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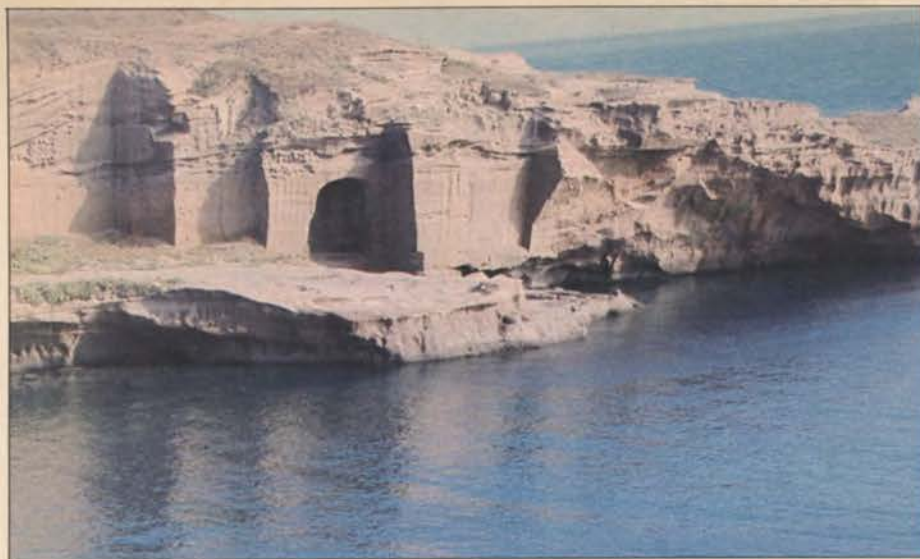


MAY 1985 \$3.00

FRANK LANGELLA:

THE MAN WHO
DREADS THE LIMELIGHT

LEISUREWEAR FOR SUMMER



The volcanic islands of Ponza, Palmarola and Ventotene, which along with tiny Santo Stefano and Zannone, make up the Pontine archipelago 20 miles off the coast of Rome, are rarely mentioned in the guidebooks of Italy. Those who have heard of them often dismiss them as barren, desolate prison-islands. But although their vertical cliffs once confined Fascist Italy's dissidents and, long before that, adulterous imperial Roman ladies, they are now a haven for travelers seeking private oases of sun. So resplendent are these simple fishing ports that they rival even Capri.

Visitors to Ponza—the largest and most popular of the islands—may be tempted to say that it is the new Capri, that is, the uncluttered, charming and still very Italian Capri of the 1950s. For starters, the *ponzesi* will assure you that you've come to the isle of love; after all, the seductress Circe had her royal palace here. To prove their point, the locals (whose ancestors sailed from Naples in the 1700s) will put on their best smile and direct you to the caves of Ulysses near the port, where the Homeric hero and his men landed, beckoned by Circe to *l'isola dell'aurora*, the island she called dawn.

Ponza's physical similarity to Capri is at once evident as your hydrofoil approaches the island from Anzio on the mainland. Like its neighbor in the Bay of Naples, Ponza is a kingdom of sea-rocks, staggering cliffs, islets, private beaches, grottoes and other lava formations. Its hillsides, washed in a warm palette of color, are sweet with wild sprays of yellow broom, lemon trees and the grapes of Cala Feola. The *ponzesi* tend to see angels, priestly frocks and hell with all its demons in the volcanic sculptures, and name them accordingly. Dazzling as these rocks are at first sight from the hydrofoil, the effect can be almost hallucinatory when seen through binoculars from a small boat, which can be rented at the port.

Perhaps the most dramatic of Ponza's sculptures is Cala d'Inferno, located a few hundred feet beneath the tiny settlement of La Forna. As the name suggests, it is a blazing-white eroded cone. Stairs carved by the ancient Romans wind down to the water where, in the tradition of Circe, topless sunbathers bask on rocks and pontoons. Huge mushroom-shaped tufaceous rocks dot the sea between Cala d'Inferno and Ponza's port. Nearby you can steer your boat into the emerald waters of the Grotta degli Smeraldi, and take refuge from the intense Mediterranean sun. As you move closer to port you pass L'Arco dei Topazi, which spans a patch of gold-and-green sea, colored by its abundant flora and teeming with oysters and limpets of enormous size.

Sun worshippers will revel in the volcanic pools on the western side of the island at

THE PONTINE ARCHIPELAGO: SOME ENCHANTED ISLANDS

A captivating chain that links a mythical past to a magical present, the Pontine Islands still lure travelers from the beaten path.

BY SUSAN MAZUR



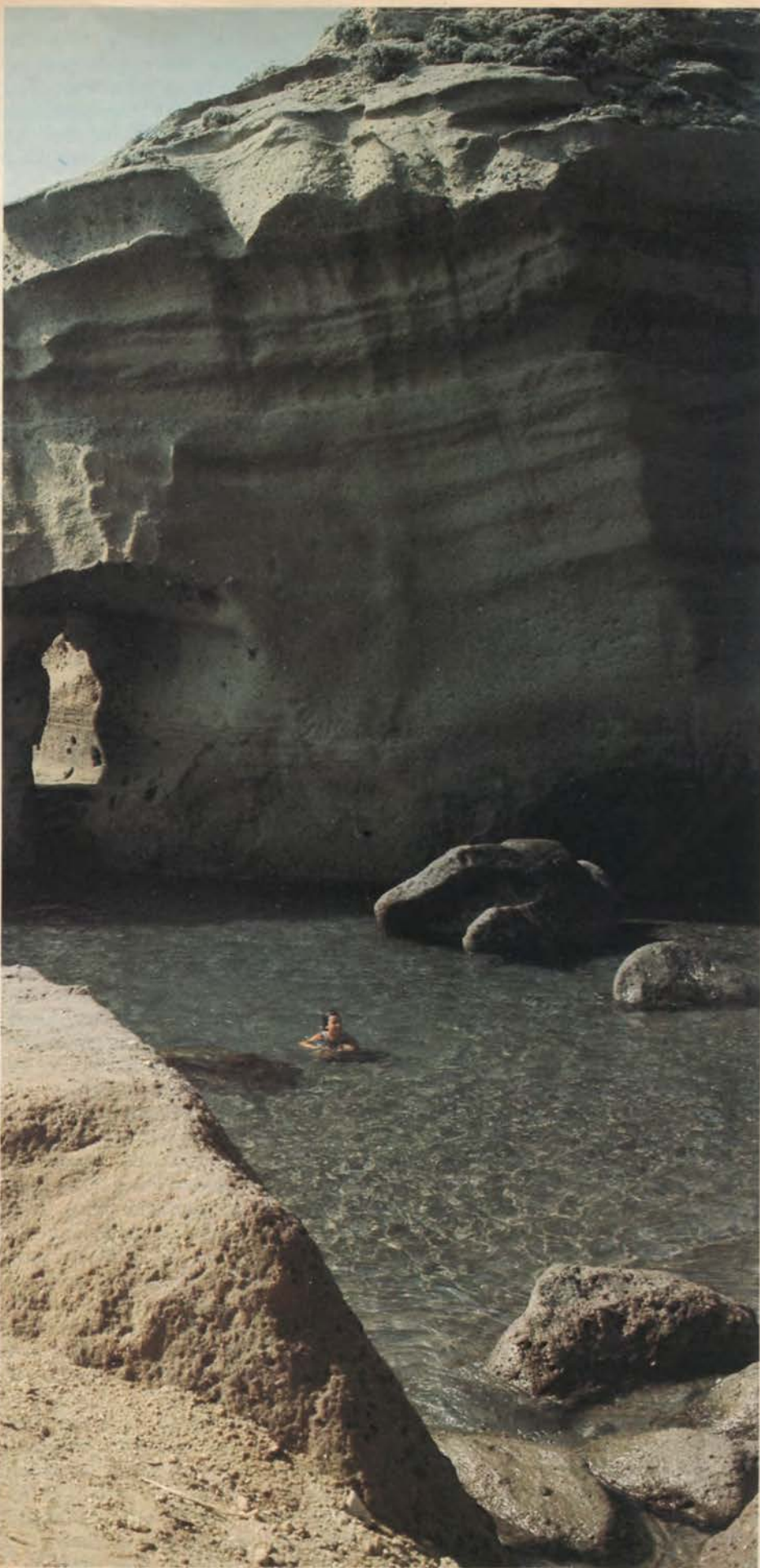
Cala Feola. While these perfect swimming holes are the main attraction, the region is also famous for its hillside trattorie, where you can sample local wines at their best. The beaches at Frontone, Core and Sant'Antonio on the port side of the island are all accessible by bus or taxi. The bus to Chiaia di Luna beach, Ponza's largest and best, leaves from the Sant'Antonio newsstand for Via Chiaia di Luna. From here it's a walk through two Greco-Roman aqueducts and down hundreds of feet of stairs to the pebbled, pumice beach of the moon goddess. Don't miss the full moon at Chiaia di Luna, when the beach is lit by the reflection off the 700-foot wall of white volcanic rock.

For both the amateur and the professional archaeologist, there is much to discover on Ponza. Any documents offering clues to the history of the Pontine Islands that may have existed were undoubtedly destroyed when Barbarossa the pirate invaded in the sixteenth century, killing all the monks. After the pirates came the Spanish Bourbons, the French Bourbons and a host of other conquerors who so diluted the Pontines' cultural identity that they were virtually forgotten.

Certainly one of the most curious remnants of Ponza's mysterious past is the Grotta di Pilato, found just under the cliff near the port. Accessible only by boat, this cavern was the marine entrance to one of the two principal villas the emperor Augustus had built on the island, which have long since been destroyed. Inside the cave you'll see an ancient Roman pond where moray eels were bred, decorated with jewels and eventually dissected—their entrails read to determine the future.

Equally astounding is the Grotta del Serpente, so named for the legendary reptile who lived there guarding his treasure. In Roman times the caves served as a water reserve fed by aqueduct from Cala d'Inferno. Now half buried by brush near the roadside en route to the village of Santa Maria, the ruins are beginning to receive some attention from local authorities who suspect the caves wind back into the rock and around the Augustan caves perhaps one-and-a-half to two miles, and date back 3,000 years to the Phoenicians.

On an average morning Ponza's harbor is laid back like most fishing ports, except in July and August when wealthy Romans and Milanese arrive in their yachts and there's competition for docking space. Otherwise, the excitement's in the catch—exquisite assortments of eel, aragosta (small lobster), swordfish, octopus, squid and cernie (sunfish). Occasionally, the sea is rough, and



(Top left) The windswept cliffs of Cala Rossano on Ventotene. (Bottom left) Cave-like dwellings on Palmarola. (Right) Nave di Terra, a secluded swimming spot on tranquil Ventotene.

then you're likely to see little else than the repair of fishing nets or skivvies getting strung up to dry.

Overlooking the port is the Piazza Carlo Pisacane. This is the center of town—a street the length of the harbor, bordered by modest pastel-colored shops and restaurants. Here Ponza's elders gather to look out over the sea and take early morning caffè, while their dusty, fiercely independent hunting dogs patrol the waterfront. By the time the fishing boats return with the day's catch the piazza is in full swing and the day's promenade begins. The handsome coast guard officer from Napoli, the Texan-decorator-turned-Roman-exporter of extra-virgin olive oil, the archaeology student from London—all make their way to the umbrellas outside Bar Incontro, Ponza's answer to Harry's. Here *ponzesi* and *turisti* alike sip apéritifs and trade adventures until sunset.

Don't look for the Kashoggi entourage to appear then, or the Aga Khan or the Grimaldis. Unlike Capri, Ponza has no nightlife—no clubs or casinos and just one disco that's open in July and August. The appeal here is private, quiet relaxation, nothing less and nothing more.

Officially Ponza's resort season begins June 1 and ends around mid-September. Gennarino a Mare is the only hotel on the island that's open year-round, though there are always rooms and villas to rent. The most colorful time to visit is around the 9th of June, when the residents of the four-mile-long island faithfully whitewash their villas and tidy the geraniums for the day of their patron saint, San Silverio di Frosine. The spiritual leader of Ponza, San Silverio was exiled here in 537 by Emperor Justinian's wife, who then named her friend Vigilius to replace Silverio as pope. Silverio is remembered throughout Italy each June 20, the day the Empress's assassins murdered him as he attempted to flee to nearby Palmarola.

The *ponzesi* commemorate his feast by decorating the port with colored lights and streamers and sending a party of men by boat to Palmarola to fetch the saint's statue from atop 250-foot Mt. Silverio. When the procession arrives in Ponza, the statue is adorned with coral and gold and paraded through the street amid singing, dancing and feasting that culminate with a fireworks display on June 20th.

Many *ponzesi* expatriots return for the festival of San Silverio, some from as far as New York. There are those who never leave again, like one bronzed hydrofoil attendant who worked in the New York City subways for 11 years before returning to his homeland. Ponzesi Luciano and Joe Mazzella sold three pizza shops in New York to reopen on the Piazza Carlo Pisacane a few years ago. The brothers Mazzella—descendants of one of Ponza's founding families,

who trace their roots to Mattia Mazzella who arrived from Naples in 1734—also own a video-game arcade at the port, and hope to establish Ponza's first casino. They are part of the new wave of up-and-coming entrepreneurs who are finding their way back to the Pontine Islands as commercial opportunities increase.

The distance separating Ponza and Palmarola is seven miles, a 90-minute ride by boat. Formed three million years ago of the same volcanic soup as its neighbor, Palmarola is a mile-long spired sculpture, largely uninhabited and named for the dwarf palm (*la palma nana*) that flourishes there to the northwest on Mt. Tramontana. Visitors planning to spend the night will want to take provisions. There are no hotels, fresh water or electricity—though, strangely enough, there is a French restaurant.

Stopping at Cala Brigantina Bay on the southern tip of the island, opposite Ponza, you are immediately captured by the surrealism of the space. A 600-foot limestone cliff that ends in azure water, seagulls in criss-cross flight—it's little wonder that worldly pirates tapped out caves and settled in.

During the summer about 100 people make their home (mostly in old pirate caves) on the beach between San Silverio and Le Galere—boaters needing shelter for the night, campers and some naturalists who rough it out a bit longer, including wealthy Italians like Guido Fendi, who's a frequent weekend.

The most western island of the Pontine archipelago, Palmarola lies directly on the migration route of birds flying from Africa to Europe, and is the only island in the Pontines where the *gabbiano* (seagull) will mate and nest. From 1966 to 1973, environmentalist Domenico Rossi studied the bird life and flora of this extraordinary island. During that time he set up an observatory and hospital for the *falco marino*, the gull and other creatures injured in flight.

On the way to the beach where Rossi's midnight blue house still sits against the melancholy hills, you pass through the Grotta di Mezzogiorno, a cove on the south famous for the aperture in its ceiling. Rapid water makes the entrance tricky, but with careful maneuvering the boat slips safely inside and is buoyed along by deep turquoise water. Distracted by the safety of the shelter, you move on, but within moments you're startled by a blast of sunlight from the top of the grotto, which seems to have lifted off upon your arrival.

The eastern fringe of the island offers clear tranquil waters, ideal for swimming and snorkeling. But the fast set has already discovered the therapeutic benefits of Palmarola's silence, and sad to say, the peaceful life is beginning to lose its innocence.

Less than one-square mile, with fewer



Stark white cliffs surrounded by a sparkling clear blue sea characterize Ponza, the largest of the Pontines.

than 300 inhabitants, Ventotene sits exactly in the center of the deepest part of the Tyrrhenian Sea, a mere 40 minutes by hydrofoil from Ponza. There is a wonderful eeriness about the place: An island of sun and profound privacy, Ventotene is the forgotten port of the Pontine archipelago, a museum of unmarked ruins, wild with overgrown rosebushes, sunflowers and other vegetation. The Romans called the island Pandataria—"where the winds blow"—and through the ages, the winds have deposited sand from North Africa onto its north-eastern shores, giving an almost chartreuse color to the beaches.

With few signs to guide you when you arrive, you might find yourself peeking in



doorways and stopping to ask directions. You pass some fishing boats at port, a few small yachts. In the center of Porto Nuovo you notice a row of curious pillars made of the same golden-green tufaceous rock found at Cala Parata Grande and Cala Nave beaches. These supports once belonged to a Roman warehouse and now prop up the island's water sports club—the best in the archipelago—run by Salvatore Braca, whose 107-hour underwater dive stands as a European record.

Ventotene's harbor was built in 18 B.C. to protect the port from violent winds. So perfect is its design—quay sides with tufa arches—that it made the island the ship-building center for the Roman navy, and has withstood the ravages of time so well that it is still used for small craft today.

Ruins of the Villa di Giulia near the port at Punta Eolo (Giulia, the daughter of Au-

gustus, was accused of adultery and banished to Ventotene in A.D. 2) have long been the main attraction of this windswept island—though only remnants of its entrance hall, courtyard and *exedrae* still exist. A column that was originally part of the villa can be found in a small park built in memory of those imprisoned on the island by the Fascists, in Ventotene's main square, Piazza Castello.

Believed to be similar in design to the Villa Iovis on Capri, the Villa di Giulia was also used as a prison for Caligula's mother, Agrippina, and after her, Nero's wife, Octavia, who was savagely beheaded by the emperor's men. As you stand atop the rubble, looking out onto the empty sea, the *sciocco* whines and, some say, repeats the names of the men Giulia had ferried to her villa at night by local fishermen.

While history records the confinement of

Giulia as the most significant event to occur on this fishing isle, its value as a laboratory for underwater research and environmental study will no doubt soon be recognized. Mauro Ugazio, a professor of political economics at the University of Rome and summer resident of Ventotene, is seeking to raise the \$4 million necessary to renovate the eighteenth-century prison of the Bourbons on the tiny island of Santo Stefano, just across the channel, and to build a science center with an airstrip. Head of Ventotene's school for skippers, Ugazio is perhaps the island's best friend. He is a visionary who is helping to revitalize an area that has been ignored for centuries. "My colleagues in Rome, they are puzzled by my absence from the university," he says. "I don't care. Here, there is life." ■

Susan Mazur has traveled extensively in recent years as a print and television journalist.

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30 DAY MONEY BACK GUARANTEE

1685. Much has been written about these two composers in this anniversary year. *Attenzione* should do the same for Scarlatti and his remarkable family.

Philip Farina
Chicago, Illinois

PONTINE PRISON

In her interesting article on the Pontine Islands (May '85), Susan Mazur was quite correct in stating that they were used as prison islands.

In 1848, during the first Italian war for independence and unification, several thousand men from all parts of the Kingdom of Naples went north to fight as the Neapolitan Volunteers. Among them was my grandfather, a young medical officer. They fought at Curtatone, Montanara and Custoza. Sometime during that period, King Ferdinand II of Naples ordered them to return home. Grandfather and some 500 others refused to obey and were declared deserters. They went on to Venice, which came under siege by the Austrians, and served under General Guglielmo Pepe, an old Napoleonic veteran. This battle is known in Italian history as *la Difesa di Venezia*, the Defense of Venice, a heroic but unsuccessful struggle.

After the surrender of the city, many of the Neapolitans attempted to return to their homes. Grandfather wandered down the Balkan coast and spent a year in Dalmatia. In an attempt to cross the Adriatic on the way back to Italy, he was captured, sent to Naples's infamous prison of Santa Maria Apparente and sentenced to death. The sentence was later changed to imprisonment on the island of Ventotene, where he remained for five years. Under an act of amnesty he was set at liberty under police surveillance. But he was arrested again with a brother, a priest, for having arms and patriotic literature.

I have had the opportunity to visit the beloved land of Italy, but I never got to Ventotene, nor could I ever find a photo of it. So, many thanks to *Attenzione* for a most appreciated and unexpected dividend!

Edmund de Mattia
Storrs, Connecticut

FROM THE SUGGESTION BOX

I would like to suggest a regional area I would like to see in *Attenzione*—the Ito-Albanian villages of Italy.

I spent six months in 1978 in San Demetrio Corone with relatives. This is one of the 15 or 16 villages that have held onto their traditions over several

centuries. Albanian is still the major language spoken in the home.

This is an area that relatively few Americans/Italians are familiar with, and would perhaps be of great interest to them.

Paula H. Liguori
West Roxbury, Massachusetts

Since publishing a letter by A. DeMartini of North Hollywood, California, regarding the Albanians in Italy, we have received a great deal of mail concerning the history of the Italian-Albanian community. Some of those letters will appear in future issues of *Attenzione*. More important, we are currently preparing an article on Italy's Albanian villages for a winter 1986 issue.—Ed.

RECIPE REVISE

Please advise the author of "The A to Z of Zucchini" (July/August '85) that there is a dangerous error in the recipe on page 54, zucchini milano style.

The recipe should call for sautéed (cooked) sausages, since nowhere in the recipe is there any way that the sausage could cook properly to avoid trichinosis.

Mary Russo
Bayside, New York

WOMEN'S STUDIES

I am presently studying the socio-economic history of Italy as my final semester at Vermont College. My culminating paper, in autobiographical form, will recount my memories of my immigrant grandparents from Northern Italy, discuss their parents and homeland, and talk about my husband's grandparents from Sicily. The purpose of this project is twofold: to look at those influences in my life; to make my children's great- and great-great-grandparents known to them.

I had been suppressing a desire during the first half of this semester to examine the Italian woman because of time and the immensity of such a topic. But your article "The Italian-American Woman Now" (June '85) gave me the courage to tackle it. It also helped me understand the necessity [of my doing so]. I thank you for that.

Laura M. Ventimiglia
Gloucester, Massachusetts

CORRECTION: In an editorial reply to a letter published in the July/August issue, Lazio and Basilicata were incorrectly identified as provinces. They are both regions.—Ed.