

dolce vita

VillaCampestri, Extra Virgin Paradise

By Alfredo Briega Martín

35 kilometers from Florence and 6kms from Vicchio di Mugello, in the heart of the valley of Tuscany, one comes across paradise on earth. The paradise of extra virgin olive oil. Here lies the Villa Campestri Olive Oil Resort, a splendid Renaissance villa built around an ancient fortress dating from the 13th Century and surrounded by olive groves - from which an exceptional quality extra virgin is produced - where the visitor is given the chance to live a unique and different experience, with EVOO as it's main attraction.





As in all good resorts that value their reputation, Villa Campestri also uses the "all included" formula. Because the estate, located in this magical enclave of the Florentine countryside, provides an unforgettable experience for all our senses, articulated around three main core ideas: Art, History and Relaxation. If the historical dimension is revealed in the ample living-rooms, decorated with frescoes of the villa, and in the ancestral cities of the Mugello valley - birthplace of the Renaissance and formerly the Medici family residence – one can find the artistic dimension in the works of Giotto and Fra Angelico, illustrious artists who were born in this beautiful land. Regarding relaxation, rest is guaranteed when staying in any of the 26 rooms, suites or apartments on the complex, that have respected the original design and position; and the same goes for the bucolical swimming pool, placed in the middle of an old garden, from which we get a marvelous view of the Mugello valley. And one cannot ignore the succulent gastronomy offered here, from the tasting of delicious extra virgin olive oil from La Oleoteca, to the experience of tasting traditional Tuscan cuisine, made with regional products and to be enjoyed in the exquisite restaurant. All of this is to be found in the fascinating surroundings of the Toscana valley, which are ideal for riding a mountain bike over the beautiful hills, or for contemplating millennial olive groves, stopping every now and then in any of the wonderful villages, which are brimming over with history. The ancient cypress tree that guards the entrance to the villa welcomes the visitors to this magical corner of Mugello, a real paradise on earth where a wise combination of Art and Nature has been taken to the highest degree. 120 hectares of private parkland hide innumerable pathways and tracks, that are sign-posted, allowing people to discover the botanical richness of the area – on their own, or

with the help of a guide – through woods speckled with little steams of limpid and crystalline waters that arise from Monte Giovi, and adorned with art-works by the Florentine artist Fanio Bini, "Further Away than the Sky" and "Human Equilibrium."

The painstaking restoration job carried out by the present owner, Paolo Pasquali, who acquired the property in 1989, has kept the unique charm and renaissance-like atmosphere intact, in a villa that boasts 800 years of history, and that displays – amongst other pieces of interest – frescoes by the Florentine painter Lorenzo di Bicci and lovely decorative pottery by Galileo Chini.





A Universe of Experiences

The universe of experiences on different levels that Villa Campestri Olive Oil proposes is simply spectacular. After having been given a warm welcome by Viola Pasquali, Paolo's eldest daughter, the visitor can take the option of venturing into the world of EVOOs thanks to the tasting sessions and courses (199 in 2013, always on demand), under the direction of Gemma Pasquali, Doctor in Agricultural Sciences; enjoy the irresistible pleasure of *Salus Per Oleum (SPO)*; take a relaxing massage with olive oils from all over the world, in a natural setting; go on a bicycle ride to admire wonderful landscapes and Renaissance castles; go on a search for truffles with the help of an expert and learn how to use them for cooking; or create a deeper link to this marvelous land by planting an olive tree, that will produce its own olive oil every year. And if one needs somewhere to hold a ceremony, nothing is better than discovering the charm of the private consecrated chapel.

The Art of Cooking with Olive Oil

Since a decade ago, Villa Campestri produces its own extra virgin olive oil, principally to better understand the fascination of this Pasquali family with this product and how the different variables in the process of production influence the final result, especially when perceiving the sensorial profiles of the olive oil. From 3.000 traditional Tuscan varieties of olive tree (moraiolo, leccino, pendolino, frantoio, allora, leccino del corno, ravece...) an extra virgin is obtained, of intense color and persistent taste, with artichoke and almond notes. As Paolo Pasquali himself says "those days towards the end of October,

when the harvesting and pressing of the olives takes place, with my four grandchildren, who are between 5 and 9 years of age – and who also taste the precious olive juice, as they are already great enthusiasts – are the best days in the year."

The Villa Campestri cuisine is without a doubt one of the great attractions of this resort, dedicated to extra virgin olive oil. The elaborate dishes that are present on the menus at the L'Olivaia restaurant – named best olive oil restaurant in Italy in 2013 – are nourished by the extra virgin produced by the old olive groves that surround the estate, an EVOO that inspires the chef Andrea Perini to create unique dishes in a magical symphony of aromas and tastes which easily combine innovation and tradition, simplicity and refinement. And a good part of the ingredients employed come from the gardens and organic vegetable patches in Villa Campestri. The suggestive atmosphere that envelops the restaurant, with its wood paneled ceiling and terracotta floors, is perhaps the ideal scenario for the celebration of thematic or Renaissance dinners, oil, wine or cheese tasting sessions, or any other kind of event – always with olive oil as a protagonist. L'Olivaia's proposal, always keeping excellence in mind, gyrates around two well-defined concepts: *L'Olio dal Vivo* (the art of cooking with olive oil without heating it, semi-raw and semi-cooked) and *Olio e Tradizione*, with free versions of Tuscan cuisine in an oil-centered key.

OliveToLive

However, the pioneering character of Villa Campestri Olive Oil – the world's first resort dedicated to olive oil – does not end here. La oleoteca Villa Campestri and its innovative





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OliveToLive

The Olive Oil Renaissance

WHAT?

a sensory
journey through
the characteristics
of olive oil

WHERE?

at the Oleoteca®
Villa Campestri
Tuscany, Italy

AND ALSO...

cooking courses,
olive oil tasting
experiences,
SPO (Salus Per Oleum),
and much more

www.villacampestri.com





system of storage and distribution of the olive oil, OliveToLive - a dispenser designed in 2000 by Paolo Pasquali himself, to protect his EVOO from being exposed to the air and light, maintaining a constant temperature and thus guaranteeing their quality and the conservation of their organoleptic and nutritional properties - has been patented and approved by the Culinary Institute of America (CIA) for the conservation of extra virgin olive oil at 16° C.

As it's creator affirms, this is an improvement system that rises from the need to create a space dedicated to extra virgin olive oil on the restaurant tables. By presenting three 10 ml tasting ampoules, OliveToLive provides several immediate advantages, such as the conservation of the juice until the moment it is consumed, the appreciation of all it's aromas thanks to the design of the server, or the chance to show the consumer that the world of olive oil is composed of innumerable sensorial profiles, each one of which is adapted to determined culinary experiences. A system which gives particular importance to the chef and the creativity of his proposals, and thanks to which, restaurants can bestow value on EVOO, offering their clients a personalized tasting session for a reasonable price, with the guarantee that the oil will be in perfect condition. This security is due to it being conserved in nitrogen, thus avoiding the product's natural process of oxidation.

Distinguished with the Prize for Design and Technological Innovation at Madrid Fusión in 2012, OliveToLive has been successfully exported far from Italy. In this way, the first Oleoteca Villa Campestri outside of Italy was set in motion in 2010 by the Culinary Institute of

America, in California; whereas the restaurant owned by Maria José San Román in Alicante, Spain, 'El Monastrell', later on implanted the first Oleoteca Villa Campestri in Spain. The Texture restaurant in London and the Wine Spectator in Graystone (Napa Valley, California) also use the OliveToLive server. At present, contacts have been made to develop the model in the United States, Austria, Argentina and Australia. All of them, points out Pasquali, marked by the maximum respect and value given to extra virgin olive oil.

As well, books such as the best seller *Extra Virginity*, by Tom Mueller, talk about OliveToLive, which has also appeared in numerous L'Accademia dei Georgofili, publications - the first and one of the foremost global agricultural and agronomy institutions - and has given it's name to a book of poems published in Italy by Fabbri Editore.

The profile of the visitor to Villa Campestri Olive Oil - which holds an average occupation rate of 85% all year round - is very varied. Although the European client predominates, the strength of the call of extra virgin olive oil also attracts many North and South Americans and, more so every day, Australians, confirms Pasquali. Will this concept be exported to other countries? Paolo Pasquali is clear: "My dream is to create a world-wide network of Olive Oil Resorts. OliveToLive is the strategy with which to penetrate into different markets, to reach this objective. The culture of olive oil still has a long way to go. It will be a wonderful voyage."

www.villacampestri.it

