

Magazine > Monaci Delle Terre Nere – An Earthly Paradise In Italy

# MONACI DELLE TERRE NERE – AN EARTHLY PARADISE IN ITALY

By Caroline Phillips



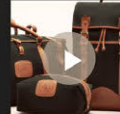
It's an earthly paradise. Mt Etna fumes theatrically behind, red molten lava slipping dramatically down its slopes, and the Ionian sea sparkles in front. Welcome to Monaci delle Terre Nere – the boutique hotel that's pulling all the awards.



The gods were smiling the day Guido Coffa (an erstwhile automotive engineer) fell in love with this 19th century putty-pink aristocratic villa – a piano nobile turned winery then organic farm. It's now a small and discreet hideaway – 19 bedrooms/suites, some dotted on the estate – that's set in a 40-acre private organic property that's being planted with enough trees to save the planet and make chef Clelio Mocerino's wizard jams (from mandarin groves, vineyards and fig trees on volcanic land tended by the Saint Ana monks for centuries, and suffused with their special energy).



## VIDEOS



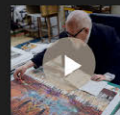
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HORSES ON ICE

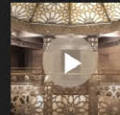
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Guido's girlfriend, Ada Calabrese, has created achingly stylish but comfortable, rustic-meets-cool-contemporary interiors with squishy B&B Italia sofas, and king-size and floating beds against walls of blackest volcanic rock and soaring wood-beamed ceilings. The cavernous reception houses the original antique 'palmento' press formerly used for crushing grapes and the old cistern where once they washed the wine barrels. It doesn't take much snooping to find other eccentric artworks and antiques.



Although it's hard to choose between a spectacular garden, Mediterranean or Mt Etna view, bag the romantic Suite Amabile to overlook the crater (and for a free-standing Jacuzzi by the bed). If you want quirky, book the Suite Dependence Suntuoso – it's approached up lava stone stairs – a small palmento with the bed tucked into the original rock structure.



As for the food, for breakfast imagine a full buffet served in the ancient wine press or outside, on the sea-view terrace, under pine trees and with homemade cakes, bread and jams plus fresher-than-freshly squeezed juices. At dinner, on the terrace by the old stone water well, the unfussy Sicilian family cuisine puts the 'oh' into slow – think sun-ripened tomatoes and zucchini plus still-flapping fish with zero miles, cooked slowly and eaten leisurely. On the estate, they grow over 100 different types of fruit, all their own veggies, herbs and life itself. Plus they keep their own chickens.





As for eco credentials, it gets the thumbs-up too: over 50% of the hotel's energy comes from sustainable forests and the sun. But there is also Wi-Fi and air-conditioning; not always a given in Sicily.



When it comes to entertainment, there's an outdoor bar and an infinity pool for lazy laps, yoga on the lawn, cinema under the stars (deliciously, the rooms are without televisions) and a library – or billiards to be played at the Victorian table. Otherwise, Guido is on hand to point guests to wine tastings at local vineyards, trips to the nearby sandy beaches, or even a tour of Mt Etna by mule. That much said, it's hard to pull yourself away from lolling in a lounge overlooking nectarine groves...but worth it just to find yourself a day bed under a palm tree. Full marks and more for soul. The only hiccup? Those lava paths kill the Laboutins.

[www.monacidelleterrenere.it](http://www.monacidelleterrenere.it)

*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).*

## HIGHLIGHTS OF THE WEEK



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L'ALBERGO DELLA REGINA ISABELLA



A COCKTAIL TOUR OF NEW YORK