We the Italians

November 2025

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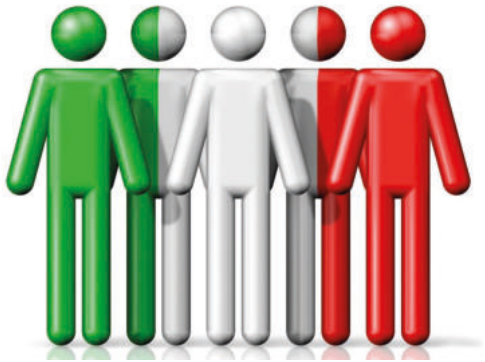

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Editorial

What's up with WTI #193

by Umberto Mucci

Dear friends,

As we do every October, we were delighted to return to the East Coast for the National Italian American Foundation gala and for a series of meetings in both Washington, D.C., and New York. This year's NIAF gala was a tremendous success, with 2,300 attendees celebrating the Foundation's 50th anniversary. We the Italians proudly joins the ongoing celebrations and extends heartfelt thanks to NIAF for these first 50 years of friendship between Italy and the United States. We were also pleased to take part once again in the Transatlantic Investment Committee meeting and in the reception hosted by Italy's new Ambassador to Washington, D.C., Marco Peronaci, to whom we introduced who we are and what we do at We the Italians.

Washington DC

In New York, it was a real pleasure to record three episodes of the Italian-language version of the Italian American Podcast. Our friends John Viola and Patrick O'Boyle invited me and several fellow journalists to share with Italian-speaking listeners why we are so enthusiastic about the Italian American community, and why people in Italy should be, too. We'll keep you posted on when these episodes will be available in both audio and video. In the meantime, a warm greeting and big hug to the team who joined me in this great project: Viviana Altieri, Davide Ippolito,

Italian American Podcast

Michele "Micky" Disabato and Germana Valentini. We had a blast, and it felt like we'd been

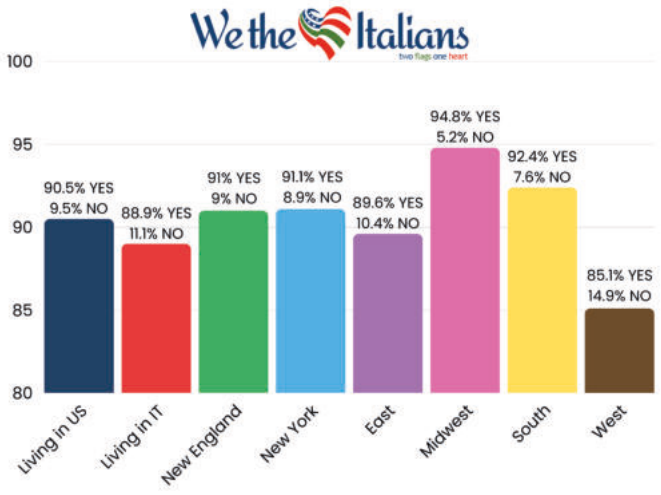
New York

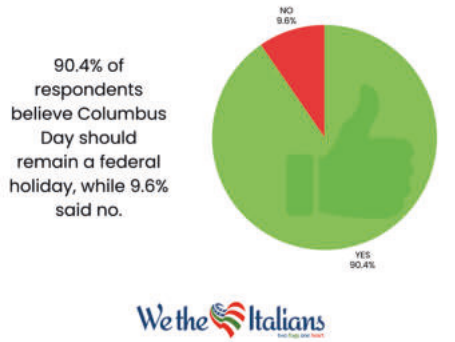
doing this together all our lives! And above all, Italians do it better!

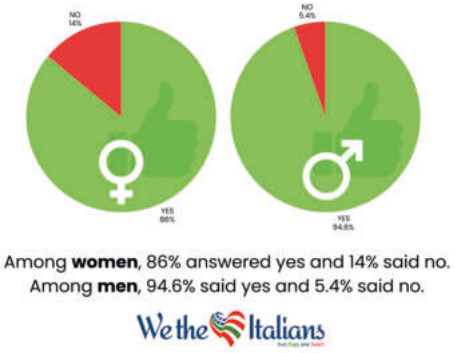
The second survey conducted by We the Italians together with the Italia America Reputation Lab delivered a striking result: 90.4% of respondents want Columbus Day to remain a federal holiday in the United States. You'll find all the details here. Thanks to everyone who took part: these surveys will resume in 2026.

But there's another initiative where we're asking for your input. Once again this year, We the Italians is inviting you, our readers, to nomina-

te the Italian American of the Year. This tradition began in 2022, with previous winners being Stanley Tucci (2022), Lady Gaga (2023), and Sylvester Stallone (2024). These three outstanding Italian Americans are therefore not eligible for votes this year. This time, you'll be able to choose from 10 nominees, selected from suggestions made by our 60 Ambassadors across the United States. You may vote for more than one candidate if you'd like. [Please vote here](#).







On November 18, 2015 - ten years ago - three Italians deeply in love with the United States met in a notary's office in Rome to officially establish a company and to formally launch a project that had begun a few years earlier. Those three Italians were Umberto Mucci, Edoardo Colombo, and Nicola Paglietti, and that company was, and still is, We the Italians. Those who know me know that I'm never fully satisfied, and indeed I wish We the Italians had accomplished even way more in its first ten years. But I am surrounded by the affection and esteem of many friends, readers, and followers who continue to congratulate us - praise that I share with the entire We the Italians team, especially my two partners Edoardo and Nicola and with our General Manager Fabrizio Fasani. What I can promise is that we will continue working with even more enthusiasm so that by our twentieth anniversary, we will

have preserved that same esteem and affection, hopefully more. And I'm sure I still won't be completely satisfied then, either. In the meantime, happy birthday to us! Two flags, One heart, Ten years.

Another important anniversary featured our Ambassador to Emigration, Delfina Licata, who presented the 20th edition of the Rapporto Italiani nel Mondo, produced as always by the Migrantes Foundation under her supervision. For twenty years, the Rapporto Italiani nel Mondo has documented Italian emigration around the world with exceptional expertise and thoroughness, and it has become globally recognized as an indispensable resource. Credit goes to everyone involved in its creation, but allow me to emphasize that without Delfina Licata, everything would be far more difficult and far less effective. Kudos to my dear friend, and happy anniversary to the RIM as well! Here you can find an article describing the 2025 report.

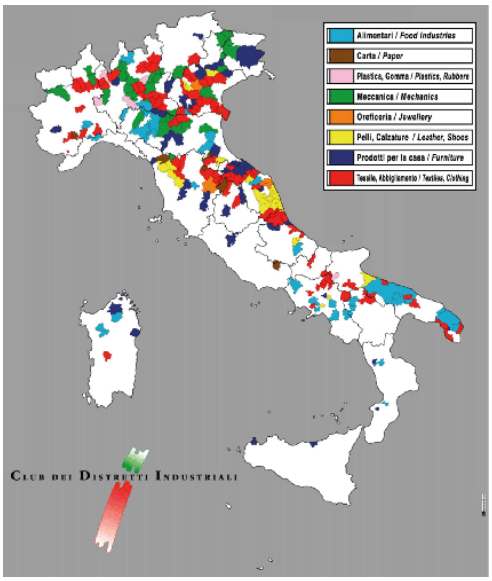
As we do every year-end, we're working on the Yearbook featuring this year's interviews - which will also make a wonderful Christmas gift for anyone interested. But 2025 brings an exciting new development. The Yearbook with the 12 interviews from 2025 won't be the only We the Italians publication this year. We're preparing a surprise that will become our second annual book from now on... I don't want to reveal too much just yet, but let's just say I'll leave you with three key words: "Italian good news." Stay tuned!

This month, our magazine is lau-

nching two new columns, and we're particularly proud of both.

The first, produced by our Editorial Staff, will introduce our readers each month to a different Italian Industrial District. The typical Italian industrial district is a geographically identifiable area where numerous companies in a specific industrial sector are concentrated, with a unique link between the territory and its industrial output. Although production structures vary from one district to another, most companies operate in highly specialized segments and handle a limited number of tasks, often tied to a specific stage of the production process. This creates a specialized division of labor among the busi-

nesses involved, so that only a few companies internalize more than one phase of production.



Industrial Districts

The second column is curated by Matteo Cerri and is titled My Life in Italy. It will spotlight the stories of Italian Americans who invest in Italy and, in some cases, choose to move there - buying and restoring properties, transforming their lives, and reconnecting with their roots. Matteo is an international entrepreneur, investor, and publisher with nearly 30 years of experience connecting the Italian diaspora, global mobility, and the revitalization of small Italian towns. He has published extensively in both Italian and English and lectures on urban-rural renewal and new territorial models. Editor-in-Chief of Nomag, ITS Journal, and Smart Working Magazine, he also co-founded ITS Italy, delivering more than 140 regeneration projects in over 20 villages. Born in Milan, he has lived between London, Europe, the United States, and Italy's small towns.

My Life in Italy - Matteo Cerri

And it doesn't stop here! That's why we ask you to subscribe to We the Italians.

It's all for now. Please stay safe and take care, and enjoy our magazine and our contents on our website. Stay safe and take care: the future's so bright, we gotta wear tricolor shades! A big Italian hug from Rome.

Italian entertainment

Portobello, from beloved tv show to judicial tragedy and Bellocchio's miniseries

We the Italians Editorial Staff

In the late 1970s and early 80s, Italian television audiences were captivated by Portobello, a variety program that broke away from traditional formats and became a nationwide ritual. Every Friday evening, millions of families would gather around their sets to watch Enzo Tortora – the charismatic presenter with a mix of warmth, elegance, and understated irony – guide viewers through a kaleidoscope of human stories.

Unlike rigid quiz shows or

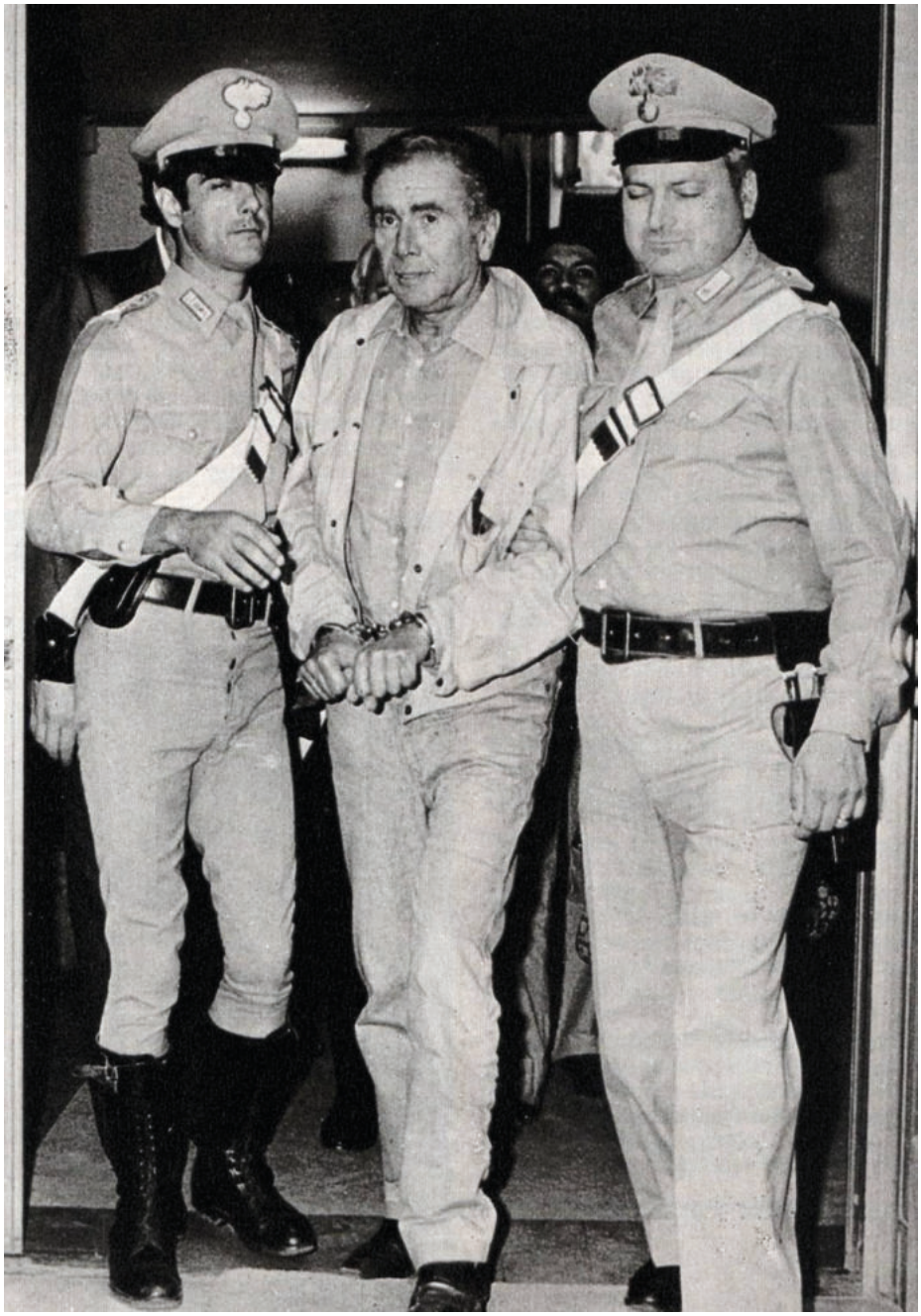
scripted dramas, Portobello offered unpredictability. The program created a virtual marketplace where people could showcase inventions, sell unusual objects, or search for missing relatives. A segment might feature a farmer introducing a homemade contraption, followed by an emotional reunion appeal or a quirky performance from an amateur artist. The effect was both eclectic and profoundly human – a window into the aspirations and eccentricities of ordinary Italians.

One of the show's most recognizable elements was the parrot mascot, who sat on stage and would sometimes interrupt with shrill cries. If the bird repeated the caller's chosen phrase, the deal was

sealed – if not, suspense hung in the air. This playful touch, combined with Tortora's natural ability to improvise, created a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere. It made the audience feel like participants in a national living room rather than spectators of a polished studio product.

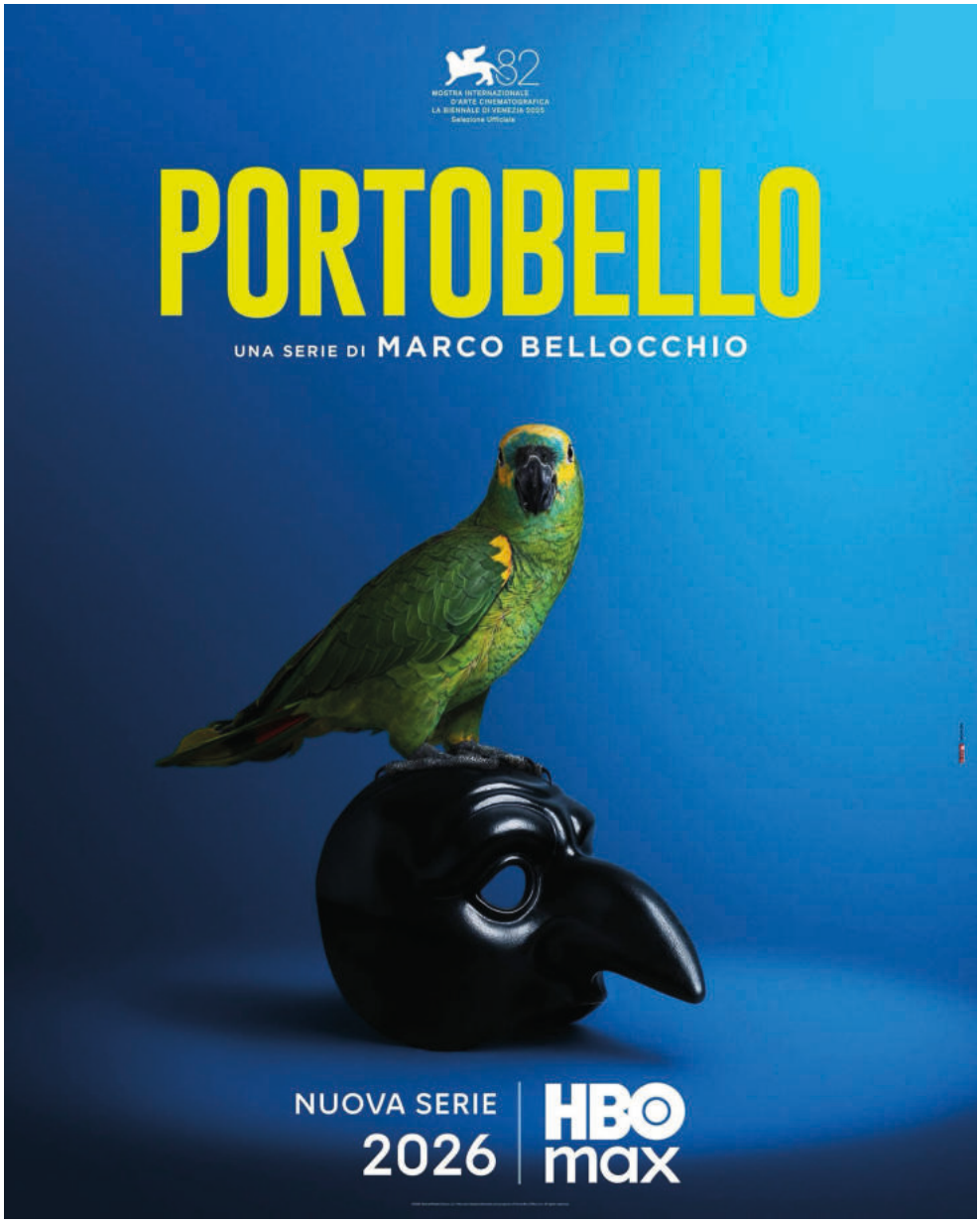
Beyond entertainment, Portobello carried social weight. Letters arrived from prisons, hospitals, and distant provinces. For many, it was a rare chance to be seen and heard. Tortora became a trusted figure who connected people across social classes, regions, and generations. His show didn't shy away from touching real emotions, whether joy, hope, or frustration. That authenticity became its hallmark and helped it draw staggering viewership numbers – sometimes more than 25 million people.

At its peak, Portobello wasn't just a program – it was a cultural phenomenon. It blended variety, commerce, and storytelling in ways that anticipated today's hybrid formats. More importantly, it underscored the role of television as a bridge between Italy's diverse realities – urban and rural, wealthy and working-class. Through humor, compassion,



and a touch of spectacle, Tortora and his team created something enduring: a shared national memory that still resonates decades later.

The extraordinary success of Portobello made Enzo Tortora one of the most recognizable figures in Italy. But in 1983, his career and personal life were shattered when he was arrested on charges of association with the Camorra and drug trafficking. The accusations stemmed from testimonies by mafia informants – most notoriously Giovanni Pandico, a prisoner with a grudge against the presenter.



From the start, the evidence was fragile, often absurd. A knitted lace doily sent to the program for auction was interpreted as coded communication. The name "Tortora" was confused with that of actual underworld figures. Yet despite the flimsy foundation, the case was pursued aggressively, turning the beloved TV host into a national scapegoat.

The arrest was highly publicized – cameras rolled as Tortora was handcuffed, an image that deeply shocked the country. After years of legal battles, he was eventually acquitted, but the ordeal left lasting scars. Tortora returned briefly to television, determined to reclaim his dignity, but his health declined, and he passed away in 1988. His story endures as one of Italy's most notorious miscarriages of justice, raising questions about media spectacle, judicial responsibility, and the fragility of public trust.

Marco Bellocchio's new miniseries Portobello, set for global release on HBO Max in 2026, brings Tortora's story back into the spotlight. The six-episode project combines meticulous historical reconstruction with the director's signature style – austere, probing, and morally urgent. The show interweaves two contrasting worlds: the vibrant stage of Tortora's television triumph and the bleak institutions that later consumed him. Fabrizio Gifuni portrays Tortora with restraint and gravitas, capturing both his charisma and his torment. Around him, a strong ensemble gives depth to prosecutors, informants, colleagues, and family members.

Rather than sensationalizing, Bellocchio emphasizes the mechanics of injustice. He shows how a beloved entertainer could be transformed into a criminal figure through flawed testimony and public hysteria. The transition from applause in the studio to jeers in the courtroom unfolds with quiet inevitability – echoing a Greek tragedy staged under television lights.

By revisiting the case, the series not only honors Tortora's memory but also invites viewers to reflect on the dangers of institutional abuse and the ease with which reputations can be destroyed. It's both a historical drama and a timely meditation on truth, power, and the complicity of media in shaping collective judgment.

Fabrizio Gifuni

Italian flavors

The saffron of the L'Aquila region

We the Italians Editorial Staff

In the heart of Italy's Abruzzo region, the province of L'Aquila is home to one of the most prized and unique spices in the world: Zafferano dell'Aquila, or saffron. This saffron is exclusively produced in the L'Aquila area, particularly on the Navelli plateau and surrounding valleys. Its exceptional quality has earned it the prestigious Protected Designation of Origin (DOP) status, guaranteeing that only saffron grown and processed in these specific areas

can carry the name.

The saffron comes from the red stigmas of the Crocus sativus flower, a delicate bloom that appears in autumn. Each flower contains three vivid red stigmas, which are carefully hand-harvested before dawn, when the petals are still closed. Harvesting saffron is an extremely labor-intensive process, with hundreds of thousands of flowers needed to produce just one kilogram of the spice. The flowers are picked in mid-October and early November, and the stigmas are separated, dried, and packaged with great care to preserve their color and aroma.

What sets this saffron apart is the unique environment in which it is cultivated. The Navelli plateau offers a combination of factors that are perfect for growing Crocus sativus: high altitude, limestone-rich soil, cool nights, and a special microclimate. These conditions allow the flowers to grow slowly and develop a deep crimson hue, intense flavor, and strong aroma. The saffron from this region is

known for its high quality, offering a distinct and rich flavor that is highly sought after by chefs around the world.

The production of saffron in the L'Aquila region follows traditional methods that have been passed down through generations. The flowers are hand-picked each morning, and the stigmas are carefully separated, dried, and packaged. To preserve the delicate aroma and flavor, the saffron threads are usually soaked in warm liquid before being added to dishes. Just a small amount is needed to infuse dishes with flavor, often as little as 10 milligrams for a serving of four. In the kitchen, Zafferano dell'Aquila is prized for its unique ability to enhance both the flavor and color of dishes. The spice imparts a warm, slightly earthy taste with floral undertones and a subtle sweetness that can transform a simple meal into something extraordinary. It is most commonly used in risottos, pasta dishes, and soups, where it blends seamlessly to create a golden hue. Saffron also pairs wonderfully with seafood, poultry, and even desserts, where its distinctive flavor adds depth to sweet

treats like cakes and custards. Just a few threads are enough to bring a richness and complexity to any dish, making it a staple in gourmet cooking.

The history of saffron in L'Aquila dates back to the 13th century, when it is believed to have been introduced by a Dominican friar. Since then, it has become a valuable commodity, prized for its quality and versatility. Over the centuries, saffron from this region has been traded far and wide, gaining a reputation for its deep flavor and vibrant color.

Today, Zafferano dell'Aquila is considered one of the finest saffrons in the world, often referred to as the "Ferrari" of saffrons. Its rarity and quality make it a highly coveted ingredient among top chefs, who use it to elevate dishes such as risottos, sauces, and desserts. The demand for this saffron is growing, yet its production remains small, due to the meticulous hand-harvesting process and the limited growing area.

The cultivation of saffron also plays an important role in the local economy and community life of the Abruzzo region. The harvest season brings together local families, who work together to pick the

flowers, process the stigmas, and prepare the saffron for sale. This shared labor has fostered a strong sense of community, with the harvest being a time of celebration and connection to tradition.

Beyond its culinary uses, saffron is an important part of the cultural identity of the region. The bright

red threads stand out against the backdrop of the autumnal landscape, adding a visual element to the region's natural beauty. Visitors to the area can often find saffron sold at local markets, often in simple packaging that emphasizes the quality of the product.

Zafferano dell'Aquila is more than just a spice: it represents the land, the labor, and the heritage of the Abruzzo region. From the fields of the Navelli plateau to kitchens around the world, this saffron carries with it a rich history and a deep connection to the people who grow it. Each tiny thread of saffron is a symbol of tradition, craftsmanship, and the unique environment of L'Aquila.

Italian handcrafts

Spilimbergo, the City of Mosaics

We the Italians Editorial Staff

Spilimbergo, located in the province of Pordenone in the Friuli Venezia Giulia region, is renowned as the "City of Mosaics" due to its long-standing tradition in the art of mosaic making.

Mosaic is an ancient yet ever-evolving art form that enhances and personalizes the spaces around us with lasting colors, shapes, and materials. Starting with a sketch, photo, or image, the artist creates a color palette for the materials to be used in the mosaic - ranging from stones, marbles, enamels, and glass pastes to precious gold. The pieces are carefully cut, arranged, and glued together by the mosaicist, bringing the image to

life one tile at a time.

The roots of modern Friulian mosaic-making can be traced back to the artistic renaissance of the 16th century. Spilimbergo's proximity to Aquileia, an important center of ancient Roman civilization, and its position along the trade routes to Venice, a hub for Byzantine mosaic traditions, made it an ideal location for the craft. The surrounding area also offered an abundance of local stones from the Meduna, Cellina, Cosa, and Tagliamento rivers, providing free access to a wide variety of natural stone colors - ranging from aqua greens to soft pinks - that were integral to creating some of the finest Roman mosaics, such as those found in the National Archaeological Museum of Aquileia. As the Venetian Republic gained control over the region, the art of mosaic-making spread, with skilled artisans from Friuli becoming renowned worldwide. One key figure in this development was Gian Domenico Facchina from Sequals (Pordenone), who revolutionized mosaic production by

inventing the reverse mosaic technique. This method involved preassembling the tiles on paper and then gluing them to a flexible backing, making it possible to complete mosaics in the workshop rather than on-site, significantly reducing production costs.

In addition to this, the technique of Venetian terrazzo, also developed in Friuli, became famous for its beautiful and durable floors found in Venetian palaces and villas. Renowned architect Andrea Palladio praised the resilience and beauty of terrazzo, further cementing the region's reputation for innovation in mosaic art.

By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Friulian mosaicists began to spread across Europe and the Americas. Artists from Sequals and Spilimbergo started to look beyond local borders, dreaming of cities like Paris, Vienna, Prague, St. Petersburg, and Detroit as attainable destinations. This international expansion saw the next generation of Friulian

mosaic artists establish themselves in various global capitals.

After World War I, with the region's mosaic tradition firmly established, there was a growing need to preserve and pass down the techniques and knowledge accumulated over centuries. In 1922, the Scuola Mosaicisti del Friuli was founded in Sequals to offer formal education in mosaic-making. Today, it is considered the world's leading institution in the field. The school houses an impressive collection of over 800 works, making it a monumental artistic installation in itself. The school's influence extends globally, with works created by its students and faculty appearing in locations such as the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., and the subway stations at Ground Zero in New York City.

The school's reputation soared in the mid-20th century, especially after being tasked with creating extensive mosaics for the Foro Mussolini in Rome - over 6,000 square meters of

flooring and wall mosaics. This significant commission helped establish the school's international fame. During the post-war period, as transportation was limited and recovery was slow, hundreds of young artists would travel to Spilimbergo on bicycles, eagerly arriving with hammers tucked behind their backs, ready to learn and work.

Through the decades, the school continued to thrive, maintaining its prestigious reputation with the help of skilled artisans, students, and active local workshops connected to the institution. The mosaics created in Spilimbergo can now be found in public and private buildings on all five continents, renowned for their vibrancy and fine craftsmanship.

The Scuola Mosaicisti del Friuli welcomes students from around the world, offering a three-year program that blends tradition with innovation. The curriculum covers a wide range of subjects, including mosaic techniques, terrazzo, drawing, color theory, applied geometry, computer science, and the history of mosaics, ensuring a comprehensive and versatile education. Students work with

traditional materials such as marble, glass, and enamel but are also encouraged to experiment with modern materials and techniques.

Through its rich history, Spilimbergo has solidified its place as a global center for mosaic art, continuing to inspire and educate new generations of artists while preserving its time-honored traditions.

Italian land and nature

The ancient pyramids of Zone, nature's strange architecture above Lake Iseo

We the Italians Editorial Staff

On the eastern shore of Lake Iseo, in Lombardy, lies one of Europe's most unusual natural wonders – the so-called pyramids of Zone. At first glance they look like giant stone mushrooms, with enormous boulders balanced on top of tall clay spires. The sight inspires questions: who placed those rocks there, and how have they stayed put for so long? The answer isn't giants or builders, but glaciers, erosion, and time.

The reserve covers about 21 hectares between 400 and 600 meters above sea level, in a small valley known as the Bagnadore. Around

150,000 years ago, during the Riss glaciation, this valley was filled by a branch of the massive Camuno glacier. As the ice advanced, it carved the landscape and deposited a chaotic mix of rocks, gravel, and sand. When the ice eventually retreated, it left behind a huge moraine – a pile of glacial debris that clogged the valley floor.

The raw material of the pyramids is mostly a reddish sandstone called Verrucano Lombardo, along with other rocks carried by the ice. Over millennia, rainwater and streams began eroding the moraine. The water cut deep channels, and wherever a large boulder happened to rest on top of a clay ridge, it acted like an umbrella. Protected from the rain, the column beneath the stone resisted erosion while the surrounding soil washed away. The result was a tall, narrow tower capped with a heavy block – a pyramid of earth and stone.

These formations are constantly changing. When a supporting column becomes too thin, the boulder eventually tumbles down, leaving the spire unprotected. Without its stone shield, the clay column quickly collapses. Elsewhere, new columns form under the protection of

other rocks. It's a slow but relentless cycle, creating a living landscape where destruction and creation happen side by side. Some of the towers reach nearly 100 feet in height, with bases more than 25 feet wide, their caps weighing many tons.
Colors add to the spectacle. The clay pillars appear in shades of gray and beige, the protective boulders often show violet or dark tones, and the surrounding forest offers a lush green frame. In autumn the foliage deepens to red and gold, making the pyramids look like monuments in a surreal park. Visitors often compare the scenery to a fantasy film set – a place where nature has done the work of a sculptor.

Walking through the reserve feels like stepping back in time. Each spire tells a story about glaciers that once dominated the valley, rivers that carved channels, and the delicate balance between stone and soil. The landscape is fragile – a single storm can reshape entire sections – but that fragility is part of its fascination. Over decades, scientists and hikers alike have witnessed new pyramids rising and old ones vanishing, proof that the Earth is never still.

Beyond their beauty, the pyramids also illustrate broader lessons about geology. The way water, gravity, and chemistry interact is visible here in real

time. Rainwater, slightly acidic because of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, slowly dissolves clay and carries it downhill. Streams cut miniature canyons, exposing layers of sediment. Even the protective effect of the boulders demonstrates a simple principle: shade and cover can make the difference between preservation and collapse.

For visitors, the reserve is accessible by trails that wind among the columns, sometimes close enough to touch their rough surfaces. Wooden platforms and paths allow safe exploration while protecting the terrain. Hikes here combine physical exercise with a sense of wonder – each turn in the trail reveals another tower, another improbable balance of mass and void. The silence of the valley, broken only by wind and birdsong, makes the experience even more striking.

The pyramids of Zone remind us how landscapes can be both fleeting and eternal. They exist because of events that began long before humans appeared in the region – yet they are also disappearing before our eyes,

eroded by every rainfall. In this paradox lies their charm. They are monuments of chance, testaments to the patience of natural forces, and warnings about impermanence.

Standing before them, it's easy to imagine myths about giants or ancient civilizations. But the truth is even more powerful: no human hand shaped these spires, only ice, water, and time. That knowledge doesn't diminish the wonder – it deepens it. The pyramids of Zone show how nature itself can build structures as striking as anything in stone by architects, and they continue to evolve with every storm that sweeps across the valley.

Italian art

A digital collection of masterpieces in high definition

We the Italians Editorial Staff

Starting September 18, visitors, scholars, and art enthusiasts can explore the first complete digital catalog of the Cappella Sansevero in Naples. This initiative makes the chapel the first museum in Italy to publish a fully scientific, open-access, and continuously updateable digital archive of its collection. The project was coordinated by Professor Gianluca Forgione and realized by a team of specialists in southern Italian art from the 17th and 18th centuries.

The endeavor combines two core elements – rigorous academic research and advanced digital technology. The scholars examined newly discovered archival sources and clarified several long-standing attributions. For instance, the monument dedicated to Paolo di Sangro and the sculpture "Amor divino" were reattributed to Michelangelo Naccherino, rather than the previously credited Francesco Queirolo. Drawing from documents in the Diocesan Historical Archive of Naples, the research also reconstructed the chapel's 17th-century history and tracked the transformations introduced by Prince Raimondo di Sangro during his years at the Collegio Romano between 1720 and 1730.

On the technological front, the catalog was created using Quire – an open-source publishing platform developed with support from the Getty Research Institute – and applied in Italy for the first time through a partnership with Haltadefinizione s.r.l., part of the Panini Culture Group. Haltadefinizione carried out an extensive gigapixel photographic campaign covering every sculpture, painting, and fre-

scoed surface, as well as immersive 360-degree imagery of the chapel's interiors. The outcome is a high-resolution digital platform where visitors can explore each artwork in extraordinary detail, zooming in to appreciate textures and nuances invisible to the naked eye.

The online catalog currently features 31 entries written as scholarly essays – each modular, updateable, and formatted like traditional printed catalogues, yet enhanced by dynamic navigation and interactive visuals. An integrated system called Coosmo – developed by Haltadefinizione – manages and preserves both the ultra-high-resolution images and the evolving text records, ensuring full transparency and long-term continuity. The interface allows users to view artworks side by side with their interpretive notes, merging academic precision with an accessible digital experience.

Beyond its technological achievement, the project represents a milestone for accessibility and cultural preservation. By publishing its catalog online, the Cappella Sansevero expands its mission far beyond Naples – offering scholars, educators, and art lovers worldwide the chance to study its masterpieces remotely. It also underscores

the museum's dedication to innovation in cultural heritage, illustrating how digital tools can deepen engagement and open new paths for research and education.

The catalog was formally introduced during a special study day hosted by the museum earlier this year. The event included presentations by the museum's president, Maria Alessandra Masucci, and the project coordinator, Gianluca Forgione, along with leading art historians such as Andrea Bacchi (University of Bologna and Fondazione Zeri), who discussed Antonio Corradini's work, and Riccardo Naldi (University L'Orientale of Naples), who unveiled an unpublished terracotta model of the celebrated "Cristo Velato," recently found in a private collection.

As the museum itself notes, the need for such a catalog was long overdue. Despite many publications devoted to the chapel, no comprehensive scientific catalog existed to guide researchers or curators. The only prior reference consisted of inventory sheets prepared in the 1990s by the Central Institute for Cataloguing – a valuable start but incomplete. Recognizing this gap, the museum launched a full-scale documentation project in 2022 to serve both the scholarly community and the general public, ensuring permanent digital access and a foundation for future conservation.

In this sense, the Cappella Sansevero's digital catalog stands as a model for how heritage institutions can merge scholarship, technology, and accessibility. It transforms what was once a static collection into a living, evolving archive – a space where art, science, and innovation meet. By inviting users everywhere to navigate its masterpieces in unprecedented depth and clarity, the museum extends the legacy of Prince Raimondo di Sangro's genius into the digital age, offering a new way to experience one of Naples' most enigmatic and intellectually fascinating monuments.

Italian cuisine

Vellutata di castagne, the perfect Italian primo for Thanksgiving

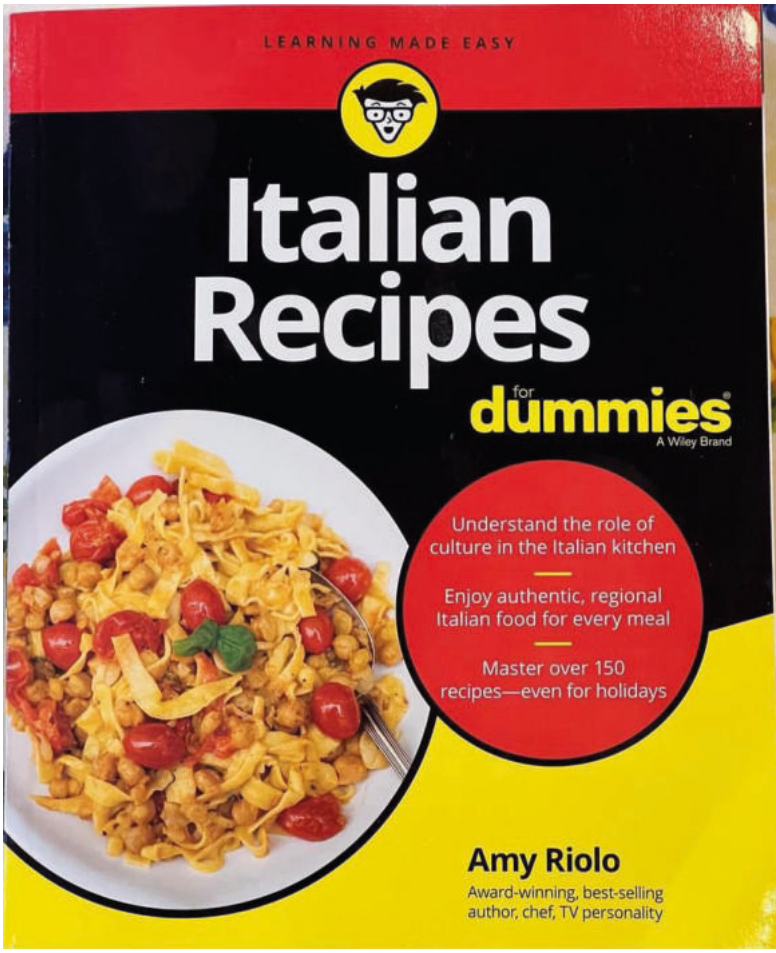
Amy Riolo

To me, the thought of fall holidays and cool weather always conjures up images of roasting chestnuts. Their ubiquitous scent instantly transports me to the streets of Rome, Torino, and Crotone, where during the cooler months fresh chestnuts are a highly anticipated treat. In honor of the World Week of Italian Cuisine, which officially kicks off the 3rd week of November in the United States, Diabetes Awareness Month, and Thanksgiving, I'm sharing a nutritious and delicious soup recipe which is perfect for a first course at a welcoming fall meal.

Freshly roasted chestnuts are traditionally used in this soup, but since that is not an option for many, the jarred variety can be substituted. You can puree this soup and serve it that way as well, perhaps with short pasta or rice added in Step 3 and cooked until done before serving.

Italian soups fall into four main categories—minestre, zuppe, crème, and vellutate—and, in the Italian language, the correct terms are used to refer to each type of soup. For example, while Vellutata di castagne, or Cream of Chestnut, would be called a soup in English, it would only be called a vellutata in Italian.

Recipe from Italian Recipes For Dummies by Amy Riolo.



VELLUTATA DI CASTAGNE/CREAM OF CHESTNUT SOUP

PREP TIME: 10 MIN
COOK TIME: 40 MIN
YIELD: 4 SERVINGS

Ingredients

* 2 tablespoons Amy Riolo Selections or other good-quality extra virgin olive oil
* 1 pound roasted or steamed jarred chestnuts
* 1 small carrot, peeled and coarsely chopped
* 1 stalk celery, coarsely chopped
* 1 small yellow onion, coarsely chopped
* 2 cloves garlic, peeled and sliced
* 4 cups Homemade Vegetable or Chicken Stock (see Chapter 3) or low-sodium chicken or vegetable stock
* 1 dried bay leaf
* 1 teaspoon fresh rosemary, minced or 1/2 teaspoon dried thyme
* 1/8 teaspoon kosher salt
* f1/4 cup cream
* 1/4 teaspoon black pepper, freshly ground
* 1/2 cup Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, grated

Directions

1. Heat oil in a large saucepan over me-

dium heat. Add chestnuts, carrot, celery, and onion, stirring to mix well. Sauté until tender, about 7 minutes. Stir in garlic.

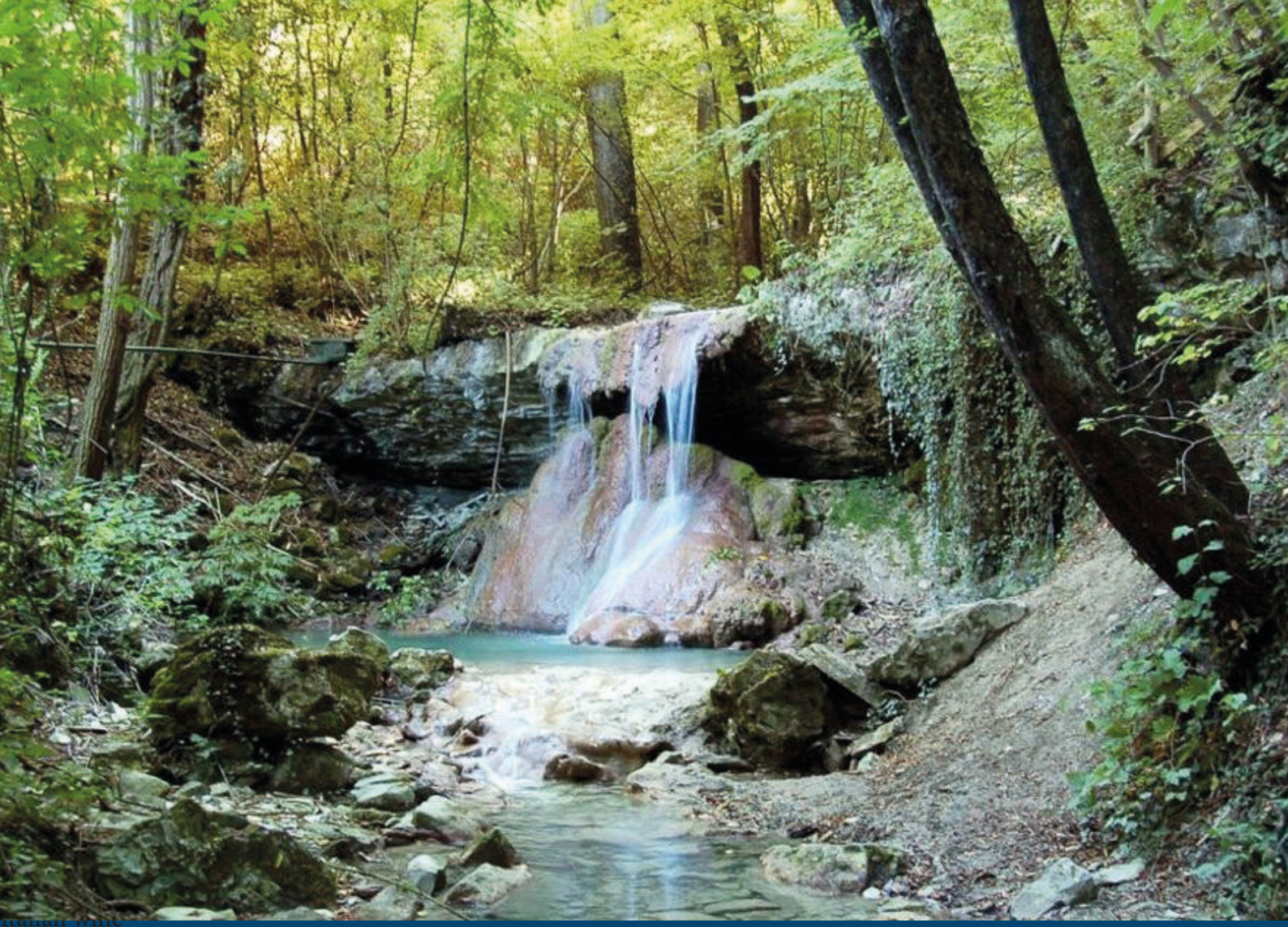
2. Add the stock to the vegetables, increase heat to high, and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium-low and add bay leaf, rosemary or thyme, salt, and pepper. Simmer, covered, for 20-30 minutes, or until vegetables are tender.

3. Purée the soup in a food processor fitted with a metal blade (carefully remove the core of the lid, and cover it with a kitchen towel, so that mixture will not burst out). Process for 20 seconds and stir in cream.

4. Pour the purée into the bowls. Sprinkle fresh black pepper and Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, and serve hot

Tip: Serve this creamy, cozy soup in the fall. It is an excellent first course and pairs well with poultry and meat. I like to serve it with turkey, and it makes an unexpected way to start the Thanksgiving meal.

Pair this dish with a bottle of Terrano del Carso or similar. A lively ruby red wine that is known for the exuberance of its acid verve and for the fragrant notes of blackberry, currant, and raspberry.



Italian territories

Frignano, land of mountains and legends in Emilia Romagna

We the Italians Editorial Staff

High in the northern Apennines, where ridges rise like rolling waves of stone, lies a territory shaped by both nature and imagination. This land, called Frignano, spreads across the Modenese mountains and has long stood as a frontier between regions and cultures. Its forests, villages, and legends make it more than a geographical area – it is a living story where past and present intertwine.

The mountains dominate every view. Monte Cimone, the tallest peak of the northern Apennines, watches over the valleys with its broad shoulders. Its slopes shift with the seasons – wildflowers and buzzing bees in spring, herds grazing in summer pastures, fiery foliage in autumn, and glittering snow in winter. From the summit, the panorama stretches north across Emilia-Romagna and south into Tuscany, underscoring the region's role as a threshold between worlds.

Frignano's forests create vast, shaded cathedrals of beech, oak, and fir. They shelter wolves, deer, wild boar, and golden eagles that soar above the ridges. Among these woods, chestnut groves once sustained entire communities. The chestnut tree was known as "the bread of the mountains" – its nuts dried, ground into flour, and stored to carry families through long winters. Even today, the scent of roasted chestnuts at village festivals carries memories of survival and solidarity.

Stone villages seem to grow out of the slopes themselves. Houses built from local rock cluster tightly around piazzas, while bell towers rise like beacons above

tiled roofs. Romanesque churches and medieval towers line ancient roads once crossed by merchants and pilgrims. These paths carried wool, salt, and spices, but also ideas, faith, and music. Life was never easy in these mountains, yet hardship bred resilience, pride, and strong community ties.

One of Frignano's jewels is Lago Santo, a glacial lake. Surrounded by forests and peaks, the lake mirrors the changing sky, from bright summer blue to moody autumn grays. Families hike along its trails, anglers cast lines from its shores, and in winter, snow transforms the entire basin into a quiet, frozen world. For centuries, Lago Santo has inspired both practical use – as a water source and pasture landmark – and poetic imagination, fueling local tales of spirits and mysterious lights flickering on its surface.

Not far from the lake lies Pievepelago, a town that captures the essence of Frignano. Its name recalls the medieval parish church (pieve) that once served as a religious and civic center for scattered mountain hamlets. Today, Pievepelago welcomes visitors with alpine charm, offering access to ski slopes in winter and mountain trails in summer. Its streets reveal

layers of history – old stone houses, shrines at crossroads, and memories of the partisan resistance that found refuge in these mountains during World War II. The town's role as a gateway between Emilia-Romagna and Tuscany makes it a crossroads of dialects, traditions, and hospitality.

The Regional Park of the Upper Modenese Apennines safeguards much of this landscape. Covering ridges, valleys, and alpine meadows, the park protects biodiversity and offers countless opportunities for outdoor adventure. In summer, trails lead to panoramic ridgelines where edelweiss and gentians bloom. In winter, Monte Cimone becomes a hub for skiing and snowboarding, while snowshoes crunch softly along forest paths. The park ensures that Frignano's natural beauty remains not just a backdrop but a living environment where people and nature coexist.

Yet Frignano is also a land of stories. For centuries, villagers explained the mysteries of life through legends that blurred fact and fantasy. Witches feature prominently in these tales – sometimes feared as bringers of storms and misfortune, other times respected as healers with knowledge of herbs and

Lago Santo

remedies. Enchanted animals also roam the folklore: wolves that vanish into mist, serpents guarding sacred springs, or spectral lights leading travelers astray. These stories gave meaning to natural forces that felt uncontrollable, transforming fear into narrative and shared memory.

Bandits and hidden treasures also play their part. Tales abound of gold buried beneath ruined towers or caves concealing gateways to other worlds. The landscape itself became a stage for imagination – lakes like Santo linked to spirits, cliffs associated with heroic deeds, and groves where people swore they had seen gatherings of otherworldly beings. The myths remind us that Frignano's identity is not only carved in stone and wood but also in the invisible realm of belief.

History, too, left strong marks. Castles perched on ridges guarded valleys and trade routes, their ruins still looming over forests. Stone bridges arch over torrents, silent witnesses to the passage of armies, merchants, and pilgrims. During the 20th century, these mountains became a theater of resistance during World War II. Partisan fighters used their knowledge of ridges and valleys to oppose occupation, adding another layer of courage and sacrifice to the local memory.

Montecuccolo Castle

Today, visitors to Frignano discover both the tangible and the intangible. They hike through alpine forests, savor chestnut cakes and mountain cheeses, and listen to stories that keep alive the witches, spirits, and heroes of the past. Festivals bring communities together with music, food, and folklore, creating bridges between generations. In the small towns of this beautiful territory, elders recount winters of hardship and nights of storytelling by the fire, while children race through alleys that echo with laughter.

Frignano is not a museum frozen in time – it is alive, adapting while preserving its soul. Its mountains remain steady, but the people give them meaning, weaving history, legend, and daily life into a single fabric. To explore this land is to experience both the grounding force of stone and forest and the soaring flight of imagination.

This is Frignano's gift: a place where the natural and the mythical, the historic and the present, merge seamlessly. From Monte Cimone to Lago Santo to the high meadows of the park, it invites us to see the world not only with practical eyes but also with wonder.

Italian sustainability

Italy's circular revolution, from wasted food to vegan leather made of coffee

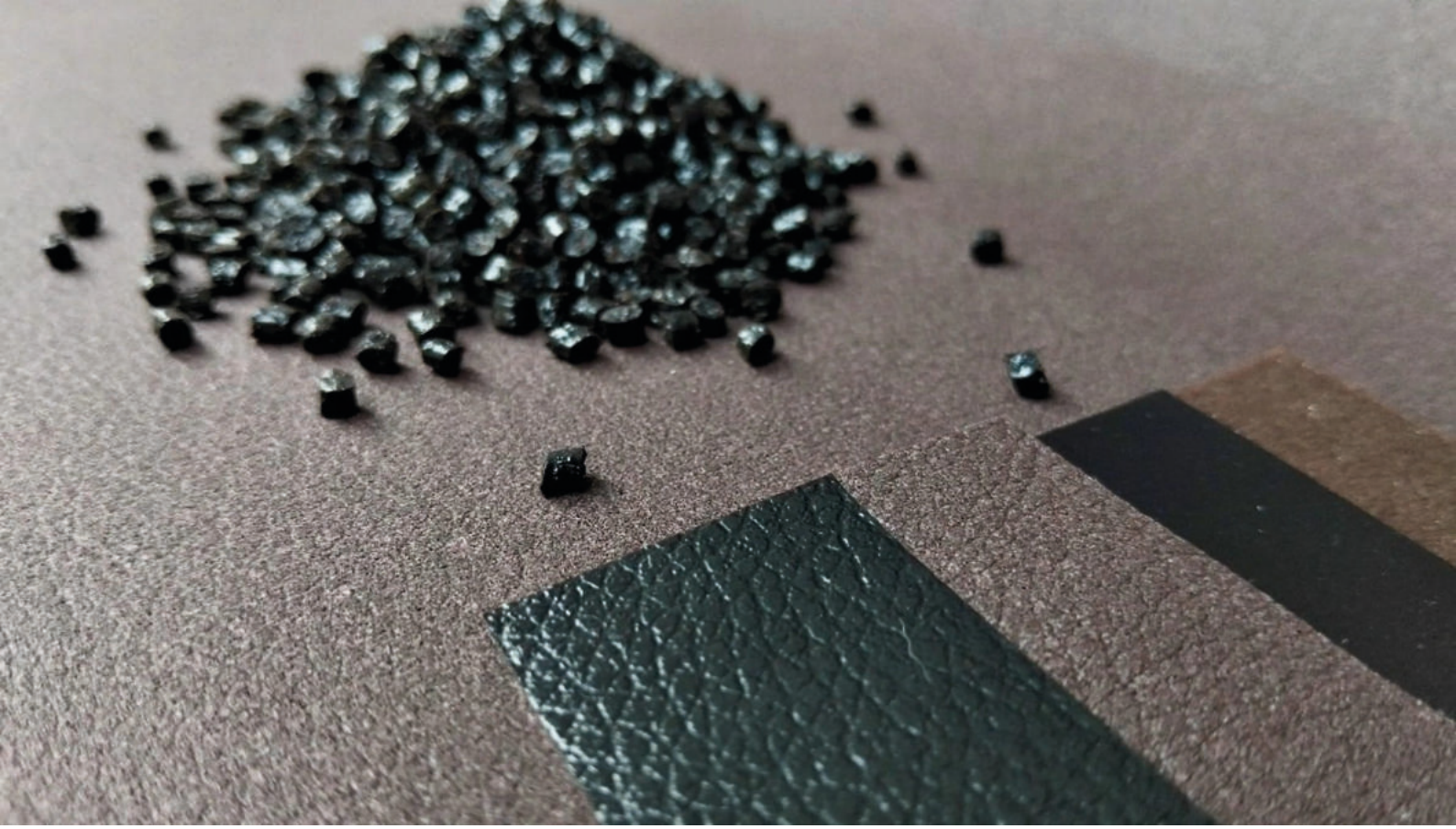
We the Italians Editorial Staff

Every year globally, roughly one-third of all food produced – about 1.5 billion tons – ends up in the trash rather than on plates. That loss occurs even while 673 million people struggle with hunger, and 2.3 billion face food insecurity. Wastefulness like this isn't just a moral crisis – it's also a climate disaster, responsible for nearly 10 % of all greenhouse gas emissions.

In Italy, there are encouraging signs of change, but the challenge remains enormous. According to recent data from the Waste Watcher International Observatory, Italian households discard over 6.7 million tons of food annually, emitting some 5.5 million tons of CO_2 in the process. During August 2025 alone, average weekly waste per person reached 555.8 grams – a reduction from 683 grams in

August 2024. The goal is to reach 369.7 grams per week by 2030.

Geographically, waste varies across the country: central Italy emerges as the most restrained region (490.6 grams/week), while northern areas average 515.2 grams and southern regions climb to 628.6 grams. Interestingly, households with children waste 17 % less food than those without, and the biggest municipalities outperform smaller towns. The most commonly discarded items include fresh fruit (22.9 g), vegetables (21.5 g), and bread (19.5 g). Economic pressures might be nudging behavior: with food inflation surging – especially for produce, oil, and rice – many consumers have become more deliberate in their purchases. The report notes that 45 % of Italians now try to consume perishable foods first, while 21 % increase shopping frequency and 19 % lean toward longer-shelf products. Still, 14 % say they haven't altered their habits, and only 6 % deny that heat stress has affected food spoilage.



Italy also sees shifts in consumer values: 37 % emphasize "Made in Italy" goods in the context of global tensions, especially among 35–44-year-olds and seniors. One in ten prioritize low cost regardless of sustainability, while 5 % say they've cut food spending for economic reasons – a proportion that doubles among those under 25. Two-thirds of Italians claim they've increased or maintained a high level of attention to environmental impact in their food choices.

This battle against waste intersects powerfully with innovation. In northern Italy, a start-up called Biosyness is manufacturing a new kind of vegan leather using discarded coffee residue. Its founder, Alireza Mansouri, combined his studies in biotechnology and bioeconomics with a novel vision: transform coffee byproducts into durable, eco-friendly material.

Globally, coffee processing generates about 40 million tons of waste every year. Among these byproducts is "silverskin," a thin film that detaches during roasting and accounts for 1–2 % of the bean's weight. Biosyness acquires it from Italian roasters, grinds it, and fuses it with bio-derived thermoplastic polymers – no solvents, plasticizers, or synthetic dyes involved. The resulting material is modular: formulas can vary between 50/50 silverskin to bio-TPU or skew higher toward biomaterials (80–95 %).

The company reports abrasion resistance up to 120,000 cycles, UV stability, fire-retardant options, and a light, natural coffee scent (removable via treatment). Rolls of this leather are now available in multiple colors and up to 6 mm thickness. Importantly, at end of life the material can be recycled within plastic waste streams.

Biosyness claims its process cuts CO_2 emissions and water use by at least 80 % compared to conventional synthetic or natural leather. In the vegan leather market projected to surpass a billion dollars by 2030, European furnishings and accessories could account for $47 million – of which northern Italy might capture $12 million. Already, the company works with a dozen Italian industrial partners and aims for scalability across the country.

Together, the stories of food waste and circular materials illustrate a broader shift in Italy – toward biocircular systems, responsible consumption, and technological creativity that turns discard into value. The path is long, but the pieces are coming together.

Italian historical trademarks

Lucano 1894

Associazione Marchi Storici d'Italia

Founded in the heart of Basilicata and now one of the founding members of the Association of Historic Italian Brands, Lucano 1894 has turned a local liqueur into one of the leading names in Italy's spirits industry. Amaro Lucano was born in Pisticci, in the province of Matera, at the end of the 19th century, thanks to the intuition of a young man named Pasquale Vena. Its success was immediate – so much so that it soon became the official sup-

plier to the House of Savoy.

After a forced break during World War II, caused by a shortage of raw materials, the company resumed its path of growth, evolving from a small artisanal workshop into a nationally recognized enterprise. It was also among the pioneers of modern advertising, investing in innovative campaigns and memorable slogans – most notably the famous "Cosa vuoi di più dalla vita? Un Lucano" ("What more could you want from life? A Lucano"), which became a registered trademark of the brand itself.

Today, Lucano 1894 celebrates its heritage through initiatives such as the "Essenza Lucano" Museum, where young artists and designers reinterpret the company's story in a creative language that speaks to new generations. While maintaining a strong bond with its roots and the Lucanian territory, the company plays a key role in promoting the image and values of Made in Italy around the world.

Alongside tradition, innovation has become a strategic driver of growth – from refreshing the brand identity to developing new products and forming partnerships with other Italian excellence. Lucano 1894 has shown how to look to the future without losing authenticity. The focus on high-quality raw materials, atten-

tion to local communities, and commitment to a more responsible supply chain now form the pillars of its entrepreneurial vision.

The Vena family, now in its fourth generation with Francesco, Leonardo, and Letizia Vena, leads the company alongside experienced managers and consultants, continuing its expansion in international markets. Today, Amaro Lucano is sold in over 30 countries, serving as an ambassador of Italian culture around the world – a historic brand that not only preserves more than 130 years of tradition, but continues to evolve with a focus on sustainability, innovation, and consumer well-being.

Italian sport

Elia Viviani, the Italian who beat time

Federico Pasquali

There's a moment in every cyclist's life when the roar of the peloton fades into a distant echo. The wheels stop whirring, the radios go silent, and all that's left is breath. Elia Viviani has crossed that threshold many times: on the final stretch of a Giro d'Italia stage, on the gleaming wood of an Olympic velodrome, or during the lonely winter miles of training.

Always there, in that suspended instant where time seems to bend, Viviani has found himself.

Maybe that's why, in the end, they called him "the man who beat time."

Born in 1989 in Isola della Scala, near Verona in Veneto, he tried everything as a child: tennis, skating, soccer. But it was the bike, that light and noisy machine, that captured his heart. As a teenager, he switched effortlessly between road and track. While others chose one path, he refused to.

To him, there was no border between asphalt and wood, between the wind that pushes and the air that resists. The two worlds blended together. That duality, which would become his signature, was already taking shape back then, amid the flatlands of home and his first national races. And when cycling entered a new era with the birth of the World Tour, Viviani was ready for the global stage.

In 2010, he signed his first professional contract with Liquigas-Doimo. A polite, soft-spoken young man off the bike, he transformed the moment he gripped the handlebars. In his first stage races, he showed startling speed. He wasn't yet the champion he would become, but it was clear he had something rare - a natural smoothness, a perfect balance of power and control. In modern cycling, few have dared to live two athletic lives at once. For most cyclists, the track is a

youthful memory, a brief detour. For him, it was always another home.

When he joined Team Sky in 2015, he entered a scientific, almost military environment. Everything was regulated, from schedules to diet. But for Viviani, science never replaced instinct. He was an athlete who listened to his body, not just his data. And when he lined up in the Italian jersey at the 2016 Rio Olympics, he carried both parts of himself: English discipline and Italian fire. On August 14, 2016, inside the Rio velodrome, he rode the omnium of his life. That race, a blend of endurance, tactics, and explosiveness, was the perfect expression of who he was.

By the end of the day, when the scoreboard lit up and "Viviani" stood above all the others, time truly stopped. Italy saw an Olympic track gold it hadn't seen in decades. Through tears and disbelief, he realized that victory was more than a medal: it was proof that one could live between two worlds without betraying either.

After Rio, he turned his focus back to the road. In 2018, he joined Quick-Step, the cathedral of sprinters.

In that winning machine, Viviani found his purest form. That year, he became one of the fastest men on the planet, taking four Giro d'Italia stages, three at the Vuelta a España, the points classification, and a string of prestigious races. His sprinting style was elegant - almost surgical - no panic, only timing. As the peloton split, he found the right line and launched. In a few seconds, anticipation became certainty. In 2019, he added a Tour de France stage and a European Championship title to his résumé.

After Quick-Step came Cofidis. During the pandemic, cycling changed again, and so did he. He returned to the track, winning world medals and an Olympic bronze in Tokyo. He was no longer racing just for himself, but for the craft, for a profession that must outlive results. Every time he mounted his bike, his body carried twenty years of memory: his first races, triumphs, defeats, and early morning starts. Perhaps that's what "beating time" truly means.

When he rejoined Ineos in 2022, he was a different man - not the ambitious youngster from a de-

cade earlier, but a mature athlete - one who could read a race, knowing when to push with his legs and when to rely on his mind. He kept winning smaller road races, but when he decided to focus once more on the velodrome, the circle began to close. The track was no longer the place of youth, but of remembrance.

Between 2021 and 2022, he became world champion in the elimination race, a ruthless, fascinating event where the last rider each lap is eliminated. It's almost a metaphor for sport itself, where endurance is as much mental as physical. That world title at 33 symbolized an athlete refusing to yield to the calendar: a way of saying that time could still be beaten, at least for a few more laps.

And then came 2025. Viviani still races, less frantically but with the same grace. In the spring, he wins a stage at the Tour of Turkey, as if to prove his legs still have power. When he lines up at the Track World Championships a month ago, no one knows it will be his final race. Crossing the finish line first, claiming gold in the elimination race once again, he doesn't even raise his arms. He simply smiles, as if that victory, more than a triumph, were a farewell to a world that owes so much to a champion named Elia Viviani.

Italian good news

Italian workers growing happier across the country, with southern regions leading the way

We the Italians Editorial Staff

New data indicate that Italian workers are feeling increasingly satisfied with their jobs – a positive trend that's emerging across nearly all regions, from Lombardy to Sicily. The shift reflects a broader cultural and organizational change that's reshaping the way Italians view work, well-being, and personal fulfillment.

Several factors are fueling this rise in happiness. Flexible work schedules have become more common, helping employees balance professional duties with personal and family life.

Remote and hybrid work – once a temporary response to necessity – is now a standard practice, particularly in central and northern Italy. Employers are also giving greater importance to mental health, creating wellness programs and offering extra time off to prevent burnout.

Management culture is evolving too. Many companies are adopting more collaborative approaches where communication is open and workers are encouraged to contribute ideas. Employees report feeling more appreciated and involved – and when people feel heard, motivation naturally grows. Recognition, whether through promotions, bonuses, or even small acknowledgments, remains one of the strongest drivers of satisfaction.

While salaries have not risen dramatically, the overall quality of employment packages has improved. Many firms now offer better health coverage, childcare and family support, education benefits, and additional vacation time. These perks are particularly valued by workers seeking stability or trying to balance multiple responsibilities.

Interestingly, the biggest gains in job satisfaction are being reported in central and southern Italy – especially in regions such as Campania, Puglia, Sicily, and Lazio. After years of economic challenges, these areas are now benefiting from new investments in digital infrastructure, regional development, and local entrepreneurship. Smaller towns and rural areas are also showing signs of revival, as employers modernize and

adopt people-centered policies that make local jobs more appealing.

Northern regions like Lombardy, Emilia-Romagna, and Veneto continue to lead in innovation and workplace flexibility, but they now face stronger competition from the South, where younger professionals are increasingly choosing to stay rather than migrate northward or abroad. This rebalancing of opportunities is helping reduce regional disparities that have long defined Italy's labor market.

The sectors showing the sharpest improvements include technology, design, and professional services – fields where autonomy, creativity, and digital tools enhance daily work. However, manufacturing, agriculture, and manual trades still face challenges linked to physical strain, safety, and limited flexibility.

Experts suggest that happier workers could translate into stronger productivity, lower turnover, and a more competitive labor market overall. Companies that invest in employee well-being are already reporting higher engagement and creativity – proof that satisfaction pays off.

To maintain this momentum, leaders must continue to prioritize flexible work models, transparent communication, and fair treatment. Regional governments can play a vital role by supporting training programs, modern infrastructure, and policies that promote equal access to opportunities.

Across Italy – from Milan to Naples, from Florence to Palermo – the message is clear: when work culture evolves toward balance and respect, people thrive, and so does the country.

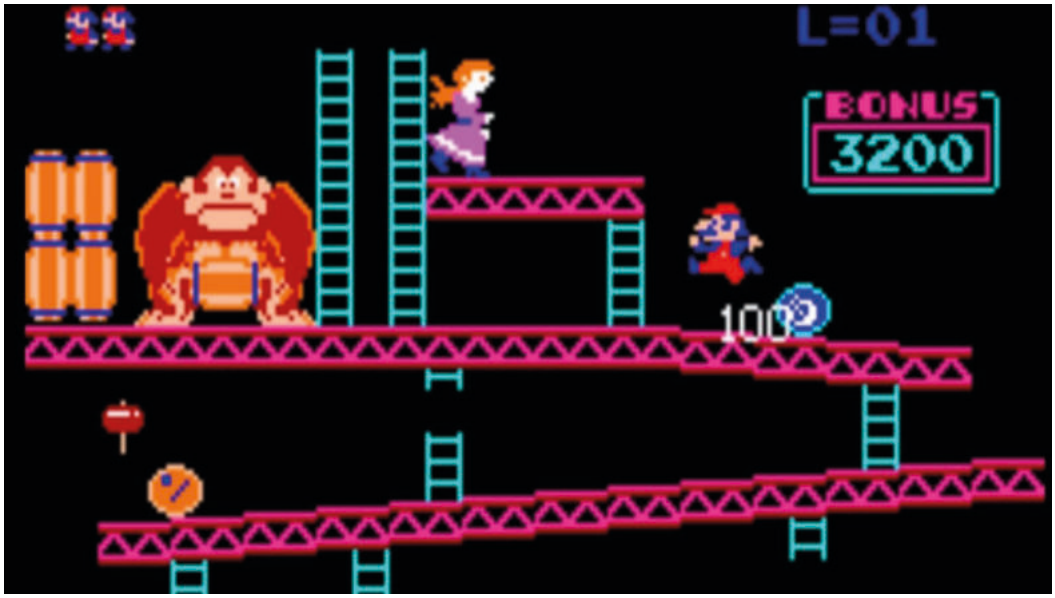
Interview with Marco Carbone

Super Mario Turns 40. How an Italian American plumber became a global icon

Umberto Mucci

In September - forty years ago - Nintendo released a video game that changed the history of global entertainment. It was called Super Mario Bros., and it featured an Italian American plumber who had already appeared in a previous game, Donkey Kong (1981). That game was so successful that in 1983 Nintendo launched Mario Bros. But it was in 1985 that Mario - now Super Mario - became a worldwide phenomenon.

Donkey Kong 1981



To mark the fortieth anniversary of this global success, We the Italians is pleased to host Professor Marco Benoît Carbone, author of one of the most complete and insightful essays ever written on Super Mario: Olive Face, Italian Voice: Constructing Super Mario as an Italian-American (1981-1996).

Professor Carbone, I'd like to start by asking how your interest in the character of Super Mario began.

My first memory of this character goes back almost forty years, to an elementary school party. I remember everyone's eyes fixed on a gray box, which I soon discovered was a Nintendo console, and a single obsessive chant: "Let's play Super Mario." Seeing characters that could move freely on the TV screen was fascinating. Then I became curious about the fact that the character had an Italian name.

Several years later, I learned that Nintendo games came from Japan. So I began to wonder what the story

Mario Bros 1983

Super Mario Bros 1985

behind Super Mario was. I think it was in those moments that a certain vague curiosity began to take shape. Many years after that, it grew into a historical interest in a pop icon that has reached the popularity - and perhaps, in part, the cultural significance - of a Donald Duck or a Mickey Mouse.

In your work, you describe the three main stages in the writing of the character Super Mario, from his beginnings to his evolution...

I simply outlined - without intending to be too schematic - a few stages in the development of a long-lived and now multifaceted intellectual property.

In the early 1980s, Super Mario was a very generic Mediterranean character: an Italian American, as that identity might have been perceived from the perspective of a Japanese creator who loved comics and cinema - Shigeru Miyamoto. This artist had been hired by Nintendo, a company that had originally produced playing cards, some under license from Walt Disney.

Super Mario Bros Game and watch

Miyamoto set out on a special mission: to transform the company's video games, based in Kyoto, into experiences that weren't just about skill and challenge, but revolved around stories, gags, and memorable characters. He worked on several games that would prove revolutionary in terms of design and character presentation: Donkey Kong, Mario Bros., and later Super Mario Bros., which had an explosive commercial impact.

At first, we control Jumpman. He later takes the name Ma-

Shigeru Miyamoto

rio - perhaps because Miyamoto was looking for a character who wasn't too Japanese or too stereotypical, someone recognizable and funny both in Japan and in the United States, a market Nintendo was strongly targeting. As for the Italian connection, maybe Miyamoto had seen The Godfather by Francis Ford Coppola, or perhaps he had been exposed to the classic imagery of the Italian immigrant working-class man with suspenders and a flat cap - a figure often seen in films and animated productions.

There was probably also a broader cultural context dating back to the postwar years. If the goal was to create a likable, slightly quirky, and original character, then an Italian one might work. Japan viewed Italy as a particular kind of "West": not the American superpower or the former British Empire, not the industrial rival Germany or the proud France. Perhaps Italy was different, as some scholars like Toshio Miyake have suggested - it was a failed former ally of World War II, and a country perceived as tied to folklore, cuisine, art, traditions, and family values, all seen as positive traits in Japan. In any case, the vagueness of the Italian reference made it intriguing.

Moreover, as I mentioned, Italians were well known in American culture - the market in which Nintendo had strong commercial interests. When Super Mario arrived in the United States, the character became a success, perhaps beyond Nintendo's own expectations. Maybe this was because, in that multiethnic, immigrant nation, Italian Americans were a very recognizable demographic group, turning Mario into a pop phenomenon. Everyone wanted to license the character's memorable face for all kinds of merchandise: pasta boxes, pins, stickers, telephones, detergents, comic books, cartoons, and TV shows - where his "ethnic" traits were often exaggerated.

Brooklyn

The Japanese creators took note of this success. Toward the end of the 1980s, they updated Super Mario's model sheet (a document describing the character for production and creative use), specifying that he was Italian American - more precisely, a New Yorker from Brooklyn.

That trait would continue to define the character to this day, although in later decades the company chose to handle Mario's identity with great flexibility. In some games, his only Italian feature is his name. Mario became part of a vast, Disney-like universe of characters encompassing hundreds of games and products. Super Mario is Nintendo's most successful brand, and the character must remain well-defined enough to be memorable, yet vague enough to adapt from one product to another - from a classic platform game to a tennis match.

Nonetheless, in many instances, his Italian identity becomes more pronounced: Mario rides a Vespa, utters phrases like "mamma mia" and "it's-a-me, Mario" (with that trademark schwa between

vowels, straight from the Italenglish cliché), and dreams of plates of spaghetti, pici, ravioli, and lasagna.

Your research focuses particularly on voice, dubbing, and accent. Could you tell us more about this topic?

Around the mid-1990s, new media and technologies were evolving. Orchestral music, voice acting, and recorded dialogue started to become potential selling points because they made characters feel more alive and dynamic. Nintendo began experimenting with giving Super Mario a voice, and after a few trials in niche products, decided to make it official in Super Mario 64.

That voice was provided by actor Charles Martinet, who - although recently replaced - remains the voice most audiences associate with Mario. Martinet is a seasoned performer, and when it came time to experiment with what kind of voice Mario should have, he began with the idea of an Italian accent. In shaping it, he drew on a well-established repertoire of national "types" (and stereotypes) that actors and voice performers had long used for cartoon characters - and not just

it's-a-me, Mario

cartoons. Ever since the advent of sound cinema, there have been fascinating acting manuals filled with stereotyped instructions on how to reproduce the speech patterns of various ethnicities and nationalities.

Charles Martinet

Super Mario 64

The result was a kind of hyperreal Italian - warm and humorous - that playfully exaggerated traits English speakers tend to associate with Italians: the rolled r, the inserted vowel in it's-a-me, and a certain musical rhythm.

What's the difference between this and Wiseguy English, the cadence used by many Italian American film characters that shaped the popular image of Sicilian-accented Italian Americans in flat caps?

Before Martinet, there had been a few attempts using deeper, more adult male voices with accents typical of New Jersey or nearby areas. But Martinet struck a unique balance by blending two accent types. The first is that of a second-generation Italian American - the kind you hear in movies, especially gangster films - which could be described as an ethnically accented native English. The second is a deliberately and playfully ungrammatical inflection, like that of a non-native speaker, delivered in a bright, childlike register, as you'd expect from a joyful, cartoonish character with a neotenic look.

The mix turned out to be a huge success - and it became the standard for the Super Mario voice.

What is the relationship between Super Mario and the stereotypes and clichés that have always surrounded Italian Americans?

When Super Mario made his way to the United States, a flood of licensed products followed. Some of these were video games - and in those cases, Nintendo maintained relatively tight control over how its characters were portrayed, keeping them within the boundaries of products designed to emphasi-

ze cultural indeterminacy and a whimsical, fairy-tale tone meant to appeal to audiences all over the world. In other cases, such as the television series produced in the U.S., the fact that they were external productions led to more localized cultural portrayals.

As a result, a few old stereotypes resurfaced - though in a lighthearted and harmless way. In the TV series The Super Mario Bros. Super Show (1989), a mix of animation and live action, Mario and Luigi are portrayed as loud, boisterous, working-class Italians obsessed with food - a familiar trope in Anglophone popular culture. In some episodes of the same series, there are "turf war" scenes between cartoonish factions where Mario and his friends wear pinstripe suits, along with other visual references that risk evoking the image of the Italian American gangster - a figure that has long shaped portrayals of Italians in the U.S. (drawing criticism from organizations like the Italian Anti-Defamation League, but also contributing to the enduring and controversial glamour of New Hollywood films).

In any case, a few traces of stereotyping even seeped into the localization of the games themselves. The evil little mushrooms Mario crushes in the original Japanese version were called kuribō; in English, they became the "Goom-

Super Mario Brothers Super Show

bas," derived from "goombah" or "coombah." This slang comes from regional dialects spoken in Italian American communities - compare, cumpari, cumpà. In the U.S., it could mean both "friend" and, unfortunately, "neighborhood gangster."

In your essay, you introduce the concepts of "oliveface" and "olive-voice." What do you mean by that?

They're two terms I use to discuss how cultural industries - such as film, media, and even video games - have codified Mediterranean characters through an ethnic lens: that of the olive, or olive-toned identity. The "olive face" is that of the typical or stereotypical Mediterranean character - darker skin, prominent features, body hair, passionate temperament, and other cultural projections and expectations. "Olive voice," by metaphorical extension, refers to the way of speaking a second language with the accent of a Mediterranean character.

When Mario was first given a spoken voice, Nintendo hired someone who neither spoke Italian nor was of Italian descent. The actor, therefore, performed the voice from outside the culture. To do so, he drew upon established cues for how an "Italian" should sound in a cartoon or similar medium. These cues weren't just informal conventions - they were

Goombas

also reflected in acting manuals of the time, which offered precise guidance on how to reproduce "foreign" accents. This reflected how Anglophone culture perceived non-native languages as something minor, easily reduced to a few recognizable traits.

Historically, such clichés provided actors and voice performers with "economical" formulas: the Mediterranean character should have this olive complexion, should pronounce English with an Italian (or Greek) accent; perhaps they love olive oil, pizza, and pasta - just like our neighbor, our friend who runs the Italian restaurant, or like the Super Mario from the TV series.

The oliveface character, then, displays recognizable traits believed to belong to their group - positive or negative - which may be internalized or rejected by members of that group themselves. Stereotypes, in fact, pose a potential "threat" to those being represented (hence the term stereotype threat): according to such generalizations, all Italians should be dark-haired, should speak in a certain way, should have a certain personality, should love pasta, should share the same culture and history. But what if that's not true?

Cultural industries and media have always been central to these now widely debated processes - from issues of wartime propaganda to contemporary questions of diversity in cinema. My formulation draws on Black theory, a field that critically examines the power of cultural industries to create symbolic realities with significant political effects. For centuries, Black and Indigenous identities have suffered simplifications, caricatures, and degrading practices such as blackface, which reduced them to comic stereotypes in stories where they were objects of ridicule.

By talking about oliveface and olivevoice, I didn't intend to draw an exact parallel between that long history of abuse and degradation and the Italian or Mediterranean experience - these are very different stories, even though Italian identities have historically occupied a complex place within the dominant American notion of "whiteness." My goal was simply to focus on the representational processes that show clear parallels: the communication of a stylized, simplified identity.


THE SUPER
MARIO
BROS.
MOVIE

Bob Hoskins

Super Mario is an Italian American plumber from Brooklyn, starring in games, movies, ads, and TV shows. What impact has he had on American and Italian American youth culture?

A remarkable impact - because, as I mentioned earlier, Super Mario has become a pop icon capable of transcending the world of video games alone.

In the United States, Italian Americans are a recognizable and well-loved group. During the 1980s - and especially the 1990s - Italy itself was becoming globally recognizable thanks to Made in Italy: fashion, food, automotive design, art. People spoke of an "Italy boom" in many parts of the world, when everyone began to celebrate Italian cuisine, pasta, wine, and opera music. Being Italian was, for a long time, hip - and at times, even fashionable.

This definitely influenced the character's success. However, as I mentioned, there's been a transformation in the way Super Mario and other characters express their "Italian-ness." In recent years - perhaps over the past decade - the Japanese parent company has taken a much more careful and strategic approach to managing its assets. Now, the most diverse products show a much greater visual and thematic consistency than in the past. The animated Super Mario we see in theaters today is a very coherent

extension of the current video game version - he has the same face, lives in the same worlds, and is essentially the same character.

In short, it's unlikely we'll ever see another movie like the one starring Bob Hoskins as the stocky Italian plumber (Super Mario Bros., 1993), which had little to do with the cartoonish video games of the time - or another TV show featuring Mario and Luigi as middle-aged, loud, and jokey plumbers, like in the television series of the 1980s.

Forty years after the release of Super Mario Bros., why do you think this character has enjoyed such extraordinary success?

It's certainly a combination of factors - perhaps, taken together, difficult to decode or even impossible to fully grasp - though we can try to identify a few of them.

Without a doubt, Super Mario is synonymous with and a guarantee of high-quality video games. In some cases, these games have represented true turning points in the history of design. Thanks to them, at certain moments in time, the company itself became synonymous with video games. This success is transgenerational: today's products also sell the nostalgia of those who grew up with them - people who now buy the new versions for their own sons and daughters.

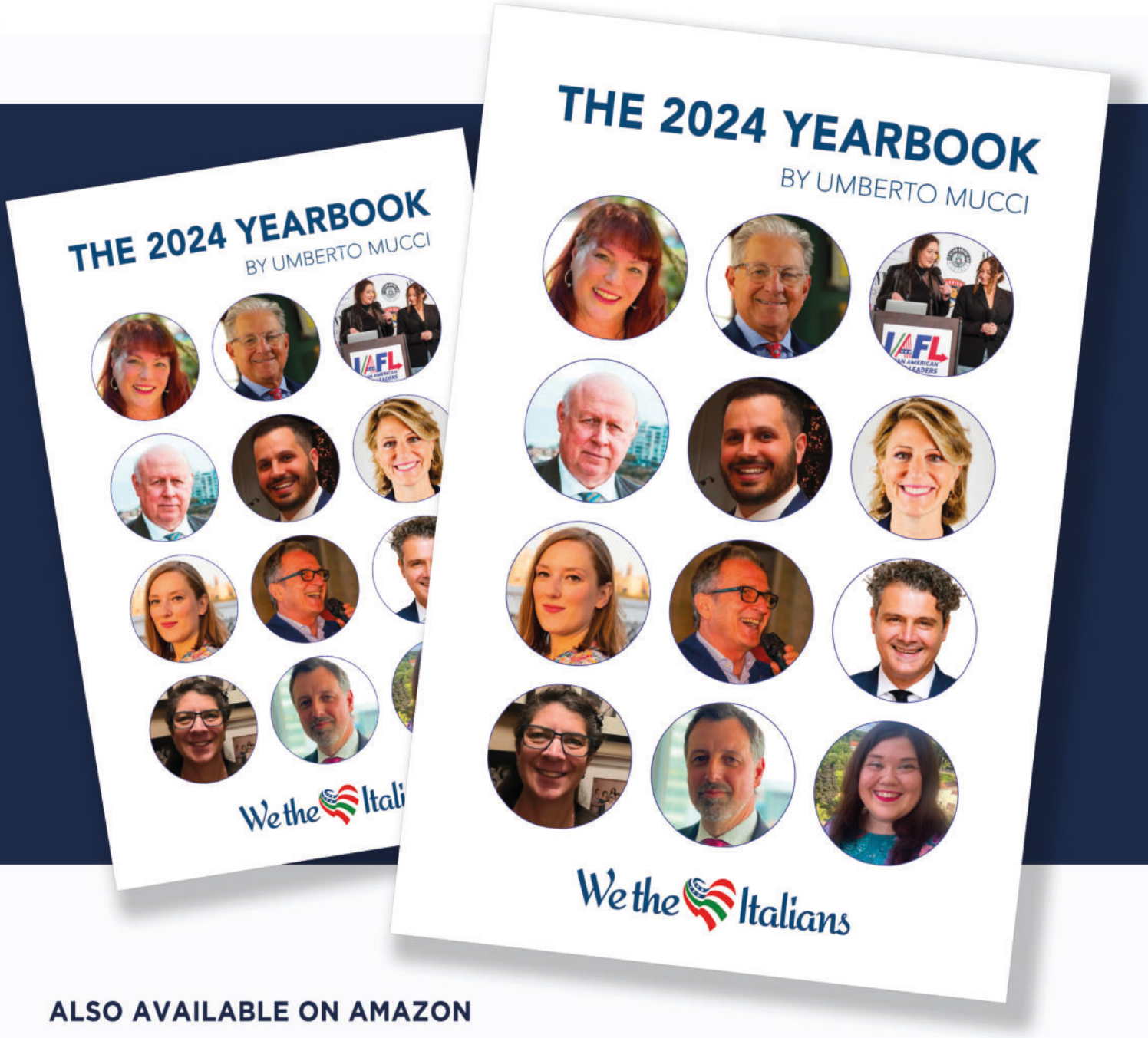
Many of the games starring Super Mario embody a philosophy aimed at transporting players into a carefree dimension. They are almost always suitable for all ages and reflect the company's historic ability to harmonize the many capacities of the video game medium - which is at once science and art, combining the thrill of control with immersion in imagery, sound, and story. Super Mario represents a universal fantasy: running through meadows, jumping across floating platforms, soaring through the air, swimming underwater. These mediated activities perhaps respond, on a psychological level, to the energetic drive of childhood - to that happy oasis theorized by Eugene Fink, who reflected on the essential existential role of play in human life.

Super Mario's face - with its now distinctly youthful, rounded features - his gentle temperament, and his positive characterization have made him a versatile figure

through whom players can forget the constraints of daily life, of the body, and of age. Mario is an avatar that fulfills, in an almost universal way, our Peter Pan syndrome.

Finally, perhaps part of his appeal really does lie in his Italian-ness: many of the positive stereotypes about Italy portray us as lovable, cheerful, loyal, passionate, and lovers of beauty and goodness - friendly and harmless. So, Super Mario may appear not only exotic yet familiar, but also capable of evoking some of those long-standing, romantic, and imprecise - yet deeply desirable - ideas about Italy.

The 2024 yearbook of
We the Italians
Two flags, One heart



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Italian design

La Spezia named UNESCO creative city for design

Alberto Improda

Italy's design industry has recently received a prestigious and important international honor. On October 31, 2025, Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO, officially proclaimed La Spezia a UNESCO Creative City for Design.

The UNESCO Creative Cities Network was established in 2004 to promote cooperation among cities that recognize creativity as a strategic element for sustainable urban development.

Announcing the new designations, Azoulay stated: "UNESCO

unesco

Member of the Creative Cities Network

Creative Cities show that culture and creative industries can be concrete drivers of development. By welcoming 58 new cities, we are strengthening a network where creativity supports local initiatives, attracts investment, and fosters social cohesion."

The designation is permanent and recognizes the city's excellence in the field of nautical design - celebrating La Spezia's creativity and production in yacht and superyacht design.

La Spezia (Liguria) is now confirmed as a world capital of the maritime industry, home to the design and production hubs of leading yacht and superyacht brands, as well as a global reference point for innovation, sustainability, and maritime culture.

The city - known as the capital of the Gulf of Poets - joins 49 other global cities recognized by UNESCO for design, including Dubai, Shanghai, Berlin, Montréal, Bangkok, Buenos Aires, and Valencia. Mayor Pierluigi Peracchini expressed his pride: "This extraordinary recognition celebrates the history, vision, and talent of our community. We worked tirelessly on this project, and today our efforts have been rewarded.

For La Spezia, design is not just a vocation - it's a language that tells the story of our culture and our ability to blend tradition with innovation. From the craftsmanship of shipwrights to the activities of the Naval Arsenal, from furniture manufacturing to interior and advanced nautical design, our city has transformed know-how into excellence, contributing decisively to the global prestige of Made in Italy. This recognition marks both a historic milestone and a new beginning: it strengthens Italy's position on the international design scene and confirms La Spezia as a true laboratory of creativity and sustainability. We are national leaders in the blue economy, and we will continue to invest in this sector. The UNESCO Creative City brand for design fills us with pride - it's a collective heritage that belongs to all the people of La Spezia."

City Councilor for Heritage Manuela Gagliardi also expressed

great satisfaction: “This important recognition places our city among more than 400 UNESCO cities worldwide. It’s a showcase that will allow us to highlight our culture and our excellence in design - always a cornerstone of our community. We believed in this project from the very beginning, back in 2022, confident that we had everything it takes to be selected. Together with key supporters, we built a proposal that captured the unique elements of La Spezia’s design culture - elements the UNESCO commission truly recognized. We are thrilled and proud of this achievement and of the international visibility our city is now gaining.”

According to Mario Gerini, President of Confindustria La Spezia, this highly coveted recognition “rewards our identity as a capital of innovation and creativity applied to industry and confirms the quality of our production ecosystem.”

A decisive role in La Spezia’s successful bid was played by the Miglio Blu (“Blue Mile”) - a short stretch of coastline, just over one

nautical mile long, between Molo Pagliari and Muggiano, where some of the world's most renowned nautical companies are located.

In this area, luxury yacht and megayacht builders such as Sanlorenzo Yacht, Riva, Ferretti Group, Baglietto, Fincantieri, Perini Navi, Cantieri Navali La Spezia, and Navale Michelini operate - making it one of the world's most concentrated centers of nautical excellence.

La Spezia also hosts the National Hub for Underwater Technologies, which attracts designers and professionals from across the globe, fostering continuous scientific, cultural, and creative exchange.
A network of research centers, university campuses, and corporate R&D departments make the city an extraordinary international laboratory for the Blue Economy, with a strong specialization in sustainable nautical design.

Culturally, La Spezia is a vibrant city filled with theaters, museums, and creative spaces, as well as an educational hub of excellence: it is the only city in Europe offering a complete academic path in nautical design - from high school diploma to master's degree.

The city's application dossier placed particular emphasis on sustainability, with several initiatives addressing social inclusion. Among the proposed projects, special attention was given to inclusion through the active involvement of local non-profit organizations and social associations.

One of the most forward-looking projects aims to attract young talent by inviting high school students from other UNESCO Creative Cities to visit La Spezia and discover its university course in nautical design.

The hope is that this recognition will not only mark a crowning achievement but also serve as a powerful starting point for La Spezia's continued growth and for the global strengthening of Italian design - both nautical and beyond.

That vision is shared by Federico Giorgilli of La Spezia, who coordinated the preparation of the UNESCO dossier in collaboration with city offices: "This title will allow us to broaden our horizons and open new paths of collaboration, generating positive outcomes for young people, students, businesses, workers, and local associations alike."

Italian culture and history

Exploring the renaissance city of Urbino

We the Italians Editorial Staff

Nestled atop a hill in Italy's Marche region, the city of Urbino invites all who wander its winding streets into a journey back to the heart of the Renaissance. The town's urban fabric remains remarkably intact–streets, walls and rooftops still retain the character they gained during the 15th century cultural explosion.

One of the city's defining monuments is the Palazzo Ducale - a masterpiece of Renaissance architecture commissioned by Duke Federico da Montefel-

tro. From its elegant façades and towers to the grand loggias and refined courtyard, the palace embodies the concept of a "city in the shape of a palace" and stands as a symbol of how art, power and place merged in Urbino's golden age. The historic centre of Urbino was recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1998 in light of its outstanding urban and architectural heritage–and especially for its role in nurturing artists, scholars and humanists who reshaped European culture. Within the city's walls one sees the result: the Cathedral, monasteries, oratories, stately homes and fortifications all forming a coherent ensemble.

Moving through the narrow alleys, you'll spot stone paved ramps and stepped walkways that link the slopes of the hill. Houses lean gently into each other; there are small medieval towers, Renaissance palazzos, and peerless views across the green undulating landscape of the Appennines. The vista from the city's fortifications gives a sweeping panorama of red tile roofs and valley below - an image that seems frozen in time.

Art remains central here. The National Gallery housed in the Palazzo Ducale holds works by masters of the Renaissance era, offering visitors glimpses of portraits, landscapes and sacred scenes that once inspired the court and city alike. Meanwhile the birthplace of Raphael Sanzio lies within the old town - a modest home today turned museum, reminding us that this UNESCO town was not only a political seat but also a seedbed of art.

Urbino is also home to one of Italy's oldest universities, founded in 1506 but with origins that trace back to the 12th century. The University of Urbino has long been a center of education and scholarship, drawing students from across Italy and beyond. Its presence in the town adds to the lively atmosphere, where the streets and piazzas are filled with young minds engaging in intellectual pursuits. The university has been instrumental in preserving and enhancing Urbino's cultural heritage, and its historic buildings blend seamlessly with the town's Renaissance architecture, making it an integral part of the city's charm. Time in Urbino moves at a gracious pace. Outside the art filled interiors, cafés line tiny squares, students from the local university mingle with tourists, and the rhythm of daily life remains unhurried. The preservation of

the urban layout and historical volume means that architecture, street life and topography merge seamlessly.

If you plan to visit, allow yourself to climb the slopes connecting one quarter to another, pausing at vantage points where you can look back on the rooftops and onward to the horizon. Consider visiting the palace at a meal break, then wander toward the museum or the cathedral. In the evening the town quiets, lights come on, and the silhouette of the Palazzo stands out against twilight–serene, elegant and slightly remote from the bustle of modern travel.

In short, Urbino is more than a city to tick off a list - it is a living relic of the Renaissance, preserved in stone and atmosphere. It offers visitors the rare chance to walk within a world shaped by humanist ideals, architectural ambition and artistic excellence–and to feel how that legacy still lingers in narrow lanes, lofty loggias and silent courtyards.

Italian healthcare

Italy's quiet health improvements. Fewer deaths from chronic diseases

We the Italians Editorial Staff

In recent years, Italy has achieved one of the most encouraging public-health successes in its modern history – a sharp decline in deaths caused by non-communicable diseases such as cancer, heart disease, stroke and diabetes. Between 2010 and 2019, the risk of dying before age 80 from these chronic illnesses fell by about 2.5 percentage points for women and 4.2 points for men. Behind those numbers lies a

mix of social change, better prevention and a stronger health-care system.

The improvement is not accidental. Italy's National Health Service has long emphasized prevention and access for everyone, and in the past decade those efforts have expanded. Screening programs for breast, cervical and colorectal cancer have become more widespread and effective, while campaigns promoting healthier lifestyles – less smoking, more exercise and better diets – have gained real traction. These measures, combined with advances in treatment and earlier diagnosis, have saved tens of thousands of lives.

The fall in male mortality is particularly striking. Men in Italy have historically shown higher rates of smoking, alcohol use and high blood pressure, but recent years have seen steady improvements in habits and treatment. Public education, anti-tobacco laws, and the Mediterranean diet's lasting influence have all contributed. Cardiovascular deaths, once a major threat to men in middle age, have dropped thanks to better control of hypertension, cholesterol and diabetes, and faster emergency response for

heart attacks and strokes.
For women, the decline in mortality reflects decades of investment in cancer prevention and a growing awareness of gender-specific health risks. Regular screening, improved gynecological care and broader health literacy have played a crucial role. Women also tend to seek medical advice earlier than men, which increases the effectiveness of early detection and management.

Equally important is the role of Italy's universal health-care system. Despite financial pressures, it continues to guarantee coverage for all citizens and to deliver complex treatments at low or no cost. Hospitals and regional health authorities have improved their capacity to manage chronic conditions, offering continuous follow-up and integrating primary care with specialist services. This long-term support helps patients live longer, healthier lives even with chronic disease.

Italy's population is among the oldest in the world, and that demographic reality makes the progress even more meaningful. Fewer premature deaths mean that more people reach old age in good health, but it also highlights the need to prepare for new challenges: managing multiple chronic conditions, maintaining quality of life and ensuring that prevention reaches the elderly as effectively as the young.

While the country still faces lifestyle-related risks – obesity, sedentary behavior and persistent regional inequalities in health outcomes – the trend is clear: Italy is moving in the right direction. The data confirm that public-health policies, prevention programs and equitable access to care make a measurable difference.

In short, Italy's decline in deaths from non-communicable diseases is not just a statistical victory but a cultural one. It reflects a society that values prevention, community health and solidarity. The next step will be to keep strengthening those values – so that living longer also means living better.

Italian curiosities

The story of the Leaning Tower of Pisa, a beautiful mistake

We the Italians Editorial Staff

In August 1173, under the Tuscan sun in the Piazza dei Miracoli, master builder Bonanno Pisano began what was meant to be the most magnificent bell tower of the Cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta. Pisa, then a powerful maritime republic, wanted a monument that would display its glory to the world. But beneath the surface, the soil held a hidden flaw – layers of sand and clay so soft they could barely support the weight of marble.

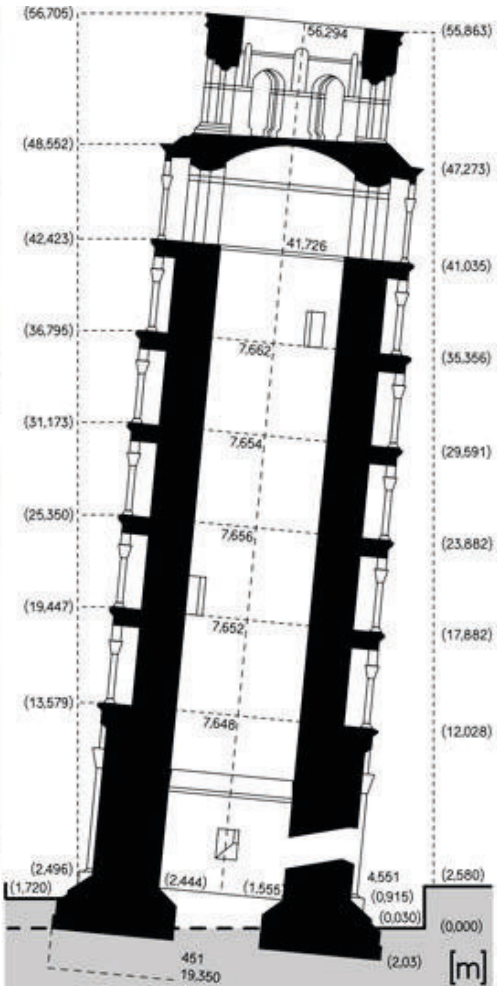
By 1178, when the third level was finished, the tower began its slow lean toward the south. Workers were stunned, unsure whether to continue or tear it down. Soon after, wars with Florence and Ge-

noa forced construction to stop. The half-built tower stood silent for nearly a century – and that unexpected pause would prove its salvation. During those long decades, the unstable ground settled and the structure found a fragile balance that kept it standing.

When work resumed, new architects tried to correct the tilt with clever adjustments. Giovanni di Simone and later Tommaso Pisano designed the upper floors with one side slightly taller than the other, creating a gentle opposite curve – the subtle "banana" shape that remains visible today to anyone who looks closely. Slowly, level after level, the tower rose again.

At last, around 1350 – or perhaps a bit later, in 1372 – the belfry was completed. The tower reached nearly 57 meters in height, crowned by seven bells, each corresponding to a note on the musical scale. From the first ring, the Leaning Tower became more than a bell tower – it became a marvel of survival and imperfection.

What began as a construction error has since turned into one of the most recognized symbols in the world. Tourists line up every day, posing with outstretched hands as if to hold it up, unaware that its tilt was never planned. For centuries, architects and engineers have fought to preserve it,



adjusting its angle and strengthening its base. Once leaning at more than five degrees, it now rests safely at about four – enough to keep its charm, but no longer in danger.

The Leaning Tower of Pisa is a masterpiece born from misfortune. It reminds us that beauty can emerge from mistakes, and that what once seemed a failure can become a triumph of creativity and persistence. The wars that interrupted its construction, the flaws in its soil, and the ingenuity of its builders all combined to give it the shape that defines it today.

Eight centuries later, the tower still tilts gracefully against the sky – proof that sometimes history's most lasting wonders begin when everything goes wrong.

Italian economy

The silent challenge of growth and the new face of exports

Fabrizio Fasani

There are two Italys: one that endures and one that struggles. A country that keeps exporting excellence - food, fashion, design, creativity - and a country that, at the same time, can't turn that strength into steady growth. It's the double face of a complex economy, built on talent, resilience, and contradiction.

Today, as the global economy slows and geopolitical tensions multiply, Italy is living in a state of suspension. Not in deep crisis, but not in recovery either:

growing little, investing little, and yet still managing to surprise.

Stagnation that doesn't stifle ingenuity

According to Istat and the IMF, Italy's GDP will rise by about 0.6% in 2025 - a modest pace, especially compared to the United States, where growth is expected to reach around 2.1%, fueled by strong domestic consumption and investments in technology and infrastructure.

The gap is more than statistical; it reflects two different development models. America thrives on consumer confidence and its ability to attract capital, while Italy tends to protect what it already has rather than bet on what it could become.
Over the past two decades, Italian productivity has risen by just 4%, compared to a 25% increase in the U.S. The difference is critical, since productivity means the capacity to create stable, well-paid jobs.

Yet behind the numbers lies another story - that of a country that keeps inventing, problem-solving, and refusing to give up. Across industrial districts, artisan workshops, and startups, Italy continues to generate value. It just does so quietly, without the broad trust network needed to turn individual brilliance into collective success.

Exports once again as a lifeline

Whenever the domestic market slows, Italy turns outward. Once again, exports are keeping the system afloat, with a trade surplus exceeding 50 billion euros in 2024.
The United States is Italy's third-largest market, after Germany and France, with trade between the two

nations surpassing $90 billion last year. It's a striking figure that shows how strong the economic bond across the Atlantic remains.

But the world has changed: having a good product is no longer enough. Buyers of Italian goods - in the U.S. as well as in Asia - now demand stories, values, and authenticity. In this sense, Made in Italy must make a cultural leap: not just sell, but tell its identity. Not just export goods, but export trust - because in today's global markets, reputation is worth as much as quality.

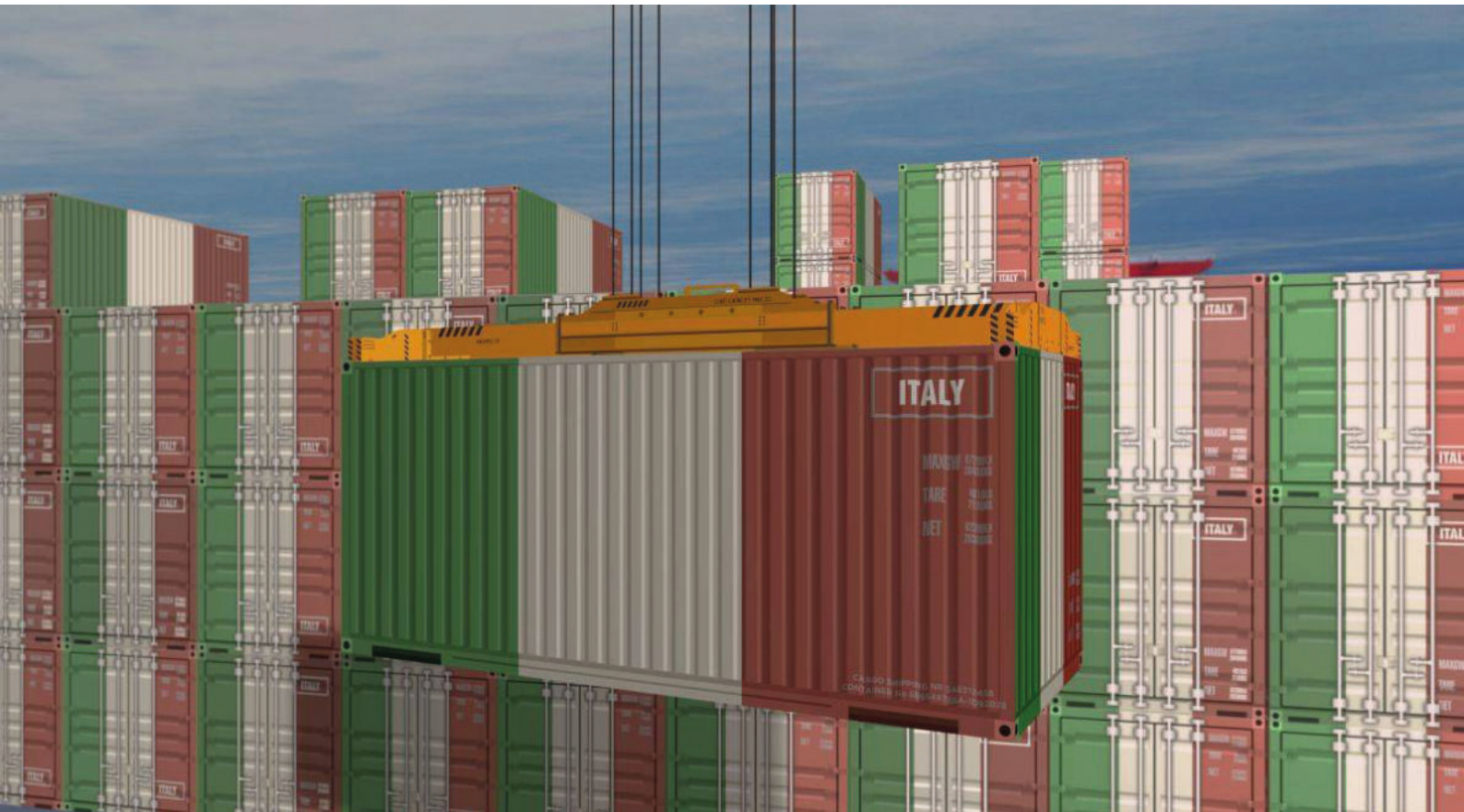
Energy and sustainability: the new frontier of competitiveness

Then there's the issue of costs. Italian companies pay about 30% more for electricity than the European average - and nearly twice as much as in the U.S., where domestic gas and energy sources keep prices low. This structural disadvantage weighs heavily on Italian manufacturing, especially small and medium enterprises.

But it's also generating a positive side effect: a rush toward efficiency.

Today, more than one in three Italian firms invests in renewable energy or in technologies to reduce waste. Sustainability is no longer just an ethical choice - it's an economic survival strategy.

In the United States, the green transition is powered by massive public programs such as the Inflation Reduction Act. In Italy, the process is slower, but the most



forward-looking companies are turning environmental challenges into competitive advantages.

The culture of "fair play" as Italy's signature

One word sums up the challenge ahead: fair play. It means respect for rules, transparency, and responsibility.

In the United States, a company's reputation has become a key part of its market value - just look at how ESG criteria influence finance and consumer behavior. Italy is beginning to follow that same path, but with a more human and cultural touch: respect for work, for quality, and for people.

In a world where competition is ruthless, Italy's true distinctive value may be this very balance - the ability to combine excellence with integrity, beauty with ethics, business with community.

Corporate fair play - consistency between values and behavior - could become the new frontier of Made in Italy, a form of economic soft power recognized around the world.

A bridge across the Atlantic

This is where the Italian American community comes in. Today more than ever, the relationship between Italy and the United States can be a strategic key to breaking free from stagnation and creating new opportunities.

Italian Americans know Italy - but they also understand the rules and mindset of American markets. They know that success

is built on reliability, clarity, and reputation.

They can be ideal partners for Italian small and medium enterprises seeking to enter the U.S. market without losing their identity. They are natural bridges between two worlds that, though different, share deep values: work, family, creativity, and personal dignity.

That's what makes the bond between Italy and the United States so special - two nations that, in different ways, still believe in the power to improve, to restart, to reinvent themselves.

A future to write together

Italy stands at a crossroads. It can remain stuck, lamenting stagnation, or it can rediscover its spirit of initiative and cooperation.

The United States - despite its contradictions - shows that trust, whether public, private, or personal, is the invisible engine of growth. It's what allows people to take risks, to innovate, and to believe in the future.

That can happen in Italy too. But it will take courage, vision, and a renewed alliance among generations, businesses, and local communities. Italian Americans, with their long story of achievement, can help lead the way - not just as investors or partners, but as guardians of a living memory built on sacrifice, ingenuity, and pride.

Because the true strength of Italy - now as always - isn't found in the numbers, but in the people who still believe that creating value together is possible.

My Life in Italy

A regeneration story that starts with people, not property

Matteo Cerri

When Americans (and others) arrive in Italy's small villages: a new chapter of Life, Community, and Regeneration. For some, it's an adventure; for others, it's a return to their roots - a chance to let a new life take shape for themselves and for the places they choose to call home.

There is an Italy you won't find on glossy brochures - an Italy far from high-speed rail lines and airport lounges, made of quiet squares, shuttered ho-

mes, and bars that close by noon. For decades, this Italy has lived in a suspended state: cherished in memory yet slowly fading in practice.

And yet, precisely in these fragile territories, something unexpected has been unfolding.

Over the last several years, a discreet but unmistakable trend has emerged: Americans - and increasingly Canadians, Northern Europeans, Australians, and Latin Americans - choosing to live in Italy's small towns and villages. Some arrive out of curiosity, some out of restlessness, some because of ancestry, and many because they want a different tempo of life.

When it works, the transformation is not real estate–driven.

It is social, human, relational.

And this is exactly why it matters.

"I came here for a house. I stayed because I found a community."

One of the clearest examples comes from Latronico, Basilicata, where PBS documented the story of Mark Bradford, an American from Boston.

He originally came to buy an inexpensive house - a simple, almost transactional idea.

But then life intervened."I came here for a house. I stayed because I found a community." Bradford's presence became a catalyst: other Americans followed, and Latronico began to regain residents, attention, and civic activity.

The home was the vehicle. The community was the destination.

Irsina: the quiet success story

Irsina, also in Basilicata, has been described by The Guardian as one of the most successful integration stories in Italy's internal areas.

Here, Americans have not "taken over" anything; instead, they blended into a town that welcomed them with curiosity and cautious affection.

One resident summarised their philosophy in a way that has since become emblematic: "I didn't want to change the town. I wanted to become part of it." This is the real difference between sustainable regeneration and simplistic "foreign buyer enthusiasm."

Sambuca di Sicilia: beyond the €1-home myth

Sambuca became a global headline for its symbolic "€1 homes," but the real renaissance happened thanks to the people who stayed afterward - including several American families who transformed their move into a long-term commitment.

CNN followed Michele and Brian Cox, whose experience goes well beyond a real estate purchase: "They didn't simply buy a house. They became part of Sambuca's cultural rebirth." Once again, the pattern is the same: a house as a consequence, not a cause.

Grottole: where newcomers contribute, not just relocate

Grottole, in the province of Matera, hosted the "Wonder Grottole" programme, initially supported by Airbnb. Here, American

volunteers worked on the community garden, the civic library, public spaces, and artisan workshops.NPR captured the essence of their experience: "It wasn't a holiday. It was a civic experience." Some later returned, and a few eventually invested in local properties - again, only after building meaningful relationships.

When it doesn't work (and why)
Not every story has a happy ending, and honesty is essential.

The most discussed cautionary tale is Montieri, Tuscany, documented by Lauren Markham (VQR and The Guardian).

Several Americans arrived full of enthusiasm but found: limited services, bureaucratic challenges, social isolation, expectations shaped by media, not by reality. Some left within months.

Similar issues emerged in Sedini, Ollolai, and other "TV-famous" villages where the promotional narrative created an illusion that the territory could not sustain.

The lesson is universal: regeneration collapses when property is treated as the starting point in-

stead of the final step.

Why property must be the destination, not the departure

Buying a house comes at the end of a process, not the beginning.

Real regeneration happens when people first: live in the town, form relationships, understand its rhythms, meet the community, test the seasons, understand local services, imagine a future there.

Only then does property make sense.

When the order is reversed - when buyers are invited to "fall in love" with an empty house before they understand the village - disappointment is almost guaranteed.

What ITS Italy does differently: a relational model, not a transactional one

This is where ITS Italy has carved out a unique role. It doesn't "sell property." It guides people through a soft entrance, a gradual discovery of the place.

Many Americans begin with stays of several weeks or months, living as temporary residents, testing daily life before making any long-term decision.

When they decide to stay, ITS Italy helps them choose the right approach: long-term rentals before buying, staged renovations, temporary housing during restoration, community-based integration pathways and more.

It is regeneration built on relationships, not transactions.

And the benefits flow both ways: the villages gain new residents and energy; newcomers gain meaning, community, and a different way of living.

Visas, residency, and the "hidden half" of relocation

Many Americans arriving in small Italian towns do not hold Italian citizenship. For them, residency is not automatic - and missteps can undermine the entire project.

Italy offers several realistic pathways:
– Elective Residence Visa (ERV) for those with foreign income
– Investor Visa for Italy, granting residency for investments in startups, companies, or government bonds

– hybrid residency paths for remote workers, depending on do-

cumentation and regional interpretation

A structured approach is essential - and often underestimated.

A shared future shaped by those who arrive and those who stay

What emerges from all these stories is something simple and powerful: Italy's villages do not need buyers. They need citizens, people and their stories.

People who want to belong, to contribute, to live slowly, intentionally, socially.

And Americans - along with many others from around the world - are discovering that these small towns offer something the modern world often forgets to supply: time, connection, continuity, and the possibility of a life built around community rather than consumption.

When those who arrive meet those who stay, regeneration becomes real. And in that meeting, both sides - people and places - come back to life.

Italian street food

Porchetta sandwich, an excellence from Umbria

We the Italians Editorial Staff

Porchetta is an iconic dish of Italian cuisine, especially beloved in Umbria. It's a celebration of authentic flavors and culinary traditions that have been passed down through generations. When served in a sandwich, it combines the tenderness of the roasted pork with the crunch of the bread – creating a meal that's more than just food – it's a story of place and tradition.

Originating in Norcia, a town famous for cured meats, porchetta quickly spread across Umbria and central Italy. This

street food is made by roasting a whole pig, including the head, which is then deboned, seasoned with herbs and spices, and tied with string. The result is a golden, crispy exterior and tender, flavorful meat on the inside.

The history of porchetta dates back to the Etruscans, who are believed to be the first to roast pork in this way. However, the tradition is most strongly associated with Umbria. Historical records suggest that Saint Francis and Brother Leo were among the first to roast a pig in the region.

In Umbria, porchetta is an integral part of the culinary landscape. It's commonly served at festivals, town celebrations, and markets. Here the Porchettiamo festival celebrates this iconic dish. In recent years, food trucks and mobile vendors have made porchetta sandwiches even more accessible, often offering creative variations. Despite being a simple dish, porchetta's rich flavor requires careful pairing with other ingredients. The classic sandwi-

ch is typically served on unsalted bread – which is a hallmark of the Perugia region. Vendors often ask if you'd like to include the crispy skin ("coccia") and sometimes the stuffing made from the pig's internal organs.

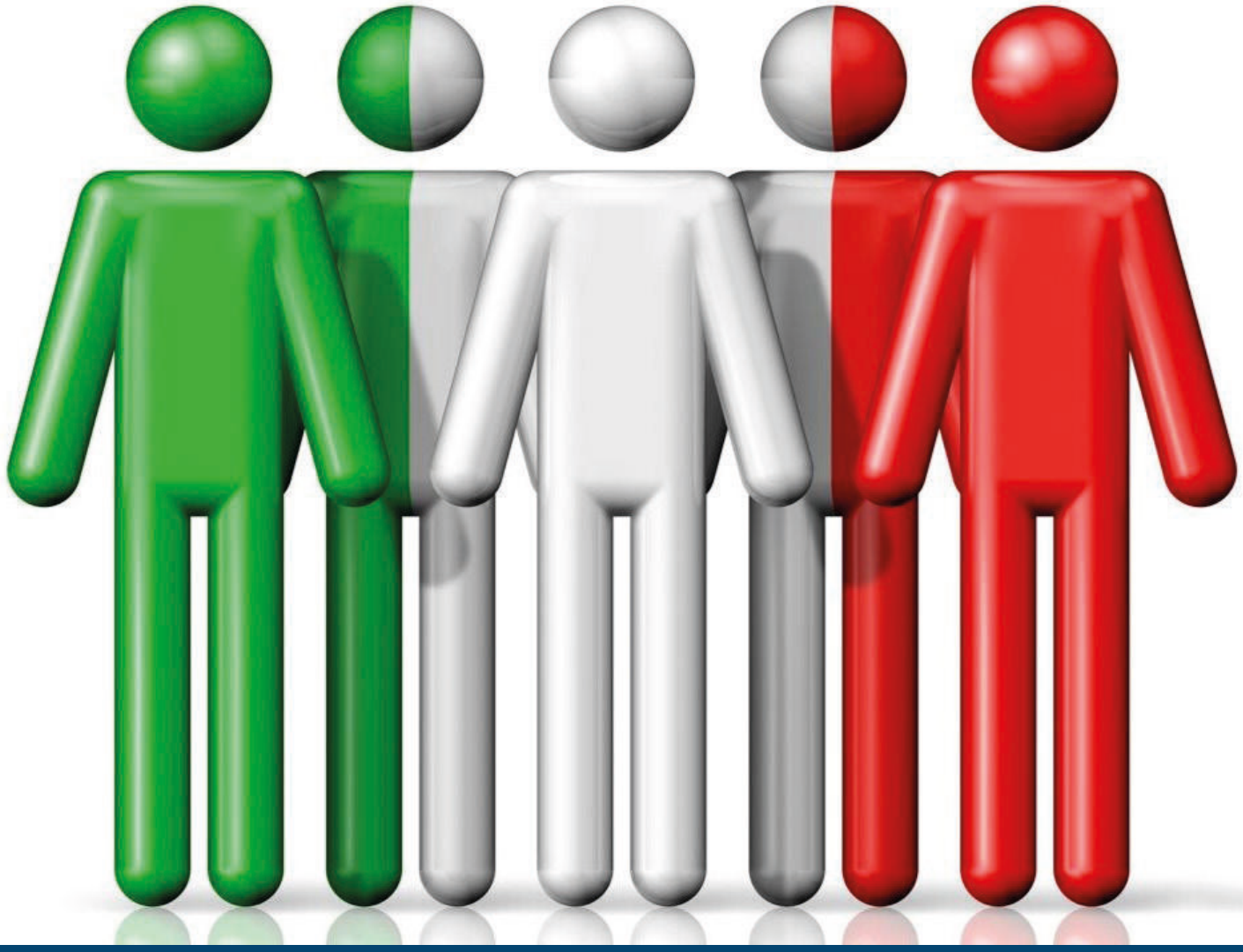
The production of porchetta follows a dedicated process. Pigs are raised specifically for this dish, seasoned with aromatic herbs, particularly wild fennel, and then roasted for hours in a wood-fired oven. This slow roasting creates the signature crispy crust and ensures the meat remains tender and juicy.

The porchetta sandwich has become an iconic part of Italian street food, enjoyed by locals and tourists alike. Toppings like green sauce, arugula, cheese, and sun-dried tomatoes are often added to enhance the flavors. Every bite delivers a burst of taste, making it an irresistible treat. The tradition of making porchetta is passed down from generation to generation, requiring specific knowledge and care in the preparation and cooking.

To fully enjoy a porchetta sandwich, it should be served warm. The heat softens the meat, enhancing its flavor, while the crispy skin

adds a satisfying crunch. While the classic sandwich is delicious on its own, many enjoy adding local ingredients such as chicory, artichokes, or smoked cheese. Sun-dried tomatoes and green sauce also pair beautifully with porchetta, adding an extra layer of flavor.

Porchetta sandwiches are a popular snack at fairs, festivals, and events. The dish's growing international fame was even highlighted by the New York Times, which included it in a list of foods everyone should try at least once. This speaks to its widespread appeal..



Italian Citizenship Assistance

The Supreme Court Takes on the "Minor Issue" and Tajani Decree

Italian Citizenship Assistance

The Italian Supreme Court has been called upon to review the so-called "minor issue" that has been a cause of contention in citizenship by descent cases in recent years, along with the Tajani Decree that drastically altered the requirements for citizenship by descent earlier this year. In this article, we will explore what these issues and regulations are and how the supreme court could affect them with its ruling.

The minor issue

When it comes to Italian citizenship by descent, there are two ways in which the transmission of citizenship can be affected when the Italian-born parent naturalized while the next-in-line was a minor. In one case, the minor in question was born in Italy. In these instances, the Italian-born minor loses Italian citizenship along with the parent who naturalized as a foreign citizen.

However, cases in which the minor was foreign-born are a different matter. For many years, such children were recognized as retaining Italian citizenship, as they had been born with the inherent right to Italian citizenship by descent, along with the citizenship of their birth country (assuming the country applies jus soli principles, as the U.S. does, or that citizenship was acquired through the other parent).

In recent years, though, these latter circumstances have been challenged by some Italian courts and Italian Consulates, with applications even being rejected on the purported basis that the foreign-born minor lost Italian citizenship when the Italian parent naturalized. Due to conflicting rulings and consular decisions, the Supreme Court (Corte Suprema di Cassazione) will be making a binding decision regarding "minor issue" cases. Initially, this decision

was set for January 2026, but recently, it has been postponed, so it is unclear at this time when the Supreme Court will review the minor issue.

Citizenship by descent

The regulations around Italian citizenship by descent have undergone a radical transformation this past year with the introduction of the Tajani Decree in March 2025. Prior to this decree, the requirements for Italian citizenship eligibility were as follows: Have an Italian-born ancestor alive after March 17, 1861; The ancestor did not naturalize as a foreign citizen until after the birth of the next-in-line, if at all; No ancestor since renounced Italian citizenship.

There are a few complications to these rules. For instance, if there is a woman in the direct line, she must have had the next-in-line child after January 1948, when Italy's constitution went into effect granting men and women equal rights. That said, many applicants have successfully petitioned the courts for their right to Italian citizenship even in cases when a woman had the next-in-line before 1948. Then there is the so-called "minor issue" described above. A final important date is 1992; this is when Italians were allowed to hold dual citizenship. In other words, after 1992, when an Italian acquired a foreign citizenship, he or she did not automatically lose Italian citizenship.

The Tajani Decree

The Tajani Decree created further restrictions to Italian citizenship eligibility. Following the issuance of De-

cree-Law No. 36/2025 on March 28, 2025, persons could only apply for Italian citizenship by descent in the following cases: 1) Having an Italian-born parent or grandparent. 2) If the parent or grandparent acquired Italian citizenship later in life, they must have lived in Italy for at least two consecutive years before the applicant's birth. 3) If an application was filed before March 28, 2025, or the applicant received a notification of an appointment before this date, then the applicant can still apply under the old rules.

The Italian Supreme Court's upcoming decision

The Italian Supreme Court is the highest court in Italy, which appeals primarily coming from the Appellate Court. Once the Supreme Court reaches a decision, no further appeals can be made. Given the weight of its rulings on the decisions of lower courts, it is particularly significant that the Supreme Court will be weighing in on the discussions of the "minor issue" and Tajani Decree. As mentioned, this decision was initially set for January 2026 but has now been postponed.

Italian Citizenship Assistance can keep you up to date on the progress of the Supreme Court's ruling, along with other important news regarding Italian citizenship by descent. If you would like help with your own application, or are even unsure if you qualify for citizenship, do not hesitate to contact them at info@italiancitizenshipassistance.com. You can also visit them online at www.italiancitizenshipassistance.com.

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Italian innovation

Italy's new space smart factory marks a turning point for Europe's satellite industry

We the Italians Editorial Staff

Europe is gearing up for a leap forward in the space sector – and Italy is at the center of it. With a €100 million investment, the country is building a state-of-the-art Space Smart Factory near Rome that will be capable of producing up to 100 satellites a year – about two per week. The project represents one of the most ambitious steps in Europe's effort to strengthen its role in the global space industry.

The new facility is a partnership between the Italian Space Agency and Thales Alenia Space, a joint venture supported by Leonardo

and France's Thales. Covering an area of 21,000 square meters, it is designed as more than a traditional factory. Its flexible and modular layout will allow it to adapt quickly to the production needs of various missions, making it a cornerstone of Europe's future in space.

The plant will integrate the most advanced forms of automation, robotics, and cobotics – systems where humans and robots collaborate on complex tasks. Production lines and cleanrooms will be reconfigurable to assemble different types of satellites, from Earth observation and communications units to reusable space vehicles. The design emphasizes digital innovation: engineers will work with digital twin technology, augmented and virtual reality tools, and high-precision simulations that improve performance, reduce errors, and streamline testing and assembly. The goal is to cut costs, boost efficiency, and make Europe's satellite manufacturing more agile.

The Space Smart Factory will play a crucial role in several high-profile European programs, including the second generation of Galileo navigation satellites, the Copernicus missions for Earth observation such as ROSE-L and CIMR, and Italy's new Sicral-3 defense satellites. These projects requi-

re rapid and coordinated production, and the new site will provide the infrastructure to meet that demand.

Part of the funding comes from the European Union's recovery plan launched after the pandemic – a reflection of Europe's broader industrial strategy to achieve technological autonomy in key areas such as aerospace and defense. By developing its own large-scale production capacity, Europe aims to reduce dependence on external suppliers and strengthen its strategic sovereignty in space technology. The project also supports the national aerospace supply chain, involving around 150 small and medium-sized enterprises across Italy that will contribute to components, materials, and specialized services.

Discussions are already under way between Leonardo, Thales, and Airbus to build a wider European alliance in satellite manufacturing. Such an initiative could create a stronger industrial network capable of competing with large commercial players like SpaceX, while maintaining a distinctly European identity in the new space economy.

Beyond production, the complex will include the Space Joint Lab, an innovation and training hub supported by Italy's National Recovery and Resilience Plan. The lab will connect the Italian Space Agency with major universities such as Politecnico di Milano and Sapienza University of Rome, offering opportunities for research, skill development, and collaboration between academia and industry.

Sustainability is a key element of the project. The factory will be LEED-certified, equipped with solar panels, energy-efficient systems, and rainwater recovery infrastructure. These features reflect a commitment to reducing environmental impact while advancing technological excellence. The facility will also create new, highly skilled jobs, helping Italy retain its brightest engineers and scientists in a rapidly growing sector.

Italian traditions

The alpine cow battles of Valle d'Aosta

We the Italians Editorial Staff

Every autumn, the Valle d'Aosta transforms into a theater for one of its most iconic traditions - a spectacle where strength and aristocratic heritage meet in the form of cow contests. The event culminates in the final showdown at the local arena, where some 150 to 160 cows from across the region compete for the revered title of Reina des Reines, Queen of the Queens. This year, 159 bovines entered into the contest, each representing the proud

tradition of alpine cattle rearing in this mountainous region.

The format is straightforward yet deeply rooted in local custom. The cows, primarily of the Valdostana Pezzata Nera and Pezzata Rossa breeds - but also the Hérens breed from the Swiss Valais - are naturally inclined to establish dominance within a herd. The contest simply gives them a venue to do it in the open - without injury, yet with all the drama of competition. Early each contest day the animals are weighed, and are sorted into three weight classes: up to about 520 kg, 521–570 kg, and 571 kg and above. In autumn rounds, these limits may shift upward by 10 kg or more. Once sorted, the animals are paired at random and then fight one on one, pushing with their horns until one yields - either by backing down or being forced off his or her feet. The winner advances, elimination style, until a champion emerges.

The event has its roots in alpine peasant culture, where strong horned cows would naturally fight to assert dominance within the herd. Over time, these informal displays of bovine strength transformed into organized contests, still preserving the key elements of respect for the animals, local identity, and community invol-

vement. The modern regional contest dates back more than six decades in its current form, and today draws thousands of spectators, breeders, and tourists alike.

Preliminary rounds take place throughout the spring and summer across different towns and valleys within the region - places like Montjovet, Verrayes, La Salle and others host elimination events. Then in October the grand finale happens at the arena in Croix Noire, near Aosta, where the best cows of each class meet to fight for the top prize. In recent years the finale has also included other categories - such as junior calves or first time mothers - to widen participation and showcase future stock.

For visitors the experience is uniquely Alpine. Arriving at the arena you'll hear the lowing of cattle, see the colored collars and headdresses of the animals, sense the quiet tension as two queens face off in the ring, and feel the cheer of the crowd when one pushes the other's horns aside. The result is not only a contest of strength but a celebration of rural tradition, mountain life and regional pride.

If you plan to attend, arriving early is wise - especially for finalsweekend - since seating fills quickly and ticket lines form. Dress for changing mountain weather, even in October: sun, wind, and sudden showers are all possible. And whether you're an agri-

culture enthusiast, folklorist, or simply curious traveler, the Batailles de Reines offer a vivid glimpse into how Alpine communities maintain living traditions that honour both animal husbandry and collective identity.

In sum, the Batailles de Reines are more than a novelty fight among cows - they are a window into the culture and landscape of the Valle d'Aosta, showing how the region blends nature, heritage and festivity in a uniquely bovine spectacle.

Italian wine

Cirò classico, Calabria's first DOCG wine

We the Italians Editorial Staff

When you uncork a bottle of Cirò Classico DOCG, you're tasting more than wine – you're tasting a moment of history and the triumph of a region's winemaking soul. Nestled in the rolling hills of southern Italy's Calabria region, the appellation steps boldly into a new era as the first DOCG of its kind in these sun-baked lands. For centuries this land has yielded wines under the broader Cirò DOC designation, but now a distinct class rises –

refined, defined, and celebrated.

The vineyards cling to the Ionian-facing slopes of the communes of Cirò and Cirò Marina, where winds from the sea meet ancient soils of clay and limestone. Here the local grape variety Gaglioppo reigns supreme – at least 90 percent of the blend – supported by small amounts of Magliocco or Greco Nero that bring subtle dark-fruit and spice notes. The result is a wine with rich personality – ruby red in youth, garnet as it ages, offering full body, dry structure, and a lingering, harmonious finish.

The new designation comes with strict rules – limits on yield, required aging periods, and minimum alcohol levels – all designed to capture the best of terroir and tradition. Each bottle must age for at least 36 months, including six months in wood, before it can bear the label. These measures elevate what was already Calabria's flagship wine into a new level of distinction.

On the palate, Cirò Classico DOCG offers ripe cherry and blackcurrant, hints of Mediterranean herbs and warm spice, with tannins that are firm yet balanced. The wine pairs beautifully

with the bold, rustic cuisine of the region – roasted goat, spicy sausage, rich pasta with pecorino, or grilled lamb. It's a wine that rewards patience, unfolding slowly with air and conversation.

This milestone is more than an official recognition – it's a statement of identity. For decades Calabria remained in the shadow of Italy's more famous northern wine regions, but this new DOCG designation shines a light on its authenticity and skill. It affirms the dedication of local growers who have worked tirelessly to transform a challenging land into one of elegance and resilience.

The vines face intense summer heat and salty breezes from the Ionian Sea, yet they yield grapes of remarkable concentration. Modern vintners, while faithful to ancient methods, favor gentle extraction and long aging to let the character of Gaglioppo speak clearly. The result is a wine that bridges past and present – rustic in origin, sophisticated in expression.

To pour a glass of Cirò Classico DOCG is to celebrate Calabria's rebirth as a serious wine region. It's not a revolution but a well-earned recognition of quality built over centuries. The label honors the land's heritage while projecting it toward the future – a symbol of pride, patience, and passion distilled in red. So take your time with it, let it breathe, and savor the taste of a story that began long before you opened the bottle.

Italian industrial districs

The faucet and valve industry of the Cusio area in Piedmont

We the Italians Editorial Staff

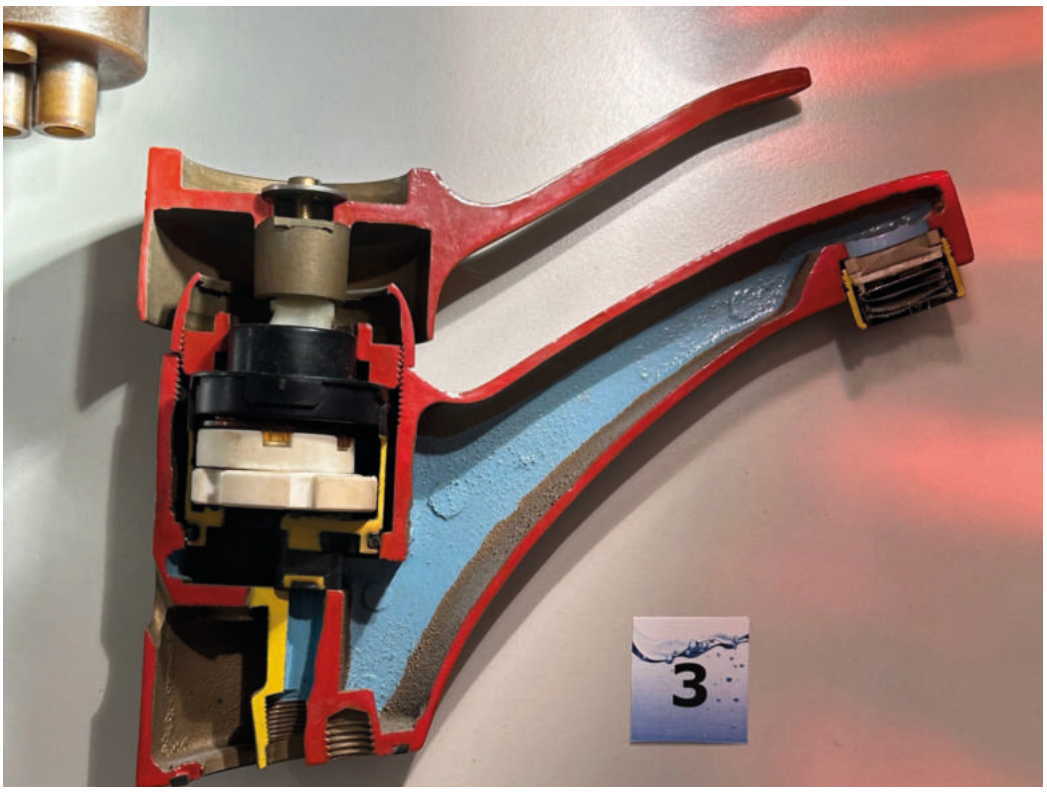
The Cusio-Valsesia district, located in the Novara province of Piedmont, is a hidden gem of Italian manufacturing, specifically known for its faucet and valve production. This region, nestled by Lake Orta and the Alpine hills, has a long history of metalworking, which began with the casting of bronze bells and evolved into producing various brass items such as household goods and cut-

lery. Over time, this tradition laid the foundation for what would become a thriving faucet industry.

The area's proximity to valuable fuel resources like peat and lignite played a crucial role in the development of industrial activities, especially the processing of metals. The industrialization of local quarries in the late 19th century furthered the region's transformation, leading to the emergence of a specialized faucet manufacturing sector. By 1908, the first faucet workshop opened, and as demand for brass items declined, the focus shifted toward producing faucets and valves.

The growth of the industry was further catalyzed by labor availability after World War I, as granite extraction declined. Small family-run workshops, known as "buchi," became the backbone of the early faucet industry. These artisans worked out of cellars or small domestic spaces, with women often assisting in the molding process. Many workers used their personal savings to fund their businesses, driven by a passion to succeed. This grassroots approach to manufacturing paved the way for the district's eventual expansion.

By the mid-20th century, as public health and hygiene standards improved, the demand for faucets, especially for bathrooms and kitchens, surged. This shift in consumer needs fueled the growth of the industry, leading to the establishment of three key faucet production areas: the Lake Orta region (focused on single-product manufacturing), Brescia (specializing in non-ferrous metalworking), and Milan (serving as the commercial hub). These areas developed strong synergies, combining quality craftsmanship from Novara, mass production from Brescia, and commercial expertise from Milan, forming a highly competitive industrial district.



The district has grown to be one of Italy's most dynamic industrial sectors. It is characterized by a mix of small and medium-sized enterprises that prioritize innovation and design, allowing them to compete with larger manufacturers. Over time, many entrepreneurs, after gaining experience, have established their own businesses, creating a tight-knit network of interdependent companies. This collaboration has led to economies of scale, enabling the district to maintain competitiveness on a global scale.

Several factors have driven the district's growth: a tradition of brass and bronze processing, access to abundant water and low-cost energy, and legislative support for public housing and infrastructure development. Additionally, the construction of the Simplon Railway connected the region to more industrialized areas, facilitating access to cheaper energy and broadening market reach.

The region's success is also attributed to its strong workforce, which has evolved over the years. Today, the district employs around 4,000 skilled workers, with many of them gaining experience before starting their own ventures. This highly trained workforce, combined with an efficient local economic network, has helped the region maintain a reputation for quality and craftsmanship. Companies in

the district are also recognized for their commitment to environmental sustainability and customer service.

Design has become a key strength of the district, with many manufacturers focusing on creating aesthetically pleasing and technologically advanced faucets. The sector's reputation for innovation is reinforced by the continued development of high-tech solutions and the use of modern design in their products. This has positioned the Cusio-Valsesia region as a global leader in the sanitary faucet industry.

One of the highlights of the region is the "Museum of Faucets and Their Technology" in San Maurizio d'Opaglio, which explores the historical relationship between humans and water. The museum provides a unique perspective on the evolution of hygiene and the technological innovations that have shaped body care, from a luxury practice to a mass phenomenon. It also highlights the role that faucets and valves have played in this transformation, reflecting the region's integral role in the development of modern sanitation.

The museum aims to explore the social history of water, focusing on the innovations that allowed people to master this essential re-

source, shaping the evolution of body care and leading to the rise of the faucet and valve industry in the Cusio region. Today, the district continues to be a hub of innovation, with a strong export orientation and a focus on quality and design, making it one of Italy's most successful and influential industrial regions.

Italian proverbs

Il Diavolo fa le pentole ma non i coperchi

We the Italians Editorial Staff

The proverb "Il diavolo fa le pentole ma non i coperchi" (The devil builds the pots but not the lids) reminds us that you may hatch a scheme or commit a wrongdoing – like the devil building a pot – but you'll likely forget the lid that hides it. In other words, misdeeds and deceit rarely stay concealed forever. Eventually, the cover slips, the truth spills out, and what was hidden becomes visible. The saying serves as a caution: avoid dishonesty and wrongdoing, because sooner or later, someone spots the uncovered pot – and the one who made it will have to face the consequences.

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