

Part of the “Inside Tuscany: A Second Time Around” series.

Central Tuscany: Best of Cortona

Enjoy the Hill Town of Cortona

2018 / 2019 Edition

Scott Tiezzi Grabinger



Verso

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Email: Scott.Grabinger@gmail.com

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Cover Photos:

An antipasto of *burrata* cheese, fresh tomatoes, and arugula.

An Etruscan altar at the excavation of Sodo II at the base of the Cortona hill.

A fountain near Chiesa di San Domenico in Cortona.

Inside Tuscany Books by Scott Tiezzi Grabinger

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Social Media Sites

Contact: scott.grabinger@gmail.com

Facebook: www.facebook.com/scott.grabinger

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Dedication

For Grace, our newest traveler (10.30.17).

III Eating, Sleeping, and Events in Cortona



Dolce of sweetened ricotta with fresh strawberry sauce at the Trattoria la Grotta in Cortona.

He who has seen one cathedral ten times has seen something; he who has seen ten cathedrals once has seen but little; and he who has spent half an hour in each of a hundred cathedrals has seen nothing at all.

Sinclair Louis



A statue honoring the “Idea of Flight” with both da Vinci’s “Every man” and Icarus represented. Outside the Chiesa di San Domenico.

18 Sleeping in Cortona

LOCANDA PRETELLA HOTEL 26

43.274371, 11.985751

Vicolo Petrella, 26
52044 Cortona

Graziella's cell: 338.4187837
Land line: 0575.604102
Daily: 10.00-17.00: 06.484663

Website: <https://www.booking.com/hotel/it/locanda-petrella.html>

Website: <http://www.petrella26.com> (not up to date, use the site above instead)

Email: info@petrella26.com

Locanda Petrella occupies three floors of a sixteenth century building in a quiet location in the heart of Cortona. It has five double rooms and two triple rooms, each with bath, shower, AC, TV, mini fridge, and free wifi. All the rooms open onto a spacious salon and breakfast room. A wide staircase with metal balustrades goes to the two rooms on the upper floor.

The rooms are modern with stylish fixtures and comfortable beds integrating the ancient stone structure and massive wooden beams. Towels are the traditional waffled linen, with a bath towel big enough to be a blanket. There is plenty of scalding hot water.

Cell phone reception was good, but for 3G I had to stand by the window.



Graziella is the owner and a gracious, cheerful hostess seeing to your every need. I enjoyed my stay there. Ask for a “deal” if staying more than a couple of days.

BREAKFAST

The breakfast room is also a living room with overstuffed chairs and a large fireplace decorated with prints of modern art around the walls. Two tables take care of the breakfast crowd, or you could enjoy your own picnic lunch there.

Breakfast is an elaborate collection of pastries and breads. There is a toaster. Available to drink are orange juice, *caffè* and hot milk. I was there alone and told her not to bother with breakfast, but she still brought out enough for ten other people.

RUGAPIANA VACANZE

43.2741051, 11.9876848

Via Nazionale, 63
52044 Cortona

Massimo's Cell:
340.8086879

Website: http://www.rugapianavacanze.com/index_eng.html

Email: info@rugapianavacanze.com

“Rugapiana” is the ancient name for car-free Via Nazionale, the only flat street in Cortona and the heart of the historical and tourist center. It's an ideal location for travelers who want to be in the heart of the action with everything a few steps away.

The hotel is an ancient palazzo restored into several rooms and a few apartments with kitchens. Each room integrates the old stone walls, wood



beamed ceilings, and terracotta floors, and are furnished with antiques. The TV in my room was also an antique of the old CRT variety.

Rooms are cozy and comfortable with deluxe terry-cloth towels, bathrobes, shower, refrigerator, ceiling fan, and wifi. It has strong wifi though for 3G cell reception I had to stand at the window. The bathrooms are modern and comfortable if not spacious. Soap was a tiny bar, broken into a dozen pieces.

The hotel gives you a voucher for breakfast at any of the local bars on Via Nazionale good for a pastry and cappuccino.

It is a bit less expensive than the Locanda Petrella.

Massimo is helpful and friendly and speaks excellent, rapid English.



Pasta with Fresh Tomatoes

In late summer (in Colorado) there is usually an abundance of fresh tomatoes at the farmers' markets, perfect for this recipe. Well drained tomatoes are important, so after removing the skins squeeze out the seeds, chop coarsely, and then let them drain in a colander to drain while working on the other steps of the recipe. (Store-purchased tomatoes don't need peeling, but they don't taste great either. Use cherry or grape tomatoes instead).

Ingredients

1/2 med sweet onion finely chopped
 3 to 4 fresh tomatoes, skinned, seeded, and chopped coarsely
 1 t garlic, finely minced
 1/4 c EVOO
 1/2 t red pepper flakes
 4 oz fresh buffalo mozzarella cut into 1/4-inch cubes. Bring to room temperature.
 8 oz fresh pasta like penne or rotelli.
 3 T fresh grated parmigiano-reggiano
 salt and pepper

Directions

- Peel, seed, core, and chop the tomatoes.
- Finely chop 1/2 onion.
- Heat oil in pan over medium low heat, add oil, onion, and hot pepper flakes and sauté gently until onions are transparent and beginning to brown. Then add the garlic and sauté gently for another couple of minutes.
- Heat salted water to boil. Add pasta and cook until al dente.
- About two minutes before the pasta is ready, add the tomatoes to the pan to warm them up so they don't cool the pasta.
- Add about 1/4 c of pasta water to the sauce, then drain pasta.
- Add pasta to the pan and stir to mix well with the tomatoes, then put the pasta in a serving bowl.
- Add the mozzarella pieces and stir and mix well.
- Add the parmigiano. The parmigiano and mozzarella will serve to thicken the sauce.
- Serve with more parmigiano on the side.

19 Eating in Cortona

TRATTORIA LA GROTTA

43.274945, 11.985402
Piazza Baldelli 3
Just off Piazza Repubblica in a tiny alley

0575.630.271

Closed Tuesdays

Email: www.trattorialagrotta.it

Simply outstanding.

After my friends and I had finished our tour of the MAEC I stopped at the ticket counter and asked the clerk, in Italian, for a good restaurant, one that she would like to eat at. The clerk gave the standard PC reply, “All of the restaurants in Cortona are good. BUT, I like the Trattoria La Grotta.” To add to the reliability of her advice she did not pull out a business card for the restaurant. Whenever a hotel or a tourist site pulls out a business card it means that there is a special “relationship” between the two and not necessarily a great meal.

The four of us walked a short distance to have *pranzo*. Sitting inside the door is an antique corker for wine bottles. Inside are two rooms with typical Tuscan beige stone exterior walls and plastered interior walls. A stone and brick arch separates the rooms. Around the 12 tables are book cases filled with wine bottles. The owner took us to our table and then came by to take our orders. The pasta is home-made. We had an antipasto



Trattoria la Grotta is squeezed into a tiny alley next to Piazza Repubblica.

An antipasto of fresh tomatoes, arugula, and burrata cheese.





Top: The primo piatto at Trattoria la Grotta: pici with a cinghiale ragù.

Above: the contorno of grilled eggplant, peppers, and zucchini.

of grilled vegetables and *carpaccio* followed by pasta with porcini mushrooms, ravioli, *pici*, and a pork chop topped off with a pudding for dessert.

The next time I returned I made sure that I was starving so I could have a more elaborate meal. Again the owner took me to the table. I asked him for the day's specials and he gave me a handwritten sheet of paper to add to the regular menu — you have to ask, it is only in Italian and kept for locals. I began with an *antipasto* of *burrata* (aka *burratine*) cheese on a bed of peppery arugula with tomato slices and added some olive oil. *Burrata* is a soft and rich combination of mozzarella and cream giving a rich contrast to the bed of bitter arugula.

My *primo piatto* was osso bucco in a rich, thick tomato sauce garnished with a couple of bay leaves. The osso bucco is sliced thin but is about six-inches

in diameter. It isn't as tender as the braised US method of cooking thick slices but the flavor is intense. My *contorno* was a plate of tender, fresh spring asparagus cooked *al dente* accompanied by a wedge of lemon.

I finished the meal with a *dolce* of sweetened fresh ricotta layered with fresh strawberry sauce in a tall goblet and a *caffè*. It was a smooth ricotta with a creamier texture than we find in the US. The strawberries seemed picked that morning from the garden.

I've had other meals since then and they are always outstanding.

CAFFÉ DEGLI ARTISTI

43.274760, 11.985749

Via Nazionale, 18

One of my inviolable rules is “Never ever eat at a restaurant on the main tourist street or piazza. Never.”

I'd just spent a morning visiting places in Cortona and had walked up and down the hill twice. It was 2:00 and I was starving so I started walking along the main street looking into the side streets and alleys for a restaurant. As I walked by one place I caught a whiff of black truffle from a plate of spaghetti that a woman was eating. It smelled amazing, but it was on the main drag and violated my rule. I continued to the end of the street and turned around to go back. Again I passed the woman eating spaghetti in truffle sauce. I love truffles! I broke my rule and gave in to both the truffles and hunger and sat down at one of the outside tables squeezing space out of Via Nazionale.

I struck up a conversation with the woman eating the truffle pasta. She told me that she ordered it special and that it wasn't on the menu. When the owner came for my order I asked for the same. First, though, I began with bruschetta with prosciutto and melted pecorino cheese. It came on a crispy slice of bread with a thin slice of prosciutto on top of the pecorino. Then came my half order (the full order is huge) of spaghetti with a creamy truffle sauce. Truffles are a rare treat, especially at a reasonable price. Cream is a perfect match with the earthy truffles. I finished with a plate of sliced mixed fruit in season.

It was an excellent meal from a place that looked like an over priced tourist bar on the main tourist street. Far from overpriced, the truffle pasta was only €5.00 (\$7.00). Does this mean I will violate my rule with impunity? I don't think so. It's still a pretty good guideline, but I have learned to follow my nose.



At the Caffè degli Artisti: pasta with black truffle sauce.

RISTORANTE LA LOGGETTA

43-274888, 11.985475



Top: the restaurant has outdoor seating under the loggia and umbrellas above Piazza Repubblica.

Above: Antipasto at La Loggetta: crostini nero, salsiccia, pecorino cheese, prosciutto, and bresaola.

Piazza Pescheria next to Piazza Repubblica.

Website: <http://www.laloggetta.com>

This one confirms my rule. The food is OK, but the main reason to eat here is to sit above Piazza Repubblica under the covered *loggia* or umbrellas and watch the people in the piazza. It's a pleasant atmosphere with plastered walls, attractive tables and dinnerware.

As I said, the food is not great and it costs too much to be mediocre. The times that I have tried their pasta were disappointments with bland sauces and mushy noodles. It's on the fence so that when I've eaten there I've thought that maybe it was slightly an off day and that I should try it again.

However, I've also had a good snack there. I ordered a plate of cured meats, cheese, and bruschetta — a typical Tuscan antipasto. It was served in a unique, attractive way, on a piece of black slate. The problem was that the slate had dulled all the knives in the restaurant and it was impossible to cut the meat. Still, all was fresh and of high quality.

20 Cortona Events

GIOSTRA DELL'ARCHIDADO

The crossbow competition is held on the second Sunday in June in Piazza Signorelli. Every year, a procession of more than 300 people wearing medieval costumes march through Cortona's historic center. The crossbow men who come from Cortona's five quarters, or *quartiere*, compete for a golden arrow. The contest originated in 1397 to celebrate the wedding of Francesco Casali and Antonia Salimberi. The festival re-enacts the wedding and the town is festooned with banners.

Website: <http://www.giostraarchidado.com/en.aspx>



TUSCAN SUN FESTIVAL

Last week of July, first week in August. The arts festival celebrates classical music, food, art exhibitions, and alternative medicine. Some of the world's finest musicians, scholars, authors, Academy Award-winners, artists, critics, and historians come to the festival, which also incorporates side events ranging from food and wine tastings to traditional Chinese medicine and fresco-making workshops.

Website: <http://www.cortonaweb.net/en/cortona-events/tuscan-sun-festival>



SAGRA DI BISTECCA

Middle of August. An outdoor culinary event celebrating the succulent meat from the Valdichiana *chianina* beef. The town cooks *bistecca alla Fiorentina* (steak Florentine) on a 14-meter long (46 ft) super grill — “rare” is the only option. Citizens and visitors line up for steak accompanied by local wines. There are also other exhibits of typical Cortonese products. It costs about €25.00, and includes steak, vegetable, bread, fruit, and wine or water. Held at the Parterre Gardens.



Photos from WMC.

SAGRA DEL FUNGO PORCINO

On the weekend following the *Sagra di Bistecca* the *porcini* mushroom is celebrated. Taste dishes based on mushrooms collected in the hills around Cortona. There are *antipasti*, *primi piatti*, *secondi piatti*, and *contorni* — mushroom everything. Served with local wines.

CORTONA ANTIQUARIA

End of August and beginning of September. The prestigious Casali and Vagnotti palaces hold an exhibition of very valuable antiques and artworks. It is a gathering of antique dealers and collectors from all over Italy. It attracts about 20,000 visitors. It has a highly select group of about fifty exhibitors.

Website: <http://www.cortonantiquaria.it>