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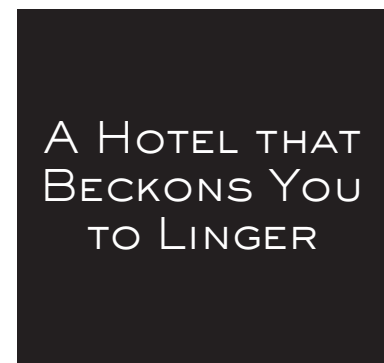
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## There's just something about Italy.

No matter how many times I sojourn in this magical, olive-tree, pasta-laden land, I am struck by its beauty, its people and its bounty. And nowhere do I feel more connected or more in awe of my surroundings than in the picturesque town of Ravello, set 800 feet above the Mediterranean's Gulf of Salerno and a world away from the nearby bustling Amalfi tourist town of Positano. Ravello's gardens (inspiration for Richard Wagner's Parsifal) and sea, dotted with fishing boats, are breathtaking; its winding cobblestone streets lined with peeling-paint churches, colorful handmade ceramics and the region's famous Limoncello liquor, beckon you to linger.

On a recent trek back to Ravello, I sped from Naples along windy roads past mountain goats with clanking bells and endless rows of orange and lemon trees to reach Ravello's crown jewel: the five-star Palazzo Sasso hotel, built in the 12th century for

Lavarra. Young, enthusiastic and charming even by Italian standards, this former protégé and sous chef of famed Raymond Blanc at Le Manoir and Quat' Saisons in England, first learned the art of cooking and sourcing local ingredients from his mother, who doubled as his school's chef. This fall, Pino's much anticipated cookbook will debut. His inspired recipes and



royalty. The stunning palace operated as a hotel from WWII to the 1970s, before rebirthing again in 1997 with a \$20 million renovation. More than a decade later, the 43-room Palazzo Sasso continues to stun.

On this visit, after checking in at the marbled lobby marked by stained glass windows and wide French doors, I left my luggage at the desk and headed straight to the hotel's newest amenity: Sasso by the Sea, a private villa exclusively for hotel guests, set in the village of Marmorata. While a private free shuttle is available, I chose to stretch my plane-weary legs with a long walk (thankfully downhill) to Sasso where I was rewarded with a glass of vino, salt water pool, private beach access and bed-style loungers which I sank into alongside Venus- and David-esque sun worshippers.

Later, after a hot soak in my room, I embraced my inner Italian girl, donning stilettos and little black dress, and glided into Rossellinis for a more than memorable dinner by Palazzo's two-Michelin-star chef Pino

photos will make you want to visit again and again.

"I'm all about locally sourced and fresh ingredients," says Pino, demonstrating his philosophy with a plump, melt-in-your-mouth tomato. "First I smell. Then slice. Then taste." He smiles. "And if the taste is the best taste, then that is the tomato I use." Pino also hand makes all his own pasta, tossing it with fresh caught seafood and local virgin olive oil for a typical Amalfi meal that, when served on hand blown glass plates from Venice, presents as anything but typical.

This same impeccable service and attention to detail is a constant throughout the hotel — delivered even when sleeping. One of my favorite amenities here (or anywhere) is the sleeping menu — offering a choice of three Frette linens. The famous Italian linen house hand picked Palazzo Sasso to deliver this exclusive service and it's beyond decadent. During my stay, I decided to live dangerously (and yes, frivolously) by opting to

change linen styles daily. But on day one, after sinking — soundly and deliciously — into my 300-thread count satin Frette sheets, I just didn't see the point of changing. Even in the morning, with sun streaming through my window and dark Italian espresso in hand, I could barely force myself to rise from the downy bed.

But I did, of course. I was in Ravello, after all. And while there are many nearby attractions — including easy day trips to Capri and Pompeii — I spent most of my days meandering along twisty pathways, up and down gnarled steps and through secret gardens and palaces, ending each late afternoon in the arched spa with a Turkish steam bath and lymphatic

scents and know that just as the late Jacqueline Kennedy, Humphrey Bogart and Gore Vidal returned (and even made residence here), I too will return. And when I do, Palazzo's General Manager Aaron Kaupp, who received top (GM) honors this year, will have more surprises in store.

For reservations and information please call +39 089 81 81 81, email [info@palazzosasso.com](mailto:info@palazzosasso.com) or visit the website at [www.palazzosasso.com](http://www.palazzosasso.com).



massage — always perfectly executed in Europe — or a long soak in the hotel's rooftop Jacuzzi.

One day, I did book a cooking class with local legend and quintessential grandma Mama Agata, who once cooked for Jacqueline Kennedy during her respite here, and whose daughter Chiara used to work at Palazzo. During my first stay years ago, Mama Agata was a word-of-mouth find and spending a morning cooking lemon chicken, pasta arrabiata, fried zucchini and lemon cake was a simple phone call away. Now arrangements should be made ahead of time. The experience is worth any wait.

On my final day, I rose early, and took advantage of the not-to-miss sumptuous breakfast served with a view before taking one final walk back to Sasso by the Sea for a dip in the saltwater pool and toes in the sea finale. But as I depart this magical fairytale town — still surprisingly unknown to the average American tourist — I breathe in the salty, lemony, sea-infused

1. The Terrazza Belvedere serves an array of delicious snacks, fresh pasta dishes, refreshments and cocktails.

2. Side view of the magnificent 12th century castle that is Palazzo Sasso.

3. Beach Club Sasso by the Sea allows water access for guests.

4. A short ride from the hotel is Sasso by the Sea — the hotel's private villa for relaxing, swimming and light lunches.

5. The SPA is located next to the swimming pool in the gardens of Palazzo Sasso and overlooks the Mediterranean Sea.

6. Enjoy a candlelight dinner served in the signature two-Michelin-star restaurant Rossellinis.

7. Spacious Junior Suite composed of a large bedroom with a sitting area and large bathroom with Jacuzzi bath overlooking the Mediterranean Sea.

8. The Belvedere Suite is situated in the gardens of the hotel and has a large living area and a master bedroom with round Jacuzzi bath, separate wardrobe and large terrace overlooking the Mediterranean Sea.