CEREAL

In this volume, we explore the theme of **process.** We converse with **Faye and Erica Toogood,** discuss garden design with **Luciano Giubbilei,** and perfumery with **Lyn Harris.** We visit the studios of **Stanley Whitney** and**Elliott Smedley,** and travel to the mountains of **Bhutan** and the hills of**Rwanda.**

VOL.17 *S/S 2019* £12

9 781999 821869



SPREZZATURA

Marie-Louise Sciò's Grand Italian Vision

words
Laura Fowler

photos
Cerruti Draime

hair and makeup
Simone Belli Agency

14
Sprezzatura
Marie-Louise Sciò's
Grand Italian Vision



Marie-Louise Sciò, CEO and creative director of Pellicano Hotels, spent her childhood summers between Il Pellicano and La Posta Vecchia. "I used to hide in the oleanders, watching all those wild, fabulous parties," she says.

"I have breathed this air my whole life," says Marie-Louise Sciò, on a rosemary scented terrace of Il Pellicano, high above the Tyrrhenian Sea. "There's something magical about it." Ever since Il Pellicano first opened its doors in the 1960s, a starry set has beaten a path to this sweet spot on Tuscany's Maremma coast. Film stars, such as Sophia Loren, Bing Crosby, and Henry Fonda, floated in kaftans around the hotel's saltwater pool with European royalty. Aristotle Onassis dropped anchor offshore, as did John Wayne, who once sent a deckhand ashore for 10 martinis.

Charlie Chaplin kept a cottage in the grounds. One night, noticing his 18 year old daughter Josie looking bored, he hissed to a dashing young man nearby, "Quick, ask her to dance!" That gentleman was Roberto Sciò. He fell in love instantly — not with Josie Chaplin, but with Il Pellicano. In time, despite having no hospitality experience other than the love of a good party, he bought the hotel. His beautiful wife, Marie-Louise Mills, was a muse of Slim Aarons, whose photographs captured both the illustrious guests and the beating heart and soul of Il Pellicano. Their daughter, Marie-Louise Sciò, home from her Swiss boarding school for the summer, saw those vignettes of *la dolce vita* unfold. "I used to hide in the oleanders, watching all those wild, fabulous parties," she says, her smile wide. "It was a beautiful bubble."

Marie-Louise junior, who is now CEO and creative director of Pellicano Hotels, spent her childhood summers between Il Pellicano and La Posta Vecchia, two of Italy's most eternally elegant hotels. It might now appear inevitable that she would end up at the helm of the family business, but being a hotelier was never part of her plan. After training as an architect at the Rhode Island School of Design, Marie-Louise's father asked her to redesign a couple of bathrooms, and, eventually, the entire hotel, in order to spruce it up for a new generation. "My approach was to try and make the walls talk, so I could bring the history out of the place," she says. "I wanted to protect it, but also to update it — to make it relevant without losing its DNA or spirit. And then I got sucked in. I got involved in everything."

This unorthodox background might just be the key to Marie-Louise's success. With no boxes to think inside or out of, she is limited by none of the usual constraints and conventions. "Rhode Island taught me to question things. It helped me to look at hotels as more than just a good night's sleep. There are so many opportunities for enriching experiences. You might discover the very best Italian chocolate, or some incredible juices in your minibar, or a book in







the library you've always wanted to read. It's those details that make one feel that there is love in a place. It makes the heart beat a little bit faster."

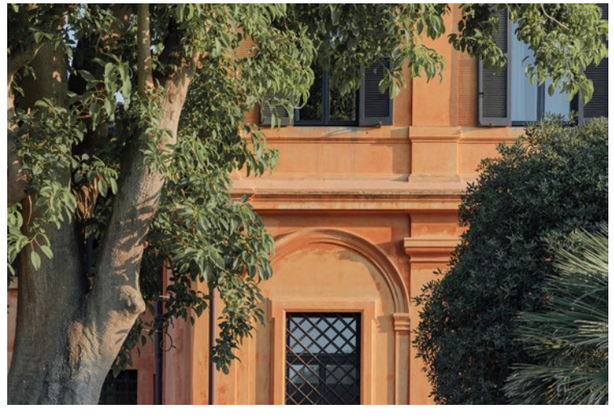
Marie-Louise draws inspiration from everything around her, including self-help books and podcasts — *Here's The Thing* with Alec Baldwin, and *How I Built This*, in case you were wondering — but most of all, her voracious hunger to improve and learn is inspired by the people she works with. "We try to give space to everyone to express themselves and bring ideas," she says of her staff. "And it's not about establishing a hierarchy. The best ideas tend to come from people who don't work in your sector, because they have a fresher point of view."

Collaborations form a key part of Marie-Louise's work. She has published books with Juergen Teller — including a cookery book, of all things; *Eating at Hotel Il Pellicano* with two Michelin-starred chef Antonio Guida and an introduction by Will Self — and curated Pellicano fashion exclusives by A.P.C., J.J. Martin, Olympia Le-Tan, and For Restless Sleepers. "All these projects have been based on fun relationships, and have come about in a very organic way. There's never been a business plan, or a 'this will make us money' consideration involved. They're just things I feel are right."

Marie-Louise is interested in everything and charming to everyone. Her energy draws you in. She levels with you, and infectious laughter bubbles out of her. Her fingers are never still and neither is her mind. The Italians have a word for the art of concealing the effort behind the brilliance — Marie-Louise embodies *sprezzatura*, and so do her hotels. "When things feel light and breezy, there's usually a lot of thinking and training going on behind them." She has a similar philosophy about success: "Everything happens when it's supposed to happen, but, obviously, you have to put the work in. It doesn't just drop in your lap. In the end it's all about believing in what you do, I think. I work really hard and I like what I do. It's as if it were a hobby, so I am happy when I have to wake at four, start work at seven, and finish at 10. It's the nature of the job — there's no beginning or end to it at all."

I want to create five or six new hotels across Italy — the grand hotels of the future. The idea is to create a new Grand Tour of Italy by staying in beautiful properties that have a heart, a soul, and a story.

— Marie-Louise Sciò



Off camera in trainers and cashmere, Marie-Louise flits between languages and devices, drinking coffee and smoking. She embodies a feeling that her hotels will always be works in progress, and that she will always be refining and updating them. But there are also more ambitious plans afoot, beginning with the reimagining of an old-school hotel on Capri's neighbouring island Ischia this spring. "I want to create five or six new hotels across Italy — the grand hotels of the future. The idea is to create a new Grand Tour of Italy by staying in beautiful properties that have a heart, a soul, and a story." The process of revival is key. "I like old glories, you know? My approach is always the same: don't go in and stamp your ego. Don't kill it. Try to tiptoe. See the best of what's already there, and bring out the history in the walls, the music, the design. I think of it in terms of storytelling, because everyone loves a good story."

pellicanohotels.com