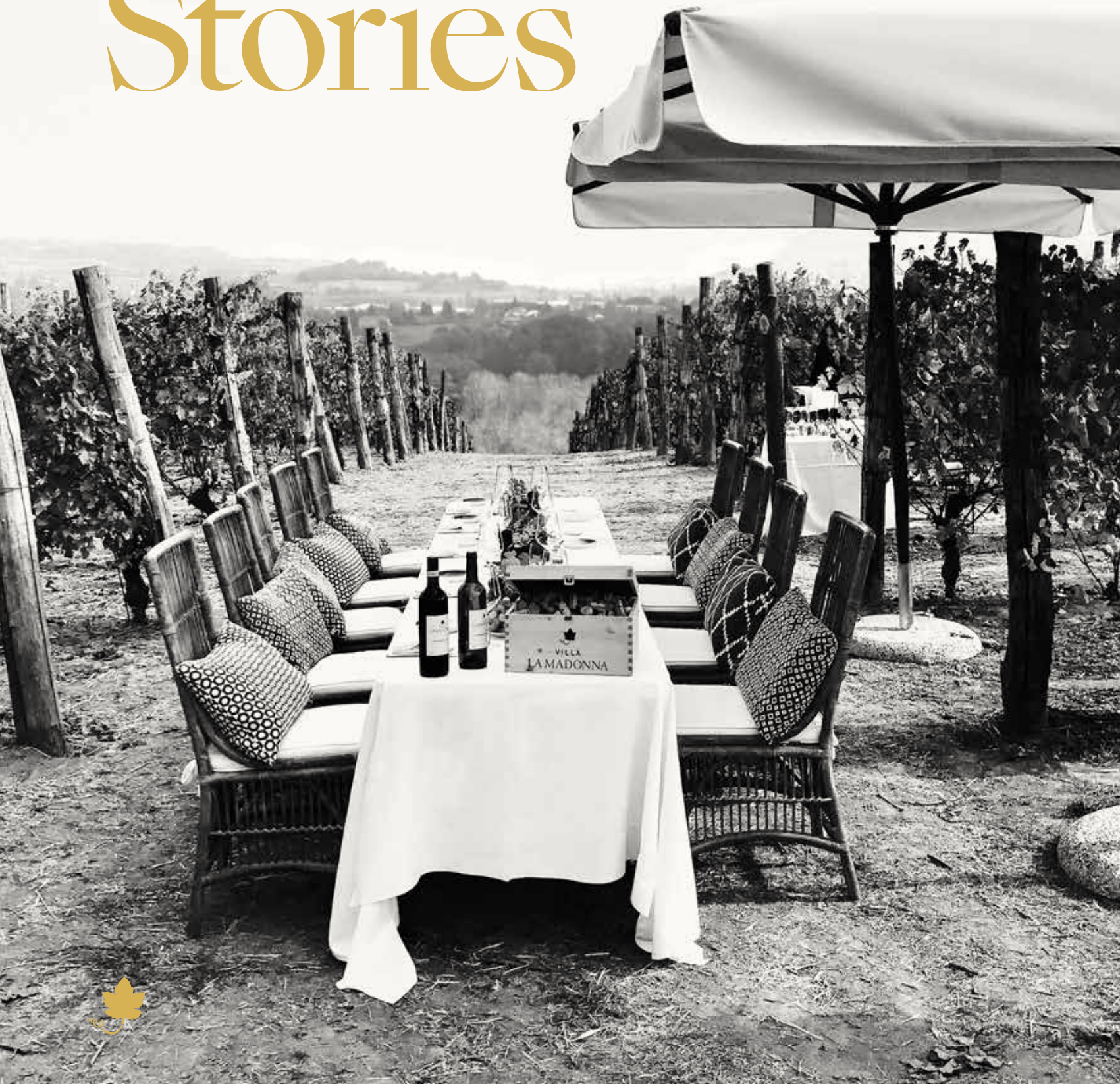


Villa La Madonna Stories







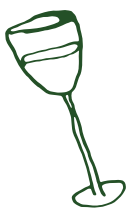
“Questa è la patria del
tartufo bianco,
dei funghi porcini,
delle nocciole e delle
varietà di uva che fa
venire l’acquolina in bocca.
È qui che nascono
i lussi più notevoli
della natura.
La casa della vera
indulgenza.”

“This is the home of white truffles, porcini mushrooms, hazelnuts and a mouthwatering variety of grapes.
This is where nature’s most evident luxuries are born.
The home of true indulgence.”



Villa La Madonna Stories

Photographer Annica Eklund
Storyteller Johan Åkesson
Editor Catt Söder























I



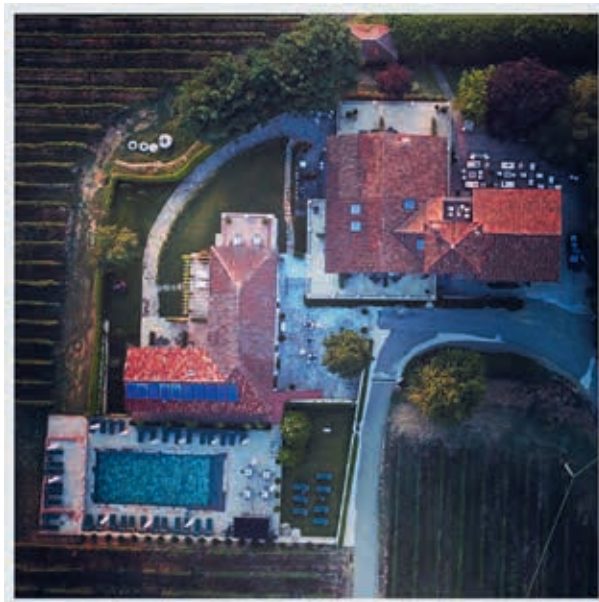
A Love Story

"THE BEST PART ISN'T THE ENDING SO MUCH AS THE START"
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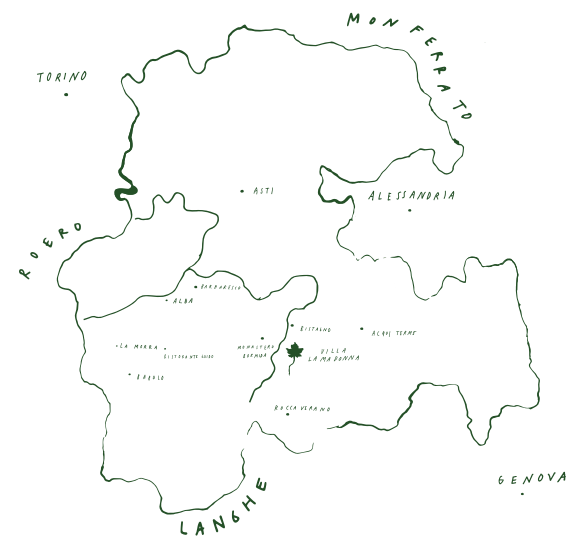


With the heritage of their warm and welcoming childhood home as a guiding light, their creative vision and can-do attitude as fuel, a new home has been built in Piemonte. Open to anyone who wants to tap into Marie and Annica's idea of the ultimate retreat experience.

III

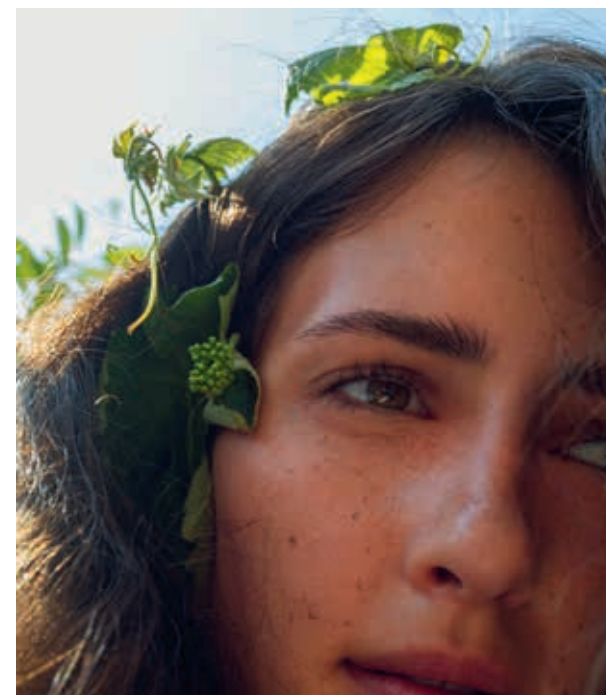
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IV A Sunny Story

A PIEMONTE FASHION STORY
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANNICA EKLUND
STYLING BY MARCUS SÖDER
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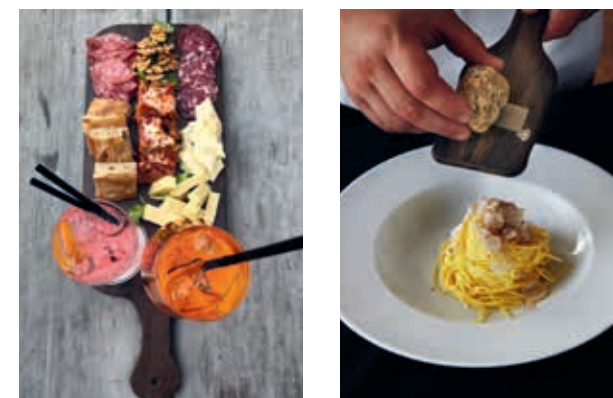


V Wine Stories

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SLOW FOOD, TRUFFLES AND PASTA
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I A Love Story

It started with a love affair.

Marie was in her twenties, travelling the world, light on luggage, exploring all that was waiting far away from her family's small lake town in the south of Sweden.

She found herself on an overnight train, skimming through the hilly landscapes of South Africa, when another Swede tipped his hat and struck up a conversation somewhere north of Cape Town.

Björn, not Borg, a tennis player residing in Liechtenstein, made a brief appearance and the two northerners away from home shared a bottle of vintage Stellenbosch Cabernet.

A first meeting.

Not much more to it then, but much more to it later.



She remembered him. She remembered him speaking passionately about his farmland in northern Italy, the old stone villa and the Barbera seeds he was planning on planting.



Several years passed and the young traveller from Sweden was now cruising the turquoise seas of the Caribbean with her fiancé at the time. One hot and humid evening, near the port on Union Island, she noticed a familiar face. The man from the train years before stood in front of her again, in another remote part of the world, wearing the same tennis shoes and curious smile. For Marie, who was fully preoccupied with planning the following year's big event in white, this would again only be just a brief meeting.

The following summer, with Marie's wedding only a few days away, the man once again appeared in the most unexpected place. She was walking along the docks of a remote fishing village in the far south of Sweden, contemplating the knot soon to be tied in that self-same town. He was there untying another knot, preparing his boat, ready to set sail.

They both found this third encounter awkward yet undeniably predestined. Thoughts raced madly through the bride-to-be's mind. She fought them off and bade the sailor farewell.

Two days later she married her fiancé.

VLM archive photos

THE STATE OF THE VILLA when first purchased by Björn.



Fast-forward life.

A young divorce.
Travels, work and other distractions.

Memories of the man from the train, from the harbour
on Union Island, from the docks of a Swedish small town.

She found him again. At his vineyard in northern Italy, with
an autumn fog falling heavy over the fields and a scent of
thyme and rosemary greeting her from the gardens.

Quietly content and fully present, breathing lighter than
ever before, she was savouring every moment of this seemingly
simple, beautiful life.

She fell immediately in love – with him, with Piemonte,
with the Villa.



Finally the two
travellers became
one, as the universe
seemed to have
repeatedly
endeavoured
to engineer.
A year later ... two,
then three. A family,
settled right here
in the valleys
of Piemonte, at the
Villa La Madonna.



A BOILING HOT WEDDING DAY in the bay of San Frutoso. All the men attending threw their tuxedos on the rocks and went for a swim before dinner. The groom included. Hence the missing hat in one picture.



MAX AND LIV The two children of Marie and Björn will always have a special relationship with Villa La Madonna, known to them as "dad's place".

A fairytale would end here – with happily ever after. But as with most love stories, the best part isn't the ending so much as the start. The fog over the fields below the Villa would eventually become darker and less romantic, the relationship would slowly fade and her Italian dream with it.

Marie moved back to Sweden with the children, the couple separated.

Years later, Björn had sadly passed away. The Villa long gone before him.

At his funeral, it was whispered to Marie that the Villa and vineyard in her one-time home valley of Piemonte, was again waiting for a new owner.

VLM archive photos

Marie first took on the house as a new project, together with a business partner. For Marie, this was a chance to keep a part of her children's father in their lives: a place and a passion rather than just memories. After a year the two business partners parted ways, but Marie was not ready to give up on Villa La Madonna. Her next phone call was to her sister Annica. She needed some convincing, but soon the two sisters had devised a plan for reclaiming the one-time family home. Their plan involved starting up a hotel and commercial wine production, to support the upkeep of a potential generational home-away-from-home for their families. With every new opportunity unfolding, and every passionate idea, their vision grew. Never content to settle for second best, the sisters pushed for every detail to be perfect. Marie and Annica, in their builder's dungarees, spent days on end sweeping floors, hammering and tightening screws.



As a farmer and family friend, VITTORO has been caring for the vineyard since day one.



Renovations were a challenge. At the outset much of the building was nothing more than a skeleton, though ambitions were never any lower than sky high. A week before the Villa's grand opening, it had yet to have water and heating installed, and the garden was still a construction site. Perfecting details takes time. From day one the project was a test of patience and commitment – a crash course in realising their dream in a different language and a different culture.



FRANCISCO CORTINA AND ROBERT KILL, architect friends of Marie and Annica, have played a crucial role in the renovations of Villa La Madonna.

ONE WEEK BEFORE THE OPENING PARTY A star is always born out of chaos. ALL hands on deck, builders and family, working around the clock, managed to complete the Villa on time.



In the three years that followed, the hotel and vineyard grew into a successful family business. It became a realisation of two sisters' joint, ever expanding, dream.

On the set date all was finished and a new Villa La Madonna was born.



That's where we are now. Inside a boutique design hotel with a carefully perfected interior, a retreat for slow living, with a restaurant and bar, and an outdoor pool. All this is alongside the Barbera grapevines, which provide the fruit for the potent house wine. Listed on the global portal Small Luxury Hotels (SLH), it is a home-away-from-home, not just for the owners' families but for anyone seeking some Piemontese bliss. For two sisters from Sweden, a dream come true.

Furthermore, Villa La Madonna is a physical manifestation of life's mysterious paths intertwining, always leading elsewhere than first imagined. A reminder that for every love story, no matter its own course, new stories are written.



VLM archive photo



HARVEST BOUNTY

A snapshot from their first time picking the fruits of their labour, paying tribute to the riches provided by the Piedmontese soil.



VLW archive photo





SUNRISE
A different scene played out at every new break of dawn.
Fog and light. Bliss.



II

A Family Story

Their bond first grew strong at the stables.

Though two years apart in age, the Eklund sisters were more like twins in their teens. Both with the same interests, drive and endless optimism. Every single day they would both be perfecting their skills on horseback, competing at weekends and getting more experienced with every passing year.

Side by side.

Their home, in the south of Sweden, was an open, loving one. Anyone and everyone was welcome at their parents' house. There would be dinners in the garden, big Christmas celebrations, friends constantly dropping by.

Pappa Lars, together with mamma Monica, had inherited his father's local business, Bolon. They produced camping rugs, something their daughters had no interest in whatsoever. Naturally.

Life, to them, was all about horses and eventually, about studying design in Italy, travelling and exploring. It wasn't until later in life when pappa Lars practically begged Marie to at least give the family business a go, that she hopped on board. Soon sister Annica joined in.

They quickly realised the potential in making design a core element of Bolon, a move well received by clients, as was every other initiative along the way.

"We wanted to attract those we were attracted to, to create a product for the future – not for camping. Taking our place at Bolon was only an option if we were

given the freedom to transform the company into something we were passionate about," says Marie.

Since then they have constantly challenged the perception of what Bolon is.

"When we believe in something, we just go for it.

Like most of our ideas, starting up a hotel and vineyard seemed crazy at the start, but it has quickly proven to be



VLM archive photos

the natural next step for our vision of combining creative output with good business," says Annica.

As third-generation entrepreneurs in the interior trade, Annica and Marie now take turns shouldering the CCO and CEO roles at Bolon, now known as "design flooring from Sweden."

In retrospect, they have identified some important keys to their success as a long-lasting, and growing, international interior brand – and as a basis for every new venture.

FIRST is to never settle when it comes to products, but to create an overall aesthetic experience with what they produce. The same goes for their recent focus on Villa La Madonna. It could never be just a bed and breakfast, the two sisters have pushed for every detail of the Villa to fulfil their ever-growing vision.

"My initial ambition for Villa La Madonna was simply to have an Italian vacation home for my sister's family and mine,

THIRD, and perhaps most crucial, is their mutual appreciation of the importance of sisterhood. Ever since their teenage years at the stables, Marie and Annica have supported each other's dreams and ideas.

These three key factors have opened the doors to Villa La Madonna. With the heritage of their warm and welcoming childhood home as a guiding light, their creative vision and can-do attitude as fuel, a new home has been built in Piemonte. Open to anyone who wants to tap into Marie and Annica's idea of the ultimate retreat experience.

Most important of all, they've built their business, vision and Italian villa together.

As sisters.



"We're so different, yet so alike. Most siblings wouldn't stay so close, at least not after working together. For us, it's been the opposite. The more time we spend together the closer we have grown. We both possess genuine confidence in ourselves, but also in each other."

but as ever we started expanding on that ambition together, spurring each other on with a constant flow of new ideas. In the end there was no talk of anything less than a boutique hotel. Inevitably we soon also began strategising regarding the vineyard, we never seem to be able to keep anything simple," laughs Annica.

SECOND is the sisters' shared, endless optimism, which has been present since childhood. A genuine belief in the power of positive thought and its ability to move mountains.

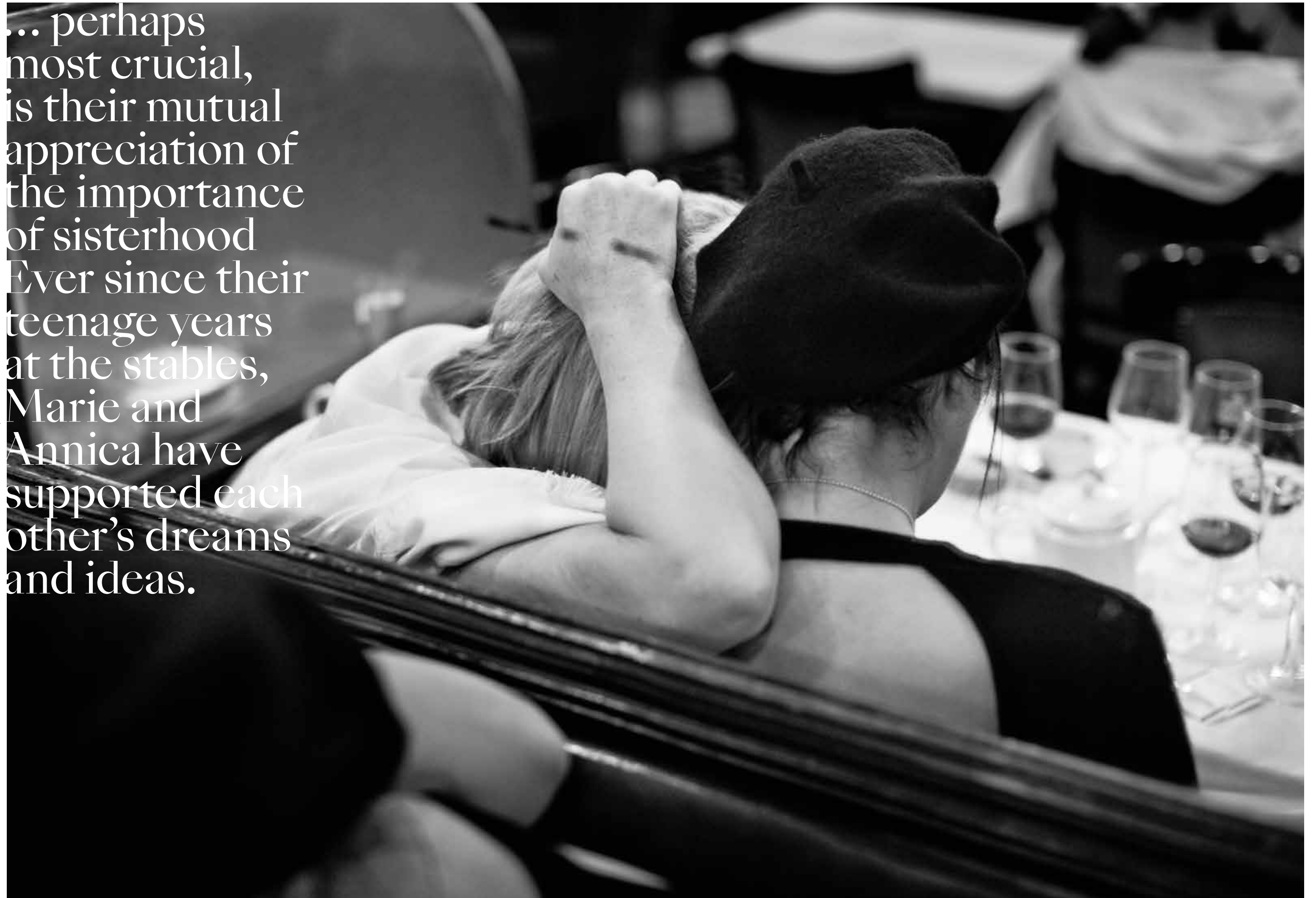
THE STORY OF BOLON This picture was taken by Tobias Regell in 2012 for the book "The Story of Bolon".



THREE GENERATIONS OF EKLUND Outside the first Bolon factory in Ulricehamn, Sweden.
B / Annica and her daughter Linn. O / Marie. L / The children of Marie, Max and Liv.
N / Monica and Lars, the mother and father of Annica and Marie.

... perhaps
most crucial,
is their mutual
appreciation of
the importance
of sisterhood.
Ever since their
teenage years
at the stables,
Marie and
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and ideas.

THE STORY OF BOLON This picture was taken by Tobias Regell in 2012 for the book "The Story of Bolon".



III

Villa La Madonna Stories



Photographs everywhere. Grand prints featuring portraits, landscapes, details. Connecting the stories that have been and might be, allowing guests to move around the Villa as through the visual mind of Annica Eklund. What she sees and envisions, guests will also experience.

Most of the photographs at Villa La Madonna have been taken in and around Italy. People and places captured in the moment, or arranged according to the snapshot taking shape in Annica's vision.

"Modern photo art in general can really enhance the ambience of a contemporary boutique hotel; having my own photos here makes it more personal. This is how I interpret Italian culture, food, fashion. It is also a sort of mood board for the experience we wish to create here at Villa La Madonna," says Annica.



VLM archive photo

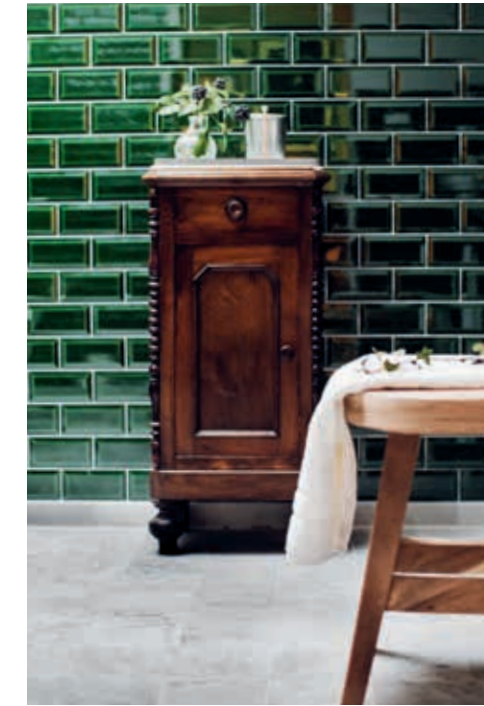
MATILDA PETTERSSON, a young artist from Marie and Annica's hometown, climbed a ladder and brought life to the plastered ceilings of the Villa's second floor.



As owners of an international design brand, creating a boutique hotel is in a way the ultimate canvas – a way to demonstrate an overall design ethos. For Marie and Annica, designing Villa La Madonna was also a chance to dive deeper into their personal definition of luxury. Drawing on their own travel experiences and inspiration from all kinds of hotels. To them, the idea of luxury is about an intimate, relaxed atmosphere, a mix of both traditional elements and a modern interior, a villa full of many unique expressions. A place to be yourself.

“The Villa is so old and we wanted to keep as much of the original patina as possible, yet still include our modern design elements. Keep the Italian feel and yet allow space for the contemporary traveller. Not stiff and boring, but rather cosy and relaxed. We chose to focus a lot on details, not just with our rugs and Annica’s photography, but in every little find we hunted down at antique markets around Piemonte,” says Marie.

Basing the design concept on certain core values, such as “family focused,” “personable” and “welcoming,” also guided Marie and Annica in their work on Villa La Madonna.



The colour green became a common thread.



“We’re close to nature, or rather in the middle of a fantastic, lush landscape, and we see the softness of green as important. You’ll find it in our logo, on our window shutters, here and there throughout the Villa. It goes well with the modern touches as well as the dark wood of all the local heritage interior items we’ve found. Everything from the antique bedside tables to the grand storage cabinets,” says Marie.



POUFS AND RUGS BY BOLON Books everywhere. Books containing stories and art, photos and words, fashion, food and architecture. Inspiration everywhere.

The tactility of every new place can be a subtle adventure in itself. Wandering with bare feet over cold, gently cracked terracotta floors in the morning. Tip-toeing over grass and gravel in the warm afternoon. Stepping onto silky smooth, woven and textured rugs while getting ready for dinner. It can bring another dimension to an already sensory experience of meditating, eating, drinking and swimming your days away at Villa La Madonna. All while breathing in the herbal scents of your surroundings.



For Marie and Annica, completing Villa La Madonna involved a natural challenge of presenting a gift, a final touch for the Villa. Something that would connect their daily routine as designers of flooring for urban properties to the historical stone villa in Piemonte and the boutique hotel it was transforming into.

Marie and Annica had never produced individual rugs before, but they decided to make Villa La Madonna their inspiration for launching such items.

Earthy colours, forest green and rust. Plastics woven with wool and other yarns, as never tried before. An experiment in both pattern and weaving structure.

Finally, a collection of rugs was complete, not just to perfectly match their vision of a contemporary countryside boutique hotel, but also to take their place in homes around the world.



The main villa has 18 bedrooms, all styled in a blend of contemporary design and vintage. All rooms have a terrace or balcony and most of them have a stunning view over the vineyards surrounding the hotel. You'll also find a restaurant, bar and a piazza, perfect for an early evening aperitivo. Adjacent to the Villa is an outdoor pool with decking of native stone and an indoor yoga studio loft. All laid out to encourage interaction between guests.

"Villa La Madonna will always be a small and intimate place, where old friends and new can enjoy a few days away together. But we've also managed to create some spacious areas where guests can be undisturbed, where they can enjoy solitude amidst the greenery and calmness that surrounds the Villa," says Annica.

Hiking, taking yoga classes or even enjoying a body treatment are all part of the Villa La Madonna experience. These aspects of wellness combined with a wide selection of books and board games in the bar area, Italian delicacies served at any time and the daily wine o'clock striking early is the foundation for an experience Marie and Annica would vouch for at any given moment, a reflection of their own personal preferences when it comes to travelling.



Marie explains:

"To recover and recharge, be inspired and have all your senses stimulated, to have friends and family around and at the same time be completely present and in touch with yourself. That is the perfect embodiment of luxury to us."



MEDITATING IN THE VILLA GROUNDS Yoga classes, hikes and strolls, a lot of time. Soaking up the scents and sun. A place of peace.

GAMES, PLAY, RECREATION

Sharing moments with friends and family, sometimes in a game of ping pong, boules or marble solitaire. Here, it's never about winning. Always about enjoying the moment.





"I heard it through the grapevine. Rolling over the grass fields. A whisper.
The spring of life is an eternal summer. Some stories only I can hear."



THE SPA AND THE POOL

Massages and body treatments in the Villa. An outdoor pool next to the Barbera grapevines providing fruit for the potent house wine. Villa La Madonna will feed your dreams and cravings, your body and soul.



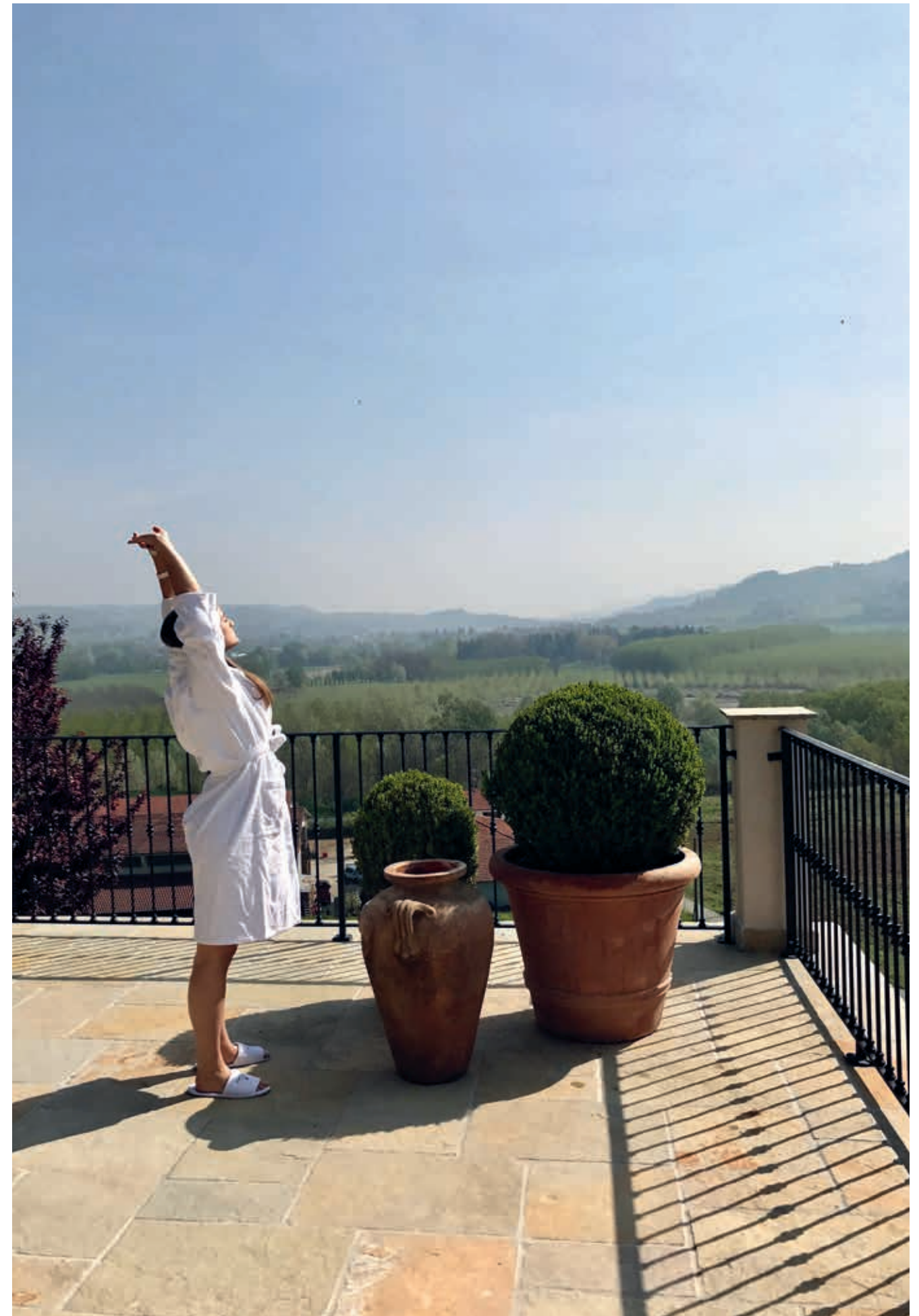




UNIQUE INTERIOR

To Marie and Annica, the idea of luxury is about an intimate, relaxed atmosphere, a mix of both traditional elements and modern interiors, a villa filled with many unique expressions.







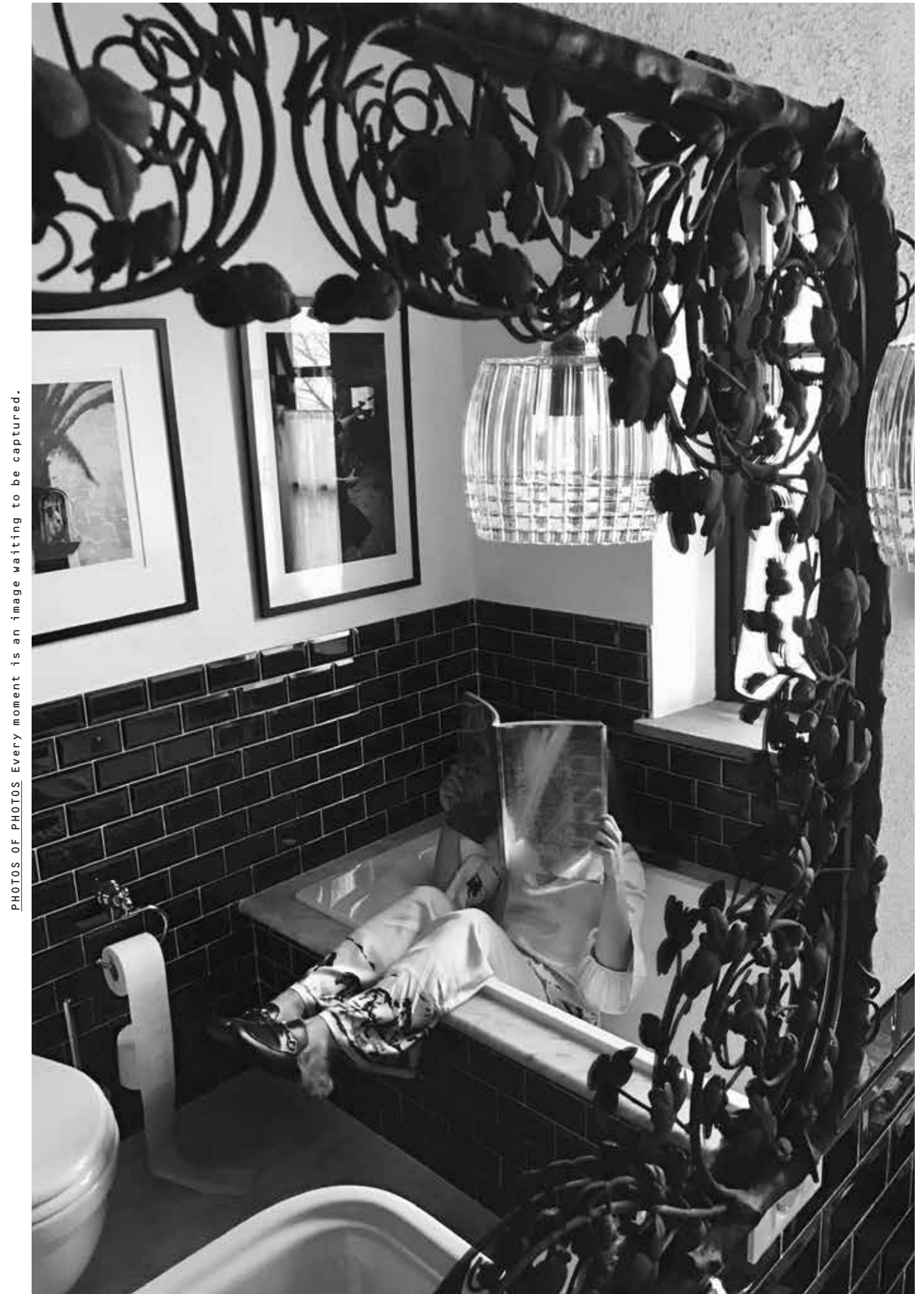
PIEMONTE IS A PLACE FOR SLOW LIVING Draw back the curtains when you're ready. Life is not just waiting outside, life is right here. In the moment.



SPACE FOR IDEAS

For yoga classes in the studio, a conference in an unexpected place,
a dinner with room for everyone you wish to invite.





PHOTOS OF PHOTOS Every moment is an image waiting to be captured.

HELÉN, MIKAEL AND STELLA THE DOG

Close friends of the owners agreed to flip their lives upside down, move from Sweden to Piemonte and run the daily operations of the Villa. With a suitcase full of passion, their new life here turned out to be a dream come true.



WEDDINGS, CELEBRATIONS AND PARTIES
A home away from home. Bring your family, bring your friends,
bring home memories of your celebrations.



VLH archive photo





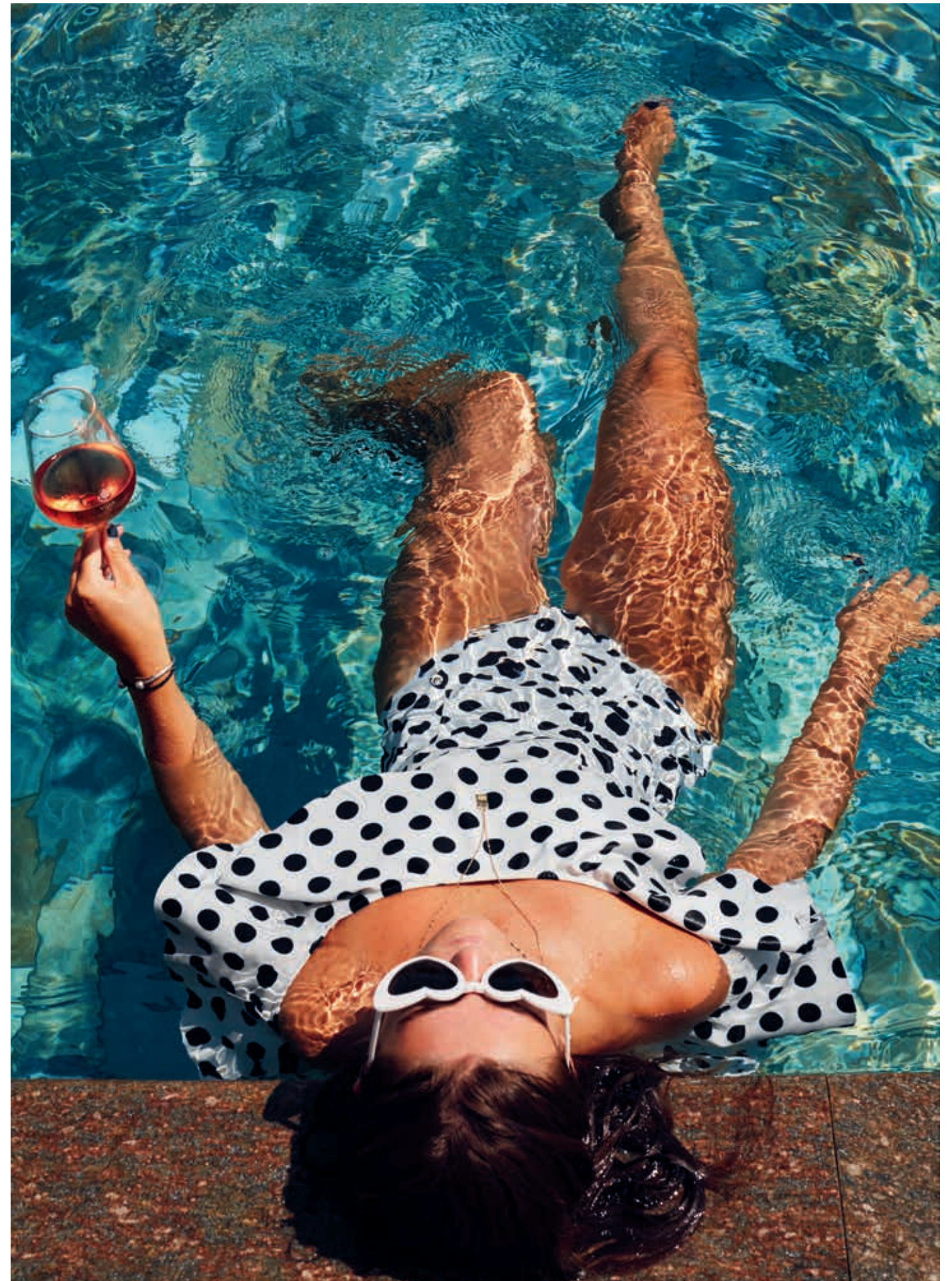
VLM archive photo



VLM archive photo









APEROL O'CLOCK

Leave your watch at home. Days at the Villa follow a rhythm other than time, a rhythm where intuition tells you when the next Aperol Spritz should be served by the pool – or when the post-nap espresso should be brought to your lounge.







A GIFT THAT KEEPS ON GIVING A bright pink rose,
a gift from Rosita Missoni. Planted in the Villa grounds.



WELCOME TO THE PIAZZA

An early evening aperitivo or an after-dinner grappa?
Consider this a living-room extension.









VOLARE! Meet Mario,
the singing farmer from next door.







THE GREAT INDOORS

When darkness falls and the evening breeze reminds us of the sudden seasonal shifts, we'll meet by the fire, browse through the Villa's selection of books and find some dusty, vintage wine from the cellar, and stay up as long as we want.





FOOD FOR OUTSIDERS AND INSIDERS

Meals are an experience for all the senses, and will vary based on the mood of patrons. The snugly dining room under old brick vaults is an intimate affair, while the landscape framed from a terrace table provides a window for dreamers.







IV

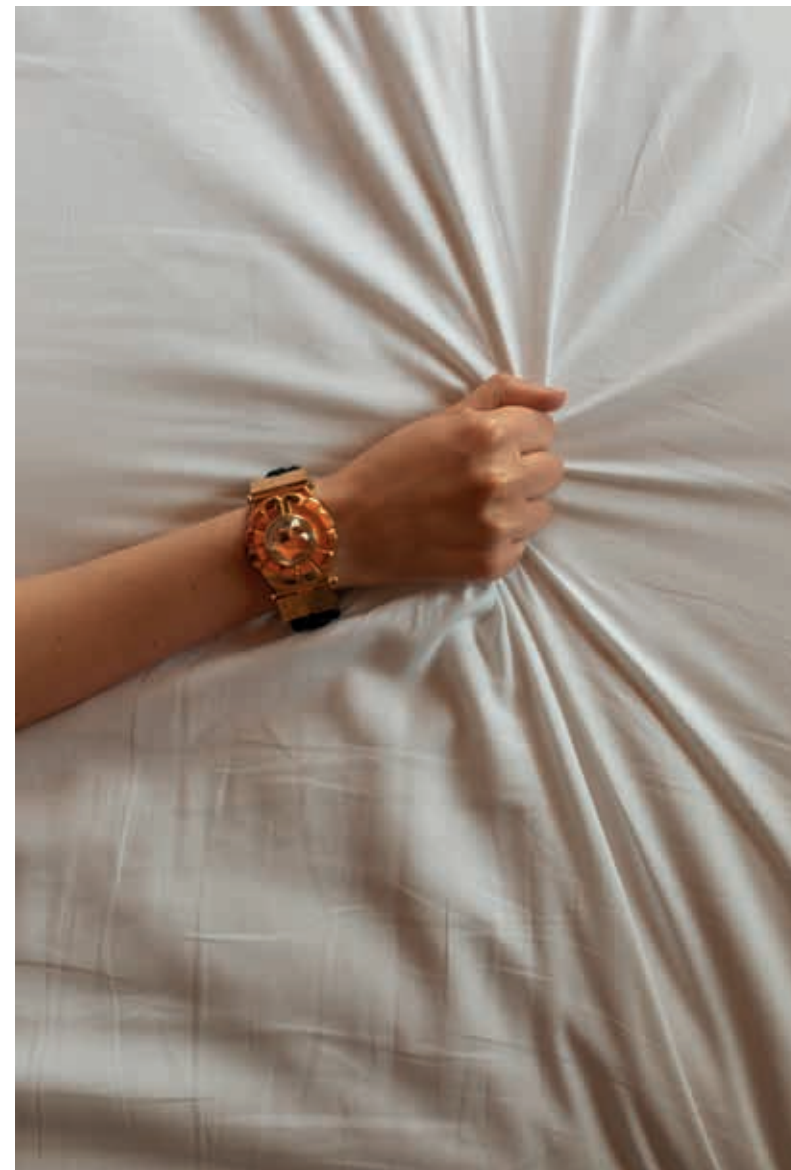
A
Sunny
Story

Photography ANNICA EKLUND
Styling MARCUS SÖDER
Hair and Make Up SARA ERIKSSON
Model MARTA DANA
Art Direction, Set Design CATT SÖDER
Assistant LINN EKLUND







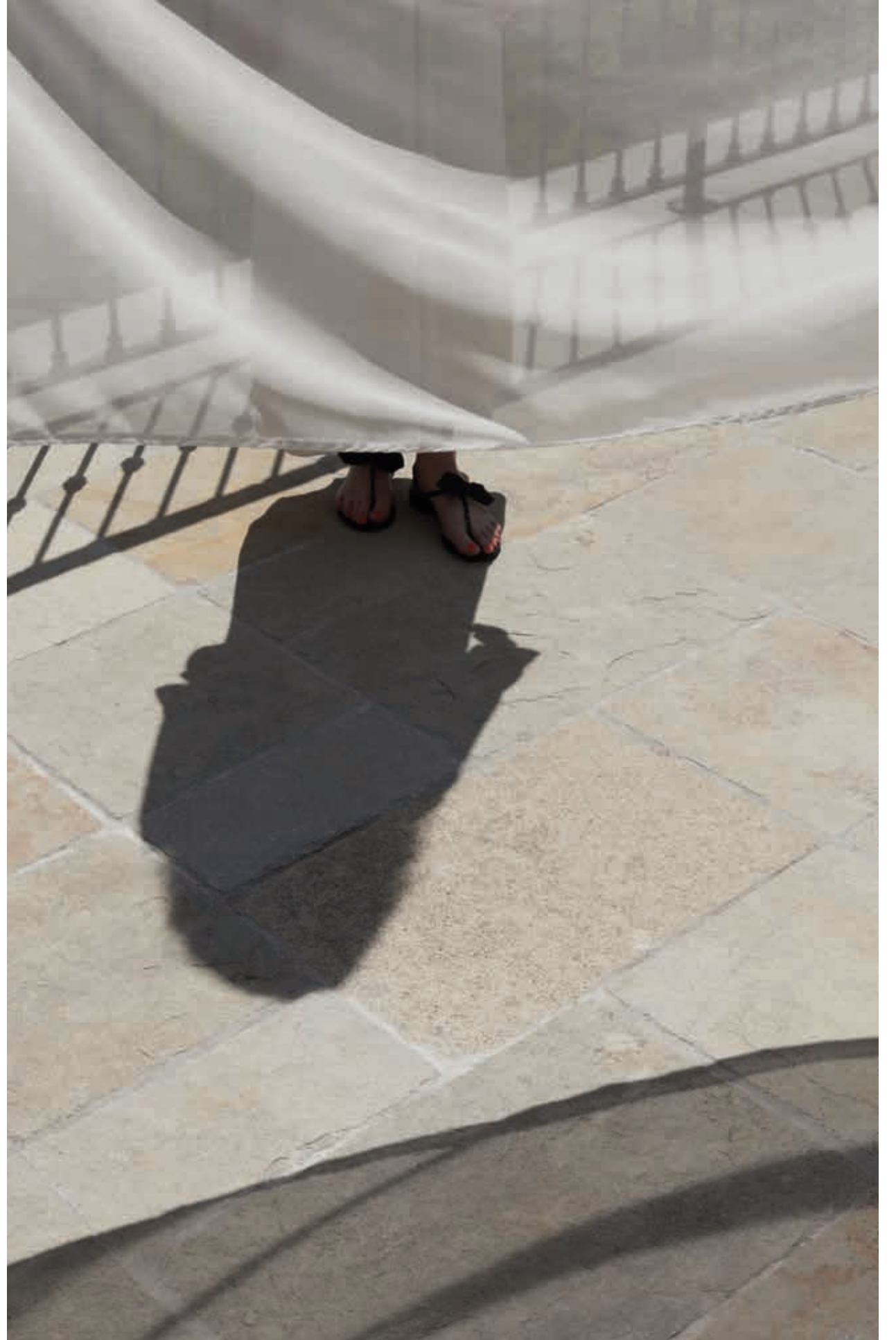




























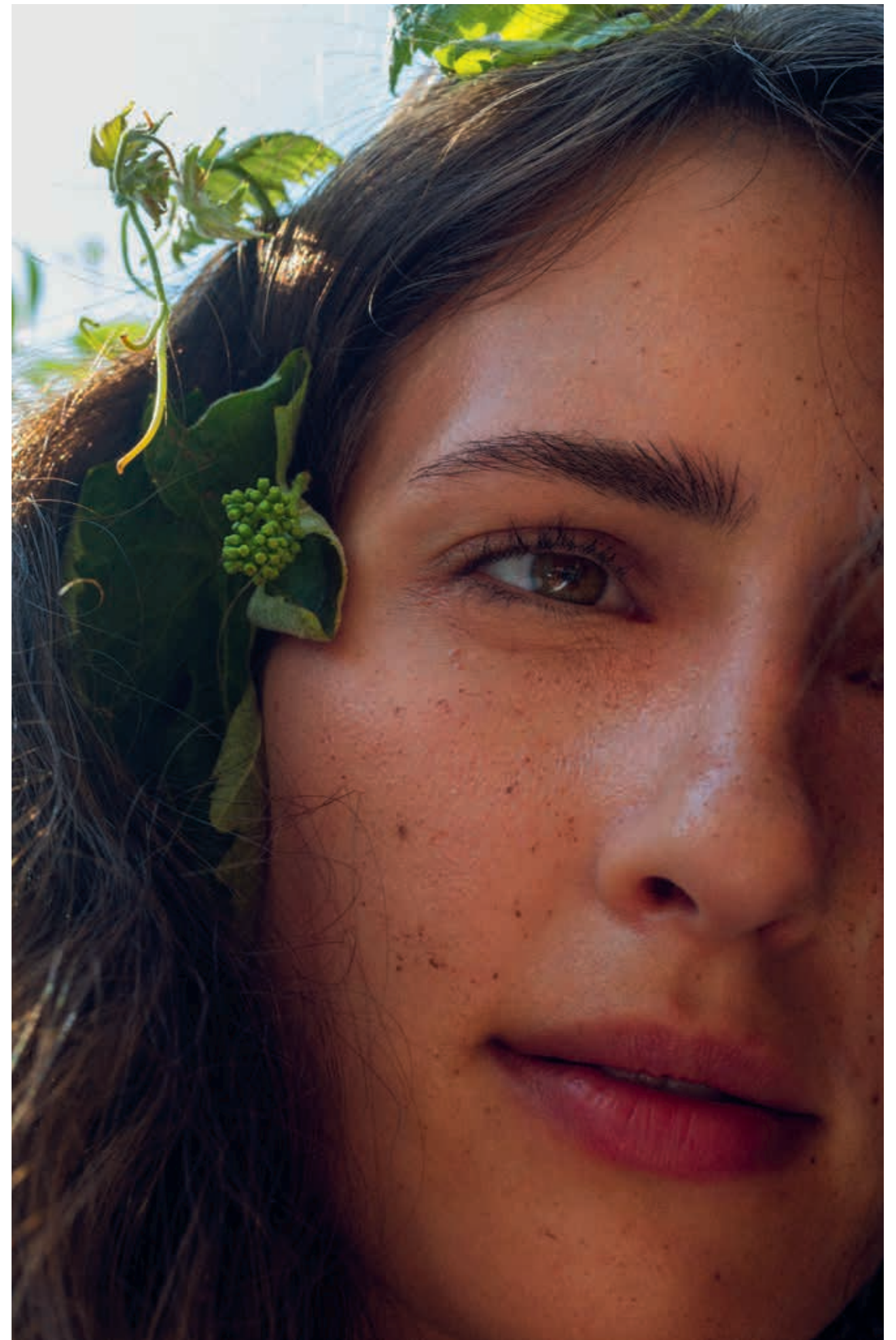
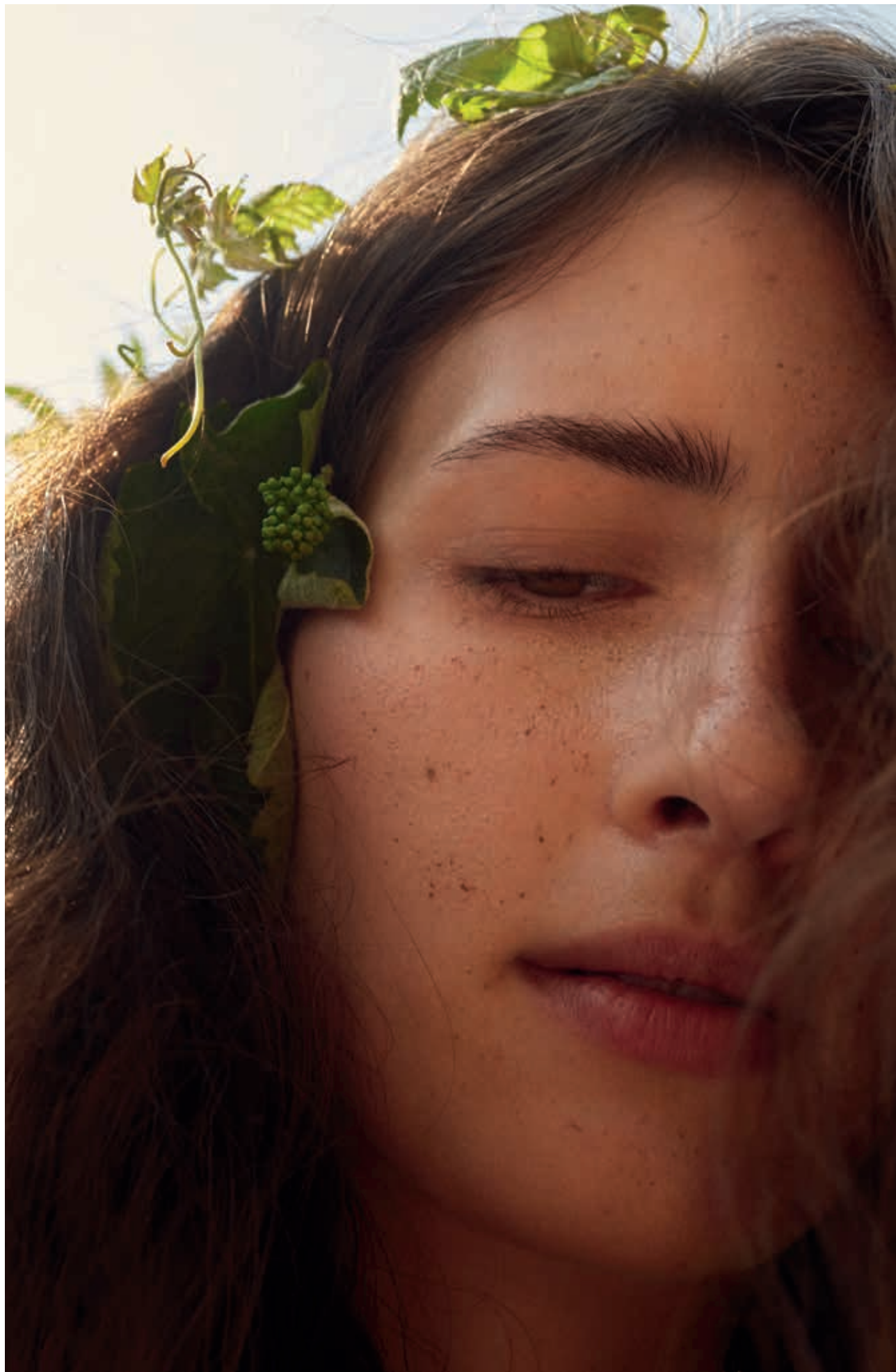














P I E M O N T E



TORINO

ROERO

ALBA

BARBARESCO

LA MORRA

RISTORANTE GUIDO

BAROLO

MONASTERO BORMIDA

BISTAGNO

VILLA LA MADONNA

ROCCAVERANO

MONFERRATO

ALESSANDRIA

ACQUI TERME

GENOVA

LANGHE



00

V

Wine Stories



“La Barbera è la linfa vitale di questo territorio.”

“Barbera is the lifeblood of this territory.”

Small, swollen, dark blue and ripe. Barbera and Cabernet grapes grow neatly in the south west facing grounds of the Villa. These demand precise care right through their 12-month cycle up until harvesting in October.

At least 15 people will come to harvest the two hectares, with the Villa La Madonna family joining in. It’s a feast, a celebration of the blessings that grow and give pleasure throughout the year.

Some grapevines have been here longer than anyone really knows. New vines were planted in 2000 and the first

bottle of house wine was produced 15 years later.

Every January the vines are pruned, and the clippings burned in a bonfire on the fields that surround the Villa. Come February, the vines are tied to wires, and two months later the first flowers bloom.

Careful pruning is demanded throughout the summer, awaiting perfect ripeness in the autumn. At Villa La Madonna, wine is not a simple matter, not just a beverage served in variations. Wine here is the pulsing heart of every moment spent.

A constantly unfolding story.

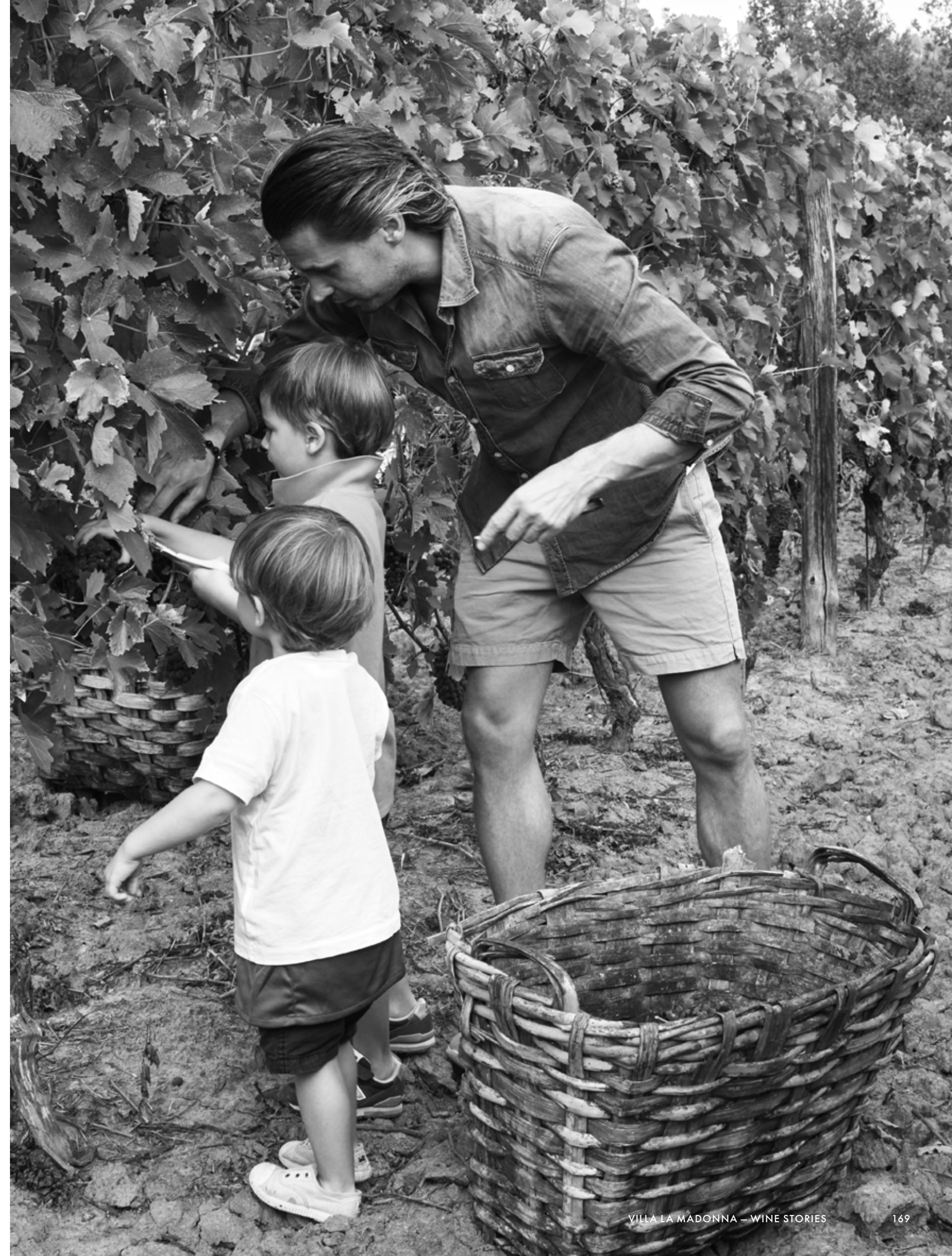
The harvest yields between five and eight thousand litres of wine. Maceration and fermentation takes place a 20-minute drive from the Villa – a process lasting about one month – before the wine is poured into Torneaux oak barrels where it is aged for two years.



BARBERA GRAPES The beauty before transformation.
The shape, colour and texture that will soon give life to Villa La Madonna's house wine.

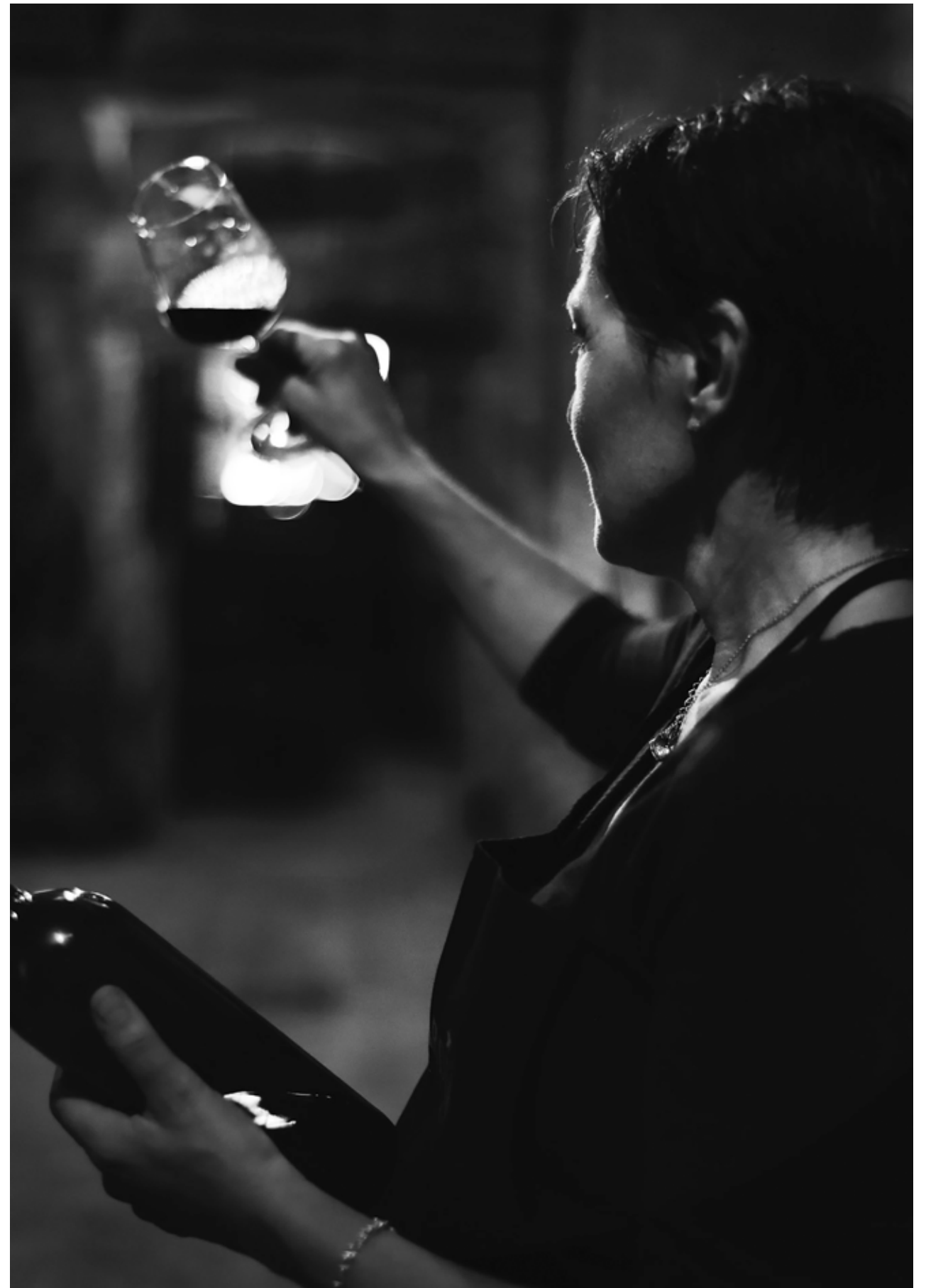
HARVEST CELEBRATIONS

Friends and family, all join in. The annual harvest is like Christmas to both locals and visitors – a time for outdoor activities and time for each other.









JOSH EISENHAUER, WINE DIRECTOR "When I was living in New York, I would be looking at a map of Italy when drinking wines from this specific region. I must say it's a lot cooler when the vineyard is right in front of you."



Tasting wine here comes with a scent of rosemary from the surrounding fields, a warm summer breeze and a far-reaching view over the magnificent Piemonte landscapes. Josh Eisenhauer, wine director at Villa La Madonna, believes the specific location and surroundings here add an emotional component, another dimension, to the experience of the wines made from the Villa's own grapes.

and guests can enjoy a candle-lit, guided wine tasting before dinner.

The wine list at Villa La Madonna is constantly being updated and renewed. It's the baby of Josh Eisenhauer; though far too long and versatile to be referred to as a baby anymore. For Josh Eisenhauer himself, the natural way to begin an exploration of the wines of Villa La Madonna is with a glass



of Barbera. "It's the most widely planted red grape in this part of the world. Barbera is what the locals drink, it's the lifeblood of this territory."

Villa La Madonna also produces several different wines in collaboration with friends in the area. There's a Spumante, a local white, a Barolo from famed producer Mauro Molino.

In addition to their wine production, the Villa boasts a deep, UNESCO-listed, cellar of thousands of wines, mostly from local winemakers,



BAROLO PAR MAURO MOLINO PER VILLA LA MADONNA Gregorio presenting the 2018 limited edition.





THE CELLAR

In addition to their wine production, the Villa boasts a deep, UNESCO-listed, cellar of thousands of wines, mostly from local winemakers, and guests can enjoy a candlelit, guided wine tasting before dinner.





Villa La Madonna
SPUMANTE
Sparkling wine

750 ml
100% Cortese
12% vol

A light, fresh and summery sparkling white wine made from Cortese grapes locally grown in Piemonte.



Villa La Madonna
VINO ROSATO 2017
Rosé wine

750 ml
90% Barbera 10% Cortese
12% vol

A wonderful and fruity rosé wine made from our own Barbera grapes and a touch of Cortese.



Villa La Madonna
MONFERRATO BIANCO 2016
White wine

750 ml
100% Cortese
12% vol

A mature and flavourful white wine made from Cortese grapes locally grown in Piemonte.



Villa La Madonna
BARBERA D'ASTI 2017
Red wine

750 ml
100% Barbera
14.5% vol

A dark, fresh and flavourful red wine made at Villa La Madonna from our Barbera grapes.



Mauro Molino per Villa La Madonna
BAROLO 2014
Red wine

750 ml
100% Nebbiolo
13.5% vol

This lovely Barolo from 2014 is the first wine in our limited edition series. The wine is produced in cooperation with the vineyard Mauro Molino in La Morra (Barolo) and the young, extremely talented winemaker Matteo Molino.



An elegant, ruby-coloured and tasty wine, which is the crown jewel of our wine selection.



Marco Capra per Villa La Madonna
NEBBIOLO D'ALBA 2016
Red wine

750 ml
100% Nebbiolo
14% vol

Our Nebbiolo comes from a vineyard in Roero known for its rich and elegant Nebbiolo grapes. We have produced the wine in cooperation with wine maker Marco Capra, one of Langhe's most talented young wine producers.



A wonderfully fresh, light and gentle Nebbiolo wine with a lot of taste of red fruits.



ON THE ROAD Driving through the rolling landscapes of Piedmont is a journey bordered by grapevines in every direction. Many winemakers along the way welcome visitors to sample and purchase their wines, harvested right here.

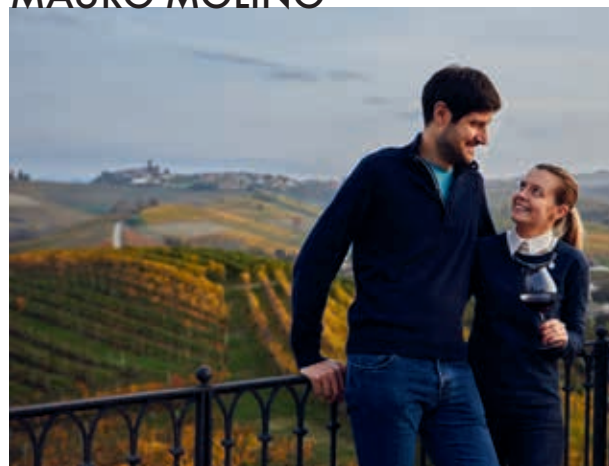


SNAPSHOT Annica's pursuit of capturing moments often involves her daughter, Linn. This time running away. The image ended up on the Villa's limited edition wine label (2018) and in a photo exhibition at Abecita Museum of Modern Art in Borås, Sweden (2019).





Exclusive visit to winemaker
MAURO MOLINO



Every wine region has great internal differences.

In Langhe, part of the central hills and valleys of Piemonte, the best-known wine is Barolo. Even when narrowing a wine down to the specifics of a Nebbiolo grape only grown in the municipalities southwest of Alba under regulated conditions, a vast variety in flavour and experience is to be found. A Barolo is never just a Barolo.

In La Morra, 513 metres above sea level, some of the world's most celebrated grapes are planted. The Molino family proudly farm some of these. Not many, just about enough to make 4.000 bottles a year, but the very best in their range. On this side of the Barolo zone, the terroir is known to yield more elegant and aromatic wines. This is also where the Molino family have their winery and cellar, producing a total of around 95.000 bottles of wine every year, half of which are Barolo wines.

Some of them are produced in collaboration with Villa La Madonna and exclusively served there.

Now run by two siblings, Matteo and Martina Molino, the family business started with their grandfather buying the flourishing farmland in 1953. It later became a vineyard, when their father, Mauro, took over in 1982. Mauro still wanders the steep vineyards every day, checking up on the growth and wellbeing of the grapes.

Matteo Molino, a tall and broad-shouldered yet subtle and gentle man, is known to be one of the most skilled winemakers among Piemonte's younger generation, with a unique sense for tasting and perfecting wines. Still, he says, he is humble to the many years of experience his father has, and will turn to him for advice before each harvest.

"In our family we talk about wine all the time. We all relish the whole process, from tending the vines through to harvest, to fermenting the grapes and sampling the wine from the barrels. Wine-making is also a trade in which you are lucky enough to meet a lot of interesting people



“Per essere un buon produttore di vino devi essere molto umile.”

“As a good winemaker, one needs to be very humble.”

who share the same passion,” says Matteo Molino.

Growing up, Matteo and his sister Martina assisted their father with cutting grass, harvesting grapes, cleaning the vines. For the two siblings, there was never any doubt about taking over the family business and diving deeper into their passion for the potential greatness in every single grape grown here.

“Our generation is experiencing the best time in history for this region and this wine. It is a great opportunity to be able to be part of wine production in Langhe today,” says Matteo Molino.

The land of Barolo has seen a boom in interest in the 2010s, with the wine world coming to recognise its greatness. Up until recently, Barolo wines were more of a secret shared only between sommeliers and real aficionados. For makers of this unique product, now in high demand, comes a responsibility not only to new Barolo fans around the world but also to the traditions, as well as to the fertile soil, that bring life to the wine. Come autumn time, Matteo Molino will be up early every day to check the condition of the grapes, awaiting the perfect point of

maturity. There can be no humidity from the soil, the grapes must be dry and the skin should separate easily. When the time is just right, a decision to harvest is made on the spot. Holding up the harvest by just one more day may risk the quality of the entire yield for that year.

“For me, it is important to set high standards, follow traditions and be precise throughout the whole process,” says Matteo Molino.

Though acknowledged as one of the top producers of Barolo, Matteo Molino does not beat his chest nor take any of his wine for granted:

“I could never close my eyes to the world around me and say that our Barolo is the best wine out there, I will always taste and try other wines. That is how I learn and continue to develop the quality of my family's wine, knowing that nature also plays its part and every year the grapes will produce a new version of our wine. As a winemaker, one needs to be very humble.”





BAROLO

Touring Club Italiano



BANDIERA ARANCIONE

Marchio di qualità turistico ambientale per l'entroterra

THE SMALL TOWN OF BAROLO, with a population of less than one thousand but far more daily visitors, is situated about an hour's drive from Villa La Madonna.

Exclusive visit to winemaker
GAJA



“Il lavoro agricolo è anche un atto estremamente materno, implica la formazione delle viti, la loro protezione e la preparazione alla lotta contro le sfide. Accompagnare un vino durante tutto il suo viaggio implica fiducia, comprensione della sua inclinazione e rispetto – ancora una volta un lavoro molto genitoriale.”



“Farming the land is a very maternal act, it involves training vines, protecting them and preparing them to cope with challenges. Accompanying a wine throughout its journey involves trust, understanding of its inclinations and respect for it: again a very parental job.”

A fifth-generation family affair, a surname-turned-superstar wine brand. Gaja, to many people, is the very definition of true luxury in a bottle. For Gaia Gaja and her sister Rosanna Gaja, who now run the family business together with their brother, the wine is such a natural part of their everyday life that luxury has come to mean something else. Something deeper.

“Luxury is the essence of things: the inner values, the deep sentiments, the wisdom and the experience of a lifetime. When you can experience the real deal, then you feel blessed,” says Gaia Gaja.

The family vineyard is situated in the heart of Langhe, a unique part of the world where grapes – just like the people – take on a distinct character.

“Everything in Langhe is moulded by its special clay; compact and hard to work but also incredibly generous. Langhe people have a sense of sacrifice and a respect for work that comes from farming their land. The landscape is also very strong. The hills embrace every space, light and sound, leaving you with the feeling of being gently cocooned,” says Gaia Gaja.

For many winemakers and food producers in this area, family is a significant ingredient. However, two sisters spearheading one of the world's most beloved wine estates goes against a sometimes stuffy tradition of a very male-dominated industry. To Gaia Gaja though, this has not been an obstacle or challenge.

“Farming land is a very maternal act, it involves training vines, protecting them and preparing them to cope with challenges. Accompanying a wine throughout its journey involves trust, understanding of its inclinations and respect for it: again a very parental job. The challenges we have to face are our normal routine.”

“Above all challenges, my sister, my brother and I are proud to be taking the project of our grandparents and parents forward, it is our project and dream as well, and we protect it from all resentments or disappointments that may occur,” she says.

Just like the owners of Villa La Madonna, Gaia and Rosanna Gaja find strength in sisterhood and see their work flourishing not despite, but rather because of, it being cared for by family. Gaia Gaja explains:

“My sister is more suited to dealing with certain circumstances: she comes out with a harder and more determined attitude, while my determination comes out in certain other situations, and I am better suited to handle them. We are aware of our weaknesses, and we complete each other in that sense.”

VI

Food Stories

All the land in front of us was once deep under the Mediterranean sea. Millions of years have passed, but history has left its mark on what Piemonte is today. A culinary dream.



VLM archive photo

The fertile, sandy soil and unique microclimates have enabled some of the world's most treasured delicacies to thrive right here. Distinct seasons, with warm summers, foggy autumns and crisp cold winters, allow for different produce throughout the year. Cold nights and warm days during peak growing season create a push-and-pull effect that allows for slower maturation in the soil. All for the best of flavours.



This is the home of white truffles, porcini mushrooms, hazelnuts and a mouthwatering variety of grapes. This is where nature's most evident luxuries are born. The home of true indulgence.

Abandoning the two-minute pleasure of an industrialised quarter-pounder in favour of a locally produced, slow-cooked meal enjoyed during long hours in the company of friends and family. This stretched translation of slow food might simplify the message on either side of this eating philosophy, but reactions to fast food culture have fuelled a movement that has now taken on a life of its own.

”Lo slow food è un lusso al quale aspirare.”

“Slow food is a luxury to aspire to.”



TAGLIATELLE DI MARE
The Villa is situated only an hour from the Ligurian Sea,
with access to daily caught local seafood.

In Piemonte, however, the region where the movement was first born in 1989, slow food is not a reaction to anything, it is simply a natural way of eating and living.

Here, every hyperlocal microclimate and terroir will have served as a foundation for equally local recipes and cooking techniques. Slow food is about knowing how different types of tomatoes have different flavours and textures, and that even the same type of tomato will differ depending on where it's grown. It's about utilising the differences, maximising each ingredient's potential. It's about keeping your own chickens rather than buying a plastic-wrapped fillet from a homogenised supermarket. Only eating food you know the exact origin of, eating the best food possible made out of the ingredients at hand. In a way, it's pure logic.



Simplicity, quality, craft and community are not just key components of slow food, they are the foundations on which Villa La Madonna is built.

POMODORO E BUFALA
An Italian summer classic.



To an outsider, slow food might also represent the ultimate in luxury. For sisters Marie and Annica, their perception of luxury has evolved over the years, and since opening Villa La Madonna, the local tradition of eating almost dogmatically, not allowing room for stress, celebrating family and friends, sharing a bottle of wine out in the open air, has become the luxury they aspire to.

Cherries, apples, pears, almonds, hazelnuts, apricots, plums, bay leaves, rosemary, thyme, nettles, mushrooms and wild hops. They all grow in the grounds of Villa La Madonna. Surely there could be no better place for a chef to settle down, bring fresh produce into the kitchen and start exploring local traditions and Italian classics. Although situated in a valley rich in all kinds of fruit and vegetables, with farmers nearby producing some of the world's most celebrated grains, meats and cheeses, it sometimes takes an outsider, with an eagle-eye view to perfect what is already there.



ROSEMARY DI VILLA LA MADONNA
Freshly clipped from the Villa grounds.
A scent to bring back memories from here.

VILLA LA MADONNA ESSENTIALS: red wine, parmesan cheese, bread, olive oil and a pinch of sea salt.



"LOCALLY GROWN" takes on a new meaning at Villa La Madonna, where fruit, herbs and vegetables are found on the Villa's doorstep.

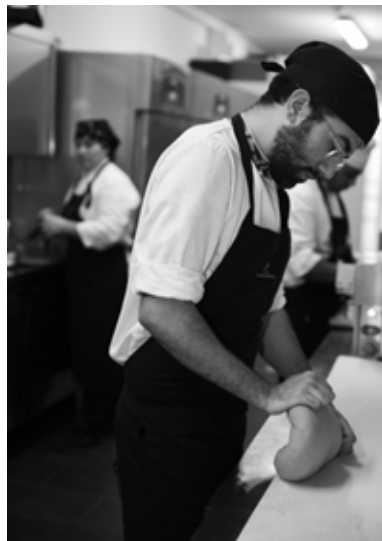




SPAGHETTI AL POMODORO, ZUPPA DIORTICHE CON SARDE, PASTA IN BIANCO
A typical lunchtime table, a family meal of slow food.

Marie and Annica had a vision for the restaurant from day one. Their simple, yet determined, brief to the chef was delivered as soon as he first set foot in the kitchen: to create a perfect balance of innovative Piemontese cuisine and Italian classics.





Villa La Madonna pasta dough recipe

2 cups of flour
3 large eggs (room temperature)
2 tbsp olive oil
1 tsp salt
2 tbsp water (or as needed)

Beat the flour, eggs, olive oil, and salt together in a bowl. Add water (1 teaspoon at a time) to the flour mixture until it forms a smooth and very thick dough. Turn the dough out onto a work surface and knead for 10 minutes. Leave the dough to rest for 5 to 10 minutes. Divide it into 8 balls and use a pasta machine to roll and cut it into the pasta shapes.

The kitchen staff take pride in cooking every single component from scratch: home-made pasta, freshly baked bread, hand-rolled gnocchi, secret recipes acquired down through the years.

“If you come to our restaurant, you will eat what our chefs have made, not what they’ve bought. We truly believe in this. Our team will put in all the work so that every guest can experience and enjoy the ultimate flavours achieved from the treasure trove of ingredients we have here,” says Marie.

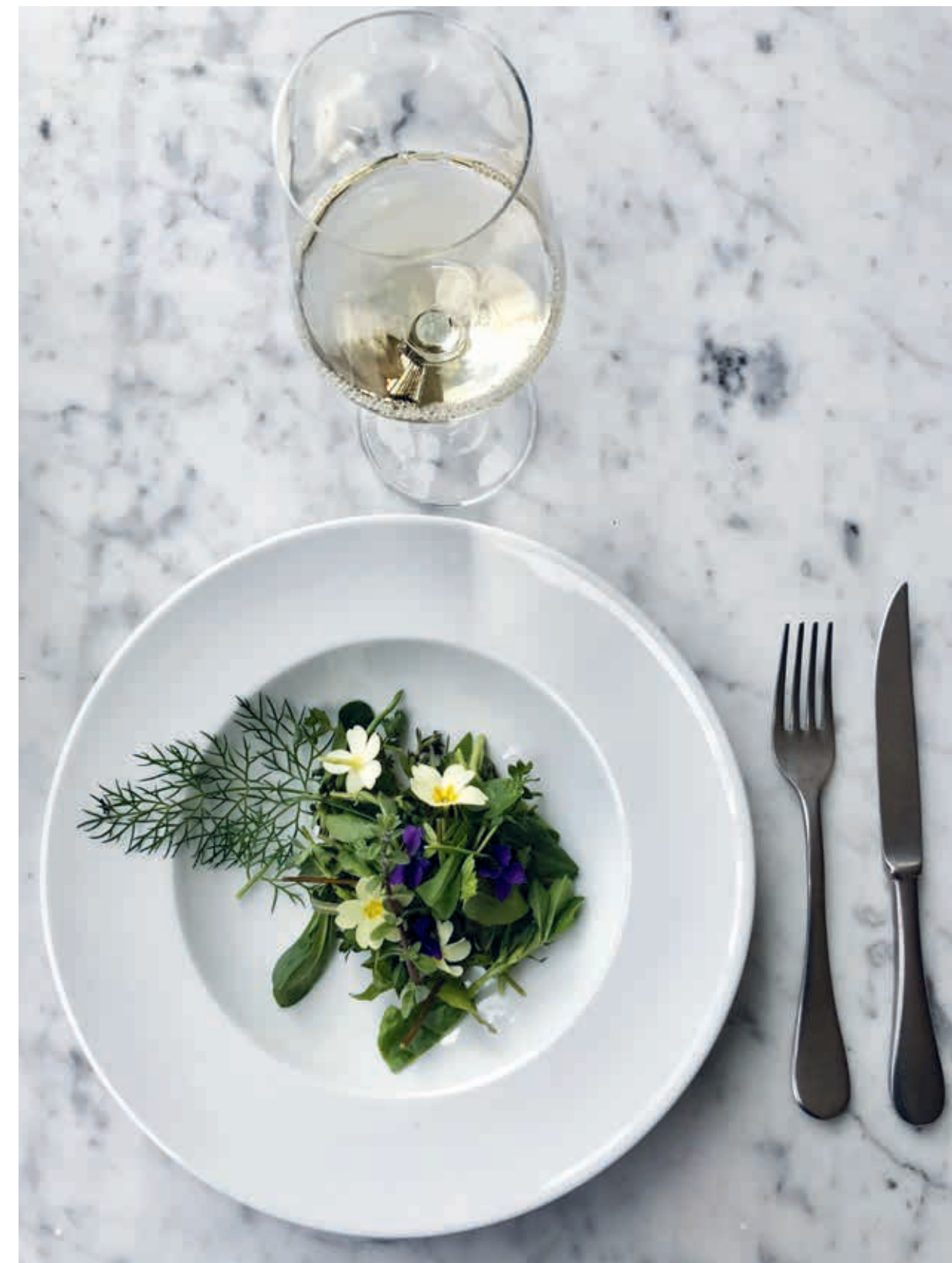


AGNOLOTTI DI VILLA LA MADONNA
An unforgettable local speciality.

HOMEMADE COOKIES To be dipped in Coazzolo Passito.
A divine dessert.



HERBS FROM OUR GARDEN Food is not only a matter of taste.
Food is a thing of beauty.





AFTER A LONG LUNCH WITH FRIENDS Feel at home, but not quite. Savour the moment, indulge, take it easy, leave the dishes to us.

Marie and Annica are not much for strict dining etiquette and unnecessary formalities. They like their restaurant at Villa La Madonna to be more casual and indulgent.

Dinner served on wooden and marble tables under the fruit trees in the garden in summer, warming family meals with plenty of pasta on the glassed veranda on chilly autumn evenings.



Everyone involved in the restaurant is committed to making it feel like a home. The service, the interiors, the guest interaction. Even in a region so rich in the finest produce, food is never everything. At Villa La Madonna, the environment and staff are just as highly valued.

Together they offer a unique and always welcoming dining experience.

COOKING CLASSES AT VILLA LA MADONNA
Chopping and stirring, tasting and experimenting. Get to know the secrets of Piemontese cooking.
To us, food is togetherness.







Trifola d'Alba, known to non-locals as the white truffle, is a treasure worth its weight in gold. Or at least a tenth of that. While black truffles can be found around Piemonte in spring and summer, it is the autumn season of wild-growing white truffles that draws the most attention. Rightfully so. Festivals and markets attract both locals and visitors to sample these recently unearthed treasures. They will influence the flavour of seasonal dishes and be the talk of the town. Anyone who hasn't enjoyed a hearty bowl of Piemontese pasta topped with freshly shaved white truffle, hasn't yet enjoyed life.



To enjoy the full truffle experience, visitors can join a truffle hunt where dogs scour the countryside, sniffing up and around poplar, oak, willow and hazel trees. The white truffle is known to favour the roots of these trees. Patrons of Villa La Madonna can join a hunt, together

with experienced locals and trained dogs. It's the real deal. But, naturally, a well-organised event for visitors. As Josh Eisenhauer, restaurant manager at Villa La Madonna, says: "for some locals, this event would involve far more alcohol and trespassing."



MAN'S BEST FRIEND Helps us dig up pasta's best friend.



Villa La Madonna truffle pasta recipe

8 oz pasta
1/2 cup of parmesan cheese
1/2 stick of salted butter
2 oz white Alba truffle
salt and pepper to taste

Bring a large pan of water to the boil, add a generous amount of salt (1 tbsp) and then cook the pasta until al dente.

Meanwhile grate the parmesan and set to one side.

Add the butter to a heavy-based skillet and allow to melt over a low heat.

Stir well and then remove from the heat.

Save a 1/2 cup of the pasta cooking water and then drain the pasta.

Stir the pasta into the butter, along with a 1/4 cup of the saved pasta water. Stir gently over a low heat until everything is combined.

Add more water if it starts to feel sticky. Add the parmesan and serve immediately.

Shave white truffle over the top.



Villa La Madonna egg truffle recipe



Melt 1/2 a cup of butter in a pan.
Crack two eggs into the pan.
Cover.
Cook until the white is solid.
Serve hot.
Grate white truffle over the top.

Exclusive visit to chef
UGO ALCIATI, RISTORANTE GUIDO



On the third floor, the beds are made. Hardly touched since the 19th century, when this building was part of the private estate and hunting grounds for Viktor Emanuel II, the first king of a unified Italy. Guests at Ristorante Guido, however, are not encouraged to take any post-meal naps on this museum-like floor of the building, no matter how stuffed they are. Downstairs is the modern restaurant and wine cellar, where chef Ugo Alciati and his team prepare their Michelin-starred dinners for long-standing regulars and foodie guests.

"My parents established their first restaurant in the 1960s, outside of the gastro area, a place just for locals. When my brother and I took over, we moved it to a location more in the centre of things. Later, when there was an opportunity to open up the restaurant here, we were honoured to do so. Earlier in my life I worked at restaurants for clients. After taking over my parents' restaurant I noticed the difference: with their restaurant being more of a home for guests. That sense of home is something I've treasured and worked hard to maintain," says Ugo Alciati.

He remembers spending time in his parents' restaurant as a child, watching guests present gifts to his parents on arrival. For the guests, eating at Ristorante Guido was always a special occasion. These memories are Ugo Alciati's mantra in his continued development of Ristorante Guido today.

"I have Swiss guests who bring me chocolates. I have a regular who brings

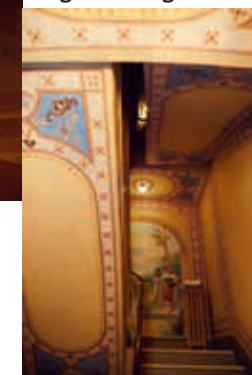
me salami from his village every time he eats here, which is every week. Twice a week, actually. Reservations, eat, pay – that's not what we're about. Here, things are different. We have lifetime guests. We have a family heritage to honor. I go to many of the same producers that my parents used, I try to change as little as possible and maintain those relationships. It's not that I'm against innovation. My mom didn't use sous-vide, I do. But maintaining relationships and traditions is important to me," says Ugo Alciati.

WHAT IS PIEMONTESE FOOD TO YOU?

"Food that is tied to primary ingredients, numerous types of both vegetables and animal products. The basis of Piemontese food is great



respect for these ingredients. Piemonte borders Liguria and France. The old salt roads came through here, so this region has always been exposed to foods travelling through. All of which have influenced our food today. The fact that we have been a poor region, where nothing was ever thrown away, has left its mark on our philosophy regarding food.



So has the fact that there has been a long-standing presence."

WHERE DO YOU FIND MOST INSPIRATION FOR YOUR WORK IN THE KITCHEN?

"From stories. In feedback from our guests. By looking at my grandmother's old recipes and challenging myself to make them accessible in a modern restaurant."

IN THE PROCESS OF CREATING A MENU AND COOKING FOOD, WHICH COMES FIRST FOR YOU – YOUR HANDS, HEART OR HEAD?

"All three are important. I constantly try to find a balance between the three. My heart is in the traditions. My hands let me perfect every dish. My head is used for innovation. I don't want to be cooking the same food as was served in the 70s."

Family and food go together throughout Italian culture. Not least in Piemonte. The family traditions of Ugo Alciati are reflected in every dish he cooks. He is proud to carry on his family's life work and welcome new guests into the community around their food. When asked if there is anything in particular he wishes for his guests to remember after a dinner at Guido, Ugo Alciati immediately replies:

"I want them to remember to come back because something is calling them back. The worst criticism for me is not a guest having a bad experience, but a guest not coming back."

“Il mio cuore è nelle tradizioni.
Le mie mani mi permettono
di perfezionare ogni piatto.
Uso la testa per l'innovazione.”

"My heart is in the traditions. My hands let me perfect every dish. My head is used for innovation."



Exclusive visit to Robiola producer
CÀ DEL PONTE



“È una scienza di temperatura, consistenza e gusto.”

“It's a science of temperature, texture and taste.”

Only 17 producers make the sought-after Robiola di Roccaverano, a milky white, fresh and moist, acidic and delicate cheese. It's the only raw 100% goats milk DOP cheese in all of Italy. One of the 17 producers, Cà del Ponte, is a small farm run by the Rizzolio family. Fourth-generation cheesemakers. Their farm, on the outskirts of Roccaverano, in the province of Asti, has bleating goats grazing the pasture on one side of their dusty gravel path, while large pigs wallow in the mud on the other side. The path leads up to the Rizzolio family's small and clinically clean production facility, with framed cheese contest awards on the walls and plenty of fresh, wobbly cheeses on the tables, setting in their moulds.

Whilst the goats are being led around to different clove-covered pastures in the area, the family stay at home making up to 1.400 cheeses a week. On a productive day they will label and send off 400 cheeses. A large quantity for a small family business, but nothing compared to the increasing, international demand for their high-quality cheese.

As with most delicacies, terroir comes into play in determining the unique flavours of the Robiola di Roccaverano: elevation, climate, variation in pasture.

Here, everything is done by hand. The cheese is salted, dried and aged for five days. The result will not only reflect the terroir but also the specific craft of the cheesemaker on duty. One key to an outstanding cheese is mixing morning and evening milk together, but many of the specifics can't be explained.

"It's a science of temperature, texture and taste," says Pinnuca Rizzolio.

The 17 producers of Robiola di Roccaverano all follow the same rules and procedures, yet the taste and texture will differ between them all.

"There will also be a slight difference between the cheeses I and my mother make here. Milk is a living thing, any little factor can influence the outcome. Even my mood makes a difference to the taste," explains Pinnuca Rizzolio.

The Rizzolio family's cheese production is part of a hyperlocal ecosystem on the farm, where the whey, as a by-product, feeds the pigs who will later make their inevitable journey to become salami. Production is also, always, the result of a family's traditions. It's an evolving family with Pinnuca Rizzolio having been leading the business for just a few years.

"I make the decisions now but I'm not the boss. No-one is ever the boss of a family business," she says.

To Pinnuca Rizzolio, being a cheese-maker is more than just a job. It's been her passion since childhood. Following the process and evolution of the Robiola, starting with the baby goats, watching them grow up, motivates her for getting up before seven every morning.

"There's no pay for all the hours I put in, but there is also no price to my satisfaction. I can't taste a cheese without thinking about where the flavour comes from, where the animals have grazed. This kind of connection does not exist in industrial production. I want to make this cheese so that more people can experience all the stories that are embodied inside every single cheese made. This is our tradition, this is our identity preserved over time."











Villa La Madonna Stories

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Villa La Madonna
is a physical manifestation
of life's mysterious paths
intertwining,
always leading elsewhere
than first imagined.
A reminder that for every
love story, no matter
its own course,
new stories are written.



VILLA
LA MADONNA