliament changed the law in 1999, the Italian Constitution hadn't included Greek speakers in the regions of Calabria and *Puglia* as protected minorities. These "protections" come in the form of government funding for projects and educational programs designed to maintain a minority culture. *Apodiafazzi* is helping Calabria's estimated 5,000 Greek speakers get these protections.

"There are nine communities which have applied for inclusion in the regional law of October 2003. I told you that 20 percent of these communities speak Greek, but truly that is just a

guess. Part of the law calls for some kind of census. Do you know that the total number of speakers in all these communities is estimated to be about the same as the number living here in Reggio? Many moved to the larger city for work years ago, so Reggio has the largest Greek-speaking population of them all. And it has yet to apply for inclusion in the law."

"Most people don't know or don't believe it, but many of us are descended from the Greeks. Look at the surnames. Thirty percent of them are Greek in origin." He looked up at the ceiling as he thought of some examples. "*Crea*. It means 'meat.' *Romeo*. It means 'from Constantinople.' *Chila*, 'man with fat lips.' *Chardia*, 'heart.' *Monorchio*," he chuckled and held up his index finger, "'man with one testicle.' Even the former mayor's name, *Falcomatà* meant *calderaiò*, 'coppersmith.' So you see? It's not just a few speakers in some villages."

The legislation simply lays the groundwork for a process that must be taken up by the people themselves, and *Apodiafazzi* is leading the way. One article of the law allows for public broadcasting time for the language; on certain Saturdays there are short bits in Greek on the local television channel. *Apodiafazzi* is also publishing some tourist brochures and historical works in Greek.

Another element of the law makes Greek optional in the elementary schools. Families will need to encourage their kids to learn. But even more importantly, teachers need to be trained and hired. What was being

done about that? I asked.

Apodiafazzi is working with the University of Messina, just across the narrow strait of the same name in nearby Sicily, to offer a master's degree course, he told me. Graduates will be eligible to teach, the money for their salaries coming from the government. But Dr. Nucera's goal is not simply to maintain an archaic tongue among the hills of Calabria.

"We don't want to teach a dead language. The children should learn Modern Greek. They should be able to go to Athens and speak and be understood." He showed me a dictionary of Calabrian Greek and its modest contents. "It is better for them to learn a useful modern language and include the truly Calabrian words."

"This year is the Olympics in Greece," he told me. "I would like to see Calabria recognized as part of that heritage. In fact, in August we will take a local group of Greek singers to Athens. What most people don't realize is that the Greeks here were renowned cham-

pions when the Olympics first began." He drew out a pamphlet with a picture of two ancient coins on it. "You see these? They are in commemoration of an Olympic victory. *Anassila di Reggio*, the 'tyrant' of Reggio in 480 B.C., was a champion racer."

Today Calabria is undertaking another Olympian challenge and as I left Dr. Nucera, I felt optimistic, despite the odds, it may just emerge victorious. ♦

— Kevin Revolinski

Kevin Revolinski is a writer living in Reggio Calabria where he is at work on a collection of stories about his experiences there. He can be reached at krev@hotmail.com

acked internal and external roads.

News, Tips, Deals

New at THE MALL

The outdoor shopping complex housing the outlet stores of designers such as *Gucci*, *Armani* and *Valentino* just keeps growing. The building that once housed The Mall's surprisingly good café is now home to a *Hogan/Tod's* outlet. And there are some real bargains to be had there, which isn't always the case at these designer outlets. Recently, *Tod's* ladies driving mocs were selling for just 75€ a pair. That's a third of their regular price. Gorgeous soft leather *Hogan* and *Tod's*

handbags were tagged at about half off the original prices. Also new at The



Mall is *La Perla*, one of Italy's finest lingerie brands. At this outlet, you can buy beautifully made bras, panties and nightgowns, at a significant discount, similar to the prices you might pay at home at *Victoria's Secret*. For more information, call (39) 055

8657775 or e-mail info@design-management.it (For more on The Mall, see DOI's January/February 2003 issue.) ♦

1 € = \$1.24 at press time

We All Scream For... Gelato!

When investment banker Michael McGarry's wife received a year-long art history fellowship in Bologna and Rome, he wasn't sure what he would do while she was working. A visit to Bologna's *La Sorbetteria* convinced him that his calling was gelato. And so began a year of first-hand research that culminated in his book *Gelato: Finding Italy's Best Gelaterias* (Fancy Pants Press, \$10.00).

McGarry reviews over 50 gelaterias in northern Italy as well as Rome and Naples. He plans a follow-up volume on southern Italy and Sicily. Interspersed with reviews, McGarry

explains the history of gelato and how it is to be eaten properly. He also includes a glossary of over 75 flavors, which is very helpful for any serious



gelato lover/traveler. *La Sorbetteria* is still one of McGarry's favorite gelaterias but he also has a special place in his heart for the legendary Roman gelateria, *Gioliti*. "Half of

it is the experience. It is always packed and there is always a scene," he says.

Gelato changed McGarry's life. He has left investment banking and started his own publishing company. His books on American ice cream should be available by next summer. For more information, visit www.happybellyguides.com ♦



Cozy Cairolì Offers Roman Hideaway

Rome's *Locanda Cairolì* can be a bit hard to find, but that's part of its charm. Only a small brass sign in front of a huge wooden door notes the location of this small 4-star hotel at the back of an old palazzo on *Piazza Cairolì* just blocks from the monument to *Vittorio Emmanuele*.

With a warm décor and equally warm service, this 13-room gem feels like a country inn in the middle of the city. Cairolì's beautiful wood furniture is complemented by a blue and white color scheme. The owner is clearly an art collector as paintings and sculptures are on generous display in the common rooms and guest rooms alike. The palazzo's high ceilings add to the airy, relaxing atmosphere.

Each guest room has a television with VCR, CD player, hair dryer and coffeemaker, as well as an eclectic mix of guides to Rome. In the hotel's sitting room, a gigantic wood farm table provides the perfect setting for the daily buffet breakfast. Cairolì's staff members are friendly and helpful, yet discreet. And best of all, a stay here comes with an affordable price tag. The rate for a double room is 240€ per night including breakfast. For more information, call (39) 06 6880 9278 or visit www.locandacairolì.it ♦

"The world is a book, and those who do not

and Events



ITALY'S Best Beaches

Tourists looking for pristine beaches in Italy would be wise to head south this year.

Legambiente, an Italian environmental group, publishes an annual beach guide, which uses 128 parameters to comb 243 coastal spots in a yearly quality test. This year, it again gave southern Italy or the *Mezzogiorno* top marks. Not all of Italy's 1,000+ miles of coastline makes the grade, but the good news is that figures are improving.

The list can be used to decide where to go, but also where to expect crowds. In a recent poll 41% of Italians said they plan to vacation in 2004 by sunning on Italian beaches.

There has been some jostling over the previous years' top ten, but southern beaches continue to dominate better-known locales in Liguria and Tuscany. Famous beach spots *Rimini* and *Riccione* on the Adriatic coast were towards the bottom of

these ratings, scoring two and three out of a possible five respectively. Ratings take into account natural beauty, contamination but also tourist structures, noise levels and environment-friendly waste systems.

Ten spots received a perfect five out of five "sails" rating:

Calabria: Tropea
Campania: Pollica Acciaroli, Pioppi
Liguria: Cinque Terre
Puglia: Otranto, Isole Tremiti
Sardinia: Arbus, Buoso, Orosei
Tuscany: Castiglione della Pescaia

Sandy spots with a "four-sail" rating include:

Campania: Anacapri, Positano
Marches: Sirolo
Tuscany: Isola del Giglio

For a free, searchable database of Italy's beaches, visit www.legambiente.com

—Nicole Martinelli,
zoomata.com



Why Didn't We Think of This?



There's nothing quite like a drive through the rolling hills and stunning landscape of Tuscany. But so many questions come up along the way. What's that castle over there? Is it worth it to stop at this town or that one? The new company *Hear's A Journey* offers the answers to these questions in the form of two driving tours that you can listen to in your car's tape player as you set out from Siena into the Tuscan countryside.

Each audio tour lasts for a total of 90 minutes, but you can make a day of it by stopping at the various towns and sites pointed out on the tape. The driving tour discusses each place before you reach the town or site and provides directions on how to get there. You can stop or continue as you like.

Each tour tape comes with a booklet that includes a driving map with directions, town maps, places of interest and a calendar of festivals and events. *Hear's A Journey* offers *South of Siena* and *Northwest of Siena* driving tours at \$15.95 each. For more information, call (973) 403-8989 or visit www.hearsajourney.com

On the Web: Finding a Cooking School

Gourmetget.com: Marlene Iacofano's site features her own cooking tours as well as detailed information on the several dozen Italian cooking schools she represents in the U.S.

Italycookingschools.com: Mama Margaret's search engine includes over 100 schools throughout Italy. This site also has some helpful articles on how to choose a cooking school and get the most out of the experience.

Shawguides.com: If you can't find it on this Web site, it probably doesn't exist. Shaw Guides is the granddaddy of cultural travel search engines. It has listings for 17 professional cooking schools in Italy as well as an astounding 766 recreational programs. Shaw Guides also publishes a 398-page print version of its guide to world-wide cooking schools which can be ordered from any book store.



Coming in
September...
A Special
Report on
CHIANTI

travel read only one page.” —St. Augustine

Special Stays in Milan's Shopping District

Blowout Choice: *The Bulgari Hotel, Milano*

With the backing of a luxury goods company, a location in the heart of one of Milan's most exclusive neighborhoods, bell hops who could (and probably do) double as male models and elegant, modern décor, I expected the brand-new *Bulgari Hotel* to be, well, how can I say this, a bit cold. I was completely wrong.

No matter that I inadvertently arrived in the sleek, modern, black marble lobby in jeans and running sneakers (yikes, can you say American?), I was treated to a warm welcome and a genuine interest in my stay in Milan. The hotel had been open for just 10 days and while this might have accounted for the enthusiasm of the staff, I like to think they will be just as friendly a year from now.

I knew this hotel stay was going to be different when my taxi driver turned on to a private road and checked in with a security guard. Set next to Milan's botanical gardens, yet just steps from *Armani's* flagship store, the Bulgari is a resort oasis in the middle of a bustling city. Most of the guest rooms have views of the hotel's lovely back garden which turns into an already-popular-with-the-chic-locals outdoor lounge in the evenings.

My surprisingly cozy room was decorated in a palette of black, beige, white and tobacco. It had a walk-in closet (there's a free unpacking and packing service), a black leather desk, a movable flat-screen television, a Tivoli CD player and two plush, pillow-strewn beds.

I often judge hotels on the quality of their bathrooms. Although it may sound cliché, when I walked into mine, I thought I had died and gone to heaven. The well-lit and airy marble bathroom featured a large tub, bronze-accented shower, separate toilet area, thick white towels and a slew of sweet-smelling bath products from Bulgari's Green Tea line. There was also a large window overlooking the garden. Next to the tub was a bath menu, in case I wanted a staff member to whip me up a relaxing aromatherapy bath (for an additional fee).

Even luxury travelers who are paying a small fortune per night, don't like to be nickel-and-dimed and I was pleased that the hotel offered free Internet access on the plasma TV as well as the complimentary use of a laptop computer.

I knew this hotel was truly focused on the details when the chocolates I received at turn-down were so luscious that I saved the wrappers on the side table so that I could remember the brand name, *Babbi*. The housekeeper noticed my enthusiasm and returned to my room one night to give me a few extra. This winning combination of detail and service extended to the bottle of water the front desk clerk handed me as I left for the airport. It was like she had read my mind.

Bulgari Hotel

Via Privata Fratelli Gabba 7b
(39) 02 8058051
www.bulgarihotels.com

Rates: Through August, the introductory rate for a superior double room is 450€ per night.



Budget Choice: *Hotel Manzoni*

For those who want to stay in the middle of the shopping district, but who don't want to pay the equivalent of a *Prada* bag for the privilege, the *Hotel Manzoni* is an ideal choice. On a quiet street just off of *Via Montenapoleone*, the Manzoni offers one of the best deals in the entire city. A double room with breakfast is 193€ year-round. This 52-room hotel offers comfort without the frills. There's a bar and television lounge just off the lobby. The guest rooms are small but functional with simple, yet attractive décor. Some of the rooms have balconies. All have television, hair dryers and air conditioning. Don't expect bath menus here as the bathrooms contain showers only. Travelers renting cars and heading off to the Lakes or other destinations should take note that the Manzoni has an attached garage where guests can park for an additional fee. If you're planning a visit to Milan, make your reservation at Hotel Manzoni as soon as possible. The word is out on this affordable gem. One travel agent I know has never been able to book a room here, while I was able to secure a last-minute reservation at the beginning of June.

Hotel Manzoni

Via Santo Spirito 20
(39) 02 76005700
www.hotelmanzoni.com

Rates: A single room with breakfast costs 135€ per night; a suite is 260€ per night, including breakfast. ♦

1 € = \$1.24 at press time

Milan is northern Italy's richest city.

I dream of Italy...with a
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