

II. Nature's call

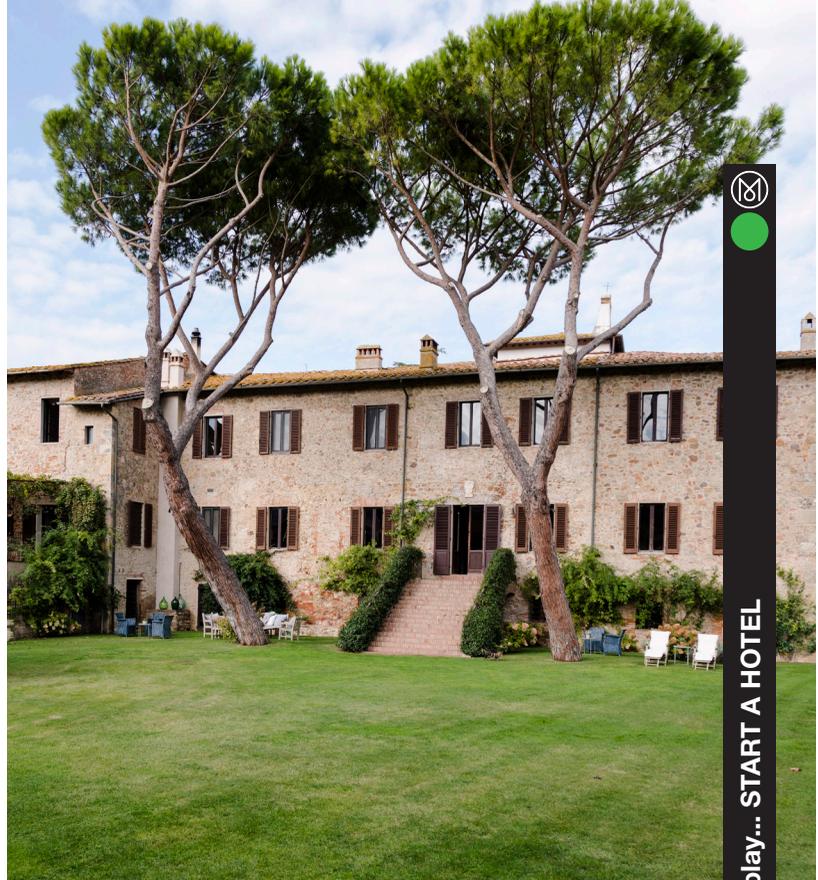
You don't have to launch your new business in a city. The sisters behind a Tuscan resort are proving that the countryside is where you can put down your roots and flourish.

By *Laura Rysman*
Photography *Rocco Rorandelli*

"The countryside has changed in people's imaginations," says Margherita Ramella who, with her sister Beatrice, created La Pescaia Resort in the ruggedly rural Maremma region of southern Tuscany, along with their husbands, Mariano Fiorda and Gonzalo Müller. "It's no longer just a place for travel and relaxation; it's become a place for an alternative lifestyle." Younger guests, says Margherita, are full of questions about starting their own countryside hotel. Rural living has become more enticing and the move seems easier than ever before now that working remotely is widely accepted.

La Pescaia's reverie-inducing location helps to fuel daydreams of rural living. The stately villa, with its sprawling farmland surroundings, was once a racehorse ranch and guests can indulge in horseback excursions through the surrounding Tuscan woods. The spacious house was constructed in the early 1500s by the Tolomei family, whose aristocratic descendants still occupy the property's outbuildings. It is now teeming with heirlooms and antique treasures found at flea markets. The manicured central garden is flanked by the vine-covered patio of the resort's restaurant and a bar is tucked into the farmhouse. Further afield, a long stone pool borders the farmstead, with donkeys, horses and Maremman cows wandering among the olive groves.

The blue-eyed and raven-haired Ramella sisters hail from Milan and have had cosmopolitan careers – Margherita as an actress and Beatrice worked in fashion at Tom Ford. "We always told ourselves that we could go back to our city lives," says Margherita. "But we never

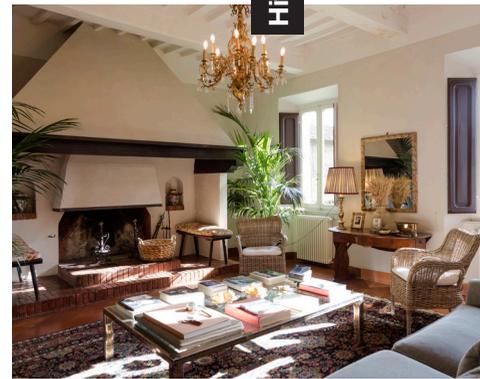


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1 have because we realised that working for ourselves on our own project couldn't be beaten." Those who live near La Pescaia were initially suspicious of their city-slicker neighbours taking over the Tolomei villa, which had long functioned as the heart of the community. But that didn't last. "When they saw that we treated the place with love and involved them in the life of La Pescaia by having dinners with the villagers and employing them here, everything changed," says Margherita. "Now they invite us out for drinks or give us mushrooms that they have foraged."

2 Though Margherita still spends time at the computer, running a farm also calls for "physical but satisfying commitment" that gets her out into the fields. "In the city your day doesn't change, whether it's raining or sunny but here your life is guided by the rhythms of nature," she says. "You also follow a different logic when you're working with people you love," says Margherita. "You're not thinking about your own advancement; you're thinking about your shared welfare." — (M) pescaiaresort.com

Monocle comment: It has been a hard year for hotels but hope remains – particularly for the sort of stays that offer plenty of space in which to roam and breathe in fresh air. The team behind La Pescaia have hit a sweet spot between offering guests a taste of Tuscany and creating a place that's a pleasure to work in.



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(1) Villa turned country resort
(2) Generations of antiques make for cosy digs (3) Working in the countryside as a family



3