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Ride 'em, cowgirl. On a hired boat near the Faraglioni, Capri's famous jagged rocks. OPPOSITE: An ocean view from the ruins of the ancient villa of Damecuta, in Anacapri.



by michael gross photographed by stewart ferebee



# italy's new star

after a two-decade exile in the archipelago of unfashionable islands, capri is back on the scene.  
and its second city, anacapri, is leading the way







There were two big events on Capri last July 4. In the chief town, which has the same name as the island, the owners of the prominent jewelry store Alberto e Lina gave their annual party in honor of America's Independence Day at the Grand Hotel Quisisana. A fabulously bejeweled, well-fed, mostly elderly crowd of 400 Italians and Americans was decked out for a poolside sit-down dinner-dance that ended well after midnight, with the revelers in a conga line.

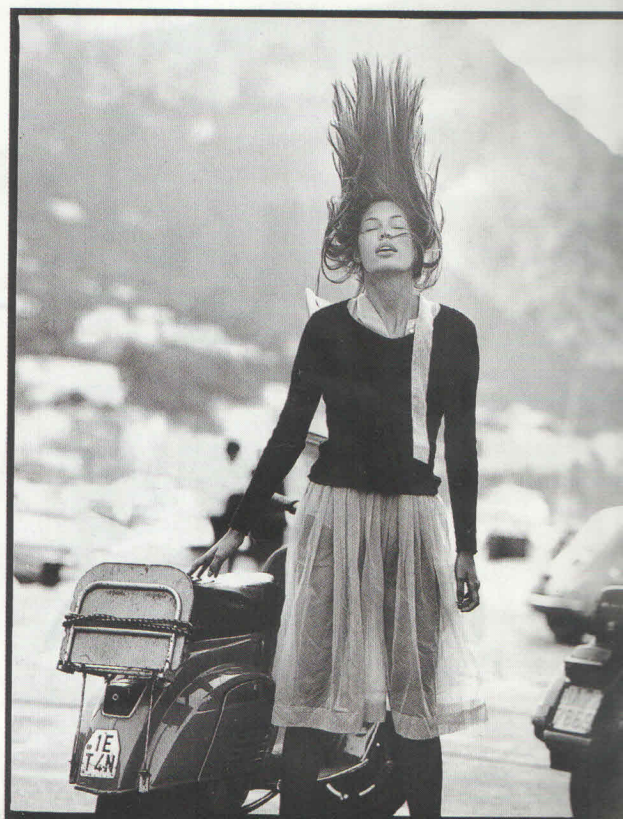
Meanwhile, in the town of Anacapri, Tonino Cacace, owner of the Palace Hotel, brought a group of friends and guests to the ruins of the villa Damecuta, said to have been built by the emperor Tiberius. There, on a parasol-pine-studded plateau, 150 people in summer chic watched modern dance performed at sunset on a cliff-top stage set, with the scimitar curve of the Bay of Naples gleaming behind it. It had nothing to do with July 4.

The evening's dueling dances told a tale of two cities.

THE ISLAND OF CAPRI JUTS FROM THE TYRRHENIAN SEA, ALL MOUNTAINS, crags, and grottoes, four miles long and two wide, bursting with broom and thistle, jasmine and myrtle, roses and campanula, grapevines and lemon trees. It was colonized by the Greeks about 600 years before the birth of Christ, and in 29 B.C. was acquired by the Romans in exchange for Ischia. Vestiges of the roads, aqueducts, and villas built by Tiberius can still be seen at Damecuta, the Baths of Tiberius, and the huge Villa Jovis.

Capri town sits in the saddle between the two tallest peaks. High above, on a table of land between one of those mountains and the sea, is Anacapri. For centuries, it was all but inaccessible. It had—and still has—an undeserved inferiority complex. Capri looks down on Anacapri even as it looks up at it.

So the morning after the dance at Damecuta, Cacace, who has emerged as Anacapri's chief cheerleader (as well as a sort of super concierge, arranging helicopters and private boats for celebrities),





stood in the lobby of his Palace, beaming. The newspaper had reported that his town has surpassed its sister in a recent ranking of Italian island resorts, coming in fifth compared to Capri's 19th. "We've waited a long time for this," he said.

NO PLACE KNOWS THE SHIFTS IN TASTE OF THE rich and stylish better than the island of Capri, which has been repeatedly discovered and forgotten over two millennia. In the golden era after World War II, princes preened in Capri town's *piazzetta* with parrots on their shoulders. Emilio Pucci translated the island's colors and light into luxurious fashion. Brigitte Bardot and Jean-Luc Godard spent their days filming *Contempt*, and their nights lingering in taverns. Aristotle Onassis sailed in on his yacht *Christina* with Maria Callas and, later, Jackie Kennedy, who famously walked barefoot through town—at least until she found the perfect pair of sandals.

In the 1980's, the fashionably fickle abandoned Capri in favor of the south of France and the Amalfi coast. But suddenly, they're back. And Anacapri—long disparaged as a Capri without style—is a big part of the lure.

Snapshots of Capri: Electric carts piled high with Louis Vuitton luggage on narrow car-free streets. Overdressers drinking Campari in front of the Quisisana hotel. Middle-aged men wearing women's jewelry. Middle-aged women with towering teased hair wearing big round cartoon sunglasses. A Saudi billionaire watching the World Cup in the *piazzetta*. Cell phones everywhere; an American, nattering endlessly into one about his Hamptons renovation. Police in designer shades.

Snapshots of Anacapri: Goats in a field just outside town. Views of the sunset over the nearby island of Ischia. Antonio Viva making sandals by hand in front of his tiny leather-littered store, L'Arte del Sandalo Caprese. Professors in khaki climbing Monte Solaro. A family right out of a Ralph Lauren ad, window-shopping the few boutiques in town. College girls with backpacks cruising on motorbikes. Buses







filled with tourists crowding the piazza. Gianfranco Ferre, Ambassador Jean Kennedy Smith, Julia Roberts, Harrison Ford, Naomi Campbell—all quietly making the scene. Police in designer shades.

THE RIVALRY BETWEEN CAPRI AND ANACAPRI GOES BACK centuries. In 1335, when the priests of Anacapri refused to make the long trip down the mountain for religious processions, the bishop was furious and a feud erupted. The priests took refuge in the medieval Chiesa di Santa Maria a Cetrella, a mountaintop chapel that commands a view of Capri, the port of Marina Piccola, and the mainland coast. Perhaps the best views on the island provided consolation when the priests were excommunicated.

The plague of 1492 sealed the divide. Fearing infection, residents of Anacapri closed a huge door near the top of the Phoenician Stairs—the 800 stone steps that lead up to the citadel of Anacapri. The Capresi stormed the mountain, tore the door from its hinges, and threw it down the cliff, which led King Frederick II of Aragon to formally divide the towns. Capresi called the Anacapresi *ciamurri*, a slur taken from the Turkish word for pirate.

"Here you see everyone," says Katherine Mondadori, an American interior decorator who has long lived in Capri. "In Anacapri, you see no one... except the Anacapresi." But don't criticize her favoritism; the Anacapresi are just as chauvinistic. When Edwin Cerio, one of Capri's gentry, bought the former home of British writer Compton Mackenzie high on Monte Solaro, and offered to repair the decaying Passetiello, an ancient fortified passage leading to it, the mayor of Anacapri abruptly shut down the path, declaring that it belonged to the Anacapresi.

Says the Palace's Tonino Cacace, "Even today, the Capresi laugh and say 'You are *ciamurri*.' " (Continued on page 212; see page 214 for The Facts)

Quiet Capri. CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: A marble sculpture at the Villa San Michele; a house on Capri; kicking back in a room at Anacapri's Palace hotel. OPPOSITE: Riding a pleasure boat near the Marina Piccola.



## CAPRI

(Continued from page 172) Pirates or not, the Anacapresi control a treasure. Staying in their town, a visitor has the best of both worlds: the tranquil life of the country, with easy access to the lures of the harbor. In Capri, it's almost impossible to avoid the screeching fashion, the pressured atmosphere of an international resort town. If you stay in tourist Anacapri—the Piazza della Vittoria, a small, crowded square that feeds into the Via Capodimonte, with its souvenir stalls—you'll never understand the town's appeal. Really, the only reason to go there more than once is to see the Villa San Michele, at the end of Capodimonte, atop the Phoenician Stairs. Swedish physician Axel Munthe arrived here in 1876 and bought a ruined chapel and abandoned farm. His house and gardens are now a museum that looks out to the sea. Visitors share its view with a sphinx that was part of Munthe's bounty from his omnivorous archaeological dives, treks, and excavations. Also off the piazza is the chairlift up Monte Solaro and a footpath to the Cetrella. The Via G. Orlandi leads to the Piazza San Nicola, site of the 1719 San Michele church, whose majolica tile floor illustrates the story of the Garden of Eden.

Beyond the town, in a wooded district, working farms abut gated estates like the Torre di Materita, a 15th-century castle built by Carthusian monks, and Torre della Guardia, a former fort. Just beyond, a pine-needled footpath leads along the coast above Punta Carena's lighthouse and beach club, then on to the Belvedere Migliara, a magnificent lookout.

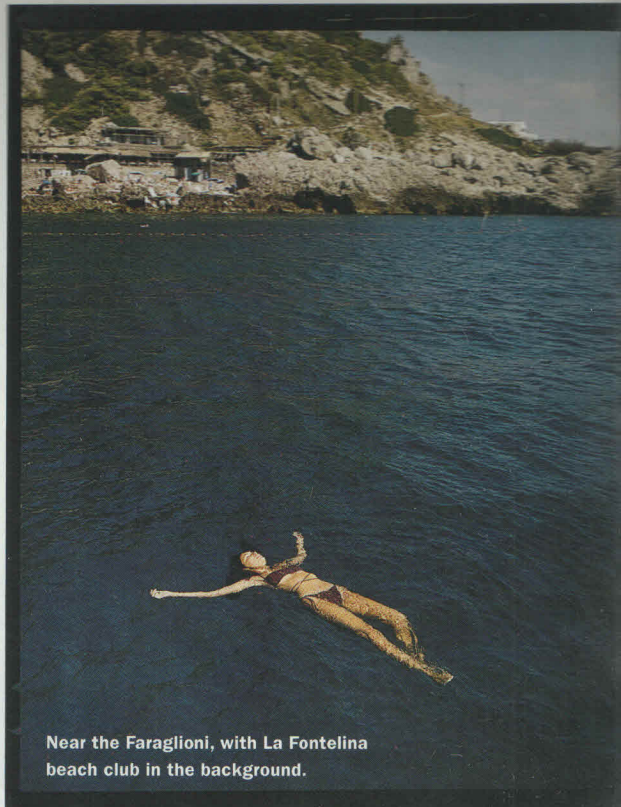
It's entirely possible to spend a week on the island and never leave Anacapri, especially if you stay at the Palace, which has its own vineyard, several swimming pools, a sprawling spa, and a very good restaurant. The hotel is the descendant of a *locanda* run by Cacace's great-grandmother. His mother and father, Rita and Mario, married after World War II and turned the *locanda* into Anacapri's first souvenir shop, the Mariorita boutique, on the undeveloped hillside above the Piazza della Vittoria. Later, in 1961,

Mario built the Palace to compete with aging grand hotels such as the Caesar Augustus and the Hotel San Michele. "He saw the future," says the young Cacace, who is completing a renovation, exchanging an outdated Italian Modern look for a timeless Mediterranean one, with Moorish arches, tile floors, and white-washed walls.

But Anacapri's intimacy is also a flaw. Beyond the hotel zone, there are only a few restaurants, and the best, Da Gelsomina, near the Belvedere Migliara, is a bit too far away from the center of town (especially after a bottle of wine).

FROM ANACAPRI YOU CAN dip into the rest of Capri whenever you choose, treating it as the playground it is. The 15-minute bus ride from Anacapri's Piazza della Vittoria to the bus station just off Capri's *piazzetta* is an adventure. For one dollar, you get an amusement-park-quality ride down the mountain; views stretching from Sorrento in the south, past Vesuvius, to the beaches north of Naples; and the thrill when two of Capri's skinny buses pass so close you couldn't get a slice of pizza between them. The timid are advised to take a taxi—especially one of the island's famous 1950's Fiat convertibles, topped with bamboo sunshades and painted in bright colors.

The best introduction to Capri, the island, is to hire a boat and captain in the harbor and sail around it. Or get a rubber Zodiac from Bagni Le Sirene, a beach club at Marina Piccola, and navigate the journey yourself. On a calm day, it's possible to make your way around the entire island and see Cruzio Malaparte's famous brick-red Modernist cliffside house; the Arco Naturale, an immense eroded arch; and the Grotta di Matermania, a cave said to have been the site of orgiastic practices of the cult of Cybele, goddess of nature and fertility. On the way back, ride right through the opening in one of the Faraglioni, shards of rock sticking out of the sea like teeth at Punta Tragara, and buzz



Near the Faraglioni, with La Fontelina beach club in the background.

the big yachts that anchor in Marina Piccola every summer.

Lunch is best at one of the island's beach clubs, where there is an entry fee and one can rent chairs, umbrellas, and mattresses while building up an appetite for grilled seafood, *spaghetti con rucola e pomodori*, or *ravioli capresi*. Fontelina is a club set in the craggy rocks of an ancient Roman landing place at Punta Tragara. It can be reached from Marina Piccola by boat or by a long walk along a cliffside path whose rock steps have been worn to the color of burnished steel. On the other side of the point is Da Luigi, home to Capri's best swimming hole, in the shadow of the Faraglioni. Marina Piccola shelters Canzone del Mare, the largest and most elegant club, with gardens, cabanas, sun terraces, and a salt-water pool that's adults-only at midday. If your Italian is strong enough to overrule the waiters who will try to order for you, there's also Add'o Riccio, just above the Blue Grotto, with excellent seafood and a stairway carved into the rocks, leading down to the sea.

Night is the ideal time to visit Capri town. When the last ferries full of day-trippers leave, the streets clear and you can easily shop on Via Emmanuele and Via Camerelle, Capri's brick-trimmed versions of Rodeo Drive. At dusk, wan-



der the roads that lead from the *piazzetta*. Via Madre Serafina runs under arches and follows old ramparts. On the gentle climb along Via Tragara, the sounds of the town give way to the chirping of birds; ornamental gates in stone walls offer glimpses of lush gardens and white villas.

Back in town, there is an abundance of stylish restaurants. Aurora and La Capannina are musts. Da Paolino—a few minutes away in Marina Grande—is always a scene, serving great food in a grove of lush, fecund lemon trees.

THE ULTIMATE SEASCAPE IS ANACAPRI'S Grotta Azzurra, or Blue Grotto. The grotto is easy to skip because it seems like such a cliché; it's hard to reach, closed when the sea is high, crowded with tourists when open. But it's well worth visiting. Because the cave is lit by an underwater source, red sunlight is filtered out by the water so only blue reaches the surface. Objects plunged in the water take on a silvery hue.

Long considered by the Capresi to be bewitched, the grotto is thought to have been an extension of Tiberius's Villa Gradola, just above it. Visitors, who arrive by land and in packed water taxis from Marina Grande, are picked up by rowboats, brought past two money collectors (one for the local authorities and one for the Italian government), then made to duck below the gunwales while the boatmen lurch through a tiny opening by tugging on a chain.

At the end of the day, the boats are towed back to port, and the grotto belongs to the people—or at least those brave or foolish enough to swim in. Tourists have been known to drown attempting this in high seas, but when the water is calm it's easy for good swimmers. The light show within is only slightly lessened by the waning of the sun, and the joy of having this ancient echoing space to yourself can't be overstated.

Drowning isn't the only risk, though. You can also cut yourself on the rocks, as one American visitor learned this summer. He'd taken a bus to the grotto at 5:30, and found the cove just outside it blessedly boat-free. Swimming into the grotto was fairly easy. The

water rushed in and he grabbed the chain overhead, lifted his legs, pulled, and was inside—alone!

Getting out didn't seem too bad, either, but when he climbed the ladder to the landing, he saw blood streaming from his ankle. He limped to a snack stand, where without a word the counterwoman handed him a bottle of hydrogen peroxide and a wad of cotton. As the American blotted the blood, the Italian laughed heartily.

"A souvenir of Capri," he said.

(Turn page for The Facts)

## Credits

Model: Amanda Montoya/Next. Page 164: Bikini by Malia Mills; sunglasses by Cutler & Gross for Apropos; hat by Whiskey Dust. Page 167: Sheer dress by Family Jewels, NYC; briefs by Helena Stuart for Only Hearts; sweater is model's own. Page 168: Top by Family Jewels, NYC; sunglasses by Cutler & Gross for Apropos. Page 170: Dress by Manolo. Page 172: Embroidered skirt by Cynthia Rowley; shoes by Stuart Weitzman. Page 173: Dress by Family Jewels, NYC; briefs and camisole by Helena Stuart for Only Hearts; sunglasses by Cutler & Gross for Apropos. Page 212: Bikini by Malia Mills. This page: Dress and shoes by Family Jewels, NYC.

## Fashion: Sport Sandals Buyer's Guide

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Getting into the swing on a ride at Marina Grande's amusement park.

