We the Italians

December 2025

N.194

interview with

Barbara Faedda pag 71

Italian American of the Year 2025

N.194, December 2025 • Index

Italian art

Italian nativity scenes, a masterpiece of faith and art

Italian cuisine

Milanese-Style Veal Scaloppine with Creamy Polenta and Brussels Sprouts

Italian territories

The essence of Gallura

Italian sustainability

Italian rice waste becomes a new model for sustainable building

Italian historical trademarks

Savio Firmino

Italian sport

Milano-Cortina 2026, Italy's past triumphs on snow

Italian good news

Women become the majority in Italian higher education

Interview with Barbara Faedda

200 Years of Italian Studies at Columbia University in New York

Italian design

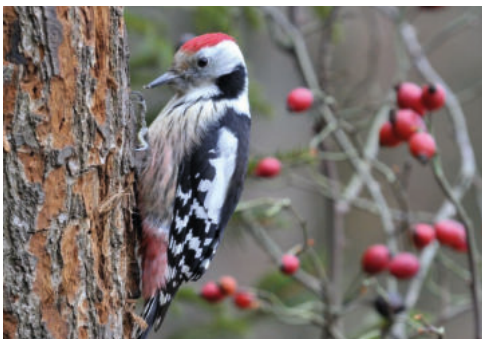
The figure of Gae Aulenti and the 60th Anniversary of the Pipistrello

Italian culture and history

The illuminated nativity of Manarola

Italian healthcare

Italy reaches record levels in blood donation: second in the world



Italian curiosities

The legend of the woodpecker and the Piceni people

Italian economy

Tariffs, Value chains, and new balances. What will change for Made in Italy in the United States in 2026

My Life in Italy

Try living here. How Digital Nomadism is giving Italian Americans a new way to understand whether Italy could be Home

Italian street food

Pani câ meusa

Italian Citizenship Assistance

The B1 Exam, A Potential New Change to Italian Citizenship

Italian innovation

A new Italian technology that moves satellites without fuel

Italian traditions

The femminiello in Napoli, a symbol of tradition and resilience

Italian wine

The wines of the Aosta valley, alpine charm in a bottle

Italian industrial districts

The pharmaceutical and chemical industrial district of Lazio

Italian proverbs

L'abito non fa il monaco

We the Italians

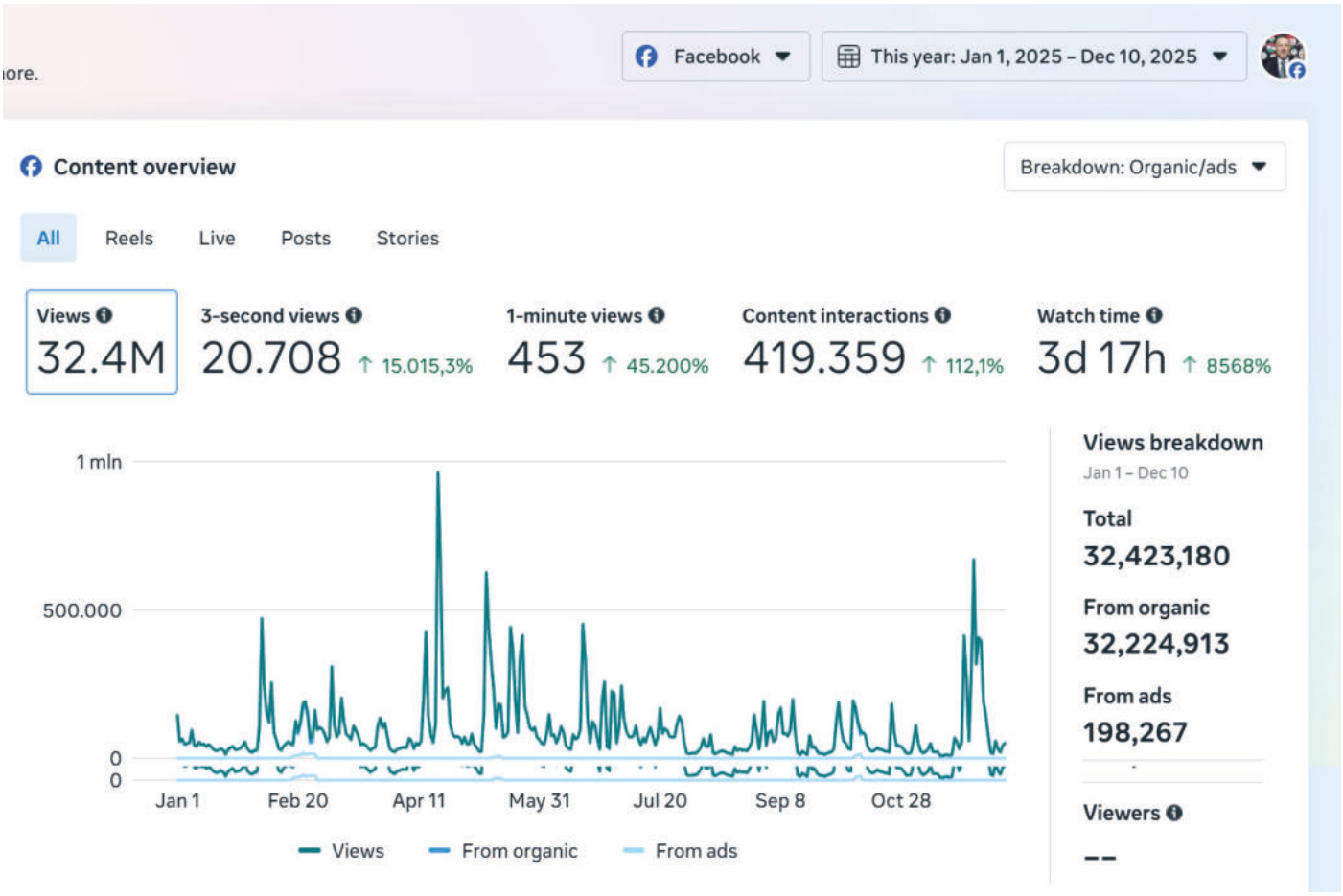
Editorial

What's up with WTI #194

by Umberto Mucci

Dear friends,
For We the Italians, a year full of projects, content, friendship, and great curiosity about a world of relationships between Italy and the United States – which, however one sees it, is evolving – is coming to an end. And in this evolution, we at We the Italians believe that the Italian American community plays an even more important role than before. We produced an audio and visual podcast dedicated to the 2025 of We the Italians. You can find the English versions here and the Italian ones here.

A few numbers from our 2025, written while there are still fifteen days left in the year. During this year, we promoted 6,056 news stories on our website (2,302 of which were positive about Italy, the others about something Italian in the United Sta-



tes); 249 articles in the 12 issues of our magazine; and one yearbook (with the 2024 interviews) in both print and digital formats. Also, during 2025 we sent out 1,121,694 newsletters: 12 months, 9 areas through September and then 6 areas from October, with many of you subscribing to more than one. We are almost at 87,000 followers on our Facebook page, where we had 32.4 million views (last year we stopped at 8 million...). We have a LinkedIn group with almost 2,000 members (we are waiting for you, join us) and also a LinkedIn page. We are also on X (almost 2,500 followers), Instagram (7,200 followers), YouTube

(630 subscribers to our channel), TikTok, Spotify, and Telegram. Last but not least, we now have 60 Ambassadors in the United

States. They are friends, a team, a family: you can find who and where they are here.

For We the Italians, the big news of 2025, from an editorial point of view, has been the return of podcasts, in both audio and visual versions. We transformed our podcast We the ItaliaNews into two new weekly audio podcasts: Italy in English, dedicated to what is happening in Italy and in English; L'Italia in America, the first and only Italian-language podcast about what is happening in Italian and Italian American communities in the US. The audio podcasts of Italy in English can all be listened to here; the audio podcasts of L'Italia in America can all be listened to here. In addition, here you will find all the visual versions of each podcast episode.

Once again this year, We the Italians has asked its readers to choose 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 were therefore not be eligible for votes this year. This time, we gave our readers the chance to choose from 10 nominees, selected from suggestions made by our 60 Ambassadors across the United States. This is the final ranking for 2025, from number 10 up to number one: 10) George Bochetto; 9) Gay Talese;8) Ray Mancini; 7) Chazz Palminteri; 6) Nonnas cast; 5) Rosa DeLauro; 4) Mike Johnson; 3) Caitlin Clark 13.9%; 2) Martin Scorsese 21.2%; 1) Adriana Trigiani 32.7%. Almost one in three, among those who participated in our survey, voted for Adriana, who is a great friend of We the Italians and wanted to thank everyone for this result with a beautiful video that you can

find here. Congratulations to Adriana!

The We the Italians Yearbook 2025, our twelfth book, is available. Please consider it as a Christmas gift, either for yourself or for your friends and family. You can find it on Amazon here. In 2025, we interviewed 14 people, friends of We the Italians who gave us 12 different views on 12 different topics regarding the relationship between Italy and the United States. These are the topics you will find in this yearbook: the Arizona Italian American Chamber of Commerce; development opportunities in the US for Italian companies; the Italian American Museum of Los Angeles; anti-Italianism, stereotypes, and cancel culture; the 50th anniversary of the National Italian American Foundation; the Centro Culturale Italiano di Buffalo; Italians in the US "Prisoners in Paradise" during World War II; Growing Up Italian, a modern voice for a timeless Italian American community; the documentary The Neighborhood: The North End becomes Columbus Park in Kansas City; the 70th birthday of the American presence in Vicenza, the United States standing in defense of Italy; Super Mario Turns 40, how an Italian American plumber became a global icon; 200 Years of Italian Studies at Columbia University in New York.

The end of this 2025 has brought back

to Italy one of the most capable, efficient, knowledgeable, and productive consuls Italy has ever sent to the United States: Allegra Baistrocchi was the Italian Consul in Detroit for four years, and she is now ready to give her wonderful contribution once again here in Rome, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We will never stop thanking her for the extraordinary way she represented Italy in Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Ohio, and Tennessee, but we will stay in touch with her here in Italy as well. We suggest that you read her farewell message to the communities of the above-mentioned states, which she honored us by allowing us to publish on We the Italians. Thank you, Allegra!

Also this December, we are pleased to welcome three Ambassadors, three new friends joining our team. Joe Rocco is our new Ambassador in Rhode Island. Joe is President of RocJo Productions, Inc., a television and video production company, and President of the Rhode Island Italian American Hall of Fame. The RIIAHF's mission is to provide financial support to extraordinary students going to college, honor prominent Italian Americans

Allegra Baistrocchi

and promote its rich Italian heritage. Joe is a two-time New England Emmy award winner as a television reporter, director and executive producer. Joe and his team have produced high profile events honoring Tom Brady, Aretha Franklin, Jay Leno, Mario Andretti, Joe Montana and many more.

Joe Rocco

Daniela Cunico Dal Pra is our new Ambassador in North Carolina. Daniela is a Professor in Italian Language, Culture, and Film at UNC Charlotte, with over two decades of service to the university and the Charlotte community enriching students' education by teaching Italian and Latin and Film Studies, and currently serves as the Interim Director of Film Studies. Her dedication extends through extensive community outreach, organizing cultural events, lectures, and film screenings, and serving as an executive director for the Italy-America Chamber of Commerce of the Carolinas. Daniela actively promotes Italian culture, global connections, and sustainability.

Daniela Cunico Dal Pra

Claudio Tanca is our new Ambassador in Washington DC. Claudio is Marketing & Events Coordinator at the Italian Cultural Society of Washington, DC, where he promotes Italian language and culture in the nation's capital. A dual US-Italian citizen, Claudio has spent 15+ years leading international communications for global health and social impact organizations, including serving as Executive Director of the G4 Alliance and International Communications Director at the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. Fluent in English, French, and Italian, he has lived and worked across Europe and the United States. Claudio

is passionate about strengthening connections between Italian and American communities through culture, dialogue, and shared values.

Claudio Tanca

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, Merry Christmas and a gorgeous Italian happy 2026 from Rome.

Italian entertainment

Figurine Panini, "Ce l'ho... ce l'ho... Mi manca!"

We the Italians Editorial Staff

Kids in Italy, especially boys, who grew up after the 1960s, eagerly collected, traded, and stuck "le figurine Panini" (Panini stickers), in their albums. These stickers became a milestone in their childhood, linked to the national obsession with soccer. Opening a freshly bought pack, they'd flip through the stickers, hoping to find the ones still missing from their album: "Ce l'ho... ce l'ho... Mi manca!" ("Got it... Got it... I was missing this one!") was a familiar phrase among children and teenagers

of the '60s, '70s, and '80s.

Exchanging stickers was more than just a way to complete a collection - it was a game, a small negotiation, and a rite of passage for many. Depending on the region of Italy, the ways of playing with them varied. In the schoolyard or at the park, each exchange became a small battlefield where kids would use their best negotiation skills to win the most desired stickers. Each person came prepared, offering their strongest arguments to complete their collection. The exchange was thrilling, with winners and losers, just like a real soccer match.

Before the rise of video games, smartphones, and the internet, Panini stickers were the ultimate entertainment for Italian kids. They saved their pocket money, dreaming of becoming champions and seeing their own face on a sticker. They imagined the joy of being part of their favorite team's success - and even playing for the national team one day. The joy of completing the album was unparalleled, especially when that missing sticker was finally found. These collections sparked genuine collector's passions, often simpler than those of wealthy magnates but perhaps more pure.

The credit goes to a great Italian, a visionary who changed the childhoods of millions of children. One hundred years ago, in Pozza di Maranello, Emilia Romagna, Giuseppe Panini, the "father" of soccer stickers, was born. To tell the story of this passion, today, in Modena, there is a magical place – the "Museo della Figurina" (Sticker Museum).

In the early years, getting the right photos to create the stickers

Giuseppe Panini

was no easy task. Panini didn't have many photo agencies to rely on, and not every soccer team had a press office to provide images of their players. The company had to get creative, asking journalist friends, turning to small photography agencies, and even hiring last-minute photographers to fill in gaps. Panini albums gave Italians their first real look at the faces of soccer players - a big deal in the '60s when radio was the primary way people followed games.

The Panini company was founded in 1961 by Giuseppe and his three brothers - Benito, Umberto, and Franco - who had previously run a newsstand in Modena. The brothers saw an opportunity in creating a soccer sticker collection, which led to the launch of the first "Calciatori Panini" collection. Over the years, their small family business grew into an international icon, and by the 1980s, Panini had expanded its reach, achieving annual revenues in the billions of lire.

In 1994, after a series of changes, Panini was sold to Marvel Entertainment Group, which hoped to introduce American superhero comics in Italy. However, the company still remained largely under Italian management, and by 1999, Panini was once again fully Italian. The name was changed from Marvel Italia to Panini Comics, and by 2013, it had grown into one of Europe's most influential comic book publishers. Panini also acquired the rights to publish Disney comics in Italy and

later took over DC Comics' publishing rights.

Panini's rise is a story of ingenuity and perseverance. In a country still recovering from the aftermath of war, the Panini brothers, along with their four sisters, created a business that has since become a worldwide legend. The Panini Group, headquartered in Modena, is now the global leader in sticker production. By 2001, the company claimed to have printed over 40 billion stickers in its first 40 years, just for the "Calciatori" album. Today, it produces more than 5 billion stickers annually

Museo della Figurina

and distributes them in over 120 countries.

What's even more remarkable is that today approximately 50% of Panini sticker buyers are adults - many are collectors who grew up with these albums. The internet and social media have made it easier to trade stickers, but the nostalgia for the collection still holds a strong grip on fans. In the past, it wasn't possible to request missing stickers, and the frustration of having one or two empty spots in the album was a real letdown.

Each year, the latest edition of the Panini "Calciatori" album

is highly anticipated, with fans eager to see what new additions it holds. However, part of the charm of Panini albums lies in their imperfections. Over the years, small errors - such as player mix-ups, swapped photos, or incorrect stadium names - have become endearing marks of authenticity. If there's no mistake, it's almost as if it's not a true Panini album. These imperfections have become part of the fun of collecting, and discovering the next mistake is as exciting as completing the collection itself.

One of the most famous missing stickers was that of Pier Luigi Pizzaballa, a relatively unknown goalkeeper for Atalanta, the soccer team of Bergamo in Lombardy. His sticker was rumored to be impossible to find in the '60s albums. Some believed that Pizzaballa had missed the photo shoot altogether, but in fact, the sticker did exist, printed just like all the others. To this day, Panini fans remember Pizzaballa not for his career, but for his elusive sticker.

Panini stickers today come in two main types. The traditional Italian version is printed on adhesive paper, which collectors place into albums. These stickers come in packets of four to seven. The American version, however, uses thin cardboard without adhesive, and the images and text are printed on both sides. These are sold in packets of six to ten stickers.

The Panini sticker collection is more than just a childhood pastime - it's a lasting tradition that continues to captivate the imaginations of fans and collectors around the world, regardless of age.

Italian flavors

Grappa Trentina: a spirit of Trentino Alto Adige's soul

We the Italians Editorial Staff

Grappa Trentina is a treasured spirit that captures the essence of the vineyards and the culture of the Trentino region in northern Italy. It is a type of grappa – a grape marc brandy born from the leftover skins, seeds, and stems of grapes after pressing for wine – but in Trentino it becomes something uniquely expressive and tied deeply to local land and history.

At its core, grappa is created by

steaming or heating fermented grape pomace in a still and then cooling the vapors to collect the alcohol and aromatic compounds. Although spirits made from such leftovers have existed for centuries in various places, the way Trentino has refined grappa production makes the region's version stand out both for quality and character. In Trentino, the tradition of making grappa goes back generations, evolving from a simple use of winemaking by products to a respected artisanal craft. Local distillers developed methods over time that allowed them to extract nuanced flavors while preserving the purity of the raw material. Around the early 20th century, advances in distillation technique significantly improved the process, enabling producers to control heat more precisely and handle smaller batches with greater care. This careful, labor intensive approach helps yield cleaner, more expressive spirits that reflect the particular grapes from which they originate.

A defining feature of Grappa

Trentina is its connection to the land. Only grape pomace sourced from vineyards within the province is used, and many producers choose fruit from high altitude slopes and cool valley sites where aromatic varieties thrive. These vinacce are picked up quickly after pressing and taken straight to distilleries, where master distillers work to retain their delicate scents and flavors.

The identity of Grappa Trentina is protected by strict quality standards. Producers who meet those standards earn a specific territorial certification, a recognizable mark that assures consumers this grappa was fully crafted within the Trentino area and meets rigorous quality checks. That commitment to provenance and excellence gives these grappas an authenticity that is rare even among other Italian grappas.

Most Grappa Trentina starts as a clear, colorless spirit. If left to rest in inert containers like stainless

steel or glass, it preserves the pure aromatic character of the grapes. However, if aged in wooden barrels, the distillate slowly takes on richer colors ranging from pale gold to deep amber. The wood also imparts new layers of complexity – notes of vanilla, spice, and dried fruit become more pronounced over time. These aged versions are often referred to as “riserva” or “barricata,” and are prized by enthusiasts for their depth and smoothness.

Taste profiles in Trentino grappas can vary widely. Some are bright and floral, with fresh hints of grape varietals like Chardonnay or Müller Thurgau. Others reveal more robust, textured notes shaped by barrel aging. A well made grappa offers balance – it carries

strength without harshness and delivers a lively but refined finish.

Grappa in Trentino isn't just a drink – it's a link to local culture and memory. Historically, such spirits were consumed after heavy meals to help with digestion, and they remain a classic digestivo in Italian dining. Beyond this, grappa has woven itself into the fabric of daily life and celebrations, held in small glasses passed among friends and family at festive tables. In times past, it was even carried by soldiers in the mountains, valued both for warmth and for the sense of home it represented.

Travellers exploring Trentino often seek out grappa as part of the region's rich culinary landscape. Distillery visits and tastings offer a chance to see the craftsmanship firsthand and understand how subtle differences in grapes, terrain, and technique can shape the spirit. Many local producers will talk enthusiastically about their vineyards, their stills, and the stories behind each expression they make. These experiences help visitors appreciate grappa not just as an alcoholic drink, but as a distilled symbol of the valleys and vineyards that nurture it.

When paired with food, Grappa Trentina can elevate a meal. Lighter, fruitier styles cut through rich cheeses and charcuterie, while more mature, wood aged versions complement desserts or fine chocolate. Some local traditions even include pouring a splash into espresso, adding warmth and complexity to the cup.

In every case, what defines Grappa Trentina is its sense of place – a reflection of mountain soils, cool winds, and the patient hand of generations of distillers who have shaped this drink into a refined expression of Trentino's soul.

Italian handcrafts

The art of wicker basket making in Puglia

We the Italians Editorial Staff

In Puglia, the tradition of weaving wicker baskets – known locally as "panari" – holds a special place in the region's cultural history. Once an essential part of everyday rural life, these baskets were used for everything from carrying olives and vegetables to storing harvests and other goods. Crafted from local natural materials like reeds, cane, and olive wood, the baskets represented both functional tools and a cultural symbol of the land and its people.

The art of basket making was passed down through generations, each artisan mastering

the intricate techniques that transformed simple materials into sturdy, flexible baskets. The process began with gathering the raw materials – reeds and cane that had been soaked and dried, or branches from olive trees that were carefully bent and shaped. The artisans would then create the base, working in a precise spiral pattern, adding the sides and finishing with a durable edge and handle. While the technique may seem simple at first glance, it required a deep knowledge of the materials and the skill to weave them together with both strength and flexibility. The baskets were designed to carry heavy loads while remaining light enough to be easily transported.

In rural villages across Salento and other parts of Puglia, basket making was traditionally a family affair. The men would gather and prepare the materials, while the women, with their nimble hands and years of experience, would weave the baskets. This work was more than just a craft; it was a livelihood that tied families to the rhythms of the land. During harvest time, entire villages would be alive with the sound of weaving, as baskets filled with olives or figs were carried to markets or oil presses. These baskets were crucial for transporting the fruits of the land, which were essential to the local economy and way of life.

However, as the 20th century progressed and industrialization took hold, the demand for handmade wicker baskets began to decline. Plastic containers and mass produced goods quickly replaced the need for traditional woven baskets. Many artisans closed their workshops, and younger generations, drawn to more modern forms of work, did not pick up the craft. By the mid 20th century, the art of weaving panari was in danger of being lost altogether, especially in places like Bari, where once common wicker baskets had become nearly obsolete.

In recent years, however, there has been a quiet revival of interest in the craft. A renewed appreciation for sustainability, artisan products, and regional heritage has led to a resurgence of the panaro. Some of the few remaining artisans – often descendants of those who once made baskets for a living – are

rediscovering and reimagining the tradition. These baskets are no longer just functional farm tools but have been reinterpreted as decorative objects, home furnishings, lampshades, or storage pieces, combining timeless materials with modern design.

This revival of the panaro is not only about restoring an old craft but also about preserving a piece of Puglia's cultural history. The process of making these baskets is now a way to connect with the past, as artisans use traditional methods to create something new for contemporary tastes. By doing so, they not only keep the craft alive but also provide a tangible link to the rural life that once defined the region. Each basket that is woven becomes more than just a product; it is a piece of living history, a symbol of the land, its people, and the hard work that built a community.

Visiting one of the workshops today – in towns like Salento or along Puglia's inland areas – is

more than just buying a handmade product. It's an opportunity to witness the continuity of tradition and craftsmanship, where the process of weaving a basket is as much about connecting with the past as it is about creating something beautiful. Watching artisans bend reeds, soak cane, and carefully weave each strip into place brings the centuries old rhythm of basket making to life once again.

Owning a panaro today is about more than just having a functional item. It's about carrying a piece of history, a reminder of a time when baskets were the backbone of rural life in Puglia. In an era of mass production and disposable goods, these hand woven baskets serve as a symbol of craftsmanship, sustainability, and the enduring strength of tradition. The revival of the panaro is not just a return to an old craft, but a celebration of the timeless connection between the people, the land, and the work that sustains them. In Puglia, these baskets continue to tell the story of a way of life that refuses to be forgotten.

Italian land and nature

Grotte di Stiffe: a subterranean world in Abruzzo

We the Italians Editorial Staff

The Grotte di Stiffe are an extraordinary series of caves located in the rugged terrain of Abruzzo, central Italy. Nestled near the village of San Demetrio ne' Vestini, these caves are part of the Sirente-Velino Natural Park and are renowned for their stunning geological features and the underground river that flows through them.

What sets the Stiffe caves apart is that they are an active resurgence system – meaning that the river beneath the surface flows through the caves before emerging at the entrance. The Rio Gamberale river carves its way through the limestone, gradually shaping the caves over millennia, forming passages, pools, waterfalls, and dramatic rock formations.

Visitors access the caves through a natural opening in the rock face high above the village. A guided pathway of about 700 meters takes guests deeper into the caverns. The journey is made easier by well constructed walkways and platforms, though the path remains uneven, and the temperature inside the cave stays at around 10°C year round. It's best to bring warm clothing and comfortable shoes for the tour.

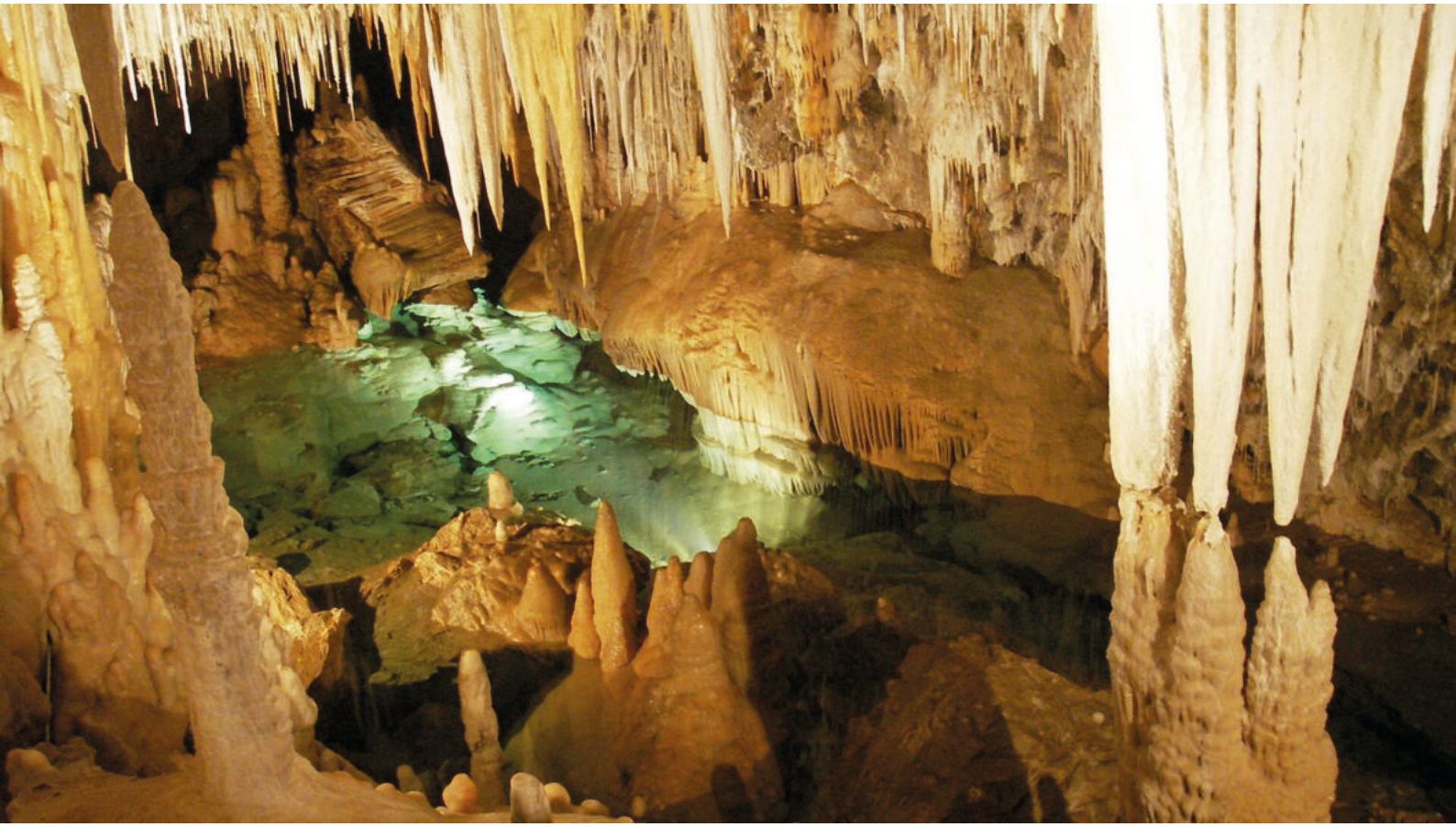
Inside, the sound of rushing water is ever present. The underground stream rises from deep channels and flows alongside the walking route, creating small cascades and rapid currents that change with the seasons. During wetter months, the water can surge through the cave with dramatic force, while in drier periods, it flows more gently, yet still holds visitors' attention.

The play between water and stone creates striking geological features. Stalactites hang from

the ceiling like frozen icicles, and stalagmites rise from the ground, formed by mineral deposits left by centuries of dripping water. Some chambers open into vast caverns, while others narrow into tight passages, all lit by soft artificial lighting that brings out the intricate textures of the rock formations.

The tour typically lasts about an hour, with a knowledgeable guide leading visitors and explaining the geological significance of the caves and their features. As visitors move deeper, the guide points out the changes in the landscape and shares the fascinating history behind the formation of the caves. Visitors are given helmets for safety as the path sometimes passes under low rock formations or over slippery surfaces.

The Grotte di Stiffe were first opened to the public in the 1990s, after extensive exploration and preparation. Today, the site remains a carefully preserved natural wonder, of-



fering an exciting and educational experience for people of all ages. The caves are not only a geological marvel but also a testament to the power of nature to shape the landscape over time.

Though the Stiffe caves are not the longest or largest caves in Italy, their combination of active water features and easy access makes them especially unique. The sight of waterfalls reaching over 20 meters in height in some areas adds an exciting visual dimension to the subterranean journey.

Beyond the caves themselves, the surrounding park area offers additional attractions. Visitors often explore the scenic trails that wind through the park, taking in views of the mountains and valleys of Abruzzo. The peaceful village of Stiffe, with its charming streets and local shops, provides a perfect place to relax after a cave tour.

A visit to the Grotte di Stiffe is not just about exploring a series of tunnels but experiencing the dynamic interaction between water and rock. The caves are constantly evolving, with every visit offering a slightly different

experience of the flow of water, the sounds within the cave, and the visual beauty of the surroundings.

Whether you're an outdoor enthusiast, a geology lover, or simply in search of a unique adventure, the Grotte di Stiffe offer a rare glimpse into the hidden beauty of nature beneath the surface.

Lignano Sabbiadoro

Italian art

Italian nativity scenes, a masterpiece of faith and art

We the Italians Editorial Staff

Nativity art is the craft and artistic skill dedicated to the creation and display of nativity scenes, a three-dimensional and scenic representation of the birth of Jesus. This tradition, deeply rooted in Italian culture, combines religious devotion with local craftsmanship.

Nativity art is not limited to just the Holy Family but re-creates an entire setting with figures made from various materials (such as terracotta, wood, papier-mâché, and cork)

that depict the stable or cave, shepherds, the Three Wise Men, animals, and scenes of daily life from the time.

Artisans, often referred to as "figurari," use techniques passed down through generations to shape and paint the figurines, which can be made of clay, ceramics, or wood. Although widespread across Italy, nativity art reached its peak in 18th-century Naples, where it became a true celebration of local craftsmanship, with lavish displays full of intricate details.

Every December, Italy revives a beloved tradition: nativity scenes pop up all over the country – from north to south – ranging from sandy sculptures to living displays carved into rocks. What began centuries ago as a simple act of faith has blossomed into a rich cultural heritage that combines art, craftsmanship, community and memory.

The origin of this tradition is often traced to a hillside village called Greccio in the Lazio region, where in 1223 Francis of Assisi staged the very first living Nativity scene. From that spiritual gesture

Greccio

sprang a custom that over time evolved into physical creations – first in churches and then across the narrow streets and markets of southern cities – until the birth of an astonishing baroque tradition in cities like Naples. In those times, master artisans crafted elaborate miniature scenes filled with shepherds, merchants, angels, vendors and everyday life, turning the nativity into a tiny theater of human stories.

What emerges today is a vivid mosaic of local traditions and regional styles, offering some of the most impressive nativity displays in the world.

In the northern region of Friuli Venezia Giulia, one finds a truly unique version: the Presepe di Sabbia di Lignano Sabbiadoro. Now in its 22nd edition, this installation transforms fine sand into monumental sculptural scenes of the Nativity and biblical narratives. Sculpted by international artists, each figure is illuminated with dramatic lighting to evoke an almost theatrical effect, blending ephemeral art with

sacred imagery. For 2025, the theme is "Mary," celebrating women across time and scripture through this expressive medium.

Move to the north-west, to the city of Milano, where the historic Basilica of Sant'Ambrogio houses a nativity unlike any other: the Presepe della Prigionia. Created originally in 1944 by Italian soldiers in a Nazi concentration camp to bring hope in dark times, this nativity is crafted from repurposed materials – wood, barbed wire, old clothes – and displayed annually at the basilica's museum. Its humble origins and emotional weight make it one of the most touching nativity scenes in the world.

From Lombardy we cross the Garda lake and we arrive in Peschiera del Garda, in Veneto. This is the first example in the world of an underwater nativity scene, built with the specific intent of making it visible to everyone. It can indeed be admired without going underwater, thanks to the nearby Ponte San Giovanni, which acts as a panoramic balcony accessible to

Peschiera sul Garda

all. The installation consists of 26 life-sized metal sculptures, sculpted with an oxy-acetylene torch, then coated with reflective paint, and placed at the bottom of the canal. On the evening of December 24, with the placement of the Baby Jesus, the Nativity scene is completed: the Baby Jesus is lowered into his manger at the bottom of the Canale di Mezzo, accompanied by choirs and Christmas carols.

In Italy's spiritual heart, the city of Rome hosts a grand international showcase known as 100 Presepi in Vaticano. Running from early December to January 6, the exhibit gathers hundreds of nativity scenes crafted by artists from around the globe – all displayed beneath the sweeping colonnades of St. Peter's Square. It's a celebration not only of religious tradition but also of global creativity and communal sharing.

The town of Assisi, birthplace of the nativity tradition, offers yet another meaningful path:

Assisi

the exhibit called Presepi del Mondo di Assisi. Held in its historic center and in a former palazzo turned exhibition space, this event brings together dozens of interpretations of the nativity from across continents. Among the highlights this year: an 8 meter long Sicilian nativity scene crafted by an Italian artist, blending Umbrian spirituality with Mediterranean flavor and global vision.

Down south, traditions remain vivid and deeply rooted. In Matera (Basilicata), the Presepe Vivente di Matera transforms the ancient stone district known as Sasso Caveoso into a living Bethlehem. Actors in period costumes reenact biblical scenes amid the city's caves and winding alleys under atmospheric lights and sound effects – creating a spiritually rich and immersive experience. The 2025 2026 edition, held on weekends throughout December and early January, carries the theme of peace.

Finally, the art and craft tradition shines in Caltagirone, Sicily – a city renowned for ceramics. Every year, local artisans display handcrafted nativity scenes made of terracotta and maiolica, often showcased along the historic center or in local museums. The event, running from December 1 to January 7, transforms the entire town into a festive celebration of Mediter-

Matera

ranean identity, craftsmanship and holiday cheer.

Together, these varied expressions of the nativity tradition reveal how throughout Italy the holiday can take many different shapes – from sand sculptures and humble re creations born in hardship to elaborate ceramic art and theatrical street performances. Each version offers a unique lens through which to rediscover culture, faith and community.

Visiting these displays is more than a festive outing – it's a journey into history, artistry and collective memory. Whether under the vaults of an ancient basilica, among UNESCO listed caves in a southern village, or on a beach molded by the hands of sculptors, the spirit of Christmas resurfaces every year in Italy, reinventing itself through the love and creativity of its people.

Italian cuisine

Milanese-Style Veal Scaloppine with Creamy Polenta and Brussels Sprouts

Amy Riolo

When the seasons change from fall to winter I tend to crave creamy polenta, crispy, olive-oil laden vegetables, and, on occasion, the rich and succulent flavors of veal. For this reason, I've created a dish that combines all three. My Milanese-Style Veal Scallopine with Creamy Polenta and Brussels Sprouts recipe is easy enough to serve anytime, yet worthy of a special occasion. Not a fan of veal? You can swap it out for roasted butternut squash, eggplant, chicken, beef, or fish fillets as well!

Recipe adapted from Olive Oil

For Dummies, co-written with Dr. Simon Poole.

Ingredients

- 1/3 cup Amy Riolo Selections or other good- quality extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- 2 cups trimmed Brussels sprouts, halved
- 1/3 cup Parmigiano- Reggiano cheese, divided
- 1 cup polenta
- ½ cup unbleached, all-purpose flour
- ¼ teaspoon unrefined sea salt, divided
- 1/3 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper, divided
- 1 pound (4 pieces between .25 and .30 pound each) veal
- scaloppine
- 1 medium lemon, quartered

Directions

• Heat the oven to 425 Grease a baking sheet and top with 1 tablespoon of olive oil. Drizzle another tablespoon of olive oil over the Brussels sprouts and sprinkle with 2 table- spoons of cheese. Toss to coat and roast for 20 minutes, until tender and golden.

• While the Brussels sprouts are roasting, cook the polenta by placing 3 cups of water in a large pot over high heat and bring to a Slowly whisk in the polenta. Add 1 more cup of water and turn down to low heat to simmer for approximately 10 to 15 minutes, stirring frequently. (If you're use instant polenta, it should be cooked according to package directions). If your polenta is very thick, whisk in an additional ½ cup of water. The polenta should be creamy and have the consistency of grits. Stir in 2 teaspoons of olive oil, 2 tablespoons of cheese, and 1/8 teaspoon of salt and pepper, to taste.

• Place the flour on a large plate and add 2 table- spoons of cheese, stirring to combine. Dip the veal pieces into the flour mixture, turn over to coat, shake off the excess, and place on a platter.

• Heat 2 tablespoons of olive oil in a large, wide non-stick Add the veal to skillet, season with 1/8 teaspoon of salt and 1/8 teaspoon.


Amy Riolo
Olive Oil
dummies

Italian territories

The essence of Gallura

We the Italians Editorial Staff

Perched in the northeastern corner of Sardinia, Gallura stretches from the river Coghinas in the west, up to Mount Limbara in the south, and extends toward Mount Nieddu in the southeast near Budoni. This region spans rugged hills, granite outcrops, holm oak and cork oak woods, and a coastline that plunges into the Mediterranean — a mix of wild nature and dramatic beauty.

In the interior, ancient hills and granite ridges — including the massif of Monte Limbara — dominate the landscape. The evergreen Mediterranean scrub, alongside forests of oak and cork, give the land a rough, resilient feel. Along the coast, the terrain changes: rocky cliffs, hidden coves, and long stretches of white sand open onto a sea so clear and vibrant it ranges from emerald green to deep azure.

This coastal stretch includes some of Italy's most renowned seaside destinations. Costa Smeralda — the jewel of Gallura — has become synonymous with glamour and leisure. But Gallura is more than that: its charm lies also in the quieter villages, ancient granite benches, winding country roads, and the wild grace of its sea rock formations.

Gallura's history goes back millennia. The earliest settlements date to the Neolithic period, but its most defining era began around 1600 B.C. with the arrival of the Nuragic civilization. From that time on, the land has been dotted with mysterious stone

towers and sacred wells — archaeological landmarks that testify to ancient rhythms of life, agriculture, and belief.

During the Middle Ages, Gallura stood as one of the island's four historic "judicatures" — autonomous territorial units — its capital originally in a place now known as Olbia. Over centuries, social and political changes followed — invasions, feudal shifts, fragmentation — but through it all the land retained a strong identity, shaped by its rugged terrain and proud communities.

Language and culture in Gallura reflect this layered history. The local tongue, Gallurese, is closer to Corsican than to other Sardinian dialects — a legacy of ancient migrations and historic closeness with the sea routes to Corsica. Traditions endure in the mountain villages, in old stone buildings, in folklore, and in hospitality anchored to land and sea rather than fast tourism.

Among Gallura's treasures are its scattered archaeological sites: stone nuraghi, ancient tombs, sa-

cred wells — traces of the island's prehistoric inhabitants that survived through millennia. Inland villages — away from coastlines and tourist bustle — preserve a sense of solitude and authenticity: granite paths, pastoral landscapes, dry stone walls, centuries old olive trees, and timeless rituals tied to shepherding and seasonal rhythms.

Yet Gallura also embraces the modern: thanks to its beauty and strategic location, the coast draws travellers seeking sun, sea, sailing, and Mediterranean glamour. But beyond the yachts and luxury resorts lies a territory rooted in history — a place where nature, memory, and daily life still coexist in a fragile balance.

Visiting Gallura can feel like stepping into layers of time — from ancient stone towers rising against granite hills, to turquoise seas lapping quiet coves, to bustling towns where tradition and tourism meet. It's a region where the wind carves the rocks, the sea shapes the shores, and history resonates in the stones and paths.

Gallura is a land of contrasts — wild yet welcoming, historic yet alive, rugged yet shaped by human hands over centuries. For those who go beyond the postcards, it offers not only sights, but stories: of ancient peoples, of forests and sea, of resilience, identity, and quiet beauty that survives the passing of time.

Italian sustainability

Italian rice waste becomes a new model for sustainable building

We the Italians Editorial Staff

In northern Italy a quietly revolutionary experiment in building is taking shape - what until recently was considered agricultural waste, the husks and chaff left after rice harvesting, is now at the center of an ambitious and distinctly Italian construction project that aims to rethink how sustainable homes are made. Leading this effort is Ricehouse, an Italian startup founded in 2016 with the goal of transforming rice by-products into high-performance, environmentally responsible building materials while strengthening a circular economy rooted in local resources and traditions. The signature innovation is Ri-

ceCyclingWall - a prefabricated wall system and "natural cement" created from a blend of rice husks, a natural hydraulic binder and very little water. The result is a monolithic, single-material wall that is breathable, fire-resistant and fully recyclable at the end of its life. Instead of burning or discarding rice husks - a common practice in many rice-producing regions - this system elevates them to a key structural and insulating component of modern Italian housing.

What makes this development particularly meaningful is how tightly it is connected to Italy's rice-growing heritage. The country's northwestern plains, especially the areas around Vercelli, Pavia and Novara, produce roughly half of Europe's rice. By turning what farmers once considered waste into a valuable building asset, RiceCyclingWall strengthens a regional identity that blends agriculture, craftsmanship and innovation. Materials are sourced close to where rice is grown, allowing the project to close an elegant loop: from field to construction site and, ultimately, back to nature.

Buildings made with RiceCyclingWall benefit from strong thermal insulation and acoustic comfort, naturally regulated humidity and dramatically reduced energy demands for heating and

cooling. The walls are resistant to mold, insects and fire, yet remain lightweight and easy to install thanks to the prefabricated system. Panels arrive ready to assemble, which streamlines construction and reduces both costs and environmental impact.

The circular approach also creates economic value for farmers who no longer need to dispose of husks by burning them - an environmentally damaging practice. Instead, agricultural by-products gain new purpose in a growing green-construction sector. This collaboration between Italy's rice fields and its building industry strengthens local supply chains and supports rural communities while reducing overall waste.

The philosophy extends beyond wall systems to include natural plasters, finishes and floor screeds that rely on rice straw, husks and lime. The result is a home that avoids synthetic materials wherever possible and reflects the textures and qualities of the Italian landscape. These buildings are not only energy efficient but also express a cultural connection to the places where their materials originated.

At a time when the global construction sector is responsible for significant emissions and resource consumption, RiceCyclingWall demonstrates that meaningful solutions can come from Italy's own agricultural heartland. It is an example of how tradition and innovation can intersect - transforming rice by-products into a foundation for healthier, more sustainable homes shaped by Italian ingenuity.

Italian historical trademarks

Savio Firmino

Associazione Marchi Storici d'Italia

In nearly 85 years of history, tradition, and innovation, Savio Firmino has drawn inspiration from the forms and values of classic style, learned with expertise in its first artisan workshop in the heart of Oltrarno, the hub of Firenze's artistic craftsmanship since the Renaissance. Over the years, the company has infused all its collections with this invaluable cultural heritage, making them exclusive and original. Attention to detail, artisan passion, and skilled, precious manual craftsmanship - these are

the distinctive elements that have continued to characterize the Savio Firmino product for four generations. Each piece is designed and created to meet the highest expectations of comfort while maintaining the harmony of form. It's furniture that expresses understated and graceful excellence.

Founded in 1941 by Firmino Savio, an expert carver, the first Savio Firmino collection featured wooden chandeliers, candle holders, and torchiere lamps, all hand-carved and gilded.

In the 1950s, Savio Firmino gained the attention of the international market, especially in the United States, South Africa, and the United Kingdom, with its collection of exclusive mirrors, hand-carved and decorated with gold leaf, crystals, brass, and semi-precious stones.

In the 1980s, Savio Firmino expanded its product range by introducing the Ambiente Notte Collection, dedicated to bedroom furniture. During these years, from an inspired design by Guido Savio, the founder's son, the art. 1696 bed was created, featuring elegant carved ribbons and flowers. The 1696 became the symbol of Savio Firmino and remains its most recognized product internationally to this day.

In the 1990s, the new Savio Firmino headquarters was opened in the industrial hub of Scandicci (Firenze, Tuscany), which houses the most important Italian fashion and design brands. The company is recognized and appreciated worldwide for its unmistakable style.

The 2000s saw the entry of the third generation of the Savio family into the business: Cosimo, Gregorio, and Michela now lead the family company alongside the founder's two sons, Amedeo and Guido.

In 2008, the Notte Fatata Collection was launched, the first high-level children's furniture ever created, and still today the most exclusive available on the market. Dedicated to children, it was specifically designed by Guido Savio to celebrate the birth of his first granddaughter. This exclusive and complete collection of cradles, beds, changing tables, castles, and study desks is the perfect expression of the Savio Firmino style, even for the youngest.

Today, Savio Firmino uses blockchain technology to register its products, offering consumers clear and transparent information about their origins, materials,

and craftsmanship. Moreover, it is considering the integration of EUDR certification, in compliance with European deforestation regulations set to take effect in 2026, further strengthening its commitment to sustainability and a responsible, renewable supply chain.

Savio Firmino, then as now, draws inspiration from the values of tradition, while utilizing innovative techniques and cutting-edge machinery that allow the company to share its historical expertise with the world.

Italian sport

Milano-Cortina 2026, Italy's past triumphs on snow

Federico Pasquali

On February 6, 2026, the Winter Olympic Games will begin in Milan (Lombardy) and Cortina d'Ampezzo (Veneto). Here at We the Italians, our Italian Sport columns for December and January will be dedicated to this event: in December 2025 we will look back at the past, and in January 2026 we will try to understand which athletes might become the protagonists of this edition of the Winter Olympics.

Italy has already hosted the event twice: in Cortina d'Ampezzo in 1956 and in Turin in 2006. Two editions far apart in time, different in context, atmosphere, and ambitions, yet linked by a common thread: Italy's ability to transform sports into an event rich with emotion. And above all, its ability to produce champions who have shaped Olympic history.

The first Italian edition, in January 1956, was a turning point for the country. Cortina, the most famous Italian resort in the Dolomites, brought a major international event to Italy at a moment when the nation was building its postwar identity. It was the first Winter Olympics

Eugenio Monti

Armin Zöggeler

broadcast on television through Eurovision - a technological leap that brought millions of people closer to snow sports. On the sports side, Cortina '56 is remembered above all for Eugenio Monti, the undisputed star of bobsleigh, destined to become an icon not only for his medals but for his fair play. In Cortina he won two silvers, but his legend would grow in the following years: two golds and two bronzes overall, and the famous episode of altruism in 1964, when he lent a crucial part of his sled to his British rivals. For this gesture he received the first Pierre de Coubertin medal, a symbol of the true Olympic spirit.

Fifty years later, Turin 2006 presented a completely different image: a modern, technological event, celebrated for its organizational quality and cultural impact. The competitions were held in Turin and across the mountains of Piedmont and the Susa Valley, a region that witnessed achievements that remain etched in collective memory. Italy closed those Games with excellent results, led by two stars: Armin Zöggeler, gold medalist in luge and the only athlete in the world to win six consecutive Olympic medals in the same disci-

Carolina Kostner

pline, and Enrico Fabris, double gold medalist in speed skating and key member of the team pursuit squad. Turin also showcased the immense talent of Carolina Kostner, then very young, who would go on to become the most successful figure skater in Italian history.

But Italy's history at the Winter Olympics is filled with a long series of accomplishments in skiing, skating, bobsleigh, skeleton, and biathlon. Some Italian athletes have become true monuments of winter sports. Gustav Thöni, a symbol of the 1970s, won one gold (slalom in 1972) and two silvers (1976) at the Olympics, along with four World Cup titles. Thöni paved the way for a generation of skiers who shaped the identity of all Italian skiing.

Deborah Compagnoni is likely the greatest Italian skier of all time. Three Olympic gold medals (super-G in 1992, giant slalom in 1994 and 1998) and one silver. Grace on the edge of the snow and the spirit of a warrior: her trilogy of gold is unique in the history of Italian skiing. And then Alberto Tomba, the name that best embodied the popularity of the sport: the charisma of a global star and extraordinary results. Across the three editions he competed in, he won three Olympic golds (slalom 1988, giant slalom 1988, and giant slalom 1992) and two silvers.

Deborah Compagnoni

"Tomba la Bomba" brought skiing into global prime time, becoming a cultural phenomenon, not just a sporting one. Also noteworthy are Manuela Di Centa and Isolde Kostner: the former, a major figure in cross-country skiing, won a bronze at Salt Lake City 2002; the latter, Isolde, earned one silver and two bronzes in alpine skiing, continuing Compagnoni's legacy.

Alberto Tomba

But the absolute Italian queen of the Winter Olympics is Arianna Fontana, the most decorated Italian athlete ever at the Winter Games: 11 medals between 2006 and 2022 in short track. Her competitive longevity and her ability to win in often chaotic tactical situations make her a true global legend. In speed skating, the male figure symbolizing Italy's success is Enrico Fabris, the undisputed protagonist of Turin 2006 with two golds and a bronze in the 5,000 meters. His victories turned, for a few weeks, a little-known discipline into a national passion, showcasing the strength of Italy's ice-skating tradition.

Still on skates, but in ice dance, few pairs in the world have left such a deep mark as Maurizio Margaglio and Barbara Fusar Poli. World champions in 2001, European champions and Olympic bronze medalists in 2002, they opened a new path for Italian figure skating, bringing elegance, theatricality, and a technical level that had no precedent at the time.

Fast forward to the present - once again, women have raised the Italian flag high in the world of winter sports. In giant slalom and super-G, Federica Brignone shines as the most successful Italian skier ever in the World Cup: the first Italian woman to win the overall crystal globe in 2020, victorious also in the giant slalom and combined standings, and enriched

Manuela Di Centa

Isolde Kostner

Arianna Fontana

by two Olympic medals and three World Championship podiums, including gold in the combined at the 2023 Worlds. Next to her in the modern pantheon is Sofia Goggia, the undisputed queen of downhill. Her Olympic gold in 2018 and silver in 2022 speak of a champion capable of dominating the specialty for years, with four downhill World Cups placing her in an almost unique category. Her victories, often built on the edge of risk, have turned every race into an event.

In biathlon, a discipline that has become central for Italy in recent years, the leading figure is Dorothea Wierer. Her two consecutive overall World Cups, four world titles, and three Olympic medals testify to her decade-long international dominance. Together, these athletes form a gallery of successes that continues to define Italy's identity in winter sports: a heritage of talent, courage, and consistency that spans different disciplines yet tells a single story, that of a country capable of excelling on snow and ice.

The arrival of the Milano-Cortina 2026 Games will add a new chapter. And once again, Italy will find itself under the world's spotlight, proud of a history that begins on the peaks of Cortina, passes through Turin, and continues to grow - snow after snow, medal after medal.

Maurizio Margaglio and Barbara Fusar Poli

Federica Brignone and Sofia Goggia

Dorothea-Wierer

Italian good news

Women become the majority in Italian higher education

We the Italians Editorial Staff

Italy is quietly becoming a country of college graduates – especially female graduates. Each year about six out of every ten university degree recipients are women, and when we look at master's-level education the figure climbs to around seven out of ten. The shift in educational attainment has been underway for decades: roughly 35 years ago girls began overtaking boys in high-school diploma attainment, and for the past fifteen years the trend has held steady.

This evolution has real implica-

tions. With every new generation, an estimated one woman in four is entering adulthood with a level of education that not only surpasses her male peers, but raises questions about what it means for the gender balance in work, influence and power. In effect, these women are entering the job market already holding advanced credentials, a fact that could reshape labour dynamics.

On the face of it, the data present a clear gain for women. The female advantage shows up across levels – secondary school, undergraduate and postgraduate. That advantage creates a demographic reality in which male age-cohorts increasingly include a high proportion of peers with lower educational credentials than their female counterparts. That matters: education remains a key predictor of future earnings, job stability and career advancement.

However, the story is complex. Despite their educational lead, women still often find obstacles in the world of employment, particularly when it comes to leadership roles and decision-making power. Higher education alone does not guarantee equal presence in positions of authority. The mismatch between female credentials and male dominance in boards, senior management and public appointments suggests we are on the verge of a turning point – but not yet fully there.

What's also striking is the cultural framing of the shift. In conversa-

tions about education, Italy is no longer best described as struggling with girls' under-performance; instead, the focus is on how the traditional male educational advantage has eroded. Schools that once delivered higher rates of male success now produce more female graduates. That inversion affects how families, institutions and employers think about talent-development and career trajectories. For young women now graduating at higher rates, the path forward opens potential opportunities. At the same time, for young men whose credentials lag, the challenge is real. If large cohorts of women are earning degrees and postgraduate credentials while their male peers are not, the workplace will increasingly reflect this imbalance – for better or worse.

In sum, Italy's educational landscape is moving into a new era. The rise of women as the majority of university graduates signals change – one that might ripple into business leadership, governance and public life. Yet the transformation is incomplete. Women's dominance in numbers does not yet fully translate into dominance in power. That suggests a phase of transition – one where female educational achievement is no longer a marginal victory, but may become the baseline from which future inequalities must be understood and addressed.

Interview with Barbara Faedda

200 Years of Italian Studies at Columbia University in New York

Umberto Mucci

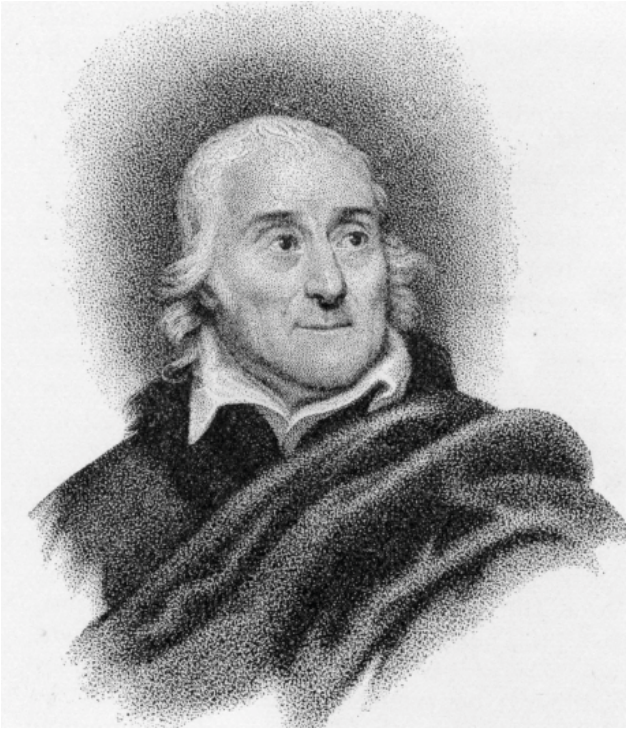
Columbia University is not only the most important university in New York, but one of the most important in the United States - and therefore in the world. In 2025, Columbia celebrated the 200th anniversary of the establishment of its first chair in Italian, and simultaneously the bicentennial of the first Italian opera ever staged in the United States. Lorenzo Da Ponte played a leading role in both of these events.

Columbia University

We discuss this with the Executive Director of the Italian Academy for Advanced Studies in America at Columbia University, Professor Barbara Faedda.

Hello Professor Faedda. I'd like to begin with a question about you: what path brought you from Italy to the United States?

In 2002-03, I spent a research period in Boston as a visiting scholar at Boston University School of Law. During that same time, I was also able to conduct research at Harvard and MIT. I returned to Boston a couple of years later, and during my stay I noticed an open position at Columbia University's Italian Academy. I applied, interviewed, and was ultimately selected. I decided to accept the offer and have remained at Columbia and the Italian Academy ever since, where I am now the Executive Director.



Lorenzo da Ponte

The Italian Academy for Advanced Studies in America at Colum-

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF ITALIAN

1825–2025
200 YEARS OF
ITALIAN STUDIES

Casa Italiana

bia University in New York was founded in 1991. But there have been Italian studies at Columbia for 200 years now. Can you tell our readers about this history?

Yes, in 2025 we celebrated two centuries since the establishment of the first chair in Italian at Columbia. It was in 1825 that Lorenzo Da Ponte - the celebrated librettist of some of Mozart's most beloved operas (Così fan tutte, Don Giovanni, The Marriage of Figaro) - took up that position, which he held until his death in 1838.

He was succeeded by another historically significant figure, Eleuterio Felice Foresti, a patriot, exile, and friend of Giuseppe Mazzini. The foundations of Italian studies at Columbia University are fascinating, prestigious, and rich in history; both the Academy and the Department of Italian are certainly proud of them.

You are housed in a nearly 100-year-old building called Casa Italiana, which recalls the style of Renaissance palaces. It is an important pillar of Italian culture in New York...

Columbia University's Casa Italiana was inaugurated on October 12, 1927. The night before, a lavish banquet was held in a downtown hotel in honor of Senator Guglielmo Marconi, the 1909 Nobel Prize winner in Physics, who had arrived specifically for the event as a representative of the Italian government.

The building was considered a successful expression of Italian culture, and in its beautiful au-

ditorium one could admire portraits of Dante and Michelangelo, quotations from Virgil and Ennius, the coats of arms of many Italian cities, and refined neo-Renaissance architecture.

All of this originated in the early 1900s, when a dozen students of Italian origin founded the Circolo Italiano; the Circolo played a fundamental role in creating Columbia University's Casa Italiana, which was built with financial support from Italian Americans as well as from Italians and Americans.

The architecture firm responsible for the design, the renowned McKim, Mead & White, had already worked on several Columbia campus buildings; Casa Italiana stood out for its beauty and has for several decades been listed among New York City's historic - and therefore protected - buildings.

In 1991, thanks to a rather unusual agreement between Columbia and the Italian government, the Italian Academy for Advanced Studies was created. The Italian government purchased the building and leased it back to Columbia University for 500 years.

After the purchase, the Casa was renovated, and an endowment was established - a fund that allows the Academy to offer postdoctoral research fellowships, run interdisciplinary programs and projects, and organize public events.

At that time, the Italian government made a forward-looking cultural investment to finance the world's only institute of advanced studies with a distinctly Italian identity, strategically placing it in an exceptionally international and prestigious setting: Columbia University and the city of New York.

The Department of Italian, which for many years had been housed inside the Casa, was moved to the center of campus while continuing to educate undergraduate and graduate students from all over the world. For many years I have had the privilege of teaching there, which makes me something of a bridge between the Department

of Italian and the Italian Academy - between the two main campus hubs dedicated to Italian culture and scholarship.

What are the activities and programs of the Italian Academy?

An important part of the Academy is the Fellowship Program, a research fellowship initiative (a PhD is required) that each year attracts scholars from many parts of the world. After being selected by a committee of experts in their respective fields, these scholars can spend a research period here at Columbia. Beginning next year, thanks to the vision of our new director, Professor Elena Aprile, the Academy intends to focus primarily on young people - that is, promising and brilliant postdocs - so that their experience at Columbia can serve as an important launch for their research careers.

Alongside these fellowships, there is also a series of other programs and projects, some of which I have conceived and developed over the years thanks to the support and collaboration of

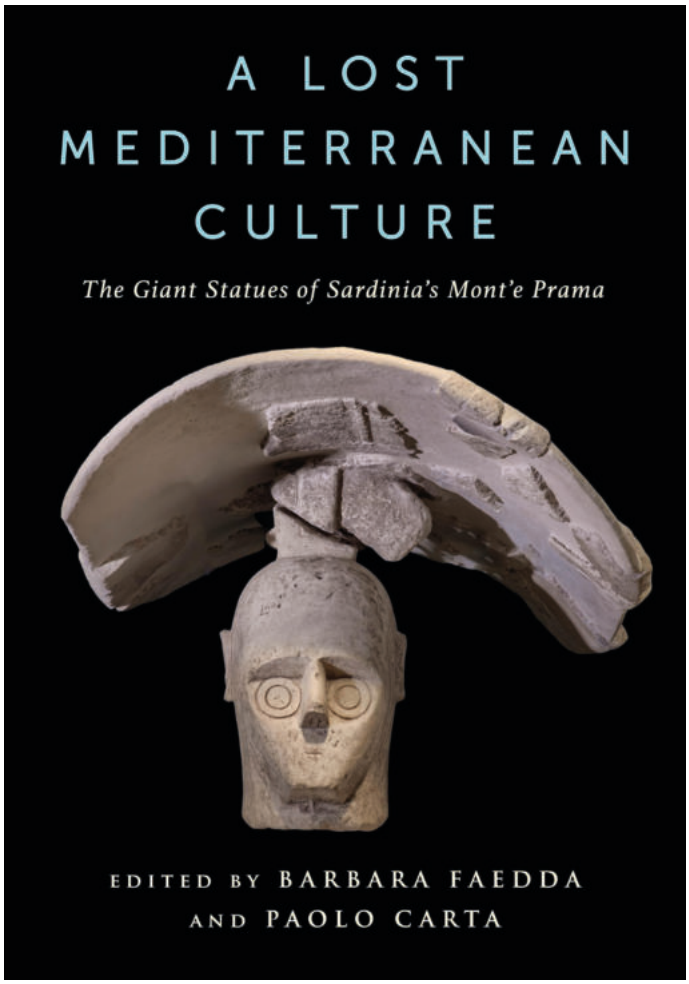
Mont'e Prama at MET

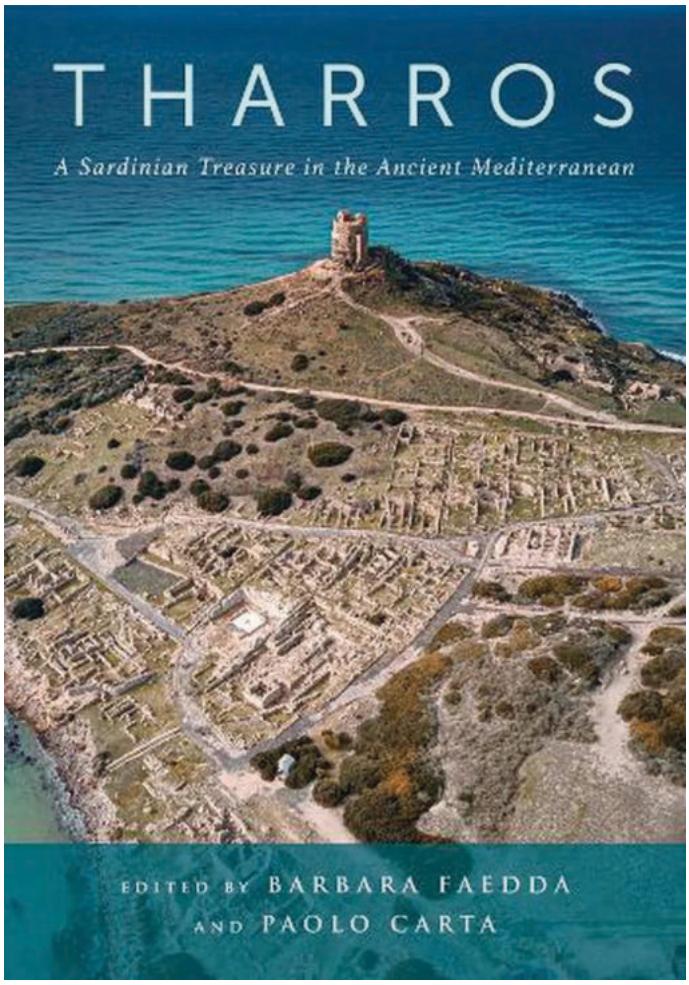
an exceptional staff.

The International Observatory for Cultural Heritage, launched in 2016, is dedicated to the study, safeguarding, and conservation of cultural heritage, particularly that which is at risk (due to natural disasters, urban development, conflict, environmental deterioration, and illegal trade or trafficking). In 2023, thanks to the IOCH, thousands of visitors were able to admire a colossal statue brought to the Metropolitan Museum of Art from the archaeological site of Mont'e Prama in Sardinia. Among the Observatory's most important initiatives is the Sardinia Project, which over the years has produced two volumes (A Lost Mediterranean Culture. The Giant Statues of Sardinia's Mont'e Prama and Tharros. A Sardinian Treasure in the Ancient Mediterranean), as well as several conferences and exhibitions.

The Rule of Law Initiative was established in 2020, given the relevance of a topic that concerns everyone and is connected to urgent and pressing issues related to human rights and social justice.

Back in 2008, we launched our Holocaust Remembrance series which - aligned with Europe





and the United Nations - seeks to offer historical and academic reflection each year on the Shoah, antisemitism, and racism, coinciding with January 27, the date of the liberation of Auschwitz. It is a particularly substantial program which, in eighteen years, has gathered a rich variety of testimonies and expertise from numerous Italian and international scholars and specialists.

In 2021 we inaugurated Women Leaders Now, an initiative linked to International Women's Day and Women's History Month, featuring participants from the worlds of science, politics, law, and diplomacy.

We also devote significant effort to public events, which reflect the Academy's interdisciplinary range. Finally, I would like to mention our publications, which require constant research and scientific collaboration, and which round out the Academy's mission.

You have also worked on several digital exhibitions, including one that intrigued me: "Italy at Columbia," which explores the history of Italian studies at Columbia University...

In 2017 we celebrated Casa's 90th anniversary. On that occasion, Columbia University Press published my book From Da Ponte to the Casa Italiana, and shortly thereafter we produced a physical exhibition in our building. For the 200th anniversary of the Italian chair, we decided to make available an excerpt from the original exhibition, by creating a digital version that can be visited permanently.

From Da Ponte to the Casa Italiana

We mark **International Women's Day** each March 8 —and **Women's History Month** throughout March— by publishing interviews on pressing issues.

Anna Grassellino is the director of the National Quantum Information Science SQMS Center and the head of the SQMS division at Fermilab, America's particle physics and accelerator laboratory.

Elena Cattaneo, co-founder and director of the University of Milan's Center for Stem Cell Research, is a lead researcher on Huntington's disease and an advisor on research ethics. She is a Senator for Life in the Italian Parliament.

Photini Pazartzis is a professor of international law, director of the Athens Public International Law Center at the National & Kapodistrian University of Athens, and chair of the UN Human Rights Committee (ICCPR).

Claudia Tebaldi is a climate scientist and statistician at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory and coauthor of the report from the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC AR6 WG1).

Christina Haswood is a Navajo member of the Kansas House of Representatives, elected at just 26 years of age. Her MA is in public health and she advises on issues of Indigenous trauma and BIPOC policy.

Valeria Valente (L), senator, is the president of the Italian Parliamentary Investigation Committee on Femicide and Gender Violence; **Marina Calloni** (R), is professor and director of the Against Domestic Violence Research center at the University of Milan–Bicocca.

2025: **Roraima Andriani**, Special Representative of the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) to the United Nations, was interviewed by Barbara Faedda, Executive Director of the Italian Academy (who launched this series).

Read this interview **starting on March 3**, and see our other conversations here: **italianacademy.columbia.edu**

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
THE ITALIAN ACADEMY
FOR ADVANCED STUDIES IN AMERICA

Alongside this, there are other digital exhibitions that highlight important cases and precious cultural heritage sites.

This year you also celebrated another major bicentennial: the arrival of Italian opera in the United States...

1825 was a special year not only for Lorenzo Da Ponte, but also for Italian music in the United States: an Italian opera, Il Barbiere di Siviglia, conducted by Manuel García, was performed for the first time - in Italian - in New York. The performance attracted New York's elite and many prominent national and

international figures.

As New York music critics observed, opera as a genre was not new, but this time it was in Italian, and it featured in the audience none other than Mozart's famous librettist, Lorenzo Da Ponte, who welcomed its arrival. Musicologists, well acquainted with the subsequent founding of the first Italian Opera House, teach us about the developments and turns that have shaped the presence of Italian opera in New York and in the United States ever since.

As you mentioned, you also teach in Columbia University's Department of Italian, offering courses on contemporary Italy. What is it like to describe today's Italy to students who may sometimes know only the Italy of yesterday?

It is an intense and rewarding experience. Columbia students are particularly international - so, in addition to a majority of Americans, the class also includes young people from many other parts of the world: Asia, Latin America, Europe, and so on. All are interested in delving deeper than what they already know of Italy, often limited to hearsay, a brief vacation, or stories from immigrant grandparents.

I find it especially engaging to take students through a journey that touches on multiple "Italies" and to explore with them concepts such as authenticity, tradition, creativity, and innovation - as well as debunking a few stereotypes.

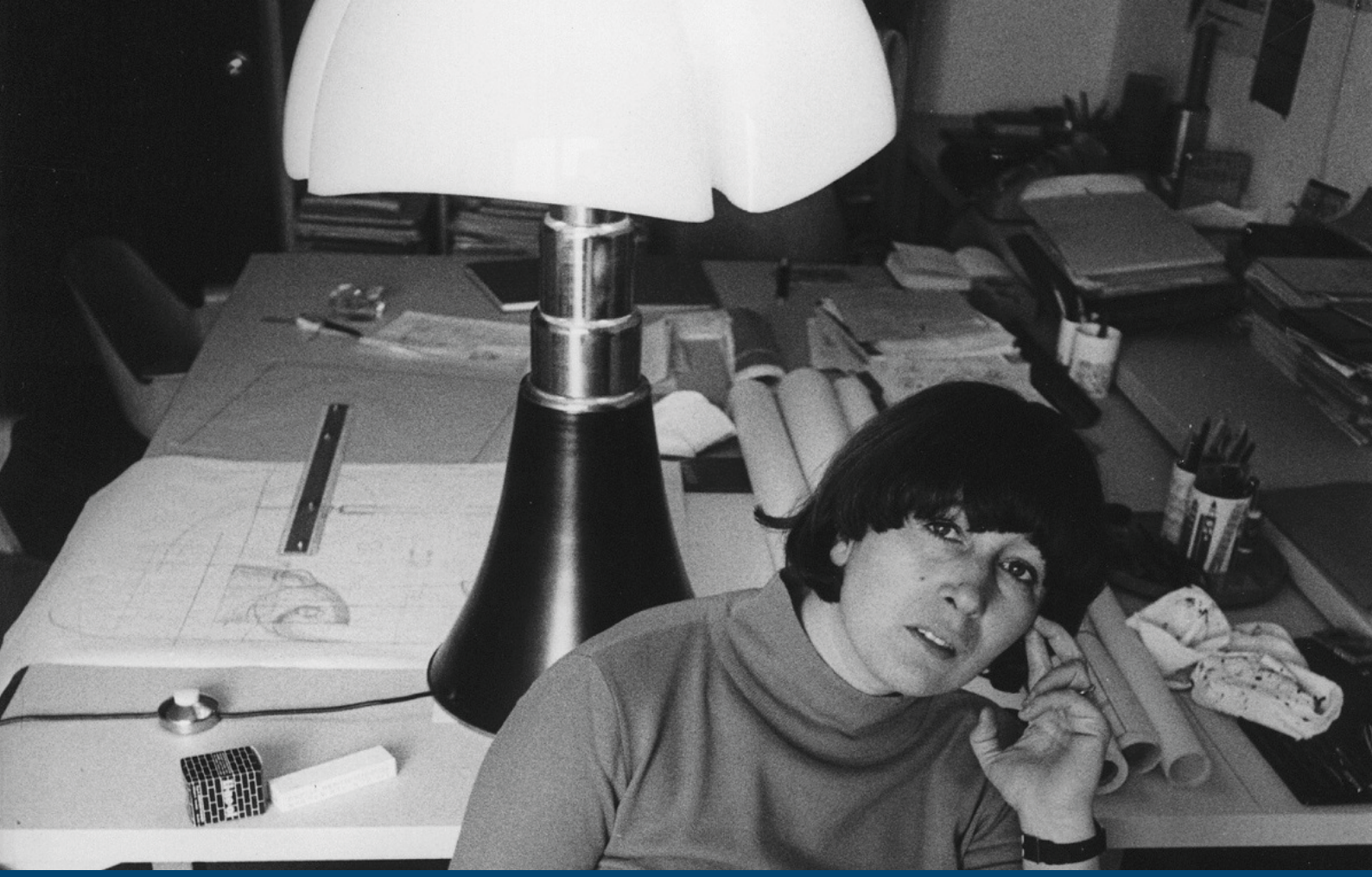
THE 2025 YEARBOOK
OF WE THE ITALIANS

amazon

ALSO AVAILABLE ON AMAZON

We the Italians. Two flags, One heart.
One hundred interviews about Italy and the US

YEARBOOKS
2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 | **2025** *new!*



Italian design

The figure of Gae Aulenti and the 60th Anniversary of the Pipistrello

Alberto Improda

Gae Aulenti stands as one of the most important and original figures in the history of Italian design. Born on December 4, 1927, in Palazzolo dello Stella, in the Friuli Venezia Giulia region, Gaetana Emiliana Aulenti – "Gae" to everyone – earned her degree in architecture from the Politecnico di Milano in 1953 and became a leading voice in the field starting in the 1960s.

The career of this architect, designer, and artist unfolded across multiple paths, from interior and furniture design to major architectural projects, such as transfor-

ming Paris's Gare d'Orsay into a museum. Transversality, multidisciplinarity, and eclecticism are defining traits of Gae Aulenti's work, and she stated clearly and meaningfully that she had "no desire to be a specialist in anything," wishing instead to live as a nomad "from one place to another, from one job to another."

In this 2025, now drawing to a close, the sixtieth anniversary of one of her most historic design creations is being celebrated – a piece that has taken on an almost manifesto-like significance for the designer: the Pipistrello lamp. Aulenti designed the Pipistrello in 1965 for the Olivetti store in Paris, and it was produced by Martinelli Luce. The Olivetti store itself was an extraordinary project – a space conceived to evoke the piazza of an ideal Italian city, characterized by enveloping curves, white plastic laminate surfaces, a red cladding for the central column, and a Senufo anthropomorphic sculpture as a symbolic element.

In this exceptional setting, poised between the metaphysical and the theatrical, the Pipistrello found its natural habitat, fully expressing its originality and helping create a unique and captivating atmosphere, one bordering on the surreal.

The lamp enters the environment not only as a technical device but also – and above all – as a kind of living organism: the shape of its white methacrylate diffuser evokes the silhouette of the winged nocturnal animal without ever becoming an explicit reference. The designer conceived the Pipistrello as an artifact halfway between a technological invention and an architectural work: the base as foundations, the telescopic stem as trunk or column, the diffuser as a capital.

This tripartite verticality gives the lamp a strong architectural rigor, a tacit structural order that enhances the freedom of its design. Its footprint reveals a carefully calibrated construction, in which the complexity of the curves finds perfect balance: the imagination and sensuality of the forms coexist seamlessly with the discipline and precision of the rapidograph.

Olivetti store in Paris

The project's extreme modernity is also evident in the difficulties encountered in bringing it to life. Some components of the lamp, as well as the telescopic mechanism, posed extremely demanding challenges – nearly impossible given the molding technologies and production methods available in the 1960s.

The creation of the Pipistrello, consequently, was anything but easy and came only at the end of a rather painful development process. It is said that the project was proposed to Elio Martinelli by Sergio Camilli, founder of Poltronova, who presented it with a phrase that has since become legendary: "Gae has this lamp she needs to make…". The project then remained in Martinelli's drawers for months: the telescopic stem was difficult to engineer, and the diffuser with its sinuous flaps was nearly impossible to mold.

After its debut in the Olivetti store, the Pipistrello spread its wings, becoming a cult object and establishing itself internationally. Over time, the lamp has been developed in numerous variants – initially in agreement with the designer and later continued by Martinelli Luce: aluminum finishes, reduced sizes, cordless versions, and models for workstations.

For its sixtieth anniversary, the lamp has been reissued in an elegant and striking limited-edition White Matt celebratory version.
Emiliana Martinelli has recalled how Gae Aulenti impressed those around her with her personal charisma, determination, and authority, as well as with her professional talent, which allowed her to visualize a project in its entirety from the outset, without hesitation.

The Pipistrello faithfully reflects the nature of its designer: it is not conciliatory, not decorative, not timid; it is independent, rigorous, capable of conversing with its surroundings while maintaining its autonomy without ever becoming hostile to its environment.

In the lamp, one finds much of Gae Aulenti herself: her passion for theater, for staging, for installations, as well as her absolute mastery of technical drawing and construction – a virtuous combination of imagination and rigor, freedom and order.

Today, sixty years after its creation, we can say that the Pipistrello retains all its relevance, vitality, and driving force. In fact, in the Contemporary world – in our Society of Complexity – the project finds a truly ideal habitat, thanks to its intricate nature as a rigorous micro-architecture, a scenographic object, a quasi-metaphysical figure, and a futuristic lighting device.

Ultimately, no one has ever captured the meaning, destiny, and essence of the Pipistrello better than its creator: "I would like an object we design to last a hundred years, because we want it that way, just as we desire an Egyptian or Mayan object. The idea of durability is, for me, a profound and moral idea. That is why a designer, even when creating an object destined for production and for a future he or she cannot fully know, must design it as though it were meant for a specific place: such is the case of my Pipistrello lamp, created many years ago for the Olivetti store in Paris."

Italian culture and history

The illuminated nativity of Manarola

We the Italians Editorial Staff

Every winter, the hillside above the village of Manarola in the Cinque Terre becomes a luminous canvas for a spectacular nativity scene installation. The display brings together tradition, art, and community spirit in a vivid celebration of the season.

It all began back in 1961 when local resident Mario Andreoli, inspired by a promise to his father, started placing illuminated figures along the terraced slopes of the village. Over time, what began as a modest display evolved into a landmark event - today,

hundreds of life-sized silhouettes, thousands of lights, and kilometers of cable trace the contours of the hill, creating a breathtaking view after sunset.

The figures themselves are remarkable. Made from recycled materials like wood and metal, they are positioned across the slopes and illuminated with care and precision. The scene combines traditional nativity characters with touches of local everyday life: shepherds, animals, villagers, and even a model train that weaves through the display, all contributing to its charm.

Typically, the display is switched on around December 8 and remains illuminated through January. Visitors arriving after dusk are treated to the full effect - glowing figures high on the hillside, the village lights below, and the sea beyond - all framed by the night sky.

For travelers, it's wise to plan the visit as the light-show begins at dusk and lasts into the evening. The hillside perch offers a dramatic viewpoint, and the pathway up - though not overly strenuous - is best undertaken with decent fo-

otwear and a little time set aside to soak in the atmosphere.
Beyond the visual display, the nativity speaks of community dedication. Each year the installation is maintained, updated, and lit by local volunteers, keeping alive the vision that Mario Andreoli set in motion more than six decades ago. His passing in 2022 marked the end of an era, but the tradition lives on through an association that preserves his legacy.

Visiting Manarola in winter offers more than just the illuminated nativity. The village, with its

pastel-toned houses stacked on the cliff, the sea breeze, and peaceful off-season streets, provides a serene contrast to the summer crowds. After enjoying the lights, one might stroll through the quiet lanes, enjoy a simple local meal, or pause at a seaside vantage point for reflection.

If you're planning a trip, aim to arrive just as the lights switch on, bring a camera (the scene is incredibly photogenic), and consider combining the visit with a train ride into the Cinque Terre region - parking can be difficult, and the train offers the scenic route.

In sum, the illuminated nativity of Manarola is more than a festive decoration - it's a striking fusion of heritage, landscape, and light, inviting visitors to pause and appreciate a winter moment in one of Italy's most evocative coastal villages.

Italian healthcare

Italy reaches record levels in blood donation: second in the world

We the Italians Editorial Staff

Italy has achieved a remarkable milestone in blood donation – the country has become the second-highest in the world for blood and component donations on a per-capita basis. In 2024, more than 3 million blood and component donations were recorded, representing a 1.1 % increase over the previous year. The result is built on the foundation of about 1.67 million registered donors, most of whom are affiliated with the

four major voluntary associations. The Italian system, uniquely relying entirely on voluntary and unpaid donations, stands at about five donors for every hundred inhabitants – just behind Greece, which records about 5.3.

The achievement also reflects Italy's status of self-sufficiency in transfusions; nearly 640,000 patients received transfusions in 2024, averaging about 1,755 people every day. In total, roughly 2.3 million red-blood-cell transfusions were performed, corresponding to about 4.5 transfusions every minute. Meanwhile plasma donation – the liquid part of the blood used to manufacture plasma-derived medicines – set a new record, exceeding 900 tons, an increase of 3 % from 2023.

Youth engagement is also rising: over 75,000 new donors aged 18 to 25 participated in 2024, marking a 5 % growth over the prior year. The data indicate that younger generations are increasingly embracing the culture of giving.

On the other hand, the Italian system still faces an important challenge when it comes to plasma because about 20 % of medicines derived from plasma

are still imported. These products are critical for treating various conditions including hemophilia, liver diseases, immunodeficiencies, burns and transplants. While whole-blood donation has reached self-sufficiency, the next key step is to boost plasma collection in order to free Italy from dependence on external sources.

In the first nine months of 2025 alone, plasma shipments for pharmaceutical use increased by about 1.5 %, reaching approximately 73,283 kg. The national associations, working in concert with the health system, are calling for a concerted effort across donors, associations and institutions to ramp up plasma collection. They stress that only by growing the pool of donors and increasing donations of plasma can the country guarantee long-term therapeutic security, grounded in solidarity and shared responsibility.

In practical terms, the message is clear: the progress achieved so far is significant – blood donation has reached record levels and continues to climb – but for full autonomy and durability the system must now focus on plasma. Encouraging current and new donors to give more often and promoting donation among young people remain key priorities. The model of voluntary, non-remunerated donation that Italy follows is not widely used elsewhere, yet it has proven effective. With sustained effort, the vision is that Italy will not just maintain its strong standing in blood donation but also secure full independence in plasma-derived medicines – strengthening both its health-care system and the ethos of giving within society.

Italian curiosities

The legend of the woodpecker and the Piceni people

We the Italians Editorial Staff

The legend of the woodpecker ("Picchio" in Italian) of the Piceni is a captivating tale that connects the origins of this ancient tribe to a bird revered for its symbolic power. According to the story, a tribe of Sabine people, migrating from the Apennines in search of new lands, was guided by a woodpecker toward the Adriatic coast. This bird, considered sacred by the tribe, became central to their identity and their eventual settlement. The tribe was named "Piceni" after this bird, which played a significant role in their journey and their destiny.

The Piceni, originally from the highlands of Sabina, were in search of fertile land when they encountered the woodpecker. This bird, which was regarded as a divine messenger, led them to the area that would become their new home. The legend states that the woodpecker perched on the warriors' standards during their migration, which the tribe took as a sign of divine favor and a symbol of protection. They interpreted the bird's actions as a blessing and a guarantee of success in their new settlement.

In this context, the woodpecker's role goes beyond that of a simple guide; it is viewed as a sacred animal with deep ties to the tribe's beliefs and spiritual practices. The bird's association with divine guidance suggests that the Piceni saw nature and its creatures as integral to their spiritual understanding of the world. The woodpecker's presence, specifically its choice to land on the warriors' banners, was seen as an omen, signaling that the tribe was destined to thrive in their new home.
Historians, including Pliny the Elder, have noted the woodpecker's sacred connection to Ares, the Greek god of war, or Mars as he was known to the Romans. This link to a god of battle and strength reinforces the notion that the woodpecker symbolized power, protection, and favor in the eyes of the Piceni. By aligning themselves with the bird, the tribe embraced its association with divine will and military prowess, which were essential elements of their identity.

The story of the woodpecker didn't just fade into history. It became a lasting symbol of the Piceni's cultural heritage and, later, of the Marche region. As time passed, the green woodpecker, the species most closely associated with the legend, became the official emblem of the Marche region. This bird, once seen as a divine guide, is now an enduring symbol of the area, representing the historical and spiritual connection between the land and its early inhabitants.
Today, the legacy of the Piceni and their sacred woodpecker li-

ves on. The emblem of the green woodpecker is a proud reminder of the tribe's origins and the spiritual beliefs that shaped their journey. It also serves as a cultural link between the past and the present, honoring the tradition of the Piceni people and their deep connection to the natural world. The woodpecker, once a symbol of divine guidance and protection, now stands as a representation of the Marche region's rich history and enduring spirit.

In modern times, the woodpecker continues to hold a special place in the identity of the Marche region, both as a historical symbol and as a reminder of the ancient people who once called it home. This timeless connection between nature and culture underscores the lasting impact of the Piceni and their belief in the power of the woodpecker, a bird that continues to symbolize the strength, resilience, and heritage of the region.

Italian economy

Tariffs, Value chains, and new balances. What will change for Made in Italy in the United States in 2026

Fabrizio Fasani

The year 2025 ends with one certainty: international trade will no longer return to the fluid and predictable model that characterized the years of expansive globalization.

Italian businesses operating with the United States - and Italian Americans who import, distribute, invest, or work in sectors connected to Made in Italy - enter 2026 in a context marked by

three intertwined factors: selective protectionism, reconfiguration of value chains, and the growing importance of economic security in political decisions.

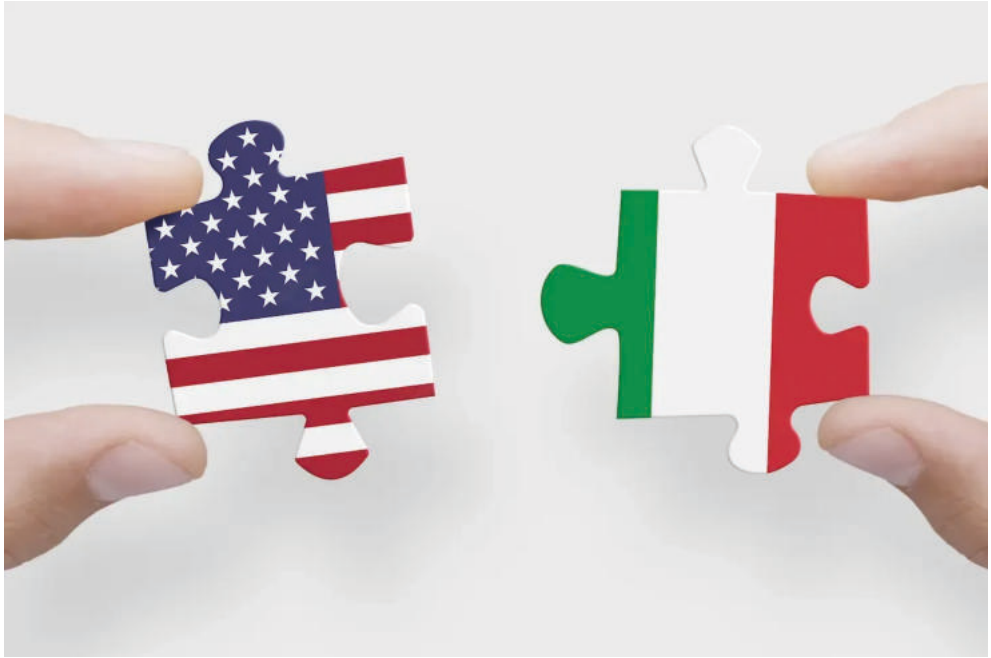
The United States has strengthened its industrial policy through massive incentives for strategic technologies, renewable energy, microchips, and advanced mobility. While this approach differs from traditional protectionist policies, it produces similar effects: it realigns domestic investments and creates new barriers to entry, not always in the form of tariffs, but often regulatory, certification, or logistical. For many Italian businesses, 2026 will be the year to determine if the U.S. market will remain as accessible as in previous years or if it will become more costly and complex to navigate.

The second element is the instability of global value chains. Tensions in the Red Sea, the variable cost of energy, and growing competition between the United States and China have turned logistics into a macroeconomic risk factor. Companies no longer operate on the principle of "lowest cost, fastest delivery," but on the ability to ensure operational continuity. For many

Italian American operators, this means that choosing European suppliers now requires a more careful analysis: not only must quality and price be considered, but also their infrastructure resilience, stock availability, traceability, and the degree of dependence on third-party suppliers located in geopolitically unstable areas.

The third factor concerns Europe, which is trying to find a balance between defending its industry and maintaining its transatlantic relationship. This ambivalence is reflected in Italian businesses, which are often excellent in high-end sectors but vulnerable in cost-intensive value chains. For Italian American readers, this context presents a dual implication: on the one hand, it offers opportunities for partnerships with Italian companies seeking to consolidate their position in the U.S.; on the other, it requires greater attention to signals coming from Brussels, as European regulatory choices can influence prices, volumes, and the availability of imported products.

In this transforming scenario, certain Italian sectors are more exposed to tariff and regulatory volatility. Processed food remains a sensitive sector, both due to the strong protection of the U.S. agricultural sector and the increasing attention of federal agencies to traceability requirements. Ceramic, metallurgy, and automotive components may also face slowdowns in a phase when Washington favors domestic or North American production. On the other hand, sectors more oriented toward innovation or distinctive quality - such as high-end furni-



ture, precision mechanics, goods for the energy transition, and fashion - appear set to maintain stable or growing demand, especially in metropolitan markets where the Italian brand continues to represent added value.

What often goes unnoticed is the effect these macro dynamics have on the margins of Italian American distributors. The rise in logistics costs, combined with uncertainty over the stability of shipping routes, requires more careful financial management. Demand forecasts are less linear, stock is more expensive, and delivery times are less predictable. Many Italian companies are responding by advancing shipments, increasing production in the months leading up to tensions, or diversifying arrival ports. All of these measures have a direct impact on the daily operations of U.S. operators: higher costs, greater insurance complexity, and the need for longer-term planning.

An interesting - and often underestimated - dynamic involves the reemergence of Euro-Atlantic routes as a preferred logistical corridor. Asian

instability is restoring importance to transportation between the Mediterranean and the United States, with more predictable times and fewer congestion risks. This trend could further boost Italian exports, especially from regions with modern ports capable of serving regular flows to the East Coast. For Italian Americans involved in distribution, this implies a possible reduction in variability in arrival times - a key factor for those handling fresh products, seasonal collections, or fast-moving goods.

The Italian American community, in this context, continues to represent a structural advantage for Made in Italy. It is not just about cultural preferences, but real economic capital: trust relationships, knowledge of supply chains, direct contacts with producers, and the ability to assess authentic quality. In an era when markets demand greater transparency and reliability, this identity dimension translates into a competitive asset. Choosing an Italian wine, material, or machine is not just an aesthetic or nostalgic decision; it is based on a principle of reliability, which, in times of economic uncertainty, holds more value than price.

In 2026, much of the commercial future between Italy and the United States will be determined not so much by tariffs - which may rise or fall depending on the political climate - but by the ability of both economic systems to align infrastructures, standards, and industrial strategies. Italian businesses that can invest in traceability, logistical continuity, and American partnerships will be those that solidify their presence across the Atlantic. U.S. companies working with Italy, on the other hand, will need to prepare for a more sophisticated approach to supply risk management, with more frequent analyses of European partners' production capacity and greater attention to timelines.

Ultimately, 2026 is shaping up to be a year where the decisive value will be solidity. In a market reorganizing under geopolitical, economic, and technological pressures, Made in Italy will remain competitive because its strength lies not in price volatility but in the consistency of quality. And this quality, in the United States, finds its natural ally in the Italian American community, which remains the best interpreter and most credible guarantor of Italian authenticity.

My Life in Italy

Try living here. How Digital Nomadism is giving Italian Americans a new way to understand whether Italy could be Home

Matteo Cerri

For generations, Italian Americans have made their way back to Italy through brief, emotional pilgrimages that fit neatly within the calendar of American vacation time. A two-week summer trip, a rented car that always feels slightly smaller than promised, a dinner in the village your grandparents once

left behind. The experience is moving, even transformative, but inevitably temporary. You come, you feel, you wonder, and then - almost abruptly - you leave, carrying back a sense of unfinished conversation with the place that made your family who they are.

Yet the question many Italian Americans have carried for decades has remained surprisingly consistent: "Could I actually live here?". Not in theory, not in romance, not as in a reality show, but in real life-work, obligations, seasons, rhythms included.

Until recently, answering that question required a leap of faith that few could afford. There was no middle ground between being a tourist and being a resident. You either visited Italy or uprooted your life entirely to move there. The idea of a "trial period"-a season, a quarter, a year-simply didn't fit into the old visa categories, nor into the traditional expectations of work.

And then the world changed. Remote work became not a luxury but a norm for millions of Americans (and Italians too); digital work infrastructure matured to the point of near invisibility; and Italy, after years of debate, introduced its long-anticipated Digital Nomad Visa - finally creating the legal framework for non-EU citizens to live in Italy while working for foreign employers.

Coinciding with these shifts, the 4° Rapporto sul Nomadismo Digitale in Italia, published by the Associazione Italiana Nomadi Digitali and Ca' Foscari University, arrived with a message Italy had never articulated so clearly: remote workers are not just tourists with laptops; they are potential temporary residents. Their presence in small towns, especially when sustained over months rather than days, brings life, activity, and economic resilience to places facing demographic decline. And Italy, a country with more than four thousand municipalities at risk of long-term population loss, has entered a moment where it needs not more visitors, but more people - people who choose to live, however briefly, in its overlooked geographies.

This new alignment of work, law, and opportunity has opened an unprecedented doorway for Italian-Americans. Not the romantic doorway of nostalgia, nor the irreversible doorway of relocation, but a pathway made of time, routine, daily life - something infinitely more revealing than a vacation. Digital nomadism is not the only way

to return to Italy, and certainly not the definitive one. But for many, it may be the most intelligent, gentle, and reversible way to understand, finally and concretely, whether Italy is simply a part of your past or could also become part of your future.

A new kind of return: from pilgrimage to participation

The Rapporto paints a far more nuanced picture of today's digital nomads than the stereotypes that dominated the early 2010s. They are not twenty-something backpackers photographing cappuccinos from co-working spaces that suspiciously resemble hotel lobbies. The average profile is now older, more stable, more professionally established. Many are remote employees of American companies, others are consultants, academics, designers, programmers, or entrepreneurs. And they stay longer - months at a time, sometimes seasons, often returning year after year.

The most striking insight from the report comes from its decade-long analysis of more than 800,000 conversations on Twitter/X tracking global sentiment around digital nomadism. Before the pandemic, discussions revolved mainly around cities - Lisbon, Berlin, Barcelona, the usual suspects. After 2020, however, the conversation shifted dramatically. People were no longer fantasizing about metropolitan lifestyle upgrades; they were seeking quiet, authenticity, affordability, nature, and places with a human scale. Attention moved toward rural areas, small towns, coastal villages, and interior regions. In other words: toward exactly the kinds of places many Italian-Americans' ancestors left behind.

This shift is profoundly relevant to Italy. Rural depopulation is one of the country's most serious long-term challenges. Entire regions risk becoming demographic deserts. Schools consolidate or close; shops operate seasonally; local services weaken; and young people leave in search of opportunity. What these places lack is not charm, beauty, or heritage. They lack people - especially people who can bring income earned elsewhere, skills derived from global experience, and an openness to integrating into community life.

The report is explicit: the presence of even a handful of remote workers can serve as a stabilizing force in local economies that rely

on fragile seasonal tourism. Long-term stays have a multiplying effect - one that is both economic and social. They sustain cafés in winter, not just in July; they revive housing stock; they generate local demand for services; they bring multilingualism and curiosity into towns that rarely experience either.

And this is where Italian Americans hold an unexpected advantage. You are not blank-slate foreigners encountering Italy for the first time. You arrive already aware of its cultural rhythms, its contradictions, its warmth, its beauty, and its maddening inefficiencies. You carry names, stories, memories transmitted across generations. You do not arrive as strangers; you arrive with a pre-existing social gravity that Italians instinctively respond to. In the words of one mayor of a small Abruzzese town involved in a digital nomad pilot project: "Gli americani di origine italiana non devono imparare da zero. Devono solo ri-abituarsi."

Italian Americans do not need to start from scratch - they simply need to re-acclimate.

The soft landing that never existed before

If the past model of return was tourism and the next step was full relocation, the new possibility unlocked by digital nomadism sits in a middle space that previously did not exist. It allows you to spend three months, six months, or a full year in Italy, while maintaining your job, your income, and your life in the United States. It is neither a renunciation of your American identity nor a binding commitment to an Italian one.

It is, in essence, a trial version of Italian life. A way to test everyday routines, to observe how you feel in a place across a season, to notice whether your days expand or contract, whether your stress dissipates or intensifies, whether you work better, sleep better, live better. These are questions no vacation can ever answer. They require time, repetition, and the accumulation of seemingly small experiences that reveal how a place aligns (or does not align) with who you are.

A year in Italy is long enough to understand how a community breathes, how weather shapes life, how people interact, how bureaucracy actually works, and whether the rhythms of the country complement your own. It is long enough to rediscover the

Italian language not as an obligation or a guilty inheritance, but as a living tool. It is long enough to transform a genealogy search into real relationships. And it is long enough to determine-honestly-whether a permanent return is viable or whether this chapter belongs instead to the realm of beautiful possibilities.

Housing: the missing puzzle piece Italy has finally started addressing

If the visa is the legal doorway into Italian life, housing is the physical one. And here, the Rapporto is refreshingly candid: most Italian small towns have an abundance of houses, but a shortage of usable homes. Many properties are aging, under-maintained, or held by owners who are reluctant to rent; others are structured for tourists rather than residents, with nightly rates or seasonal availability that make medium-term stays impractical.

This mismatch between supply and real, everyday habitability is one of the biggest obstacles preventing remote workers from choosing lesser-known Italian territories. Yet it is also where some of the most innovative responses are emerging.

Organizations like ITS Italy have begun intervening precisely where the market does not. Instead of focusing on short-term rentals or speculative purchases, they acquire or co-invest in properties within small towns and renovate them into high-quality, fully furnished, internet-ready homes designed for people who intend to live rather than vacation. These homes are intentionally structured for affordability, often costing only slightly more than traditional long-term leases, and they are available to remote professionals, couples, or families who want medium-term stability without committing to ownership.

This kind of housing ecosystem is the missing infrastructure that has long prevented Italian Americans from staying longer than a holiday. Instead of navigating opaque rental markets or accepting accommodations designed for tourists, you can move into a functional, comfortable home that allows you to experience daily life. And daily life - more than cuisine or landscape - is what reveals whether Italy resonates with the person you actually are, not merely with the emotions you inherited.

Why this moment matters more than any before

One of the most compelling insights of the Rapporto is that Italy stands at a demographic and cultural turning point. The country knows it must reimagine its internal areas, not as relics to be admired nostalgically, but as territories capable of welcoming new people and new forms of work. Remote workers, including members of the Italian diaspora, represent a bridge between Italy's past and its future - a way to bring life into places that risk fading from the national map.
For Italian-Americans, this moment is an invitation not to make a permanent choice, but to make a temporary one. To try living in Italy without renouncing your American life. To explore the rhythms of a place season by season, without pressure or permanence. To listen, observe, learn, and experience. To approach Italy not as a fantasy, but as a reality.

Digital nomadism is not the solution to every question about identity, belonging, or relocation. But it is a tool - a practical, flexible, and surprisingly humane one - that allows you to step inside Italian life in a way that is both meaningful and reversible.

You don't need to move forever to understand whether Italy could be home.

You just need enough time to let the place speak.

A season is enough

Italy has always captured the imagination of its diaspora, but imagination - beautiful as it is - cannot answer the question that truly matters: "Could I actually live here?". For that, you need time, routine, and everyday life. You need mornings and evenings, conversations and errands, good days and frustrating ones. You need to experience the Italy that exists between the postcards.

The Digital Nomad Visa gives you the structure. Remote work gives you the freedom. And a new generation of housing initiatives gives you the landing place.

What remains is the simplest decision of all: to give yourself a season. A season long enough to understand whether Italy is

only a chapter of your family's past, or perhaps a future you could inhabit.

Italy is not asking for a promise. It is merely offering a chance.

A chance to try living here, gently and temporarily, and to discover - without pressure - whether the country that once sent your grandparents across the ocean might now welcome you back, not as a tourist, but as a participant in its unfolding story.

Follow up:
Nomag - (Not a magazine for digital nomads)
ITS Journal - The journey of thousands of 'new Italians'

Italian street food

Pani câ meusa

We the Italians Editorial Staff

In Palermo, Sicily, there's a legendary street food sandwich that locals swear by – Pani câ meusa, or "bread with spleen." It's a simple but bold creation: a soft sesame topped roll filled with pieces of veal spleen, lung, and sometimes trachea – meats that are first boiled, then sliced thin and fried in lard until richly flavorful. The result is served hot, often from a street vendor's cart, and packed with character.

The origins of this distinctive sandwich reach back more than a thousand years. In medieval Palermo, many skilled butchers – members of the city's Jewish community – were unable to accept cash payment for their work because of religious prohibitions. Instead

they were rewarded with offal: organs like spleen and lung. Rather than wasting these parts, they boiled and fried them, stuffing the result into bread and selling it. Over time, what began as a humble workaround became a beloved local staple. After the Jewish community was expelled in 1492, the recipe didn't vanish; local vendors known as "vastedda makers" adopted the sandwich and carried the tradition forward.

What makes Pani câ meusa so compelling isn't just its flavor – though it is deeply savory and rich – but also its rough and ready ritual. The sandwich is typically eaten standing up, often in busy markets or by food stalls, paper wrapping in hand and grease dripping slightly, wholly embraced as a dish you don't sit down for, but bite into on the go.

There are a couple of traditional ways to enjoy it. The classic approach, called "schietto," means the sandwich is served plain – just

meat, bread, a squeeze of lemon if you like. This version highlights the pure, intense taste of the fried offal. The richer variant, known as "maritatu," layers in grated cheese – typically caciocavallo – or sometimes ricotta, combining creamy, salty cheese with the meaty, buttery interior for a more indulgent bite.

The bread used is generally a round sesame roll known as a "vastedda" (or sometimes a mafaldina roll). When the meats are hot and freshly fried, they are piled into the bread, the fat drained off lightly, and the sandwich is handed over wrapped in paper – ready to eat immediately while still warm.

Over centuries, Pani câ meusa has become not just a meal, but a symbol of Palermo's culinary culture – a bridge between past necessity and present day identity. It carries with it echoes of the city's multicultu-

ral history, the resourcefulness of its people, and the ability to turn what was once considered waste into something treasured and delicious.

Whether eaten from a street stall in the early morning, or savored late at night after a walk through the old city, Pani câ meusa offers more than just flavor – it offers a taste of history, tradition, and daily life in Palermo. A dish born out of thrift and necessity, elevated over time into an icon.

Italian Citizenship Assistance

The B1 Exam, A Potential New Change to Italian Citizenship

Italian Citizenship Assistance

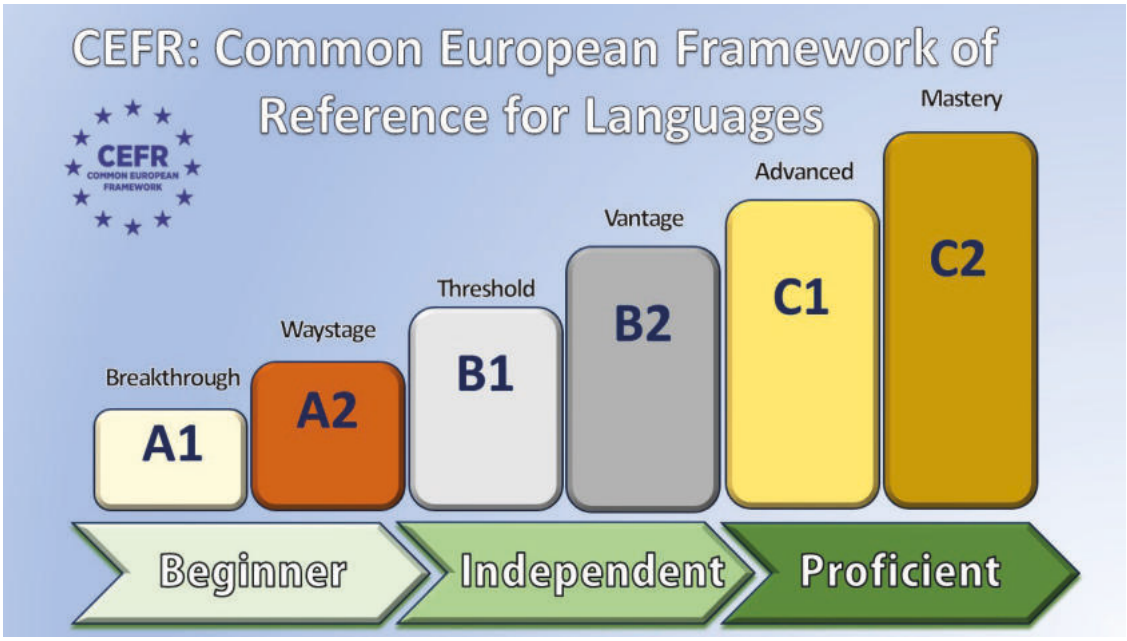
Recently, a new bill was proposed to the Italian parliament that could provide a pathway to Italian citizenship by descent for those who find themselves restricted by the Tajani Decree passed earlier this year. Notably, it would allow those with Italian ancestors further back than grandparents to access Italian citizenship—provided they can demonstrate knowledge of the Italian language at an intermediate level. In this article, we break down what the new language requirement

entails, the details of the proposed bill, and how this could potentially affect Italian citizenship jure sanguinis going forward.

What is the B1 language exam?

In Europe, the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference) is the standard by which language levels are assessed for non-native learners. The scale is as follows: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2, which A1 being the lowest level, and C2 being at the level of a native speaker. At the B1 level, the learner is lower intermediate, meaning he or she can understand the general points of a topic that is already familiar (e.g. work, family, travel). Basic conversation is possible, again, when it involves familiarity or personal interest. Simple arguments can also be made to support a point.

The avenues to receive an official certification of B1-level knowledge of Italian are through the CELI, CILS, and PLIDA exams. The former two are offered by the University for Foreigners of Siena and the University for Foreigners of Perugia. The latter is offered by the Dante Alighieri Society. However, this does not mean you need to go to one of these institutions in person to take the exam. There are many language schools in Italy and around the world that offer them. Note also that there is a regular B1 language exam and a B1 exam specifically for those applying for Italian citizenship. (Persons applying for Italian citizenship by naturalization or marriage, for instance, must take the exam). While both exams target reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills, they are slightly different, with some reporting that the exam for citizenship is somewhat



easier. In both cases, if the applicant does not pass one part of the exam, the entire exam needs to be retaken.

The new proposal

Ricardo Merlo, a former senator, recently proposed a bill to the Italian parliament that would allow those with Italian ancestors in the third and fourth generations and beyond to claim Italian citizenship by descent, provided they could pass a B1 language exam. He is the founder of the Associative Movement Italians Abroad (MAIE), which represents the interests of Italians living abroad. Merlo also acquired Italian citizenship jure sanguinis, and is originally from Argentina.

The bill does not apply to those with Italian parents or grandparents who, even under the new law (see below) can apply for Italian citizenship by descent. At the time of writing this article, we cannot say what will come of the bill. Even if passed, there is a good chance it will undergo amendments.

Other recent changes to Italian citizenship by descent

Earlier this year, the Tajani Decree introduced radical changes to the laws regarding Italian citizenship jure sanguinis. Whereas before one could claim citizenship with virtually no generational limit—so long as the Italian ancestor was alive after Italy became a unified nation in 1861—after the introduction of the Tajani Decree, this pathway of citizenship is currently only open to those with Italian parents and grandparents. Some cases include residency requirements. The Constitutional Court is scheduled to

review parts of the new law, though, as raised by the Court of Turin in September 2025. The Constitutional Court had previously and independently ruled that the previous rules for citizenship jure sanguinis did not violate Italy's constitution, which provides some hope for their future ruling on the Tajani Decree.

It is also worth noting that a quicker naturalization process is also available to those with Italian ancestry. Those with an Italian parent or grandparent who was a citizen from birth can also get Italian citizenship by residing in the country for only two years (previously this had been three years).

How Italian Citizenship Assistance can help

Our experts at Italian Citizenship Assistance are well-equipped to handle your questions regarding Italian citizenship by descent, marriage, and residency, as well as other immigration laws, such as visas. If you find yourself in need of assistance, or are interested in scheduling the B1 exam for your citizenship application, we would be happy to help. Contact us today at info@italiancitizenshipassistance.com.

Sponsored by:

ICA
ITALIAN CITIZENSHIP ASSISTANCE

AMERICANS IN ITALY
ASSOCIATION

ITALIAN REAL ESTATE
LAWYERS

Villa Cagnoni Boniotti

Celebrate your events in an elegant and historic Italian location in the Veneto region

Via XXV Aprile, 2, 45030 Villamarzana, RO

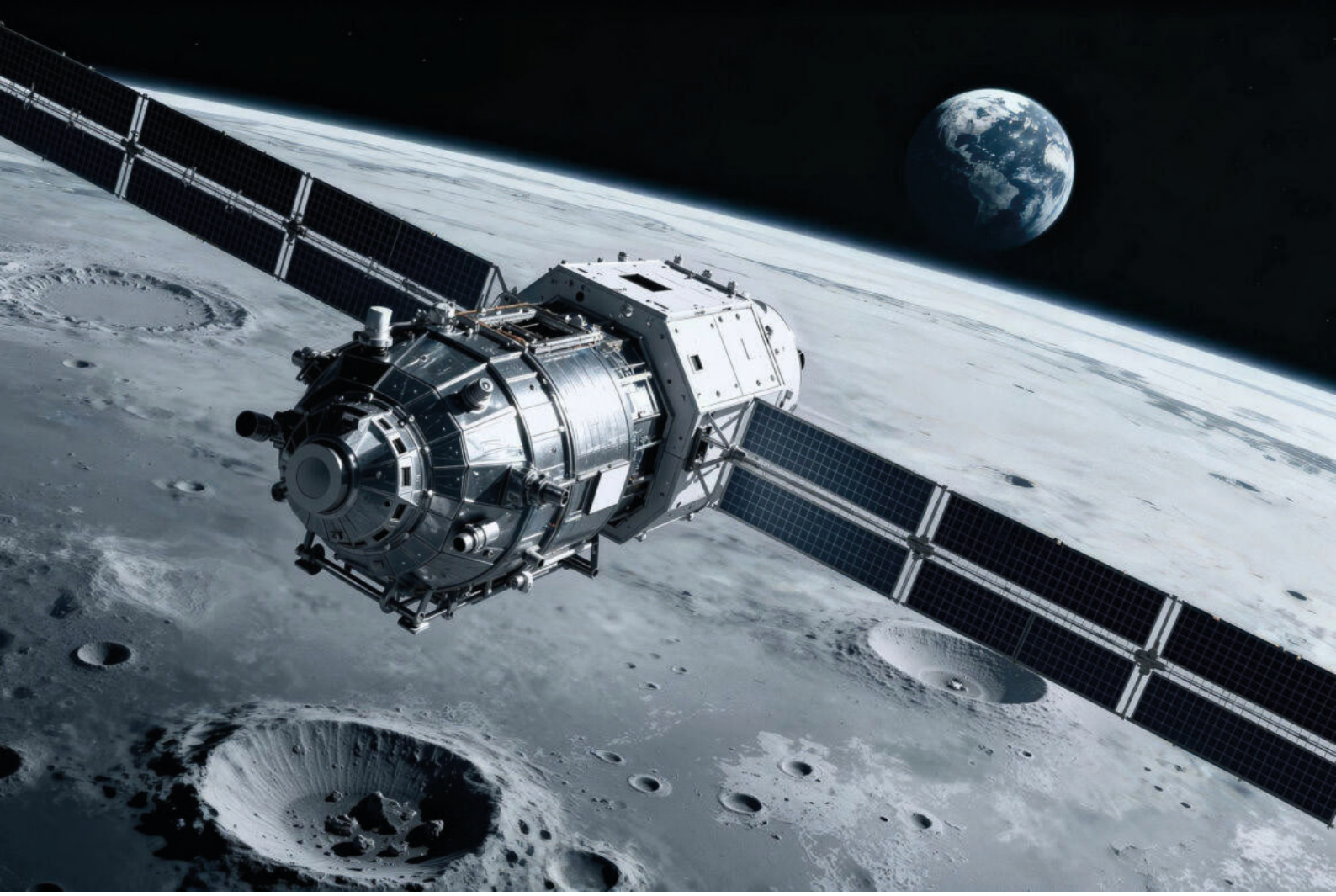
For more information, please visit: https://villacagnoni-boniotti.com/

Italian innovation

A new Italian technology that moves satellites without fuel

We the Italians Editorial Staff

Genergo, an Italian deep-tech company, has drawn global attention by developing what may be the first space-propulsion system that operates without any propellant at all. Instead of relying on fuel tanks, chemical reactions or expelled mass, the system converts electrical energy into directed electromagnetic impulses. These impulses create measurable thrust, allowing a spacecraft to maneuver even though nothing is being pushed out the back. For decades, this idea was treated as impossible or purely theoretical, yet recent in-orbit tests have shown that the technology can



function in real operational conditions.

The company began experimenting several years ago with ground prototypes designed to demonstrate controlled movement without traditional exhaust. Once the initial lab models behaved consistently, the team prepared a flight-ready unit small enough to be installed on commercial satellite carriers. Over multiple missions in low Earth orbit, the propulsion module accumulated hundreds of hours of operation. During these sessions, satellites recorded repeatable velocity shifts – both accelerations and decelerations – that could not be attributed to environmental forces like drag or magnetic disturbances. The data showed that the system was capable of altering a satellite's trajectory on command.

Because it requires no propellant, the technology introduces a series of advantages that could reshape satellite engineering. Without tanks, valves or pressurized systems, spacecraft become lighter, simpler and cheaper to build. Designers can reclaim mass typically devoted to fuel and redirect it to power

systems, sensors or scientific instrumentation. Safety improves as well, since the risk of leaks or explosive failures drops dramatically. And because the propulsion unit does not depend on running out of fuel, mission lifespans could extend far beyond current limits.

One of the most promising applications is active de-orbiting. Today, many satellites become uncontrollable once they exhaust their last reserves of fuel, adding to the growing problem of orbital debris. A propulsion system that never depletes its working medium – because it does not use one – could allow satellites to make controlled descents into the atmosphere at the end of their service. This would help keep orbital paths cleaner and reduce the risk of collisions that generate long-lasting debris fields.

The technology's modular design also suggests new possibilities for exploration. Multi-year scientific missions could adjust their orbits repeatedly without worrying about fuel budgets. Small satellites and cubesats, traditionally constrained by limited mass, could gain maneuvering capabilities once thought possible only for larger spacecraft. Long-duration

missions around the Moon or near-Earth asteroids could rely on a propulsion source that operates as long as electrical power is available.

The company behind the breakthrough believes the system is close to commercial readiness, as its performance has remained stable across numerous in-orbit sessions. Industry observers see potential in pairing this propulsion method with next-generation solar arrays or nuclear-based power units, allowing deep-space probes to navigate for decades. While further testing is planned, the initial results indicate that a new category of space mobility may be emerging – one in which spacecraft steer, adjust and return home without ever burning a drop of propellant.

Italian traditions

The femminiello in Napoli, a symbol of tradition and resilience

We the Italians Editorial Staff

In Naples, there exists a unique tradition that doesn't quite fit into typical Western categories of gender or sexuality – the "femminiello." This term refers to a man who expresses himself with feminine mannerisms, gestures, and speech, yet carries a long history of acceptance and respect rooted in local folklore and belief. The fem-

miniello embodies a social identity that transcends labels, existing somewhere between male and female, natural and sacred.

Historically, the femminiello has been woven into the fabric of Neapolitan life – from religious rites to street games, communal rituals to gatherings in the city's alleys. Their presence connects to ancient traditions, with some tracing its roots to pagan myths of dual-gender or intersex beings. These beings were thought to carry a special power due to their combination of masculine and feminine energies, and such ambiguity bestowed upon the femminielli a peculiar kind of reverence in a city that has always embraced contradictions. The femminiello was never an outcast – he was an integral part of the community.

In working-class neighborhoods, a femminiello might be greeted with familiarity, teasing, or gentle mockery – but rarely scorn. Often regarded as lucky, they were sometimes asked to hold newborn babies, believed to invite good fortune into the child's life. During social gatherings, femminielli were entrusted with calling the numbers during tombola (a bingo-style game), adding humor, innuendo, and drama to make the game more lively, turning it into an occasion of shared intimacy.

Beyond games and superstitions, femminielli played an important role in local festivities. On February 2 – the day of the Candelora – many would go on a pilgrimage to the San-

tuario di Montevergine as part of the Juta dei Femminielli. The procession combined popular faith and ancient rituals, carrying forward memories of old pagan practices integrated with Christian devotion. This ritual, filled with dance, music, and exuberance, is a vivid example of the deep-rooted presence of the femminiello in Neapolitan culture.

Another ritual connected to the femminielli was the "figliata," a mock childbirth ceremony in which a femminiello, draped behind a veil, simulated giving birth – a practice intended to ward off evil and bring luck. In some towns around Naples, particularly near the Vesuvian area, there was also a symbolic "wedding" during Easter, with femminielli parading in wedding attire, accompanied by music, dancing, and festive meals. These rituals turned social norms on their head, subverting expectations while celebrating difference.

The role of femminielli became even more significant during the Four Days of Naples (Le Quattro Giornate), a period of resistance against Nazi forces during World War II. In September 1943, as German troops retreated, Neapolitans rose up in a historic uprising. In this time of intense turmoil, femminielli were seen

Juta dei Femminielli

as symbols of resilience. Many participated in the insurrection, contributing to the resistance alongside ordinary citizens. In a city where defiance and survival were ingrained in its people, femminielli were not bystanders – they actively fought to reclaim their city.

Their involvement went beyond logistical support, as femminielli helped maintain morale during the uprising. In a time of fear and uncertainty, their participation represented a refusal to remain invisible and a statement of solidarity with the oppressed. Fighting side by side with other Neapolitans, they played an essential role in the liberation of Naples from Nazi forces. The femminielli's actions during the Four Days highlight how marginalized communities can make significant contributions during moments of national crisis.

The story of the femminiello is not static. Over the decades, especially from the mid-20th century onward, massive social changes transformed neighborhoods, customs, and the rhythms of popu-

lar life. The tight-knit quarters, the "bassi" (ground-floor housing) where long-standing communal rituals unfolded, began to dissolve under pressure from urban development, economic hardship, and changing social attitudes. With new generations and the rise of different identity categories, many of the traditional meanings shifted or faded.

Still, the femminiello persists – sometimes reinvented, sometimes quietly tucked away, sometimes re-emerging with renewed sense and purpose. Some became part of the queer community, while others remained rooted in traditional Neapolitan identity. The story of one prominent figure – a woman who called herself "the last femminiello of Naples" – illustrates both the fragility and resilience of the identity. She survived ostracism, marginalization, and post-war struggles but continued to claim her space and dignity.

Four Days of Naples

The legacy of the femminiello bridges past and present, demonstrating Naples' capacity for inclusion, fluidity, and complexity. He embodied cultural tolerance long before modern discussions on gender identity, giving voice to lives that didn't fit strict binaries. Whether through tombola nights, mock childbirth ceremonies, Easter weddings, or pilgrimages to Montevergine, the rituals surrounding femminielli once turned social differences into communal celebrations – making visible what might otherwise have been hidden.

Today, with renewed interest in queer history and local identities, the femminiello remains a living symbol of Naples: unpredictable, vibrant, and full of humanity.

Italian wine

The wines of the Aosta valley, alpine charm in a bottle

We the Italians Editorial Staff

In the Alps of northwestern Italy lies Valle d'Aosta – Italy's smallest wine region, with vineyards clinging to steep slopes and terraces along the valley carved by the Dora Baltea river. Though modest in size, the region produces wines of remarkable character, shaped by mountain soil, altitude, and a long tradition of viticulture under challenging conditions.

The region's official classifi-

cation, Valle d'Aosta DOC, encompasses a wide array of wine styles – red, white, rosé, sparkling, late harvest – often linked to sub zones and grape varieties that reflect the diverse terroir.
Many of the grapes cultivated here are native – local varieties such as Petit Rouge, Fumin, Cornalin, and Prié Blanc remain central. Others like Pinot Noir, Chardonnay or Nebbiolo (known locally as "Picotendro") have found their niche too.

On the red wine front, blends based on Petit Rouge often define the regional profile. Wines from sub zones like Torrette deliver medium to full bodied wines with vibrant red fruits, light spice, and fresh acidity – sometimes a bit chill served, recalling lighter Alpine reds more than heavy lowland wines. Fumin and Cornalin add deeper color and earthy or dark fruit notes for those seeking more structure and complexity.

White wines also stand out, especially those from Prié Blanc – often under the sub zone Blanc de Morgex et de La Salle – offering crisp acidity, mineral clarity, and delightful citrus or floral aromas that reflect the high altitude vineyards. Other whites from

Chardonnay, Pinot Gris, or local grapes complement the range, and occasionally even sparkling and passito (late harvest) wines add further variety.

Viticulture here is often defined as "heroic": vineyards carved into steep alpine slopes, many at high elevation, requiring terracing and manual work. That difficult geography gives the wines a distinctive Alpine edge – vivid acidity, clean mineral notes, and a sense of mountain freshness.

Because of its limited size and production – around 400 hectares under vine – Valle d'Aosta offers wines that remain rare and often underappreciated beyond their home region. But that scarcity contributes to their charm: each bottle feels like a small treasure, a true expression of alpine soil, altitude, and tradition.

Exploring these wines is a journey through contrasting styles – from light, fragrant reds meant to be enjoyed slightly chilled, to structured, earthy reds, crisp whites born in mountain vineyards, and occasionally delicate sparkling or late harvest wines.

For anyone interested in discovering Italian wines beyond the usual regions, Valle d'Aosta offers a compelling, authentic experience – wines that reflect a unique landscape, a small scale terroir, and generations of careful winemaking under difficult but beautiful natural conditions.

Italian industrial districs

The pharmaceutical and chemical industrial district of Lazio

We the Italians Editorial Staff

The chemical and pharmaceutical industrial district of Lazio has become one of the most dynamic production systems in Italy, showing sustained growth in exports, employment, and technological investment. Anchored primarily in the provinces of Latina, Frosinone, and Rome, the sector has evolved into a strategic hub for life sciences, powered by a dense network of multinational

companies, specialized suppliers, and research institutions. Over the past year, the district has strengthened its position as one of the leading contributors to Italy's industrial output, thanks to steady demand and a rapid shift toward advanced manufacturing and biotech innovation.

The most striking trend is the acceleration of export activity. In the second quarter of 2025, Lazio's pharmaceutical cluster recorded its seventh consecutive year-over-year increase and its sixth double-digit surge. Shipments grew by roughly 35% compared to the same period in the previous year, outpacing earlier expectations and improving on the already robust results of the first quarter. The United States remains the district's top destination, and trade flows grew at an exceptional pace. Between April and June, exports to the U.S. increased by about 270% on an annual basis, bringing the cumulative rise for the first six months of the year to around 250%. This spike is tied in part to companies moving up delivery schedules ahead of new transatlantic tariff rules that may impose duties of up to 15%. Many American pharmaceutical corporations operate directly in the region, adding substantial intra-firm trade to the district's export volumes.

The numbers illustrate the scale of this momentum. In the second quarter of 2025 alone, pharmaceutical exports from Lazio to the United States reached approximately 1.6 billion euros. During the first half of the year, the figure climbed to about 2.6 billion euros, marking a historic peak for the district and reinforcing Lazio's role as a major

European supplier of medical and chemical products. The broader regional export ecosystem has benefited from parallel growth in technology, aerospace, and ICT, but pharmaceuticals remain the most powerful engine.

Within the district, the province of Latina plays an especially prominent role. It hosts a large concentration of production plants and research facilities and has seen its export performance expand steadily for several years. The area has become a magnet for skilled labor, with thousands of technicians, researchers, and manufacturing specialists employed in pharmaceutical operations. Workforce demand has continued to rise as companies adopt more automation, expand packaging lines, and introduce new biotech processes. Local employment data show that the sector is now one of the strongest stabilizing forces for the province's economy.

The Frosinone area also stands out, thanks in part to the manufacturing corridor around Anagni, which consistently posts strong export results. The district's specialization in high-value formulations and active ingredients has strengthened supply chains across Lazio, helping small and mid-sized firms integrate with global pharmaceutical networks. This interconnected structure has made the region resilient to supply disruptions and

competitive in fast-growing therapeutic segments.

Supporting institutions have played an important role in this trajectory. Regional innovation programs have boosted access to capital for startups and venture initiatives, with new funding streams aimed at accelerating the growth of life-science companies. These efforts complement the work of research hospitals, universities, and technology parks that collaborate with manufacturers on clinical development, digital health tools, and advanced materials. The resulting ecosystem draws investment from both European and American firms seeking a strategic base for high-tech production.

As global demand for medicines, biotechnology, and specialty chemicals increases, Lazio's pharmaceutical and chemical industrial district appears well positioned for continued expansion. Strong export performance, a skilled workforce, and growing innovation capacity have transformed the region into a major competitive player. The sustained rise in shipments to the United States signals not only short-term market adjustments but also deeper confidence in the district's long-term potential. With production at record levels and new investments underway, the sector is poised to remain one of central Italy's most dynamic economic pillars.

Italian proverbs

L'abito non fa il monaco

We the Italians Editorial Staff

L'abito non fa il monaco (literally "The clothes do not make the monk") is an expression that warns us not to trust appearances, which are often misleading. It reminds us to refrain from making rushed or superficial judgments about someone. People are frequently not what they seem at first glance - in fact, they're sometimes the opposite. The saying also appears in Alessandro Manzoni's novel The Betrothed. Its American English equivalent is "don't judge a book by its cover." The proverb may come from the Latin phrase cucullus non facit monachum, meaning "the hood doesn't make the monk," referencing medieval impostors who disguised themselves as monks to exploit travelers' hospitality.

We the Italians is a media company to promote Italy in the US and represent the Italian Americans in Italy. We have a website, a video and audio podcast, a newsletter, daily news, an Italian American websites archive and accounts in the main social media. This is our magazine.

Editorial staff: Umberto Mucci, Associazione Marchi Storici d'Italia, Fabrizio Fasani, Alberto Improda, Medical Tourism Italy, Federico Pasquali, Amy Riolo, Giovanni Vagnone... and many more.

Italian American of the Year 2025

N.194 • December 2025

We the Italians

Donate