

Population: 950,000

Known for: Men's tailoring – the city's artisans have been crafting world-class shirts and suits since the 14th century

Speciality dish: Pizza Napoletana

Naples.

“Only Neapolitans are crazy enough to live next to an active volcano,” a local told me as we sped along the seafront on his moped, sans helmets. The omnipresent Mount Vesuvius looms large at the water's edge – a symbol of this city's vibrant relationship with the ephemerality and intensity of life.

Baroque but battered, Naples charms as much with its excessive beauty as with the scruffy, endearing charm of its streets. Here everything from the reckless driving culture, the balcony baskets lowered to collect groceries, the impenetrable Neapolitan dialect and the nighttime's spectral, sulphur-coloured lights points to an unmistakably singular culture born of Ancient Greek, Spanish and French rule – and shaped by these people audacious enough to live in the shadow of a volcano.

The city that popularised opera knows no shortage of drama. Raffish, thrilling and glittering through the grime,

Naples in recent years has written itself a happy plot twist – crime is down, the streets are cleaner, young people are launching hopeful new ventures and art and design denizens are moving in to set up shop. In the days of the Grand Tour, Naples was as essential a stop as Rome and now visitors are again being seduced by the dense history, southern beauty and head-spinning energy of the town, no longer hurrying straight off to Capri or the Amalfi coast.

Years ago on my first visit to Naples, I sat down in a street-side restaurant in the Quartieri Spagnoli, a gritty, wonderful neighbourhood filled with murals of local heroes like Maradona and Totò, where strings of Christmas lights hang like garlands year-round over the narrow lanes. A local couple at the next table, noticing I was a novice, began passing over forkfuls of their various dishes. “Try this,” they said. “You've never had anything this good,” they said. I was unaccustomed to eating strangers' food in restaurants, but I was in a foreign country – the alien country of Naples – and amid the invigorating chaos, the surprising generosity of strangers and the forkfuls of goodness, I was enchanted for life.

Laura Rysman: MONOCLE's Central Italy correspondent. Florence-based, her stories of fashion, design, travel and art cover the beautiful side of life in the *bel paese*.



1.
In Naples everything faces the sea
2.
The city is a collage of baroque architecture, art nouveau-inspired villas and brutish concrete housing blocks all tumbling towards the coast



1



2



8

- I. The omnipresent Vesuvius is still active – it last erupted in March 1944
- 2. Tie-maker Patrizio Capelli looking sharp. The city has a strong sartorial identity and Naples is home to some of the world's most expensive suits
- 3. A sunbather at Lido Marechiaro
- 4. Lucky charm
- 5. Gelateria Otranto in the upmarket Vomero neighbourhood. Gelato in Naples is supposedly richer and creamier than in the north of Italy
- 6. Poker face
- 7. Palazzo Panorama, a 1948 apartment tower in Vomero
- 8.



3



4



5



9



10



11

- There are many markets in Naples; they sell everything from fresh produce and street food to clothing and second-hand furniture
- 9. The Galleria Umberto I shopping arcade was completed in 1891 and features a glass domed roof and inlaid marble floor
- 10. Striking a pose
- 11. The undisputed birthplace of the doughy delight, there are more than 800 pizzerias in Naples today
- 12. A sunny smile during Ferragosto, the public holiday in the middle of August that sees all of Italy head to the beach
- 13. The historic Gran Caffè Gambrinus serves blends from Neopolitan roastery Caffè Moreno
- 14. Naples's Centro Direzionale business district was designed by Japanese architect Kenzo Tange in 1982



6



7



12



13



14

Aperitivo: *A tippie or two*

Lots of people enjoy a glass of wine at the end of the day but in Italy this indulgence is codified into aperitivo. Far from being an encouragement to excessive drinking, it's a way of "opening" somebody's appetite for dinner, which is why glasses of wine or light cocktails are always consumed with a little snack on the side. Despite the country's bounty of delicious wines and nibbles, Italians display a remarkable restraint over aperitivo.

That's because the point of this daily ritual isn't the wine but rather sharing it with a table of friends. It's a moment to unwind and offload the day's worries while enjoying bubbling conversation with a touch of decadence. Dating back to the Roman era, aperitivo typifies the epicurean talents of a country where drinking's goal is cheery relaxation and a satisfied stomach rather than drunkenness or frenzied abandon.

Whether a negroni *sbagliato* in Milan, a small *ombra* of wine in Venice or a Campari soda in Rome; be it ramekins of olives, a focaccia piled with tomatoes and cheese or *bruschette*, aperitivo comes in endless variants. But no matter where, at sundown the bars come alive with chatter and the clinking of glasses. *Cin cin!*



Food markets: *Fare game*

Since ancient times, Italy's vibrant food markets have formed the beating heart of the country's culinary life. Every small town and city neighbourhood has its own *mercato alimentare* with stands of fruit, vegetables, cheeses and meats proffered in a singsong sales pitch – a tradition upheld since the hawkers' choruses arrived with the Arabs in 800AD.

In Palermo's Ballarò market the historic roots are visible as well as audible, with twisting lanes lined with stands of produce and street food, just as it was when Arab travel writer Ibn Hawqal documented it in his journal 1,100 years ago. In Rome, the Campo de' Fiori bustles with well-coifed *signore* and eager home cooks jostling for the best tomatoes of the season.

The birth of a united Italy brought with it a flurry of covered markets erected across the nation, embodying the importance of these features of local life. Many of them still host the cities' markets and many more fill *piazze* weekly.

Where other nations depend on industrial agriculture, Italy's markets have maintained its ties to the fertility of the peninsula, keeping alive the demand for organic ingredients that define the country's cooking and relationship with food.

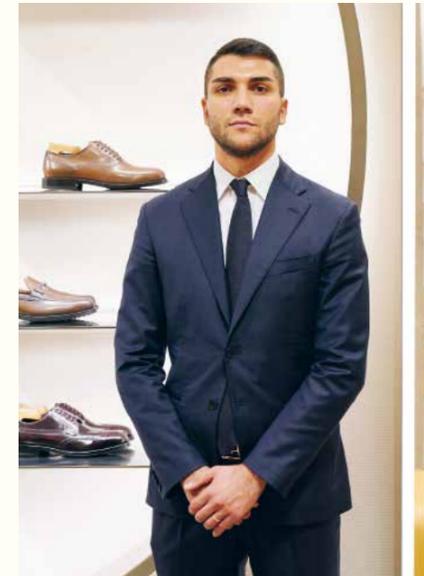
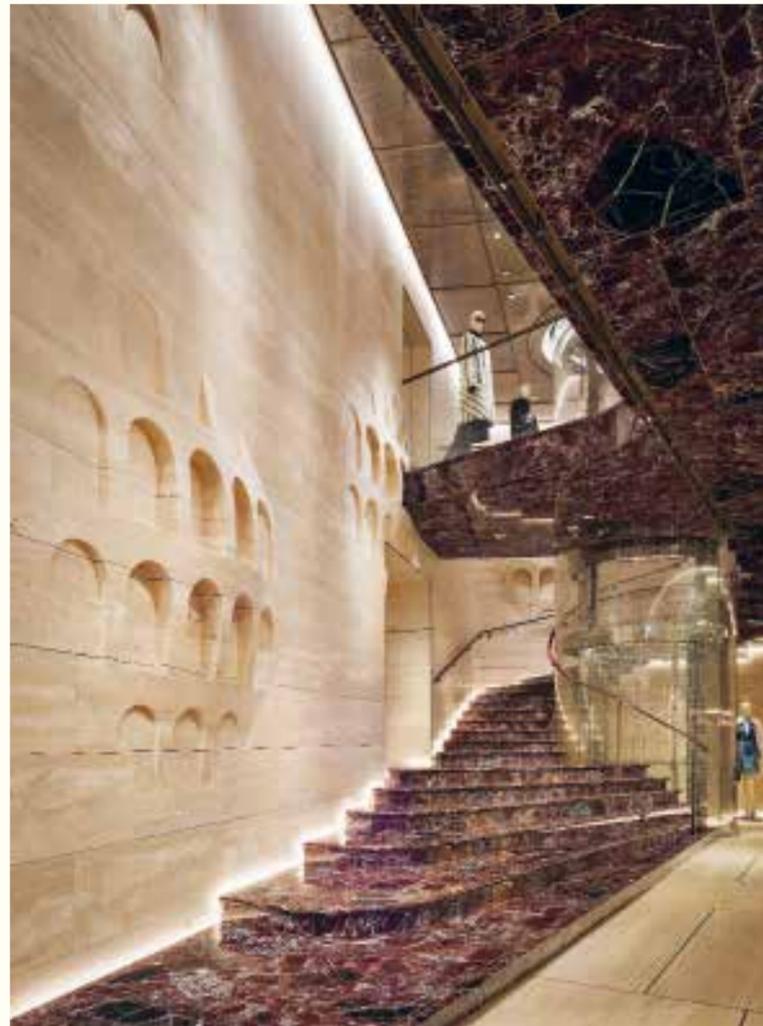


Luxury fashion: *Club couture*

Italy has centuries of retail experience up its well-tailored sleeve (it's no coincidence that the Venetians invented the cheque) and has firmly established itself not only as the most respected and powerful producer of luxury fashion in the world, but also the master of selling it.

Visit Via Montenapoleone in Milan or Rome's Via Condotti and you'll find a roster of names synonymous with global style: Prada, Gucci, Giorgio Armani, Salvatore Ferragamo and more. Each brand has created dazzling temples of retail in gleaming marble and gold leaf where impeccable doormen greet customers and products are displayed with the reverence of high art.

A newer generation of brands such as Slowear and Sunnei has injected a more youthful vision into the country's sartorial scene, with sleek contemporary boutiques to match. But impressive spaces only go so far: personalised service remains the central selling point. Italy is proof that the recipe for a successful shop lies in good taste, pride in product and a highly passionate individual or two.



Clockwise from far left: inside Fendi's palatial Rome address; Gucci in Rome; a shopper passes Salvatore Ferragamo in Florence; Boglioli's Milanese outpost; all shop and no stop; Giorgio Armani in Milan; looking sharp at Tod's, Milan



Materials: *Make it better*

Hardly any phrase elicits more pride across the nation than “Made in Italy”. All citizens grow up with a deep-seated knowledge of the value and intrinsic quality the expression signifies. Many of the country’s biggest industries and exports are rooted in time-honoured crafts that began as artisanal pursuits – and, in their updated formats, many of those traditions survive today.



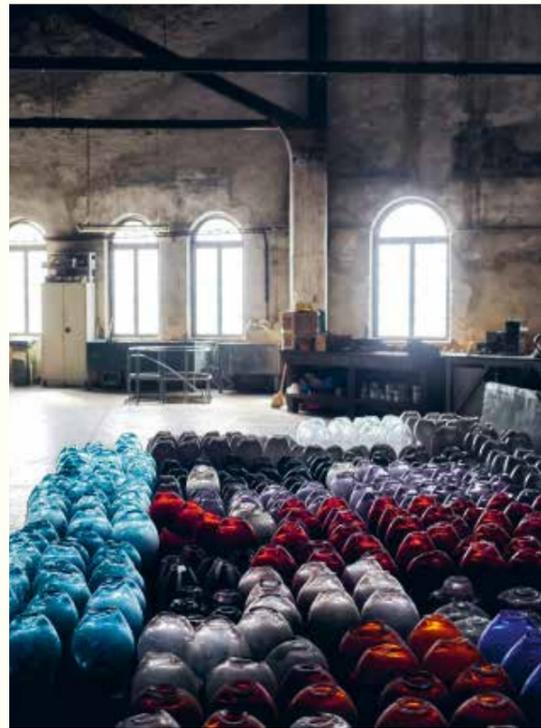
● Glass *Clear cut*

The ancient art of glassblowing is synonymous with Murano. This small island in the Venetian lagoon has been home to glassblowers since 1291, when the government of Venice relocated them in order to protect the secrets of their techniques (and also the city from their fierce furnaces).

Those practices are no longer quite so closely guarded, yet nowhere else has managed to recreate the dexterity of Murano’s glassmakers, most of whom descend from generations in the craft and employ the same methods used

for centuries. Only the designs are new – and have been renewed over the years – as the craftspeople at Murano’s top makers, such as Salviati and Venini, have attracted some of Italy’s most respected designers.

Production here will never be industrial, as the three-man dance that shapes each item can only proceed at an artisan’s pace. Due to the physicality and the customs of the production process, the craftspeople remain largely male, though a new era of external collaborations is increasingly bringing female input into the furnaces. As glass finds a new audience, the old techniques continue to adapt to new styles – but Murano remains unrivalled.



● Ceramics *Bowled over*

For centuries, Italian artisans have excelled at crafting vivid earthenware and certain destinations such as Faenza in Emilia-Romagna and Sicily’s Caltagirone have become famed for their ceramic offerings.

In Tuscany, two prominent examples have persisted over time. One is family-run Bitossi: in 1921, the brand established and nurtured a collaboration with a number of creatives, including architect, designer and general polymath Ettore Sottsass, who conceived an imaginative collection of vases and bowls. But perhaps best

known is its cerulean-hued series, Rimini Blu, designed by Aldo Londi.

The other is Richard Ginori, founded in 1735, which has enjoyed a long and glorious history thanks to its high-end tableware. Among the firm’s most prolific periods was the decade-long tenure of architect Gio Ponti as artistic director, who deftly modernised the traditional manufacturer with the help of in-house artisans.

Today, as companies such as tile-maker Mutina continue to collect contemporary designers, the country’s prowess in all things ceramic remains undisputed – especially given the main architectural ceramics fair, Cersaie, takes place in Bologna every year.



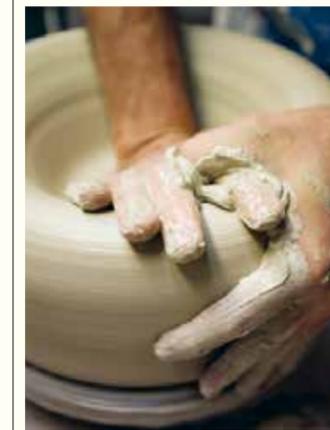
● Textiles *Material world*

Italy’s dominance in the world of high fashion begins with its textiles. In the domain of luxury apparel, the country supplies an estimated 90 per cent of all fabrics; of the world’s cloth, Italy provides 7 per cent.

Widely considered the finest quality in the world, Italian textiles hail from specialised areas around the nation that trace their manufacturing roots back centuries: when Silk Road knowledge transformed the lakeside town of Como into a mulberry tree-filled,

silk-making powerhouse, or when the shepherds’ fields of Biella began weaving the finest wool for the Duke of Savoy.

The most renowned textile manufacturers today – the silk factories of Mantero, Ratti and Mosconi in Como; the wool weavers of Loro Piana, Zegna and Vitale Barberis Canonico in Biella; Bonotto with its art-influenced fabrics in Vicenza – descend from the storied roots of such districts. Their success is underscored by one of Italy’s best manufacturing qualities: the ability to fuse artisan tradition and industrial capabilities with innovation and creativity.





Galleria Continua *Rome & San Gimignano*

Founded in the unlikely location of the Tuscan hill town San Gimignano, Galleria Continua's mission is to "help contemporary art expand beyond its typical confines," says Maurizio Rigillo, who opened the gallery with Mario Cristiani and Lorenzo Fiaschi in 1990. The trio has shown contemporary artists in villages across Italy, including a Carsten Höller carousel on a rural hill in Basilicata. "That's the spirit we were born with," explains Rigillo, "to make art available to a wider public, so someone might happen upon it and form a relationship with it."

The gallery has grown into a renowned space with an international presence, attracting heavyweights such as Anish Kapoor, Antony Gormley, Mona Hatoum and Michelangelo Pistoletto. The San Gimignano gallery covers a former cinema, stone tower and several more sites. Locations have opened in other unexpected spots: Beijing, Havana, a countryside mill outside Paris and in Rome's St Regis hotel.

Rome is hardly virgin territory for galleries, says Rigillo, but beyond exhibition rooms, the artists have free rein to place works throughout the St Regis's lobby and bar, seating strange figures next to patrons. "We like to surprise people with art," he says.





Q&A

Alice Rohrwacher

With a strong domestic scene, Italy has never been short of films for its internal market – but not all of these creatives have managed to make their mark abroad. Film-maker Alice Rohrwacher, one of the brightest lights in the picture, is breaking that mould. Twice a winner at the Cannes Film Festival – *The Wonders* took home the Grand Prix in 2014 and *Lazzaro Felice* garnered Best Screenplay in 2018 – Rohrwacher's *Omelia Contadina*, a short she wrote and directed in collaboration with artist JR, is a pastoral elegy to her beloved Tuscan countryside. In Italy, even film is a family affair and her features have starred her sister, actress Alba Rohrwacher.

Why does the Italian countryside make such a presence in your films?

As a child, I lived in a rural commune in Tuscany, then my parents wanted to create their own world so we moved to a country house where my father raised bees. That was the inspiration for *The Wonders*, but it's not autobiographical. I don't want to make stories about individuals. I make collective stories – about problems that are part of everyone's lives. The land and what we're losing now is a problem for us all.

How did you decide to blend the Italian strains of neorealism and Fellini-esque magical realism?

There's a fluid relationship between what's real and fantastical. That's how I've always seen the world. It's not about what has happened in cinema before or what I think cinema should become. It's about telling the tales that make me fall in love with them, so it's a very personal thing. It's my vision.

What are the challenges of working in Italian cinema when there are so few female directors?

You should never turn difficulty into your banner. It should remain your secret and make you stronger, hungrier to succeed. In Italy, cinema is a world that's developed around men, around their desires and their visions but that, in my opinion, should make more women want to break into film-making. An underrepresented minority's point of view is always fascinating.

Does the collaboration with your sister affect your film-making?

Working with Alba is like working with a light – illuminating and occasionally blinding. Maybe I'm biased but I think she's the best actress in the world and to work with someone who knows you so well helps bring out the profound and personal elements of a project. Making a film together, you get to know each other deeply, even more so than as sisters. I'm very grateful we're so united in work and life.