

# ESCAPE TO FATTORIA CORLEONESE

By Caroline Phillips



Rolling landscapes, home grown tomatoes and traditional red clay roof tiles. This is Fattoria Corleonese, a gorgeous manor house for holidays in Sicily. It's in the heart of the country, part of a working farm and in a building that has been in the same family since 1873. It's set in 92 hectares of beautiful countryside, among cornfields and sheep with clanking bells on their necks. All amidst plum trees, cypresses, and ancient walnut trees as far as the eye can see. You'd be hard pushed to find a more pleasant place.

The house is built around an uneven cobbled courtyard with sun-bleached terracotta walls and bottle-green louvered shutters. Plus walls that are bougainvillea, oleander and ivy clad. The hot air reverberates to the sound of cicadas and the fluttering of butterfly wings. Otherwise, all is still and peaceful, save for the occasional bark of a farm dog – of which there are four large ones of varying degrees of shagginess. That is because part of the house is lived in by the owners, a charming couple – Salvatore Paternostro, a retired lawyer and gentleman farmer, and his wife Angela, a Tuscan artist elegant in white linen.



Inside our apartment there are heaven-high ceilings and antiques: think oil paintings, elaborate, free-standing cupboards with sculpted cherubs, and dripping Murano glass chandeliers with candles. Days are spent lazily on the terrace beside the apartment, underneath a parasol amidst potted geraniums and overlooking a fountain with a lion's head.

Nearby there's a swimming pool set in a secret garden amongst olive, walnut and almond trees, overlooked by a towering limestone mountain and bordered by rosemary and lemon verbena

## VIDEOS



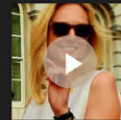
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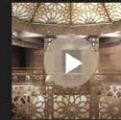
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bushes. Hours and days pass and we do little more than gentle laps and loit beside the pool, the peace disturbed by nothing more than the occasional call of a cockerel or flit of a dragon fly.

Most days the farm hand brings us a wicker basket laden with organic produce from the land. Blushing tomatoes, baby zucchini, cucumbers with thick green skins, bottles of home-pressed olive oil and cheeses from the farm: smoked mozzarella, pecorino and home made sheep's cheese. We feast on homemade pasta – gnocchi with tomato sauce fatto in casa, drizzled with pungent olive oil – and finish the meal with sun-ripened nectarines. And there's the local Donna Fugata sparkling wine to accompany the meals, another present from Salvatore and Angela.



When we can tear ourselves away from this rural idyll, Corleone is a fifteen minute drive away. It's a hilltop town made famous by Mario Puzi's *The Godfather*. Tourists didn't come to Corleone before the film. Walk into Central Bar – it's the one with the poster of *The Godfather* outside – and the owner turns on the theme tune of the movie. Its walls are covered with stills from the film – pictures of Marlon Brando wearing his gangster hat and those famous cotton-wool-puffy cheeks. By the door there are some framed newspaper cuttings that record Al Pacino's visit to see his grandmother who lived in the town.

We drink stronger than strongest coffee and fresh-pressed lemon juice in Central Bar, hiding for moments from the searing noonday sun. Then we leave the bar, past old men sitting in the shade gossiping and setting the world to right. It seems to be a town of old men. Mostly the young of Corleone have left to work abroad.



Up the street, Luca Trombaturi guides us around an upstairs room in a former monastery – the Galleria Corleone. 'This is my passion,' he says, pointing to this room that bears witness to his hometown. 'La storia del nostro passato.' The white walls are covered with photographs of the most infamous clan members who moved from Corleone and started their clandestine operations in New York. Luca wears two earrings, shaved hair sides and tresses gelled on top. 'Extortion, prostitution, drugs charges,' he's saying as he flails his arms, indicating photos on the wall of former Mafia chiefs.

Afterwards Lea Savona, the dignified and first elected female mayor of Corleone, drops by. We sit in a circle on white plastic chairs. Luca translates at breakneck speed as she tells us how she is tackling the Mafia – 'I don't confront them and they leave me alone to get on with my work,' she says – and how the Pope's secretary sent her a letter to say they were praying for her good work. 'Would you like to go to her office to see her awards?' asks Luca, with pride.

Another day, we go further afield – a spectacular 90 minute drive to the Donna Fugata winery in Marsala on the coast. Past villages, lush vineyards, mountains and incredible rock formations. The vineyard is family owned, and they produce 2.5 million bottles of wine a year – about ten

different varieties – a mixture of red, white and sparkling white, plus a sweet wine from the island of Pantelleria. Most destined for new markets in the US, Europe and Japan. Our group tries seven wines, swilling it in their mouths, the professionals among them spitting it out. 'It's too good to spit out,' says Sandra, our friend, drinking it.



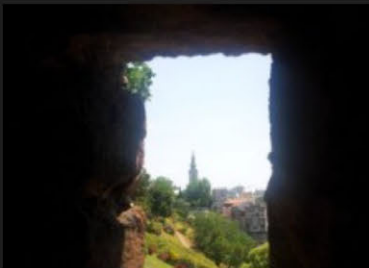
Closer to Fattoria Corleonese, a mere five minutes in the car, is the Agriturismo Giardinello. We go there for antipasti, delicious pizzas and home made limoncello, sitting among tables each of more than ten people, all Italian families. We're the only people there who speak English. Afterwards, walking midst the farm dogs and playful puppies, we go further up the hill from the agriturismo, past pens with bulls and calves, to where the farmer produces hand-made cheese. There's a room like a walk-in refrigerator with freshly made ricotta, some recently smoked mozzarella and floor-to-ceiling shelves of pecorino truckles. The master cheese maker climbs a ladder to reach a six month old one for us to taste. It is delicious, salty yet still fresh and pungent.

But we don't want to visit many places. Fattoria Corleonese is too much of a lure. Why leave its mellow light, spectacular scenery and our broken Italian chats with its genial owners? Why spend much time away from its fine old buildings, the peregrine falcons circling in the blue sky, the friendly farm dogs and the ancient olive trees? Or away from those rolling landscapes, home grown tomatoes and traditional red clay roof tiles?

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*Caroline Phillips is an award-winning freelance journalist who contributes to publications from Sunday and daily newspapers to glossy magazines and various luxury websites. To see more of her work, go to [www.carolinephillips.net](http://www.carolinephillips.net).*

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