

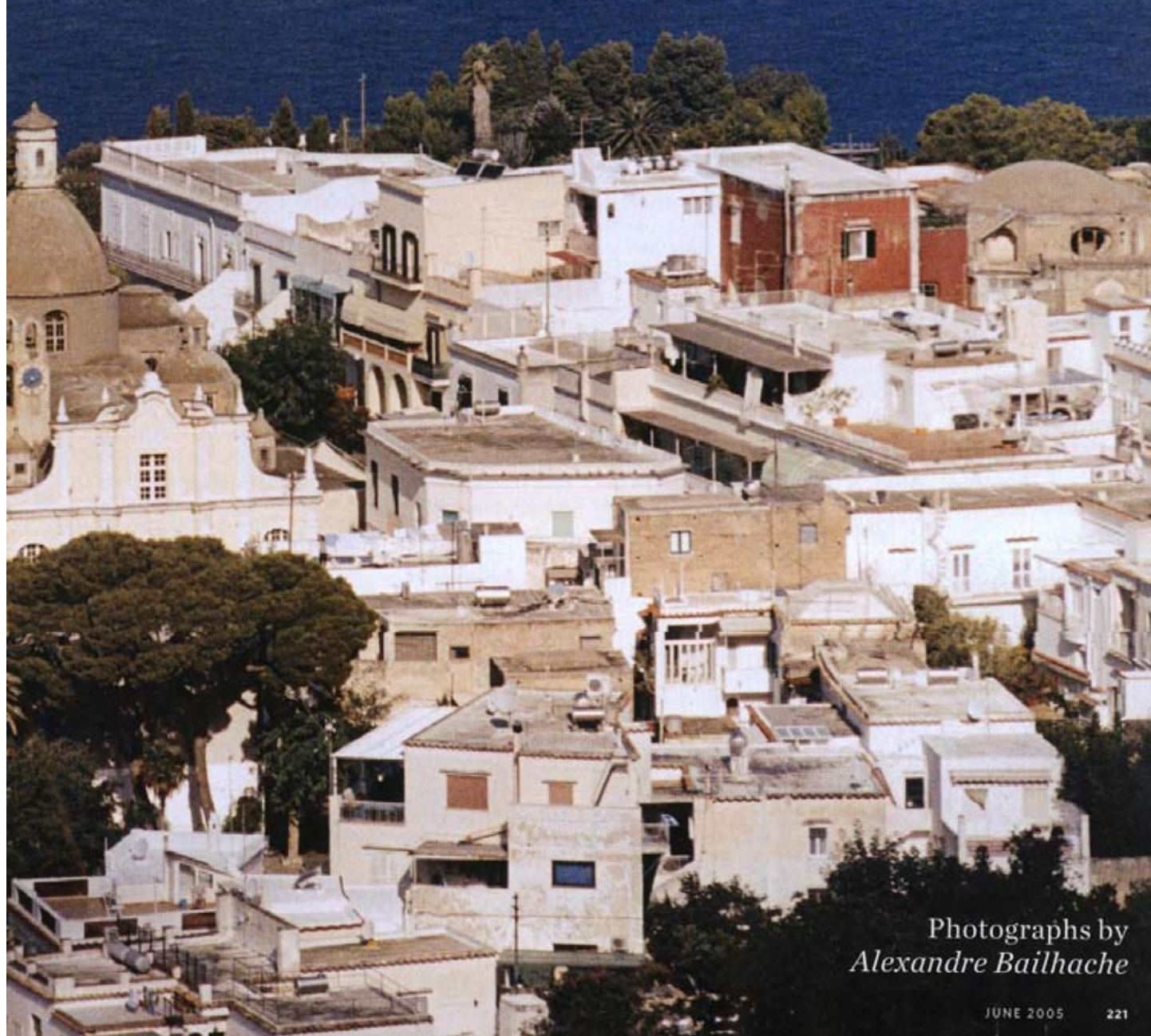


High above the summer bustle of the famous Capri resort, this tranquil

"There are places on Capri where time is visible as a fourth dimension," writes Peter Feibleman, "and others where it is worn almost as jewelry." Located in the western part of the island, the town of Anacapri—with views of the Mediterranean—is one of those places.

ANACAPRI

village captures a novelist's imagination and heart. *By Peter Feibleman*



Photographs by
Alexandre Bailhache

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CAPRI, APRIL 1990

How different it is from the island village I knew thirty or thirty-five years ago The donkeys and carts are gone, half the tables are empty at the four cafés around the Piazzetta In my parents' day Capri was chic on an international scale, but the sexual revolution in the '60s, the world recession in the '70s and the AIDS threat in the '80s all took their toll Now, in the '90s, the island has been forgotten.

It's evening now, with time to sleep and dream, to wake up in the curious tingling light and know that some places are never finished. Capri will come into its own again It may take a month, a year, a decade-but it won't take forever, not here. That is the island's final secret

It can wait

JUNE 2004

It did.

The Piazzetta is overrun with daily visitors, many shops tend to cater more to quantity than quality, and the town of Capri has gone the expected way. It's the other end of the island that's unexpectedly in bloom, and quality has a new home.

Topped by the pale tint and faint, suggestive scent of ginestra, a yellow flower (known as broom in English) that looks as though a piece of the dawn had crumbled, the village of Anacapri appears to have a light of its own, muted at times, flagrant at others, coy and flirtatious in its passage through the day; there is something of the aged courtesan in Anacapri, something grand, a kind of implied concupiscence that belies its years. Nobody hates tourists as much as tourists, but even tourists don't mind each other here, since nobody expects to have a corner on a market that was already open when the sirens called Odysseus onto the rocks

in Homer's day; the seductions of this part of the island are legion.

There are places on Capri where time is visible as a fourth dimension, and others where it is worn almost as jewelry. Guidebooks wax prosaic about ancient sex orgies in the villa of Tiberius (as reported by Suetonius in A.D. 26)-or poetic about the sexual "courtesy" of Capri's boys and girls (as reported by Jean-



Jacques Bouchard in 1632)-or erotic about kinetic coupling in the Blue Grotto (as reported by everybody-and-their-uncle since). Writers through the centuries have described the island in terms that range from obscenity to sentimentality, with no stops. Reading them all, back to back, resulted in a feeling I had one night, walking past a silent pair of villas in Anacapri, that I was either naked or overdressed. At least I hope that's what it was. That or I was drunk.

In spring and summer the nights are silky, and the sea air, laced with orange blossoms and jasmine, has a sultry quality. The island lends itself to a certain hats-over-the-windmill euphoria in people of all ages-a kind of subconscious whoopee that hits you as you arrive. The main port, the Marina Grande, is a forty-minute boat ride from Naples, twenty minutes from Positano on the mainland, which is the way I chose to come last summer in order to spend a couple of nights at the Hotel San Pietro, an old favorite that I wanted to show my wife. The San Pietro is set into a tile-encrusted cliff overlooking the Bay of Naples; from its gardens you can see the rocks, the incandescent faraglioni of Capri that appear to beckon in the distance, and there's a dock at the foot of the cliff where you can make a direct transfer from the hotel to the island.

The day we went down to the speedboat was bright and breezy, with a clear June sky and a heavy rolling sea. I'd like to call your attention here to the word "rolling"; the San Pietro dock has no sheltering harbor, and the boat, as we approached it, looked like a small cork in a large body of water that had just been flushed. I was standing close to my wife, carrying a laptop with most of my new book on it, when an impressive set of waves hit the dock hard, and it suddenly occurred to me that I might have to make a choice between protecting my wife and protecting my computer. I hope it's not immodest of me to say that I'm a man who has always been able to think clearly in an emergency. I chose, of course, the computer.

For a while I stood yelling at people to lift my wife from the dock onto the surging boat, but I needn't have bothered; she eyed the waves, counted the seconds between crests, leaped aboard like a gazelle and sat down, smiling at the crew. I followed her and fell flat on my face.

Fetching up on a gunwale, I lay for a while, grinding my teeth. A sprained wrist and a bloody nose never killed anybody, but they can make you irritable when the woman you've chosen to spend your life with is cooing with the captain of a boat you can't stand up in. The couple of islands we passed on the way to Capri were so lovely they needed no commentary, but the captain had an occasional comment that made it necessary for my wife to hop over the back of her seat and join him at the wheel. The coast of the mainland was bright with Roman ruins and roads that shimmered

like bronze in the sunlight, and the captain put an arm around my wife's shoulder to explain things to her while I wrapped my hands tenderly around my ThinkPad and tried to sit up.

The harbor of the Marina Grande in Capri is well protected by a jetty, and I had no trouble at all keeping my balance on the slender plank that led from the boat to the dock, once I'd overcome the rage and the vertigo.

But I forgot about such things when the hotel car met us at the dock and drove us up toward the small village of Anacapri (similar in size to the town of Capri), along a steep, narrow road that wound high into the hills, with hairpin turns and staggering views that loomed closer as we passed other vehicles, so that the car window on my side teetered above each cliff like a mouse looking down over an abyss, which made any vertigo I'd ever felt up to then seem silly. Acrophobia isn't fear of falling, it's fear of jumping, and the song of the sirens who tried to lure Odysseus to his death can be heard just as loud above the rocks as below them. I may as well admit at this point that I used to be scared of heights.

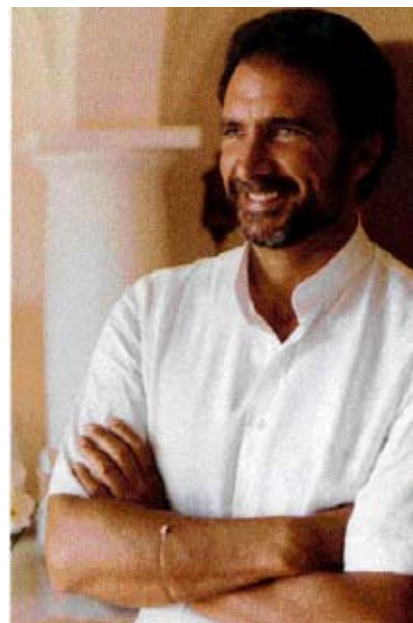
Not anymore.

When the road emerged in Anacapri, it leveled out again into a horizontal world that was as gentle as it was safe: a quiet town,

with the sort of charm that makes you think you've been going there all your life. There aren't many places on earth that are immediately familiar, but Anacapri is one of them; the effect isn't déjà vu-if anything it's the opposite, jamais vu, as though you were seeing it for the first time, not as your present self but as an earlier, more innocent self, in the days when you could still see the world by the night-lights of childhood.

I'd been to Capri countless times through the years, and I've been back to Anacapri twice since last summer, but June 13 remains a special day for me, not because it was the date of my first trip but because it was, is, the annual feast day of Saint Anthony, the patron saint of the village. The morning I got there, a little procession was moving under the Phoenician steps, carrying the figure of the saint from the church through the narrow streets, strewn with blossoms and ginestra thrown from balconies and windows as it passed, followed by children playing in its wake. Saint Anthony's feast is a popular one, and tables had been set up outdoors with food stands where traditional dishes were sold, along with toys, balloons and all the rest. There were adults, too, among them a dark-haired man with a short beard whom everyone there seemed to know. A sense of perennial youth pervaded the village till nightfall, with the sound of laughter afloat and the air off the sea stung with the odor of crushed ginestra.

At the heart of the village, the Hotel Capri Palace & Spa rises in muted crystal thrust from a high perch of bedrock. About once every twenty-five years or so, I fall in love with a hotel. The last one was the Oriental in Bangkok, under the aegis of Kurt Wachtveitl, and the present one, owned by Tonino (diminutive of Antonio) Cacace, will probably do me for the rest of my life. At first glance, the Capri Palace looks more like a private estate than a hotel, with an improbably intimate air that implies a certain sensuality. The outer structure is simple and stark, much the same as a

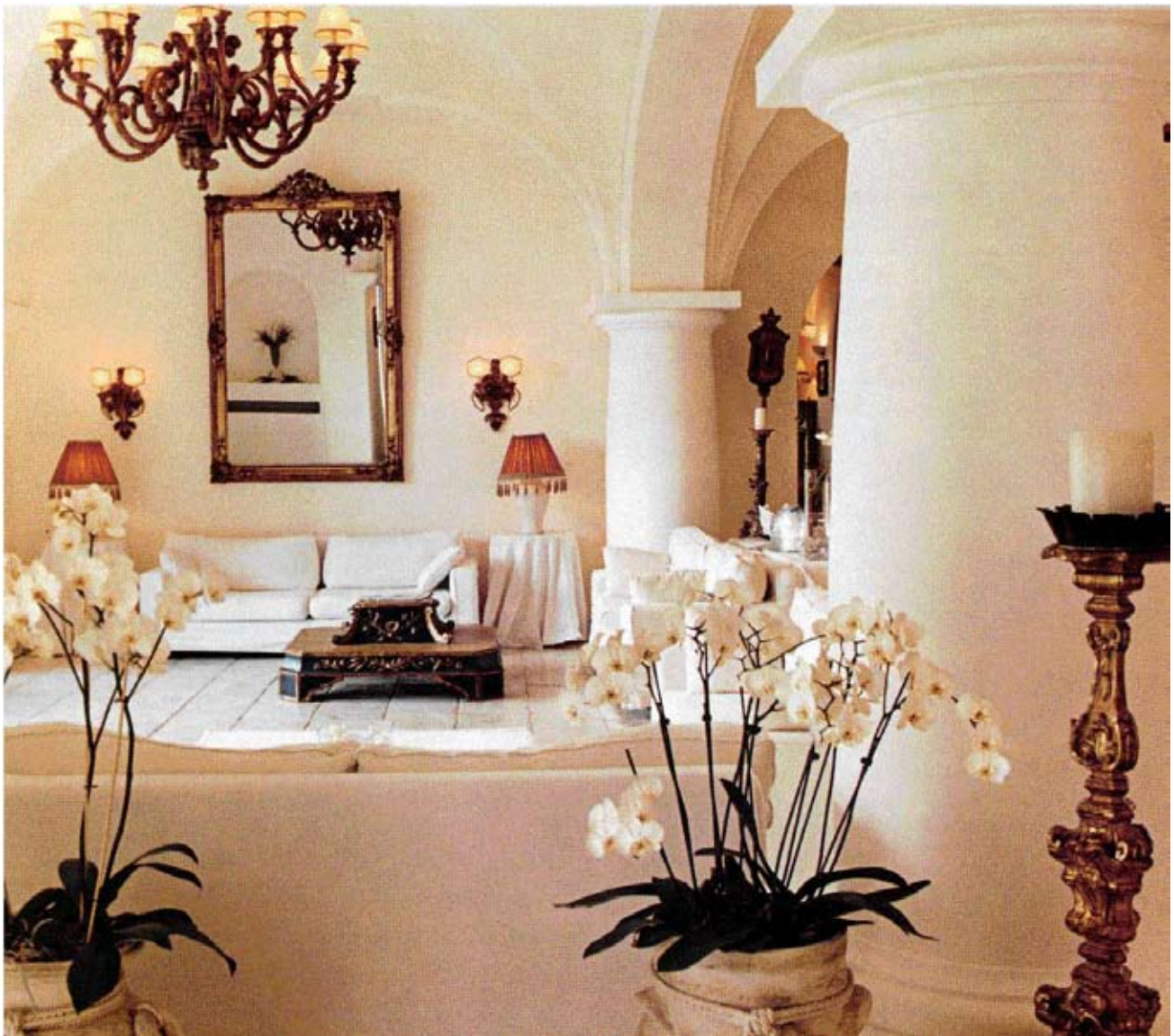


Overseen by second-generation owner Tonino Cacace (above), the Hotel Capri Palace & Spa is one of the island's most luxurious properties (left, the hotel's serene pool area). Opposite: Collaborating with the talented Italian architect Fabrizia Frezza, Cacace created a sleek lobby that is as elegant as it is comfortable.

it was last century, when Cacace's father built it as a four-star hotel, but the interior has since been gutted and redone as a five-star-plus, with a curious grace and an almost orgasmic elegance, the result of a collaboration between Tonino and his ex-girlfriend, architect Fabrizia Frezza. The talented Frezza, judging from her photograph, is a beautiful woman, and Cacace is handsome enough to be called an *homme fatal* (the man everybody appeared to recognize at the saint's-day festival). Between the two, they've managed to produce a taut, muscular design in tremulous balance between the masculine and the feminine. Which is, I suppose, a fancy way of saying that the Capri Palace is sexy. But it's also comfortable. Those two attributes used to describe the same object might seem a contradiction in terms anywhere save

Anacapri; not here. Along the entrance to the hotel, on your left, you pass a stone wall covered by a silky cascade of falling water, and on your right the swimming pool, seen from below the surface through a wall of glass, reveals in detail the seductive bodies of a few swimmers, their legs entangled. By the time you get to your room.

There are two restaurants that serve good Caprese cuisine with a flourish (the gastronomic restaurant, L'Olivo, was recently awarded a Michelin star, a first for a hotel kitchen on the island and only the second star on Capri in half a century). There's also an outdoor/indoor bar and bistro with good live but, I'm happy to say, unobtrusive music, where you can have a drink and watch the day fade across the Bay of Sorrento. Describing that >238



A New MoMA

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"Yes, but I keep wondering how large this art will become. Those pictures are big! It gets to the point that a museum can't handle it any more." Fortunately, oversized works can now be shown in galleries with ceilings that are twenty feet high.

In fact, by providing a good setting for art, the building has sparked the trustees' generosity. "Everybody's revved up," says former Paine Webber chairman **Donald B. Marron**, now the chairman and CEO of Lightyear Capital. He first got revved up by MoMA when he was in his early twenties, he says, remembering that he'd regularly hang out in the Cubist galleries. He went on to collect contemporary art; his gifts include pieces by Roy Lichtenstein, Frank Stella and Picasso. "In the big building, it isn't just about seeing art," he says. "It's seeing the *history* of modern art." He also loves MoMA's new building (where the central atrium is named for him and his wife, Catherine) because "we can display more works by contemporary artists now that we have more space. The beauty of contemporary art is that there's always something new and often surprising."

What do the trustees get in return for their time, their money and their art? To Kravis, the inestimable benefit is exposure to "MoMA's culture of collecting, learning and challenging. To have access to all that and to be able to support all that, well, it's just a huge privilege." Cisneros sees it another way: "The real pleasure is giving works so they will light up other people's lives. In that sense, I think of giving art as a selfish act, because I get such pleasure from it." No wonder David Rockefeller looks at the "protectorate" with equanimity these days. Time and again he has dreamed of new possibilities for various institutions, then forged an alliance capable of realizing the vision. "I'm taking a breather," he says. "We're confident that MoMA will continue." By "we," of course, he means the museum's guardian angels, his fellow trustees.

The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd Street. For membership and hours of operation: 212-708-9400; moma.org. ✕

Anacapri

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sort of afternoon is a little like writing about the island itself—so much has been said that most guidebooks read like copies of other guidebooks, and there's a point past which words, or paint, can no longer convey a personal experience, or even the feelings engendered by one. In the end, all you can do is go and look for yourself. Do it.

Then, in the morning, spend a couple of hours in one of the hotel's two gyms and its hedonistic spa. The people who work there, or for that matter elsewhere, will treat you with the respect that Cacace treats them with, and you'll find the same values all over.

Something should be said here about the people of Anacapri—the inhabitants themselves—whose gentleness is as touching as it is inviolate, despite millennia of invasion, conquest, barbarians, lethal volcanic eruptions and the echoes of war after war. From the time of the Phoenicians, the Greeks and the Carthaginians, down through the Etruscans, the Romans and the Arabs, the beauty of the island has seldom gone unnoticed, and the delicate shyness you find today in Anacapri is an attitude that carries with it, unseen and unspoken, a certain acceptance of and pride in the past. People who work in shops, restaurants, boats, drugstores—anywhere at all, in or near Anacapri—seem to command respect by virtue of not asking for it. How they've avoided the fate of the town called Capri, at the other end of the island, where a fountain of tourist money has resulted in a kind of businesslike cynicism, I don't know, but they have. The people of Capri seem jaded. The people of Anacapri are still able to blush.

Brochures and guided tours of the island's Roman ruins, grottoes and other famous sights are available through the Capri Palace concierge, and if you're addicted to hiking, the footpath carved into the rock that leads from Anacapri to Capri will take your breath away. A short walk from the hotel is San Michele, the villa of Axel Munthe, a well-known Swedish physician, author and humanist (1857-1949).

Now open to the public, Munthe's villa was conceived as a celebration of his feelings for the island; he wasn't a rich man, so it took him years to finish, and he left it as you see it, replete with antiques, Roman artifacts and terraced gardens leading into a park where plants and trees always seem to be in bloom. The overall effect is quite something—if it's kitsch, it's great kitsch—and very much worth a visit.

On a calm, sunny day, take one of the several boats available by charter from the hotel and circle the island for a couple of hours, slowly, with someone who knows what you're looking at in terms of history and culture. The small crew on the boat we chose included Piero de Transo, an erudite man with a ponytail and the air of a well-bred nobleman, who likes sharing his knowledge and has a way of expressing himself in English that is as specific as it is graceful (needless to say, I sat between him and my wife). If you're lucky enough to get him, you'll see a different dimension of the island than you would otherwise notice, and if you start at about 11:00 A.M., you can drop anchor off Anacapri and have lunch. In addition to having many other talents, Piero knows his way around a galley, and he served up fresh mozzarella *di bufala* with ripe tomatoes and balsamic vinegar from Modena, on a bed of wild arugula, followed by linguine with tiny clams from the morning catch, all accompanied by a good white wine from nearby Naples.

Naples, yes, Naples. Well, Naples: a short boat ride there and back, stopping for a pizza Margarita (the original, still the best), will give you time to visit the ruins of Pompeii and/or Herculaneum, both of which are still being excavated, due to an intelligent decision by the Italian government to allow each new generation the pleasure of discovery. I've been to Pompeii often over the years, but last October a new villa was being unearthed that had a different arrangement of rooms than I'd ever seen. Take a taxi from the dock to the ruins, the pizza and straight back to the dock. Naples is a dangerous city these days.

Back in Anacapri, I somehow resisted an impulse to get on the chairlift, which takes you up to the highest point on the island and whose entrance is just outside the Capri Palace. My wife, who doesn't suffer from vertigo, says the view from up there is amazing. I waited for her on the terrace of our suite and sacrificed myself by having a vodka sour just to evaluate room service (I'm a novelist, not a journalist, so I have to be especially careful with details like that). It was worth it, as were the canapés that came with it, all of which I managed to choke down while watching the lemon-tree coast of Sorrento. On her way back, my wife stopped at Mariorita, a large shop adjoining the hotel, which had been owned and run for decades by Cacace's mother, who died last year but whose taste is still in evidence. My wife is a practical woman, and along with a sweater and shawl, she bought a suitcase there, to accommodate her other island purchases (lemon soap, a coral necklace, ceramic tiles), so she could pack for the return trip without being what she calls "squeezed."

Apart from the rather formal hotel dining room, which serves, among other things, the most delicate grissini (breadsticks) I've found anywhere in Italy, I liked going down to Le Arcate, a cozy little restaurant that specializes in pizza and is a five-minute walk from the hotel. There are several small family restaurants in Anacapri, many of them filled at lunchtime, but in the evening local people seem to prefer this one, and most tables are taken by 9:00 or 9:30. There's fresh fish and shellfish daily, good pasta and (about once a week) baby lamb or goat roasted on a fan of wild rosemary. All ingredients are fresh, and the cuisine is plain and simple: no new-age goo, no *recherche* reductions, and the table is yours till they close.

At the end of the day, I like to kick back on the terrace of the hotel bar and watch the sunset, which puts on a buche, gaudy show there every night. People gather to sit and talk about the past and the future. They talk about the fate of the village, about buy-

ing and refurbishing one of Anacapri's old villages in the style set by Tonino, maybe with his help, and sometimes about his new interest, the Tonino Cacace Foundation, which will bring distinguished scientists, artists and philosophers of different nationalities from all over the planet—people who are willing to come together here twice a year to discuss the possibilities of achieving some form of world peace. These days, with our species behaving as if we never got out of the jungle, Anacapri does seem the right place to talk about that.

After sunset, if you're lucky, you can spend a night or two in a ridiculously ro-

mantic suite on the roof, one that has a skylight over the bed for watching the moon, a heated outdoor swimming pool, and terraces filled with jasmine, lemon and flowering orange trees. If you like to watch the stars, or if you're besotted with your wife enough to say "I do" all over again, there's a nightly display from the west terrace up there the likes of which I've never seen. The Milky Way looms in a mass of glitter that is mirrored on the sea straight ahead of you, but it requires at least one glass of grappa if you want to feel its reflection inside your own body.

I do.

ANACAPRI INSIDER

All telephone numbers below should be preceded by 011-39-081.

HOTEL

Capri Palace Hotel & Spa. Doubles start at \$368; suites at \$955. *2B Via Capodimonte; 978-0111; www.capripalace.com.*

RESTAURANTS

Dinner: Restaurant L'Olivio. Chef Oliver Glowig has earned a Michelin star by reinterpreting traditional Caprese dishes. *At the Capri Palace Hotel & Spa; 978-0111.*

Le Arcate. A favorite of Anacapri residents. *24 Viale T. de Tommaso; 837-3325.*

Materita. Right next to the yellow church of Santa Sofia. Good local dishes. *140 Via G. Orlandi; 837-3375.*

Il Cucciolo. Hidden on the road to Dammecuta. Nice views overlooking the Bay of Naples. Spectacular antipasti. *52 Via La Fabbrica; 837-1917.*

Agorà Resto-Wine-Bar. New and more contemporary in style than the other restaurants listed. Mixed menu with fusion food, kebabs and more. Specialty: meat flown in from Argentina. *1 Via Caprile; 837-2018.*

Lunch: Da Gelsomina. High up in Anacapri, with views of the sea. Its antipasti are very good (the vegetables are grown in its garden), and it serves a delicious *pollo al mattone* (chicken

cooked under a brick). *72 Via Migliara; 837-1499.*

Lido del Faro. Down by the lighthouse in Anacapri. Lunch on the rocks by the sea. Exceptional pasta and a daily special dessert. *Punta Carena; 837-1798.*

Add'ò Riccio. By the Blue Grotto. It's known for its seafood risotto. *Grotta Azzurra; 837-1380.*

SHOPS

Galleria dell'Arte Very good ceramics made and sold in the shop. It guarantees shipping anywhere. I bought a table, a mirror and sundry kitchen items, all of which arrived safely. *105 Via G. Orlandi; 837-1082.*

Mariorita. *Piazza Vittoria; 837-1426.*

L'Arte del Sandalo. Within walking distance of the hotel, this shop sells handmade sandals. You can even tell the owner how you want your sandals designed. *75 Via G. Orlandi; 837-3583.*

Massimono Rita. Handmade wooden objects, fine attention to detail. *66 Via G. Orlandi; 837-1472.*

Tavassi. Beautiful ceramics. *123 Via G. Orlandi; 838-2067.*

TAILORS

Ipomea Nicola. *37 Via Boffe; 837-1633.*

Marienello Battistina. *Pizzi e Merletti boutique, 189 Via Orlando; 837-3953.*

BOAT CHARTER

Contact the Capri Palace.

P.F.

JUNE 2005