

La Dolce Vita AMALFI COAST STYLE

As our obsession with Italy and all things Italian continues, BBeyond explored yet another part of the country for 10 days over Easter 2011.

The Amalfi coast is perhaps as not as well known or popular with the superyacht owners that traditionally put anchor at Portofino or Porto Cervo during the summer. This is set to change as both destinations are trading on outdated perceptions and past grandeur. A young Italian film director we met at Isola di Eea brushed off the grand old dame of style with a perfunctory, 'Portofino is for old people'.

The first leg of our trip was spent in an area most frequented and appreciated by wealthy Roman families who may not thank us for putting it on the map: San Felice Circeo and its environs. A mere hour's drive from Rome, this is one of the best kept secrets of the Italian coastline. It is where Odysseus was captivated by the sorceress Circe, whose temple is still in the mountains skirting the sea.

A shepherd found the temple and her statue and the story goes that he was bored and threw stones at the statue's nose, eventually severing it from the rest.

ISOLA DI EEA

Exploring the mysterious and breathtakingly beautiful coastline is best done from the last house built on the cliff that leads to the first ever discovered Neanderthal cave: Isola di Eea.

One of several unusual architecture houses (either designed or inspired by Michele Busiri-Vici) that are sparsely dotted among the rocks that define the coast, Isola di Eea signals the end of the path in literal and metaphorical sense.

Beyond it is the National park wilderness, full of unexplored caves, wild boar and other fauna. As you stand on its 360 degree view terrace, you feel you have reached the end of the world. Ahead is the magnificent Mediterranean sea, with Capri and

Ischia visible in the distance. On your left is only the horizon, with the most indescribable sunset you are ever likely to witness.

On a good day the sun resembles a large hot orange circle that slowly draws towards the water and as it nears it, turns elliptical before suddenly disappearing into the water.

The house itself, a privately owned B&B, is unlike any other in a multitude of ways. Bought some 20 years ago by Gianfranco Ferretti, a self-avowed 'collector of everything' and the summer home of his family, it is a veritable cornucopia of art, historical remains, rocks, shells and anything else you can imagine, eclectically spread around house, entrance courtyard, cascading gardens and outbuildings.

The family itself is no less interesting and unusual. Ferretti's wife, Pyung Cha Min, a descendent of the Korean royal family, was described by BB's young assistant as the 'coolest' white haired woman we'd ever come across.

An improbably youthful 70 year old, Min appears to run her summer establishment effortlessly and is frequently found smoking a cigar at the end of a day, looking both relaxed and patrician, but above all, unperturbable.

Unusually for a B&B, the house offers not just breakfast but also brunch on a common dining table which often consists of a mixture of traditional Italian and Korean dishes.

Helping in the summer are her son Chool Soo Min (Italian name Massimo), daughter Serena or Tania Ferretti Min and on occasion, her other two sons, Emiliano or Sascha Ferretti Min and Deuk Uoo or Alberto Ferretti Min who run the historic Apuleius restaurant in Rome. Apuleius' main hall boasts a wall of a 'Diana Temple' that has been preserved for more than 2000 years.

Easter with the Ferrettis is a grand family and friends affair, taken very seriously but partaken of with the abandon only Mediterranean people are truly capable of.



Gianfranco Ferretti with his wife, Pyung Cha Min;
Views from and of Isola de Eea



Words cannot properly do justice to the table and wines, – they spoke for themselves, and the excellence of the Korean dishes is not readily translated in images.

The suites are built and decorated to reflect the rugged coastline: white, cool, minimal... A plentiful supply of fresh fruit just outside of the main reception room is another nice touch. The ceiling and tiled floor of the main reception room are quite magnificent and remarkable for their historical value. What the estate offers is exclusivity and a special atmosphere that most top hotels seek to replicate without much success.

The walk down to the beach is steep, through well kept but wild looking gardens as befits the surroundings. A former beach storage stone hut has been transformed into a self-contained suite, overlooking the sea and offers unparalleled solitude and beauty, perhaps best suited for a honeymooning couple. Further below are the rocks and a path to a natural swimming pool, fringed by boulders and providing an easy slip for a boat.

You need a car to stay at Isola di Eea. However, a short walk down the road towards San Felice are a couple of hotels where you can stop off for a drink.

The Ferrettis also co-own an ancient Roman Fort that is protected and cannot be developed.

VEDI NAPOLI E POI MUORI

The next destination of our trip is, of course, the redoubtable Naples. Often referred to as the most dangerous city in Italy, Naples seems to enjoy its reputation in a mischievous sort of way. But if you can move past the now notorious (and still overwhelming) piles of rubbish and avoid certain parts of the city, you'd discover a veritable gem unlike any other. In terms of sheer intensity and beauty, Naples is still the city you must see before you die.

The trendy quarter behind the Chiaia, full of twisting pedestrian streets and bars with live music; the old city with its churches, stone arcades and hundreds of quirky shops; the Galleria Umberto area, with its amazing architecture and art galleries; the fabulous restaurants and hidden boutique hotels...



We stayed at the Micalo (Riviera di Chiaia, 88 - 80122 Naples Tel. +39 081 7617131 info@micalo.it), on the second floor of an old building situated on the long avenue fringing the sea.

The Micalo is a contemporary, privately owned hotel with just 9 rooms. The interior is arty, quirky (our suite had a mezzanine floor where the bathroom was situated and a lovely terrace), the common parts tastefully decorated with works by Napolitan artists, the breakfast – a just so combination of fresh fruit, great coffee and Italian breads. The owner, Michelle Lowe, gave us a map of the city, dotting the best places to visit, shop and eat, and introduced us to one of Napoli's best secrets, the Da Dora restraint, just a few steps from the Micalo.

Da Dora is a small dining room at the top of a steep and unprepossessing narrow street. The owner, an eccentric Pavarotti-like character, stops to chat with his patrons and is pictured on the walls of his famous eaterie with a large number of Hollywood actors and actresses.

The seafood is truly outstanding – and I never thought I'd say that about any establishment that produces the basic mix of fresh fish, shellfish and tomato dish. It is, however, a fact and if you haven't tried the Da Dora fish stew, you haven't eaten seafood.



*Clockwise from far left:
Duplex luxury room at the
Micalo; Ristorante Da Dora;
Galleria Umberto in Naples;
Breakfast room at the Micalo.*

