

IL PELLICANO

*Whatever comes from love, love it will exude. It's no wonder why **IL Pellicano Hotel** in Italy is considered to be one of the world's best-kept travel secrets. Its history is so charming that it makes you want to catch a plane right here, right now, just to be apart of such a thrilling vibe.*





Story by *Lulu Berton*

Back in the early '60s, British army pilot Michael Graham and American jet-setter Patsy Daszel were searching all over Europe to find a property in which to celebrate their magical love. They ended up purchasing a splendid piece of land on the Argentario peninsula in Tuscany and decided to call the secluded resort, which opened in 1965, Il Pellicano, in honor of Pelican Point, the promontory in California where they had first met years before.

What is today known for being one of the hippest and most sought-after destinations in the world soon became the perfect relaxation ground for an elite cache of VIP guests such as Henry Fonda, Charlie Chaplin, Slim Aarons and all the European royalty.

"Michael and Patsy were definitely among the most subtly elegant couples in those days — maybe a bit overly selective, yes, but they were so good looking that they could get away with anything," admits Roberto Scio, an elegant Italian entrepreneur and hotelier who, in 1979, ended up purchasing the property. He was a regular at The Grahams' and one of the few selected Italians invited to join Il Pellicano's exclusive parties. "Michael was never without a cigarette and a scarf around his neck, and Patsy, well, she was particularly selective about everything," Scio says. When the couple decided to sell their resort and asked him if he knew of anyone interested in buying that hidden haven, he had absolutely no doubt.

"The location was amazingly beautiful," Scio says, "and I bought it because I didn't want someone without an appreciation for the place to buy it and ruin it. I knew nothing about the hotel business at that time, but I was in love with Il Pellicano and the way the place felt. I wanted to be certain it would remain as perfect as it was the first time I stayed there. Of course, I've tried to improve it quite a bit over the years, but I believe our guests experience the soul of the place exactly as I did all those years ago."

Forty years later, this spectacular hotel built in the midst of the gorgeous nature of Monte Argentario by Porto Ercole on a stretch of cliffs overlooking the sea with gorgeous secular gardens designed by architect Paolo Pejrone is now home to Scio and his family. The major transformations from the Grahams' ownership to Scio's takeover mainly involve the hotel's room capacity. When the Grahams bought the land, it had 18 rooms and then there were cottages around the hotel owned by different people. Eventually, Scio ended up buying those, and they are now an integral part of the hotel. Scio also transformed the original houses into hotel rooms. The hotel slowly started to expand, and in the late '90s, many more rooms were added. Today Il Pellicano has 50.

It would be impossible to resist the temptation of asking Scio' about some colorful anecdotes involving the exclusive Grahams' VIP party guests. "Obviously, there are too many stories to recount at the moment," says Scio, reminiscing, "but one that I consider the most precious is when I visited the hotel as a young man in my late 20s. The Grahams always



Photo by Juergen Teller

had live music on Friday nights with a candlelight dinner followed by dancing. Back then, men wore jackets and ties in the evening, and women were known to change their outfits numerous times throughout the day. I was the youngest male guest one weekend when Charlie Chaplin and his daughter, Geraldine, were there. Geraldine must have been in her mid-teens at the time. At one point, a waiter came over to my table and told me that Charlie Chaplin wanted to see me. When I arrived at his table, Geraldine had just gone off to the restroom or something. He told me that his daughter was painfully bored and asked me if I would ask her to dance without letting on that he'd requested it. Of course, I was happy to grant him this favor but was also pleased to dance with such a charming young lady."

Today, the parties are still going on at Il Pellicano. "The Grahams created a private club atmosphere for a very selective few," says Scio, "and I believe I've maintained this atmosphere while opening it up to a much larger range of guests who still feel the exclusivity of being part of a club."

Scio's daughter, Marie-Louise, who presides over all the design and architectural projects of the hotel, has continued the Grahams' and her father's tradition of having these wonderful parties. "There was always a woman of the house at Il Pellicano," she says. "[In the beginning,] it was Patsy, then there was my mother, and now I have sort of taken over." Every year she throws The Globetrotters Reunion where the cream of the international globetrotters society gathers around the pool on a full moon. Marie-Louise, now 33, lives in Rome and goes to Porto Ercole a couple of days a week. She has fantastic memories of her parents' parties. "When I was 5 years old," she recalls, "every Friday night there was a party, and men had to go in suits, while women had to wear long dresses and turbans. I hid behind the cypress trees and was amazed to see the most chic, glamorous and sophisticated group of adults

dancing around the swimming pool drinking martinis and smoking cigars."

A very fascinating aspect of Il Pellicano is that it has the flair of a private home. "This is what Patsy had done by decorating the place as if it were her house," Marie-Louise points out. "This is still a quality that Il Pellicano has today, which I think is what makes it really special. This is a place that people can actually call home."

A lot of modern-day celebrities hang around here all the time, continuing the illustrious legacy of the resort, "but no names," says an adamant Marie-Louise. "That's why they come here. It's their place." The hotel has around 25 percent repeat clients, she adds, "and we still have guests who used to come when the Grahams were here. No Hollywood gossip. That's forbidden. Our clients are very understated; they don't come here to be seen or watched but just to be on their own as no one bothers them, especially today where everyone is so flashy."

A recent book edited by Rizzoli, titled appropriately *Hotel Il Pellicano*, documents the history of the hotel with images by three incredible photographers.

"It's a project I started five years ago," Marie-Louise says. She had spent all her summers at Il Pellicano, and she still does with her family and friends. "We looked into all the archives, and we had images from John Swope, who documented the opening and early years of the hotel, and then images from Slim Aarons, who visited Il Pellicano in its most glamorous years from 1967 until 1991. And after putting all those images together, we thought it might have felt a little nostalgic because it stopped in the '90s. So we chose another photographer, Juergen Teller. He came two years ago and stayed 10 days."

The book was released in Europe last March with an opening party launch in London. "I'm very proud," admits Marie-Louise. "It's been a long road to get it together." *