



HOTELS

Il Salviatino, Florence

We visited a hillside villa in Italy and felt like a fortunate house guest.

PAMELA MCCOURT FRANCESCONE

We drove through Florence's traffic-choked streets up to the residential suburb of Fiesole, where a gorgeous 15th-century villa Il Salviatino is set on a lush hillside. Once home to the Salviati family, hence the name, in the early 1900s it became the

residence of the famous Italian writer Ugo Ojetti. Despite being chock-a-block with priceless art works and antiques, the villa has an intimate atmosphere that makes you feel like a privileged house guest.

The view from the terrace is

breathtaking with landmarks like the Medici tower and the dome of Florence's cathedral tempting you to head downtown. With the hotel shuttle departing every hour this is the way to go, and it takes only 15 minutes.

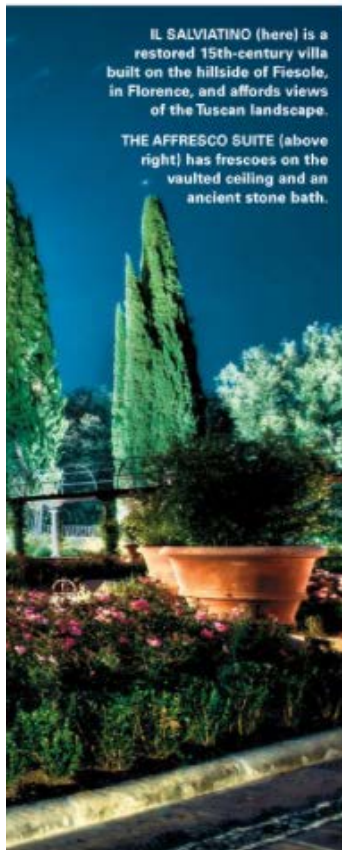
In the spring and summer

months, the terrace becomes the restaurant, which is moved into the beautiful old library in cooler weather. Chef Carmine Calò (carmine@salviatino.com; 011-390-559-041-111), who heads the kitchens, has given the menu a contemporary flair and



those unique flavors that Italy does best. For lunch, we had *gnudi* — meaning naked — a traditional Tuscan first course, which is a mixture of fresh ricotta cheese and spinach that is usually stuffed into ravioli. They were melt-in-the-mouth. Guests can learn how to make these and other traditional dishes by taking Carmine's cooking lessons.

Evenings feature grills with massive Fiorentina T-bone steaks, mixed meats and fish grills, lobsters and prawns. And, we were told, special care is taken in preparing dishes for guests who are allergic or intolerant to certain foods. Advance restaurant reservations are strongly recommended and can be booked through Giuseppe Imperato



IL SALVIATINO (here) is a restored 15th-century villa built on the hillside of Fiesole, in Florence, and affords views of the Tuscan landscape. **THE AFFRESCO SUITE** (above right) has frescoes on the vaulted ceiling and an ancient stone bath.

(imparato@salviatino.com; 011-390-559-041-111), one of Il Salviatino's Service Ambassadors.

Breakfast on the terrace is the epitome of elegance. There is no buffet, so they brought us a large silver tray with a plate of smoked salmon and a bagel, a fruit mousse and a yogurt, a large platter of fresh fruits and an array of breads, patisserie and jams. And then there was the menu of cereals, eggs, cold cuts and more to choose from.

The dome-view guestrooms and junior suites at the front of the villa have the best city views but then there are others, like the Melodia Suite on the second floor that overlooks the garden. The suite has handsome wood panelling, a fireplace and a bathroom, and a Jacuzzi that opens up to become a part of the whole. All these amenities make the suite particularly romantic. The Affresco Suite is quite spectacular, too, with frescoes on the vaulted ceiling and a stunning bath, a massive old stone Roman sarcophagus that really should be in a museum. It had us wondering just how long it takes to fill! Those who prefer privacy will like the spacious, contemporary Greenhouse Suites under the Italian gardens which have direct access to the park.

The Ojetti Suite in the tower is on two levels, with a rooftop Jacuzzi and a large private balcony. The wow part is the sun-drenched living area with a glass floor, which means the couches are, in fact, under the stained-glass skylight of the main staircase. Nice Touch: Our TV was inside the large cheval mirror, and we found it an elegant solution as we have an aversion to massive TVs, and even more so to those mounted on wall brackets. Beds and cots are available for children, and the property is pet-friendly for small dogs.

For relaxation, the tiered and heated infinity swimming pool is tucked away in the gardens



LA TERRAZZA is a popular choice for breakfast. Chef Carmine Calò heads the kitchen at Il Salviatino and has given the menu a contemporary flair.

where the spa is also located. The exclusive products they use are by Dr. Vranjes, a much-revered Florentine perfumer and cosmetologist. Tip: Make sure to book ahead for the three-hour Tuscany Pleasure treatment of scrubs and face masks based on Tuscan wines, or for the one-hour Coconut and Aloe soothing massage. To make reservations, contact Spa Manager Pierangela Flori (pierangela@salviatino.com; 011-390-559-041-111).

Head Ambassador Nada Maffoni (nada@salviatino.com; 011-390-559-041-204) and her team of friendly Service Ambassadors can help with queries and reservations and also arrange transfers from Florence's Peretola airport, which is only 20 minutes away, or from Pisa airport. From May to October, it is better to book well in advance.

Top Tip: If you have clients who don't just want the best, but the impossible, you can find exclusive experiences in inaccessible places on www.firezeesplease.com.



It went online in September, and is the brainchild of 11 general managers of five-star hotels, including Il Salviatino's Bart Spoorenberg (bart@salviatino.com; 011-390-559-041-111), and a group of young publishing and communication gurus who have persuaded local businesses and public institutions to open strictly off-limits places on personal invitation.

Think private after-hours tours of museums and monuments, visits to famous fashion houses and

wineries, and rubbing shoulders with the likes of Florence's lord mayor or Andrea Bocelli.

While at Il Salviatino, we previewed this project, first with an invitation to a private Uffizi tour with an exceptional guide, the museum's director Eike Schmidt. Then Laudomia Pucci graciously hosted us for cocktails in her showrooms in the handsome Pucci palace. We also visited the 200-year-old Antico Sertificio Fiorentino silk factory, which still produces exquisite

fabrics on ancient handlooms, and we dined with the Marquise Antinori in her ancestral home.

But the most heart-stopping moment was getting into a place that is not, and will never be, open to the public. The tiny secret room where Michelangelo hid from the Medici princes (the rulers of Florence who were trying to kill him) for three months. He left the walls covered with spectacular charcoal sketches of faces and figures, many of which he later used in Rome's Sistine Chapel. ■



THE INFINITY POOL (above) is tucked away in the gardens in close proximity to the spa.

THE GREENHOUSE SUITE (here) has glass-encased living spaces that are filled with plenty of natural light.