

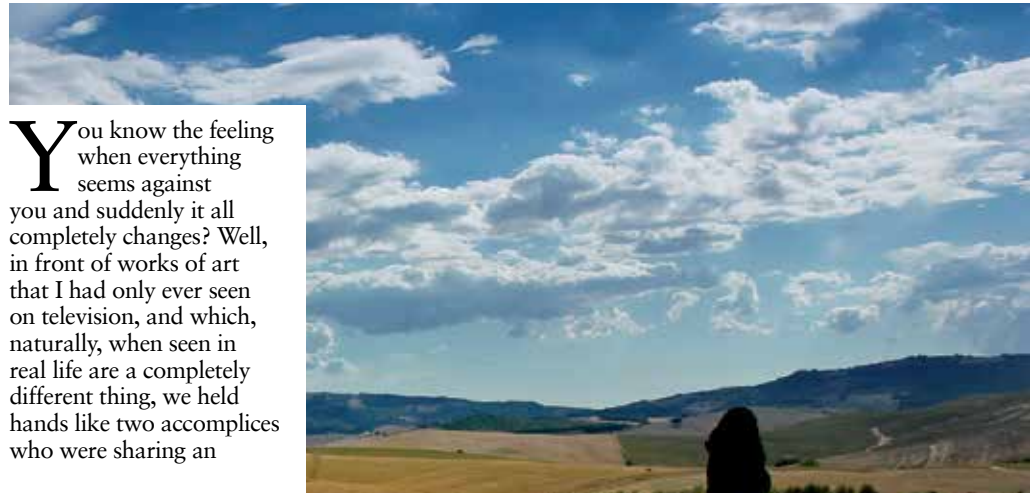
The promise of love



“I reached that level of emotion where you experience those heavenly sensations offered by the arts and passionate feelings, when I left Santa Croce, my heart was racing, life for me had become arid, I walked fearing I would fall over...”

Stendhal

“ You know the feeling when everything seems against you and suddenly it all completely changes?



You know the feeling when everything seems against you and suddenly it all completely changes? Well, in front of works of art that I had only ever seen on television, and which, naturally, when seen in real life are a completely different thing, we held hands like two accomplices who were sharing an



experience that would become our memory... We looked at each other and still hand-in-hand, we stepped into the room. A big painting: La Primavera (Allegory of Spring). A blindfolded Cupid shoots an arrow towards the central figure. This woman with the red cloak is Venus, but it is the woman on her right, in the flowered dress, Flora, who provokes bewitchment. The other couples, like us, all stopped at the same moment to look at Flora, in a collective flash mob that seemed to last an eternity. At the end of this eternity my ideas were very clear. ”



Cities of Art

Tuscany is a dream,

we went directly from an airport to a museum, maybe the most famous in the world, filled with works that leave you bewildered, long walks along the banks of the Arno and the great palaces, compositions of antique stones, ornaments desired by the nobility of the past. And then there's the Duomo, the Baptistry, the great churches, the statues, loggias, alleyways; A whirl of art and culture on a human scale, made to be enjoyed. At the Boboli gardens, there too, looking for the oranges most similar to those painted by Botticelli in "Primavera", we were inebriated by flowers and the colours.



We arrived in Siena, and we found it a mysterious city, with the streets intertwined, one above another. It's possibly the most intact medieval city in Italy. A unique work of art that has no paragon.



“Love too, during the Palio, is suspended, like everything in the city, but what is the Palio, if not a manifestation of great love for your land?”



Towns and flavours of Tuscany

“After travelling through the Tuscan countryside, we arrived within view of a castle, a medieval fortress on a hilltop, like in a story by Walter Scott. We tasted wine that that they’ve been making here for thousands of years, then tasted delicious cured meats. We felt like Lancelot and Guinevere... And if, instead, we had a big medieval wedding? with the guests in costume, with jesters, the music, the grand banquet table of the castle prepared as a thousand years ago?”

The valley of the Orcia river, a union of art and countryside, amidst the harsh, rugged countryside of volcanic origin and the softer hills, where the Mediterranean macchi, the vines, olive groves and varied cultivation mix and intersect in



frescoes of rare beauty... We were alone, in this lost corner of Tuscany, alone in the immensity of the abbey and we waited for nightfall to see the stars as its roof, an amazing fresco of nature...

And if we got married here, on an evening like this, under the stars?



Sun and sea

“Here, you really do breathe an international air: You can hear all sorts of languages being spoken! And you never get bored. I would like to take advantage of these days here to learn to wind-surf, or also to go to the nearby Apuan mountains, to have some fun together. And this evening a stroll past the shops of the centre, an aperitif and then dinner for two and then away... I drag him off to the places that have made the history of the discotheque. Just look at how he’s smiling at me.... Who knows what he’s thinking.”



The wedding



| A fairytale ceremony

¹² Ever since I was a child, when I was lying in bed, reading with my Mum, I've always suspected that Pinocchio had a soft spot for his fairy godmother. And seeing as I've grown up naive, letting myself get carried away to hypothetical toylands by silly modern-day Lampwicks and seeing as when I was a boy, I was always getting into trouble, just like a modern day Pinocchio, I couldn't help

myself but fall in love, yet again, with a Turquoise vision of a fairy. When I met her I kept my promise, not like the boy made of wood, and I returned before nightfall to wait for her at the altar. Me and my wife had no doubts: There's a town in the heart of Tuscany which gave its name to the author of the timeless marionette with the long nose. At Collodi, an entire Park awaited us, an enchanting place filled

with magic that tells of the adventures of Pinocchio. For our wedding, we didn't choose a hard winter's night troubled with a cold and rough wind, but a magical night under the stars.

2 The wedding couple amidst history

We married in the stone church of San Giusto Nuovo, beyond the old walls, surrounded by a fresco of olive trees, dominated by the cliffs of Volterra, eroded by time, ancient chasms that in the past swallowed up the cemeteries of ancient forefathers. A boy with magical hands played a double barrelled flute for us whilst a girl stroked a lyre, offering us dreams. The leather sandals of my

wife, who was dressed in a linen costume with long sleeves, tread on the ferrous sand of that land full of history. Hand-crafted filigree adorned her neck, alabaster ear-rings sparkled, kissed by the sun. After a night-time banquet with fresh fish and spelt soup, we gave our guests, from a horse-drawn cart on the banks of the Mediterranean, little copies of the evening shadow, a metallic and long-limbed profile of a

mysterious Etruscan boy, whilst they poured their wine from clay pitchers. I remember the moment when, listening to the sea breaking against the shore, I saw my wife smile at me, so beautiful, lying on a bed, confused with the slender and tall maritime pine trees.



3 Tuscan "Must"

We married savouring the art and experiencing the history. Florence... birthplace of the renaissance, origin of never-ending classical Italian beauty, dream and refuge of celebrated artists. Marrying in Florence means starting a lifetime together surrounded by the aura of enchanting history. We chose the heart of Florence, the administrative centre of the old city: Palazzo Vecchio, The Hall of the 500. To

allow us to meet Cupid in a unique historical setting, the authorities gave us permission to seal our love in the most artistically important place in the city, in the temple of Vasarian magnificence and the mystery of the Battle of Anghiari. Not just a room or a hall, but the "Holy of Holies" of the Tuscan capital. A short line of coloured vehicles with, at the steering wheels, friends dressed for a party, followed our vintage Beetle as far as Fiesole, the old

town in the hills facing Florence, from the slopes of which, whilst dining, we enjoyed once more, ecstatic, in love with, the Tuscan countryside and the enchanting vision of that renaissance city, our chosen place for the start of our life together.





4 Trendy green

I was wearing a short dress of chiffon, floral ochre embroidery decorated my bodice whilst a small bunch of wild flowers was my bouquet. The various colours in my hands stood out impertinently from the sea of July sunflowers in love with the sun. I

arrived on a buggy pulled by two horses with their manes blowing in the wind. He was waiting for me in front of the sword wedged in the stone, to promise me his love, as solid and eternal as that sword. We walked hand in hand along the dirt track, surrounded by the tall

golden sunflowers, that leads towards the bare abbey of San Galgano...

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5 An alternative style

“King and Queen of the snows“, we got married in winter, in the town of San Pelleggino in Alpe, on the highest peak of Tuscany. He was waiting for me in the little sanctuary immersed in the forest, where the White Hermit and Saint Pellegrino rest undisturbed, near the borders of the old Duchys of Modena and Lucca. I arrived covered in the warmth of a fur stole with a hood, on a sled pulled by

irresistible huskies, whilst soft white snow-flakes fell from the sky. Crystals of blown glass emerged from the bouquet of heather and hawthorn, radiating luminous reflections on the embroidered lace that decorated my warm velvet dress. The floral decorations of the church reflected winter's charm, the stone of the walls and the benches were enriched with the trunks of trees

from which hung lighted artificial stalactites and scented pine needles.

Honeymoon



“ This alternation between light and shade on the smooth surface of the hills, like the waves of the sea, that push one another to the horizon, seems to be the breath of life itself, the solemn rhythm of nature, full of the chirping of the cicadas and the dazzling light of the sun in the moments when it appears from behind the clouds....”

Andrej Tarkowskij

Ecstasy of the senses... Cultural crossroads

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“The light caresses the heavy wooden shutters of the windows, it finds its way between the folds of the ruffled blankets, it creeps up all the way to my relaxed body. I feel the silken sheets slide whilst he gets up and opens the large windows. The Tuscan morning air floods the room, the mist of the distant hills extends towards us and embraces us, imperceptibly, reflecting the green shades of the countryside and the luminescence of the sun on the frescoed walls. I would like to wake up like this. The beginning of a dream. An inviting croissant waiting for me on the bed-side table, an historic palace or a country house, with the colourful family coat of arms dominating above the entrance door to our bedroom.

Towns and villages await us, they untwine like memories not yet lived, love, let's choose Tuscany. The thermal baths of Montecatini, the castle of the Emperor at Prato, the house of the genius, Leonardo, at Vinci, the villas in the outskirts of the majestic capital: Florence. Its heart dominated by Santa Maria del Fiore, Brunelleschi's Cupola, Giotto's bell tower, the Baptistry, and the Bronze Gate of Paradise: Florence is emotion: History encapsulated in every wall of the Palazzo Vecchio, art emanating from each painting in the Uffizi: Michelangelo's David who looks down on us from on high in his perfection, Venus and "La Primavera" by Botticelli, all masterpieces of prodigious sensuality. To cross Ponte Vecchio admiring the shop windows of the jewellers, to stroll alongside the natural sculptures of the Boboli Gardens and to visit the church of Santa Maria Novella and the tombs of the "great" in Santa Croce. From Piazzale Michelangelo, Florence shows itself: Schoolmistress, understanding mother, a diadem that frees beauty and captures time; The mountains beyond the monuments, the "silver ribbon" that carries history.



A honeymoon on a Vespa

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This idea of the Vespa is fantastic, a honeymoon we can call our "Tuscan Holiday"! To start from Pisa is just as fantastic. Here we are flying towards its squares, a clear city, happy, completely horizontal, spacious, where the taste of the sea and the freshness of the pines mix together. It's maybe the only real fluvial city in Tuscany, because, in Florence, differently from here, the river Arno is not "lived". Riding the Vespa along the "lungarno" towards "Bocca d'Arno", accompanied by the trees, she's holding on to me, laughing and taking photos of the countryside. It's a fantastic experience.



Relaxing honeymoon

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Visiting Tuscan villages is a never-ending itinerary, there's just so much to choose from. How relaxing to drive along the empty country lanes, dotted with wonderful houses, until, after a curve, we notice a new village, so, we are curious to discover it together and find a romantic corner where we can have a kiss: after all, we're on our honeymoon!





I'll always love
you

**"Hush. On the threshold
of the forest I do not hear
words you call human, but I
hear newer words spoken by
droplets and leaves far away"**

Gabriele D'Annunzio

To renew your love: The ideal place

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Somewhere I don't have to cook dinner every evening, please. I'd like a hotel, maybe in a resort, with a health centre in it. - After years of marriage; she dreams of a relaxing holiday, a romantic escape with her husband to re-discover the love of their youth. - Or the sea! I'd like to relax, sun-bathe, swim in the clear water of the Mediterranean...



Let's go to Tuscany then, there's Florence, Siena, Lucca, Pisa... and then on the coast there's a place called Versilia, you'd like it, there are famous resorts there, white beach umbrellas, fashionable bars... Or we could go to the Etruscan coast, the rugged Maremma, the Etruscan tombs by the side of the sea - He was already thinking of the boat trips and of the walks, hand in hand, through the stone alleyways of medieval towns and villages.

Sun and sea

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We leave the mainland to go to Giannutri, an island shaped like a half-moon, which is in a Marine Park, an angle of protected territory that needs to be protected. We land at a little port and are assailed by the salty sea air and by the intense aroma of the Mediterranean scrub. And if we were to come to live here, in this dream that the ancient Romans discovered, building a little port and a sumptuous villa?



After having spent the night on the island, being treated like old friends of the proprietor, we depart heading north, skirting the island of Giglio, aiming for Mystery: The island of Montecristo. We chose Montecristo because it was immortalised and made famous all over the world in my favourite novel, The Count of Montecristo, by Alexandre Dumas. Also for Dumas, evidently, Tuscany was a land of love! All of this has, as a backdrop, the tortuous footpaths on which we now enter into the indescribable nature of the island: a paradise on earth, which rises to over 600 metres above the sea. Whilst we climb we come across age-old Holm trees: At Montecristo you do not measure time with a watch nor with a calendar.



Towns and flavours of Tuscany

Cities of Art

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Tuscany is like a mother, who never stops loving us and at the same time, astounds us for the amount of love and beauty that she's able to give us. It's incredible how every town and village seem to be "made-to-measure", how each one adapts to the surrounding nature and at the same time produces an architectural and civil layout which is functional for everyday life. The central square has the town hall but it's also the common home for all the citizens:

So it's solemn, elegant and welcoming whilst its walls, once needed to defend against enemies, still give us today a sense of protection. The churches, even for non-believers, are in any case an invitation to switch of from the material world, and to look to the sky, as indicated like a finger pointing upwards, by the spires. These thoughts cross my mind whilst we arrive at Sansepolcro, which immediately makes us feel serene, with that silent complicity that

we experience when travelling together, filling our eyes with new stimuli, that then transform into memories... Our journey through Tuscany, today, also means this. Maybe the best adjective to describe Sansepolcro is intimate: It's a fascinating town, beautiful and "secret", not on the usual tourist itinerary. I first heard mention of it at my desk at school, whilst studying the Italian Renaissance and the art of Piero della Francesca.



We decide to visit the most eastern city of art: Arezzo. To get there, we cross the Apennines, places enwrapped in nature's beauty and we discover that the surroundings are rich with mystical places: La Verna and Camaldoli. In the Casentini valley, dominated by Pratomagno, a plateau of charming wildness, rich with cultivated fields and of quality food products. Here, the art of weaving wool has been passed down for centuries. The raw, traditionally brightly coloured textiles are testimony to this, and because the wool retains some of the oil, they are practically water proof.



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They were used by both hunters and shepherds. As always in Tuscany, the simple things are also the most elegant...