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The Road to Romance



An avenue of cypress trees leads to the inn in the country village of Amorosa, in the rolling Sienese hills that look down on the valley of Chiana.

Love keeps Amorosa forever young, quaint

Story by

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Photos courtesy of Locanda Dell' Amorosa

We called him "The Sterling Tongue," not because of his skull of silver hair, but because he spoke eloquently, like a poet. No matter how much we praised him, lanky Marchese Carlo Citterio, dressed casually in navy slacks and shirt with the body of a basketball player and the bearing of an aristocrat, preferred to ignore our compliments. He wanted to talk about the fulfillment of his dream.

"Don't write about me," said Citterio when he gave us a tour of his village. "Amorosa is what you should write about. Tell the world about Locanda dell'Amorosa, the Village of Love in Italy."

The Lover's Inn symbolizes a fantasy of the classic romantic hideaway hidden in the hills of Tuscany. But it wasn't hard to find. We took the highway to Rome from Florence going toward Siena, where churches and castles interlaced green rolling hills...where villages hung from cliffs...where Siena, the "Beloved" city rose like a mystical illusion through the morning mist — a pink city on the tops of peaks visible from the autostata miles away.

In about an hour, we'd reached the avenue of cypress trees leading to Amorosa which sits on a hill surrounded by vineyards and olive groves, passing a farmer with oxen along the way. When we arrived, we drove through the massive trees standing like soldiers guarding the entry to the village. We found out later the trees don't just decorate the landscape, but block the wind from the dwellings.

The setting looked more like a stage set ready to film a historical novel than reality. We parked our rental car behind the walled village and walked through a brick archway with vegetation growing between the stones into a Renaissance square with a wish-

ing well. A 14th century tower dominated the medieval setting where blooming pink jasmine tousled over the verandahs. Chapel bells rang.

We watched a bride and groom run down the chapel steps. Carrying lighted candles, their guests followed them in a procession around the wishing well where the groom threw a coin in the fountain. As soon as the family from Naples noticed us, they welcomed us like cousins, and gave us goblets filled with bubbling champagne. We toasted the newlyweds and then ate rich butter-yellow wedding cake filled with lemon cream.

We don't speak Italian, but that didn't stop us from communicating with the married couple, both architects. After all, love is the universal language, and they cooed like turtle doves.

Dressed in antique lace, the bride told us about finding the hotel as if she had unearthed the lost city of Pompeii. "Amorosa," she said, "is in the Sienese Valley where art and culture flower since Etruscan times through the Renaissance to the present. We searched all of Italy to find this treasure for our wedding day. It's old, but it's new."

Convinced Italians were the friendliest people we'd ever met, we went to our room to unpack. Then we met Marchese Citterio who gave us a tour of the grounds.

"Amorosa's been in my family for generations," said Citterio. "In 1873, one of my ancestors bought it from the family of a pope. The first time I came to this village, I knew it was the most romantic place on earth. In its 700-year history, Amorosa changed hands

only once. One must follow the calling of one's heart. I discarded my career in advertising in Milan and came to Toscana to begin the modern chapter



A stable in Amorosa has become a rustic, elegant and cozy restaurant that serves wonderful Tuscan wines.

of this ancient village."

At one time, more than 300 peasants lived in Amorosa, raising silkworms, cattle, olives and grapes. Following the transition of farming from the share system to direct ownership, when workers left to buy their own land, Citterio decided to turn the hamlet into a Tuscan inn by restoring the Renaissance villa for guests. He began by transforming the stables, abandoned by the farmers, into a restaurant.

As funds became available, he proceeded with the restoration of the inn. Room by room, he remodeled the peasants' dwellings into guest rooms. Now, his farm produces honey, olive oil, marmalade and wine. People come from all over the world to experience his four-star hospitality. Americans make up 60 percent of his guest list.

Standing in an open field, the elegant Italian extended his arms toward the valley below like a priest blessing his congregation and proclaimed, "In the distance is the city of Florence, the cradle of culture for centuries of civilization. Someday, on this spot, there'll be a pool with that view — the first swimming pool in the

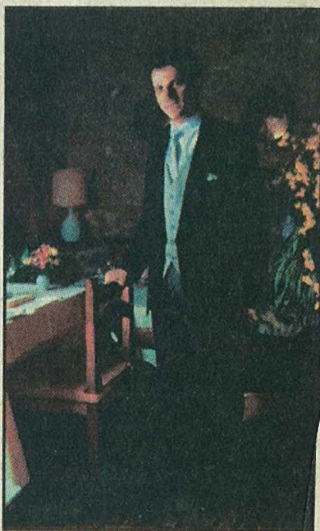
valley."

Proud as a papa, the Marchese showed us where he stayed when he began rebuilding the property. "I slept here," Citterio explained in almost flawless English. Then pointing to a window in the bedroom of suite 44, he remembered, "With my head on the pillow, I watched the full moon walk between the alley of cypress trees below, branches opening like angles' wings carrying my dreams from Amorosa to heaven."

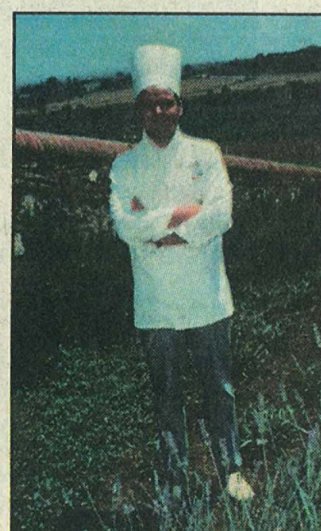
The origin of this "temple of romance" dates to the 14th century. The ancient lineage of the Piccolominis of Pienza, first owners of Amorosa, included Enea Silvio, Pope Pius II.

All 17 rooms, furnished with rustic pieces mixed with antiques, differed in size and decor, but shared the discreet style of its owner who said, "I am a simple man with simple tastes, hoping to share the simplicity of my country. My vision," Citterio continued, "is to create a small luxury resort, unpretentious and elegant, where guests come to enjoy the most culturally rich area of Italy."

Don't think simple means unsophisticated. Armani's suits whisper understatement, but



Maitre d' at the inn.



The chef at the inn.