



FROM LEFT: BELMOND GRAND HOTEL TIMEO IN TAORMINA; LO SPECCHIO DI VENERE IN PANTELLERIA

INTOXICATING ITALY

Sicily's ability to attract fashion nobles, food fans and wine buffs knows no bounds. By ELIO IANNACCI

"WHEN THE FAMILY BUSINESS IS ABOUT THE cultivation of good taste, you have to learn fast," says José Rallo, 50, the marketing and communications manager for Donnafugata wine, one of the long-standing, family-run winemakers in Italy. She's sitting in a wicker chair, overlooking the town of Taormina in Sicily, on the Belmond Grand Hotel Timeo's magnificent terrace—an historic five-star property where, as town gossip has it, Truman Capote, Oscar Wilde, Jean Cocteau and Christian Dior used to have late and lush nights of leisure.

As Rallo takes a sip of her ruby-hued *Mille e una Notte*—her family's most popular blend made from Sicily's Nero d'Avola grapes—she sums up the state of Sicily's tourism. "It is such an undiscovered territory for so many.... That's what keeps the energy so up, up, up here! Even though the land is filled with ancient history," she says, likely alluding to the Greeks, who began colonizing parts of Sicily around 800 BC and ended up building countless temples for their gods. "It still feels so young!" says Rallo, who is clad in Etro and Pucci. She breathes in the cherry and cocoa notes wafting in her glass and scans the scenery around her. Hellenic monuments, cobblestone roads, and olive and cypress trees adorn her immediate view. Adding to the beauty is Taormina's shimmering Bay of Mazzorò, framing the wild greenery and intricate stonework.

"It is easy to understand why so many fashion designers, filmmakers and artists fall in love here," she sighs. "Just look at this." Unbeknownst to

Rallo, she gestures toward Piazza IX Aprile, the spot where Domenico Dolce and Stefano Gabbana famously populated the streets with models and photographed them for their label's extraordinary Fall 2012 campaign. In June, Taormina's peak season, tourists flock to the town for its film fest, yet the surrounding buildings are unfazed by modernity. They display the kind of Grecian symbols that Gianni and Donatella Versace have reimagined in their past collections.

Sicily's well-known island of Pantelleria has also lured fashion royalty: Roberto Cavalli and Giorgio Armani have taken to the volcanic-ashed, beachside beauty. More of an anti-Ibiza or counter-Capri, the island isn't about partying but rather treating yourself. Armani's massive estate is among the island's sensational vineyards, which produce Zibibbo, Moscato and Passito wines. Many other notable names (think Madonna and Naomi Campbell) have taken refuge in the private wine villas found here. This type of accommodation, while fairly new to Sicily, allows visitors to work in a vineyard. One to watch for is Tenuta Borgia, a villa, vineyard and olive oil farm.

Staying at such abodes gets you treated to the traditional food of the region (the tastiest being salmon polpete, squid rice balls and seafood couscous). When you venture out, make sure you ascend the 2,742-foot summit of Montagna Grande, where, on a clear day, you can see the majestic rock formation known as the elephant trunk or view the outskirts of North Africa. Nicknamed the "Black Pearl of the Mediterranean," Pantelleria's bodies of water—such as lo specchio di Venere—allow passersby to recharge in energizing mud baths after nights of indulging. □



PIAZZA IX APRILE

DOLCE & GABBANA FALL 2012



DONNAFUGATA'S VINEYARD IN PANTELLERIA