

FINANCIAL TIMES

HOW TO SPEND IT

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THE
TRAVEL
ISSUE

...*in* SPLENDID
ISOLATION

SOPHY ROBERTS
DISCOVERS A WILD OASIS
IN CHAD

MARIA SHOLLENBARGER
GOES HOME
TO MONTEREY

JOHN GAPPER OBSERVES
SAKURA SEASON
IN JAPAN

SHOPPING

CIAO BELLISSIMO

Marie-Louise Sciò, Italy's chicest hotelier, has created an online boutique that brings together all things *squisito*.
By Maria Shollenbarger

ISSIMO x VILLEROY & BOCH PEPERONCINO PLATE, €378 FOR SIX



Question for the Italophiles: as you've sheltered diligently in place – a place that isn't Italy – these last months, what is it you've fantasised about most? Is it the food? The colours? The glorious profusion of handcrafted, covetable goods? The insouciant fabulousness that's so ubiquitous a part of life there that a word, *sprezzatura*, exists just to describe it?

Cataloguing Italy's appeal is no small job. Good thing now you don't have to, thanks to the enterprising (and unerringly chic) Marie-Louise Sciò, CEO and creative director of Pellicano Hotels, the micro-collection that comprises Tuscany's Il Pellicano, La Posta Vecchia in Lazio and Hotel Mezzatorre on Ischia in the Gulf of Naples. Today, Sciò is launching Issimo, an online platform that celebrates Italian style and heritage across all strata of good things: fashion and design, food and wine, arts and culture and, of course, travel and hospitality.

Such a digital space is long overdue – though timing is everything; at the height of the coronavirus pandemic, when 60 million Italians were in quarantine and thousands of lives had been lost, Sciò had a serious wobble over whether to do it at all. "I asked myself more than once, 'Is this really the right moment?'" she says over Skype. "But



then I thought, 'You know what? Actually, this is the best moment.' I have to tell you, while I love Italy and consider myself 100 per cent Italian, I wouldn't have characterised myself as a massive patriot before this. But what's happening here, the number and calibre of *eccellenze* we've realised we have, and the spirit that's rallied around them all over the world – it's incredible."

Issimo – the superlative suffix added to any adjective for emphasis, and an actual byword for Italian more-is-more exuberance – puts the Pellicano filter on the mother country and translates it into a comprehensive online destination. The result is a site that merges exclusive e-commerce, style inspiration and cultural intelligence.

Sciò proved her style mettle internationally last summer when she collaborated with MatchesFashion on a (hugely successful) resort collection, mixing beach- and eveningwear and accessories from the Pellicano's own boutique designs with a deft edit of high-low pieces by various designers sold on matchesfashion.com. It was showcased at the site's 5 Carlos Place flagship in Mayfair and at the Pellicano Hotels' own "pop-up" – a refurbished

ISSIMO x CHINTI & PARKER APERITIVO JUMPER, €520



Above left: Hotel Mezzatorre on Ischia. Above right: Il Pellicano's Marie-Louise Sciò. Left: Issimo has linked up with brands including porcelain maker Villeroy & Boch. Right: unwinding at Hotel Mezzatorre



BOOKS

Travels with my cookbook

These genre-blending recipe books are a journey for the senses – and the soul, says *Baya Simons*

COOKING IN MARFA

Virginia Lebermann and Rocky Barnette; photography by Douglas Friedman
Phaidon, £35



Ever since American artist Donald Judd opened his foundation here in the 1980s, the Texan desert city of Marfa has been a mecca for art lovers. But in recent years it has made a foodie name for itself, mostly thanks to The Capri and its menu of avant-garde Mexican-inflected fare such as tempura-fried yucca blossoms and prickly-pear wine. In this new book, the restaurant's recipes are combined with essays and photographs to evoke the taste of the desert at home.



FALASTIN

Sami Tamimi and Tara Wigley
Penguin, £28

"A love letter to Palestine, the land and its people" from Yotam Ottolenghi's longtime collaborators Sami Tamimi and Tara Wigley, *Falastin* travels through Bethlehem, East Jerusalem, Nablus, Haifa, Akka, Nazareth, Galilee and the West Bank. Recipes for dishes such as falafel with sumac onions and roast cauliflower with burnt aubergine and tomato salsa are interspersed with travel and food photography, and stories from unheard voices.

BITTER HONEY

Letitia Clark
Hardie Grant, £27



Promising to serve as "a holiday and a cookbook", *Bitter Honey* from Sardinia-based cook Letitia Clark is a journey across the Italian island via recipes, stories and photographs. Dishes include such delights as grilled aubergines with ricotta salata and mint, and malloreddus (a local shell-shaped pasta) with mutton broth and pecorino.



SUN AND RAIN

Ana Ros
Phaidon, £39.95

With an original style that combines diary, memoir and cookbook, acclaimed Slovenian chef Ana Ros shares the stories and recipes of the remote Soca valley, near the Italian border, where she was raised and now runs the 38th best restaurant in the world, Hisa Franko. Recipes are based on ingredients local to the valley, so expect dishes such as beef tongue with oyster mayonnaise and potatoes cooked in hay.



ISSIMO x FALIERO SARTI LUCCA SCARF, €590



IL PELLICANO x FOR RESTLESS SLEEPERS DRESS, €1,490



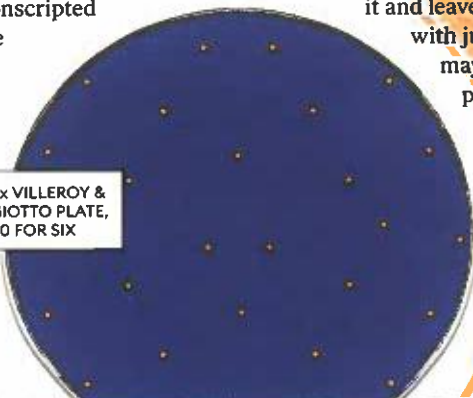
Left: view of the sea from Hotel Mezzatorre. Below: a suite at La Posta Vecchia in Lazio. Bottom: one of La Posta Vecchia's bathrooms



ISSIMO T-SHIRT, €90



ISSIMO x VILLEROY & BOCH GIOTTO PLATE, €310 FOR SIX



vintage yacht that sailed between the three properties in early June.

That eye for the mix is everywhere on Issimo. Denizens of the hotels will quickly recognise some of the shoppable artisan wares under the *Bellissimo* section – the colour-saturated bathroom tiles (hand-painted by Sorrentine artisans) and the delicately scalloped bedlinens (produced exclusively for Sciò by 150-year-old, Lombardy-based Rivolta Carmignani). The *Chichissimo* section debuts a series

"YOU LEAVE WITH SOME CULTURE, MAYBE A STYLE IDEA OR TWO"

of collaborations Sciò has done with small, quintessential Made in Italy houses, from scarf-makers Faliero Sarti to the Florentine linen-and-lingerie house Loretta Caponi. Alongside these are partnerships with more familiar names in the international style canon, among them Anya Hindmarch, Chinti & Parker and Birkenstock, for which she created the successful *Dolce Far Niente* collection last year. The retail mix ranges wide. "It's got nothing to do with price," she says. "You'll find very expensive things, but also things like the small-batch olive oil we buy, or the pesto in the restaurants."

Scroll through the content-rich *Coltissimo* and *Italianissimo* verticals, and you might find Spotify playlists compiled by the author of the definitive anthology of Italian music, or interviews with marquee names from the world of cinema. Sciò has conscripted insiders from all walks of life to create guides to the country's 20 regions (guides that go *molto* granular: think private gardens, hidden galleries and obscure cult artisans). Like everyone, Sciò and Issimo have had to adapt in recent weeks. There has been a

product or two delayed here, a rubric change there. But once Italy is fully back on its feet, Sciò plans to launch a series of cultural listings that will gather "everything from the most authentic *sagre* [historical pageants, sometimes dedicated to a local saint, always involving micro-local food] to music festivals to a full culinary calendar of events", she says.

Sciò is keen for Issimo to become a "creative collaborative space" as much as a marketplace; but it will be a place, she says, with "zero arrogance. You can just drop into it and leave without even looking at shopping, with just some really interesting culture, maybe a style idea or two" – and probably a jones to get back to Italy as soon as possible. In which case, it will be job well done for Sciò: "Really, it was always going to be kind of a love letter." ■HTS| issimoissimo.com

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