

TRAVEL + LEISURE

THE BEST

Hotels · Cities · Islands · Cruises · Airlines

IN THE WORLD





THE WAY THEY

The bucatini con le sarde at La Cambusa, in Palermo. Opposite: Gangi, a medieval village in the mountains of northern Sicily.

Here in southernmost Italy, every dish is infused with love and tradition, reflecting generations of family and centuries of history. **STEPHANIE DANLER** eats her way across the island, savoring its humble, African-inflected cuisine and soaking up the wisdom of its women.

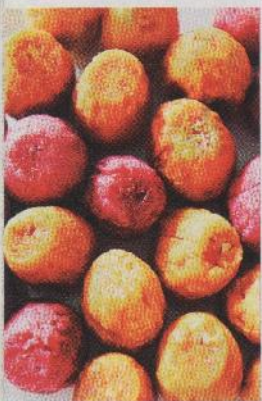
COOK IN Sicily

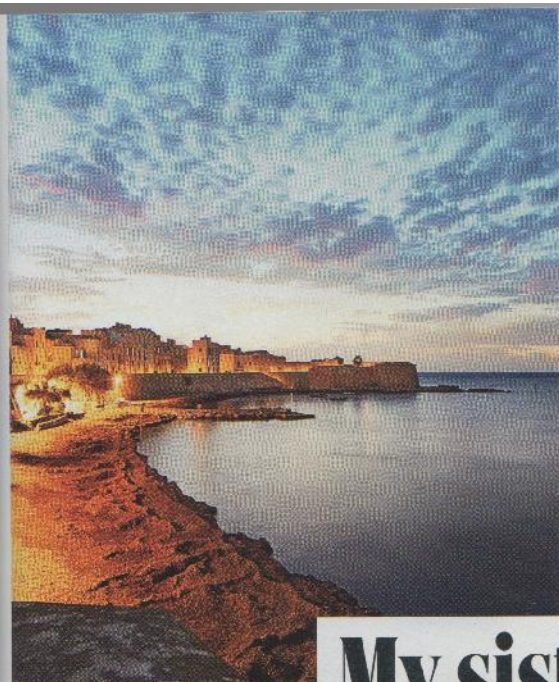
photographs by SIMON WATSON





Clockwise from top left: A student pits olives during one of Nicoletta Polo Lanza Tomasi's cooking classes at Butera 28, in Palermo; granitas at Colicchia, in Trapani; the nightlife scene at Vucciria market, in Palermo; the courtyard of the Gangivecchio estate; caponata at Gangivecchio; diners at Fritti e Frutti, in Palermo; fichi d'India, a prickly pear native to Sicily, at La Cambusa; the Piazza Mercato del Pesce, in Trapani. *Opposite:* The seawall in Trapani.





My sister, Christina, and I were sitting in a garden in Palermo,

a few sips into a mid-morning Campari and soda, when I be-

gan to feel fraudulent. The sea breeze fanned up from the port and onto the terrace as our hostess, Nicoletta Polo Lanza Tomasi, the Duchess of Palma di Montechiaro, recounted the history of the palazzo we were visiting, which was once owned by the Lampedusa family. It was on this very site, Nicoletta told us, that Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, the last of the line, wrote *The Leopard*, which chronicles the fall of an aristocratic Sicilian family in the late 19th century. "Which of course you've read," she added, "as you are a writer, and are writing about Sicily." I shot my sister a look that said, *Don't say a word*.

I hadn't read *The Leopard*, which is practically synonymous with Sicily. But I learned that Lampedusa wrote the novel after falling into a depression after his family estate was bombed during World War II. Following his death in 1957, the property was flawlessly restored by the Lanza Tomasi family. Today, Nicoletta oversees Butera 28, a collection of apartment-style guest rooms located inside the palazzo, in Palermo's once-dangerous, now-trendy Kalsa quarter. She also teaches cooking classes, leads market tours, and is a keeper of local culinary wisdom.

During previous visits, I had fallen in love with Sicilian gastronomy: the heirloom wheat

varieties, the recipes for caponata passed down through generations, the indigenous Frappato and Catarratto grapes. What sets the island apart is that, even more than the rest of Italy, it has been invaded and conquered for thousands of years. You can see this history in Palermo's Arabic and Norman architecture, in the crush of the *centro*, in the maze of markets catering to different ethnic groups. But most of all, you can taste it in the food, which bears the mark of the cultures that have ruled the island. I wanted to share the meals I'd had here with Christina, and so, on the eve of her 30th birthday, I brought her here, on a long-overdue sisters' trip, to appreciate the old and discover the new.

Over espressos at the airport in Rome, I'd prepped her: Get ready for lots of pasta courses. Bread courses. Fried courses. Don't ever say you're full. Don't turn down a glass of wine at lunch. Don't expect to sleep too much. We would be traveling without a guidebook, I explained, because although I have visited Sicily many times, I have never owned one. I just get bossed around by Sicilian women.

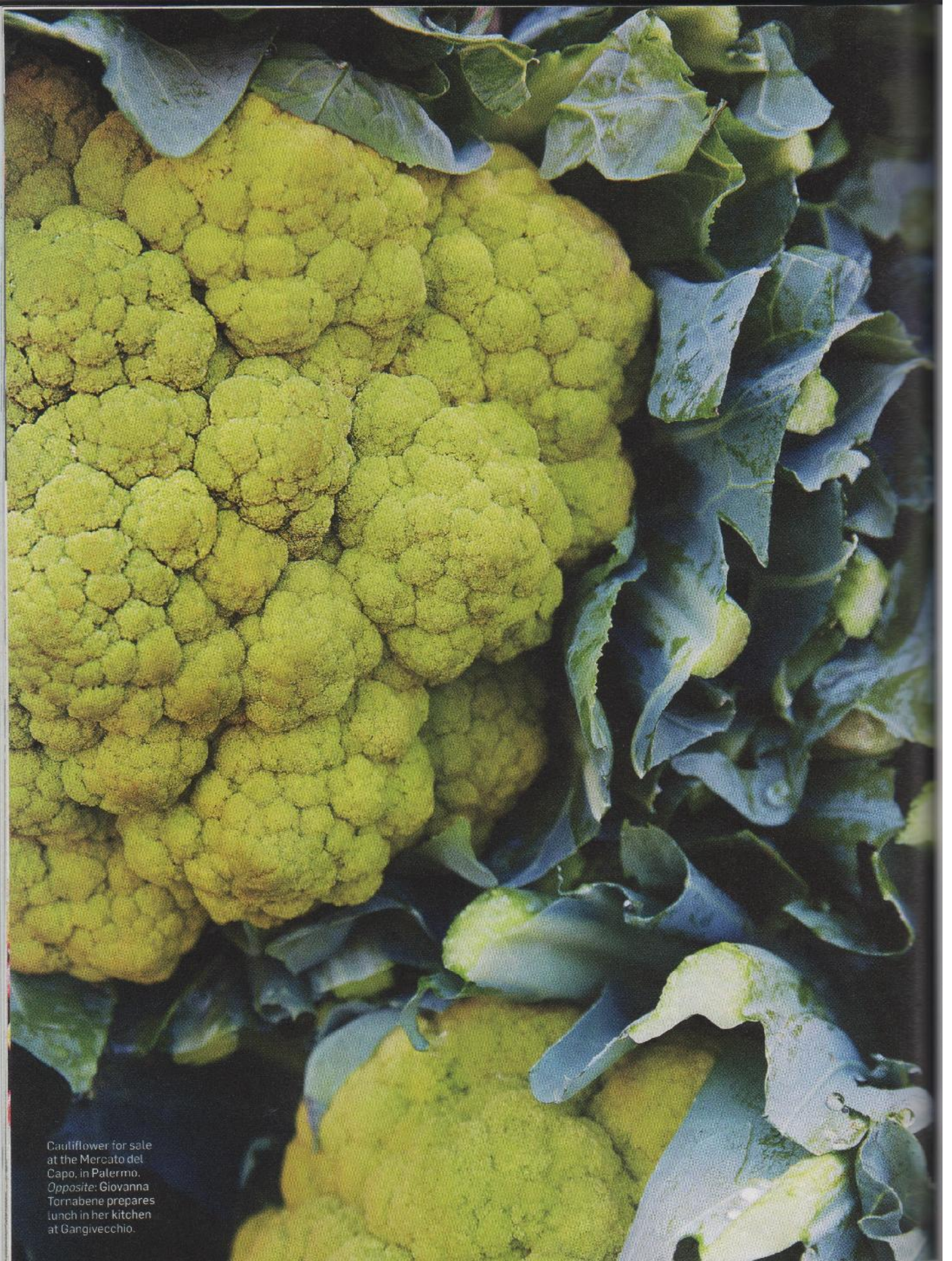
I had, however, brought a handwritten eating itinerary. Nicoletta looked at it and scoffed. "For tourists," she said, forgetting, perhaps, that that's what we were. She made us a dinner reservation at L'Ottava Nota, an example, she promised, of a place where a chef was using native Sicilian ingredients to make modern food.

As we were leaving, Nicole, the Australian front-desk assistant, stopped us. "You guys need to go to Vucciria and Aperitivo Alley," she whispered. "I'm off in ten minutes. I'll take you."

Nicoletta was eavesdropping. "Vucciria? No, no, no. All right, one *aperitivo*, fine. But please, please, do not talk to boys!"

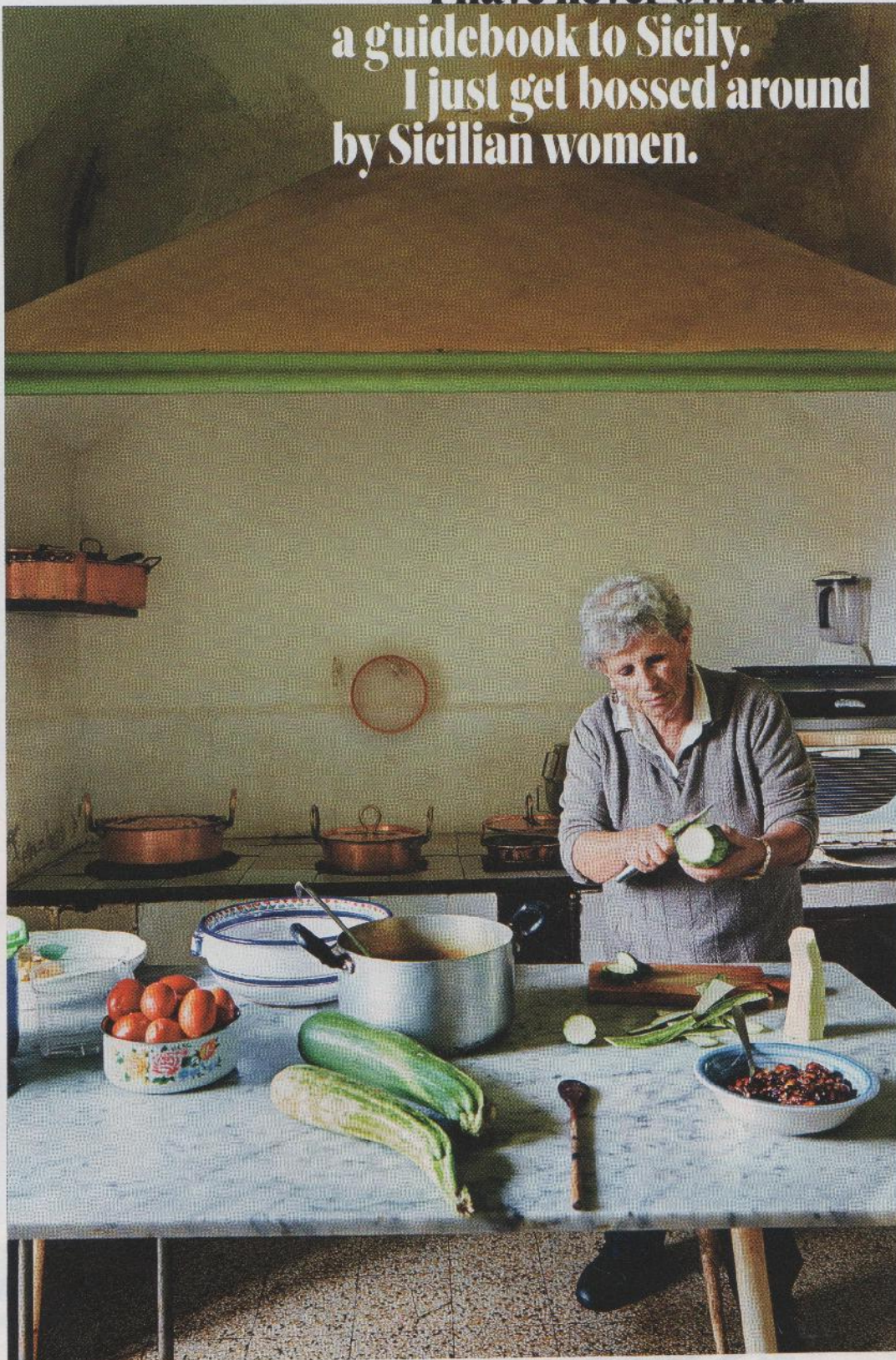
The stalls at the legendary Vucciria market are closed at night, but a few bars, like the bare-bones Taverna Azzurra, open onto the street. Cool kids sat on the curb or leaned against the rolled-down steel grates of the stalls. "Well, we found the beards and tattoos!" Christina exclaimed. Vendors sold fried anchovies, *panelle* (chickpea fritters), *sfincione* (thick-bread pizza), and *pani ca' meusa* (offal sandwiches) to soak up the wine everyone was drinking. Crumpled napkins filled the gutters. At the top of the street was an 18th-century religious statue done up in colored lights that Nicole called "Disco Jesus." "It's so Sicily," she said.

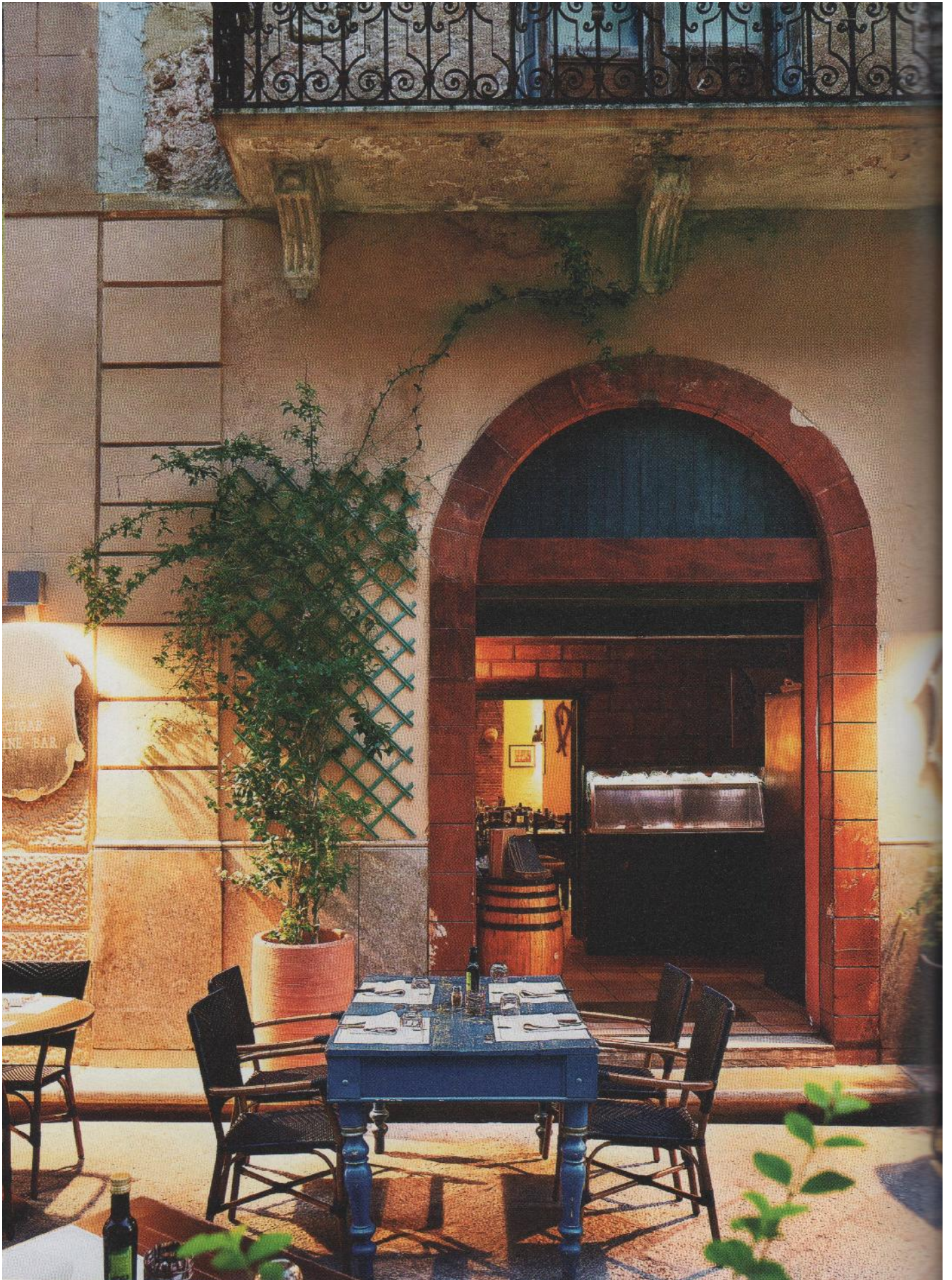
Apparently, so is missing your dinner reservation. Between the wine, the fried food, the bearded Sicilian men, and the Disco Jesus-gazing, it was nearly midnight before I checked the time. I cursed, but Nicole was unconcerned. (A general disregard for time also seemed to be

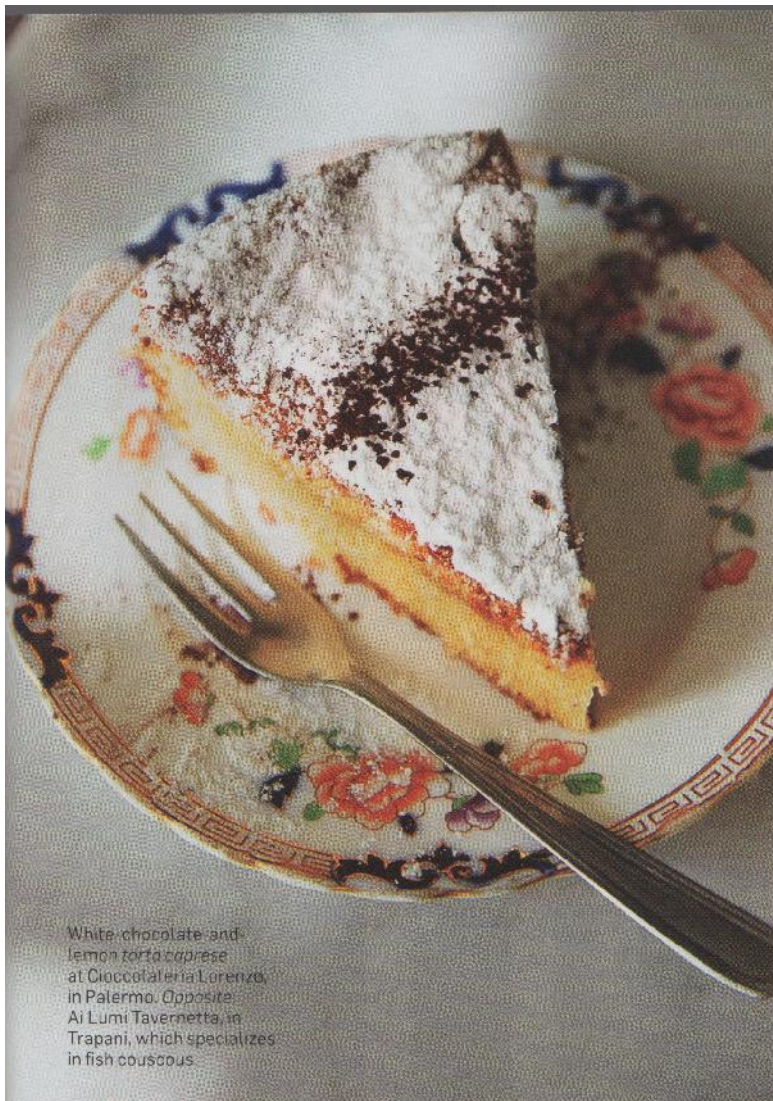


Cauliflower for sale at the Mercato del Capo, in Palermo. Opposite: Giovanna Tornabene prepares lunch in her kitchen at Gangivecchio.

**I have never owned
a guidebook to Sicily.
I just get bossed around
by Sicilian women.**







White chocolate and lemon torta caprese at Cioccolateria Lorenzo in Palermo. Opposite: Ai Lumi Tavernetta, in Trapani, which specializes in fish couscous

“so Sicily.”) To my embarrassment, she dialed Nicoletta. I prepared a speech: *I’m a fraud, I’m a failure, I’ve never read The Leopard...*

Within 10 minutes Nicoletta had secured us an outside table at La Cambusa, an understated restaurant beloved by Palermitans. Despite the hour, children still tore through the lush park in the Piazza Marina across the street. We spotted other Butera 28 guests, who joined us and sipped *limoncello* while I devoured a perfect *bucatini con le sarde*—the pasta firm, the wild fennel fragrant, the sardines liquescent. *Always* listen to Sicilian women.

BEFORE LEAVING PALERMO in the foggy early morning, we went to the Mercato del Capo for figs, bread, and wet balls of *burrata*—our version of road-trip fare. We were headed two hours west to San Vito Lo Capo, a place with gorgeous turquoise waters but none of the prestige of Taormina or the convenience of Mondello, and therefore none of those places’ English signs and inflated prices. There is a North African aura to

the low, square buildings in rosy neutrals, the beads hanging in doorways, the jasmine and bougainvillea that tumble down shaggy walls.

We planned a beach hike among the cacti, fruit trees, and flowering bushes of Zingaro Nature Reserve, 7½ pristine miles of protected coastline. Beach hikes demand picnic supplies, which is why San Vito has Salumeria Enoteca Peraino. The young men in striped newsboy caps behind the counter listened patiently as I attempted to speak to them in Spanish, pointing to hanging legs of prosciutto and rounds of cheeses and saying, “The *muy* salty and the *muy fuerte*.” We took *prosciutto dei Nebrodi* and a sharp, young pecorino to a secluded, white-pebbled spot for a swim and a siesta.

There is plenty of seafood to be had in San Vito, but for dinner we went to Bianconiglio, named after the White Rabbit in *Alice in Wonderland*. Located just off the piazza, it specializes in dishes like braised rabbit and steak tartare with quail eggs and has a long list of sophisticated Sicilian wines, a welcome option in a beach town that has mostly *gelaterie*. The tablecloths and refined food were a lovely contrast to the kids playing soccer in front of the 15th-century church nearby. When the place began to empty out, Daniele Catalano—owner, maître d’, wine aficionado—chatted with us about the summer crush and all the different kinds of jasmine that grow in San Vito. It was past midnight when he left us to buy roses from some children in the street. I was so happy and sunburned it took me a minute to realize it had begun raining.

PEOPLE GO TO TRAPANI, a spit of land hanging off Sicily’s western coast, for two reasons: to catch a ferry or to eat fish couscous. Closer to Tunis than it is to Rome, it’s a showcase for the ways Sicilian cooking marries the cuisine of its former occupiers—in this case, Arabs—with its own. Here, North African spices and semolina grains, salt from the flats outside the city, and almonds from the hills appear in almost every dish.

At Nicoletta’s recommendation, Christina and I went to see Francesca Adragna at Ai Lumi, a bed-and-breakfast in a former palace off Corso Vittorio Emanuele, the main street. Of course Francesca knew where the best fish couscous was—it was at her place downstairs, Ai Lumi Tavernetta, once the palace stables and now a dark-wooded, rustic tavern that opens onto the Corso. We drank local beer redolent with orange blossom as the fish couscous came out in three parts: the puffy, airy couscous, the coral prawns, and a broth, essentially a mahogany-colored fish soup thickened with finely ground almonds and softened with cinnamon and saffron. It was true comfort food, and it (Continued on page 164)

↓
The Details
Hotels,
restaurants,
cooking classes,
and more,
page 162

The Details

PHOTO
OP



Harry Potter fans know King's Cross as the train station housing the Hogwarts Express. Visitors now come from around the world in search of the iconic trolley cart near Platform 9.

sparkling a revitalization of the surrounding neighborhood. marriott.com; doubles from \$365.

RESTAURANTS

Caravan A global-small-plates hot spot housed in a Victorian granary behind King's Cross station. caravanrestaurants.co.uk; small plates \$5–\$13.

Dishoom Another Victorian warehouse—this one converted into the Indian-street-food chain's most impressive London branch. dishoom.com; entrées \$9–\$17.

Grain Store An upscale restaurant on Granary Square that gets glowing reviews for its vegetable-centric menu. grainstore.com; entrées \$9–\$32.

Rotunda Bar & Restaurant The modern British menu and terrace overlooking Regent's Canal make this a local standout. rotundabarandrestaurant.co.uk; entrées \$17–\$33.

ACTIVITIES

British Library The U.K.'s national library holds a collection of 150 million volumes, with rare artifacts like the Magna Carta and Beatles manuscripts. bl.uk.

Gasholder Park This old natural-gas repository has been developed into a public park with a lovely lawn and canopy overlooking St. Pancras Lock. kingscross.co.uk/gasholder-park.

King's Cross Pond Club A public swimming pool designed as part of the King's Cross Public Art Program. kingscrosspond.club.

Kings Place A multiuse venue with a waterside restaurant, art galleries, and two world-class concert halls. kingsplace.co.uk.

SICILY, ITALY

(The Way They Cook in Sicily, p. 136)

HOTELS

Ai Lumi B&B This former palace in the heart of Trapani also serves some of the best food in town. ailumi.it; doubles from \$111.

Butera 28 Apartments Beautifully designed accommodations in a restored palazzo in the up-and-coming Kalsa neighborhood. Palermo;butera28.it; doubles from \$67.

Tenuta Gangivecchio Deep in the Madonie Mountains, you'll find this rustic inn on the ancient property of Gangivecchio, with nine rooms, great wine, and fine cooking. Palermo;gangivecchio.org; doubles from \$156.

RESTAURANTS

Bianconiglio A restaurant dedicated to meat in a seafood town, with filets, a variety of steak tartares, and braised rabbit medallions. San Vito Lo Capo;ristorantebianconiglio.it; entrées \$16–\$67.

Colicchia Pasticceria World-famous granita in flavors like jasmine, almond, or lemon in Trapani's old town. 6/8 Via delle Arti; 39-0923-547-612.

Fritti e Frutti This restaurant with a relaxing back garden serves a menu of small plates and modern takes on Sicilian classics like arancini. Palermo;frittiefritti.com; entrées \$6–\$26.

La Cambusa You'll find superb *pasta con le sardie* at this eatery on the Piazza Marina in Kalsa. Palermo;lacambusa.it; entrées \$9–\$16.

Salumeria Enoteca Peraino An exquisite *salumeria* with local cheeses, prosciuttos, olives, and other classic Italian goods. San Vito Lo Capo; 39-0923-972-627.

ACTIVITIES

Cooking with the Duchess Take a market tour with Nicoletta Polo Lanza Tomasi, then learn to prepare your meal at her kitchen in Butera 28. Palermo;butera28.it.

Mercato del Capo Capo is the most atmospheric and impressive of the three major markets in Palermo. Buy what's in season and make snacks for your drive. Via Cappuccinelle.

Zingaro Nature Reserve Sicily's first nature reserve runs the length of the coast between

Scopello and San Vito Lo Capo. Either hike the full 7½ miles, or start at either end and walk to one of the pristine beaches. riservazingaro.it.

HVAR, CROATIA

(At Home on Hvar, p. 92)

HOTELS & VILLAS

Little Green Bay An old stone farmhouse restored by a chic Parisian brother and sister on a secluded bay. Hvar;littlegreenbay.com; doubles from \$391.

Villa Apolon A funky pale-pink villa with rooms facing Stari Grad's harbor. apoion.hr; doubles from \$122.

Villas Hvar With an inventory of more than 70 villas, cottages, and apartments across the island, this is the main rental company on Hvar. villashvar.com; from \$623 per week.

RESTAURANTS

Gariful Known for its "drunk lobster," this fish restaurant along the harbor promenade in Hvar town is considered by many to be the island's best. hvar-gariful.hr; entrées \$34–\$114.

Konoba Dvor Dubokovic A charming restaurant in the hillside village of Pitve that does a great octopus *peka*. dvoradubokovic.hr; entrées \$8–\$60.

Palmizana Meneghello An island restaurant, art gallery, and nature preserve 15 minutes from Hvar town. palmizana.com; entrées \$11–\$114.

TOUR OPERATOR

Secret Dalmatia Whether you choose to stay on Hvar or hop around the adjoining Dalmatian islands, Alan Mandic and his crew can develop a custom itinerary that takes you to places you never knew existed. secretdalmatia.com.

BUYER'S GUIDE

WHAT TO PACK
LOS ANGELES WEEKEND
P. 124

Ray of Light: Céline \$445 (*Solstice stores*); **Solid & Striped** \$88 (*solidandstriped.com*).

Perfect Fit: A.P.C. x Outdoor Voices bodysuit, \$120, and leggings, \$120 (*launches Aug. 31; apc.fr*).

Comfort Plus: The Row \$1,950 (*net-a-porter.com*); **Rag & Bone** \$450 (*Rag & Bone stores*); **Trademark** \$898 (*trade-mark.com*); **Maryam Nassir Zadeh** \$379 (*mnzstore.com*).

Local Flavor: Simon Miller top, \$255, and pants, \$335 (*simonmillerusa.com*); **Alexander Wang** \$475 (*alexanderwang.com*); **Olympus** PEN-F camera, \$1,199 (*getolympus.com*).

PAJAMA PARTY P. 130

Sleepy Jones (*sleepyjones.com*); **Jason Wu** earrings, \$395 (*bg.com*); **3.1 Phillip Lim** skirt, \$650 (*3.1philliplim.com*); **M2 Malletier** bag, \$1,175 (*fwrd.com*); **Vionnet** (*vionnet.com*); **Charlotte Chesnais** bracelet, \$1,785 (*charlottechesnais.com*); **Tabitha Simmons** kitten heel, \$745 (*myteresa.com*).

Olivia von Halle (*Bergdorf Goodman, 754 Fifth Ave., N.Y.C., 212-753-7300*); **Avec** **Moderation** mules, \$355 (to order at *Greg Mills, info@gregmillsshowroom.com*).

LET IT SLIDE P. 132

Alumnae (*alumnae.nyc*); **Céline** (*Céline Madison Ave. boutique, 870 Madison Ave., N.Y.C., 212-535-3703*); **Brock** mink jacket, \$11,900 (*matchesfashion.com*); **Redone** jeans, \$265 (*shopredone.com*).

Gucci (*gucci.com*); **Valextra** (*valextra.com*); **Gabriella Hearst** sweater, \$1,695 (*barneys.com*); **The Row** pants, \$450 (*The Row Retail, 8440 Melrose Place, L.A., 310-853-1900*); **Sanayi 313** (*shop.sanayi313.com*); **Loewe** (*loewe.com*); **Jason Wu** cardigan, \$1,395 (*nordstrom.com*); **Khaite** jeans, \$290 (*theline.com*).

Michael Kors (*michaelkors.com*); **Bottega Veneta** (800-845-6790); **Vince** jeans, \$275 (*vince.com*).

Content in this issue was produced with assistance from Smyth, a Thompson Hotel.