

# LUXURY SPA FINDER

THE SPA LIFESTYLE AT ITS FINEST



THE NEW  
Tuscan Spa



# New Tuscan Trio

THREE RECENTLY OPENED HOTELS REDEFINE THE ITALIAN SPA

BY GARY WALTHER • PHOTOGRAPHS BY TIM CLINCH



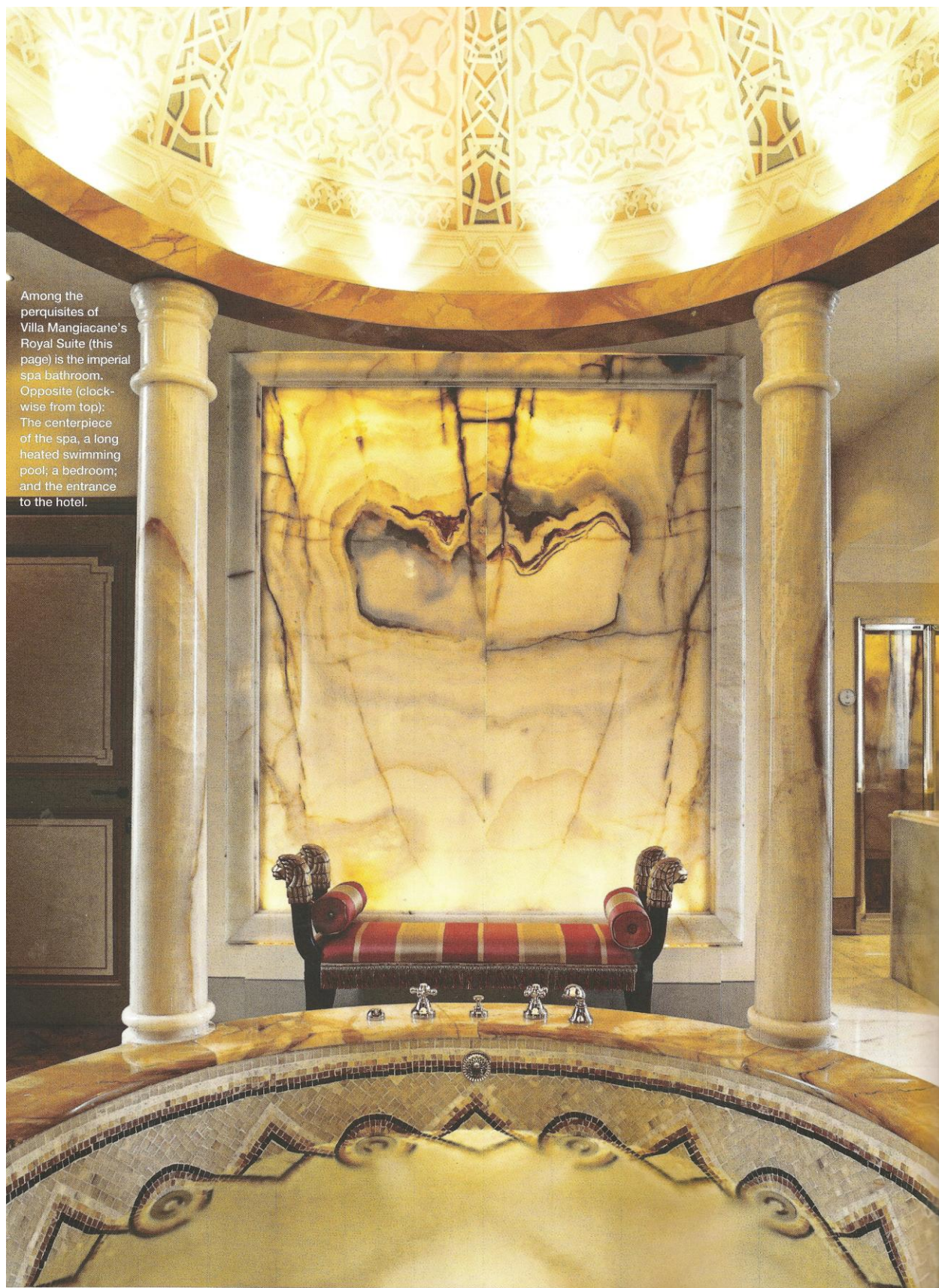




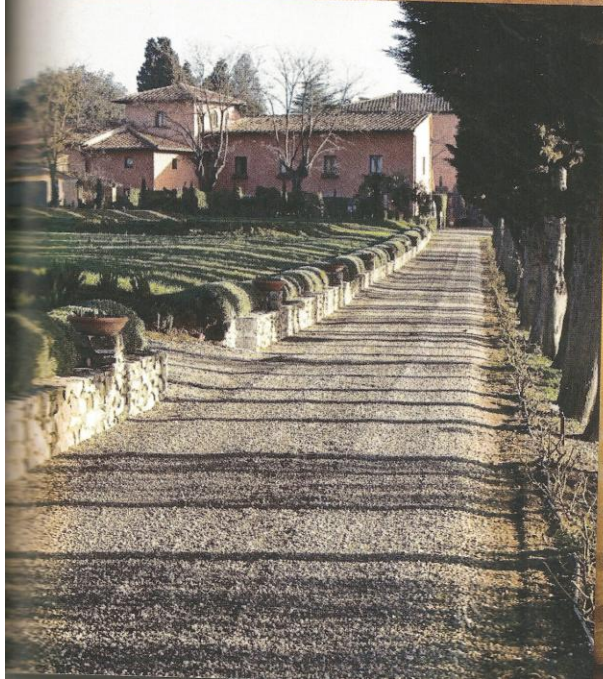
Castello del Nero, Villa Mangiacane, and L'Andana all put up-to-date spas in a luxe historical environment. Opposite: The hydrotherapy pool at Castello del Nero. This page: The sitting room at the 16th-century Villa Mangiacane. The frescoes over the doorway and beside the window are original.



Among the perquisites of Villa Mangiacane's Royal Suite (this page) is the imperial spa bathroom. Opposite (clockwise from top): The centerpiece of the spa, a long heated swimming pool; a bedroom; and the entrance to the hotel.













appreciated from the tub in the middle of the room.

The setting is sensational. The building crowns a hill, and the view across the valley is a marvel. Dun brown fields flow easily around silvery olive groves, old oaks stand conspiratorially along the edges, and here and there stands of cypress and rows of vines are stitched tightly into the terrain.

Castello's spa, while vest-pocket size, is the most luxurious of these three. It draws on the *terme* tradition in its laconium (mild heat), caldarium (high heat), ice fountain, and svelte little outdoor hydrotherapy pool nicely screened by a hedge and sheltered by an arcade. The showers are walled and the floors are covered in a deep olive stone from northern Italy called ardesia. The relaxation room has chromotherapy lighting, but what holds you here is the valley view.

Every spa has its own "ritual" these days, and the one here—a 90-minute treatment that consists of a scrub with the olive oil grown on the property and a Balinese-influenced massage—is done very well. Here, as at L'Andana, the training *Espa* is known for has really paid off. Coming out of a clinical tradition, therapists in Italy are usually pretty matter-of-fact, offering a service rather than orchestrating an experience. At Castello del Nero and L'Andana, *Espa* created a corps of therapists who understand why the latter is the heart of a boutique hotel spa.



URING THE SHORT DRIVE TO VILLA Mangiacane—it's two exits up the Florence-Siena expressway—I come back to the question that has entertained me since I learned about the hotel. What does the name mean? It turns out that Mangiacane, which translates as "the dog that eats" or perhaps "eat the dog," is a corruption of *magna cane*: great dog, a reference to the pair of Neapolitan mastiffs that crown the villa's gateposts. These are not exactly a bring-your-slippers breed: During the Roman Empire they worked the Colosseum, fighting lions and gladiators.

Mangiacane is not only a hotel but a working estate, producing Chianti, Merlot, and olive oil. The villa is grandly plain—the only embellishment is the muscular stone blocks outlining the windows and doors. The house's architectural glory is the loggias at the back and the trompe l'oeil frescoes that surround the doorways there. From here your eye is drawn down an allée that bisects the olive grove behind the villa, over a copse of trees, and into the distance until it lights on—is that what I think it is?—the Duomo. And that unassuming chalk white building to the right is notable, the bellman tells me, for being the place where Machiavelli composed *The Prince*. The free rent was probably a gift from his uncle, cardinal Francesco Maria Machiavelli, who built Mangiacane.

To reach the spa you walk through the barrel room, where the estate's wine ages. The spa designer made good use of what were storage and work spaces. The centerpiece is a long arched and columned chamber that contains a heated pool. This is a one-woman operation. The presiding spirit is Suzi Broad, who did her training in England and brings a holistic spirit and a passion for wellness that makes the experience here much deeper than you'd expect, given the size.

And that really is the gist of all three of these spas: They live larger than they are. You wouldn't go to these hotels just for the spa, but having the spa certainly rounds out the experience of being cosseted at three very good small hotels.



**Suzi Broad (above)** is the presiding spa spirit at Villa Mangiacane.

#### THE DETAILS

L'Andana, US\$751–\$2,179, +39-056-494-4800, [www.andana.it](http://www.andana.it).  
Castello del Nero, US\$934–\$4,670, +39-055-806-470, [www.castellodelnero.com](http://www.castellodelnero.com).  
Villa Mangiacane, US\$576–\$4,515, +39-055-829-0123, [www.villamangiacane.com](http://www.villamangiacane.com)

#### L'ANDANA EXCURSIONS

Drive up to Massa Marittima to see one of the Maremma's most beautiful towns, in particular the piazza. For lunch head across the valley to Suvereto and the Enoliteca Ombrone, which is not only in an old olive mill but devoted to the oil. Proprietor Giancarlo Bini, who has a passing resemblance to Frasier's dad, is an authority—and, he proudly told me, the inventor of the olive oil trolley. Bread comes with a basket of eight oils to sample. The cooking, done by Graziella Bini, who also runs a cooking school, is superb. Winery to visit nearby: Gualdo del Re (by appointment: +39-056-582-9888, [www.gualdodelre.it](http://www.gualdodelre.it)).

#### CASTELLO DEL NERO/MANGIACANE EXCURSIONS

Have lunch at La Toppa in San Donato, the family-run trattoria of your dreams, and dinner at Osteria di Passignano, an exemplar of rustic elegance (with a superb wine list). The heart of Chianti lies just across the Florence-Siena expressway. One superb winery is Castello di Fonterutoli. The estate has a store, which also sells oil and beauty products, on the SS 222 just south of Castellina in Chianti. Harder to find is Isole e Olena (off the San Donato-Castellina road), but the wine is very refined and the view from the property sublime. From Castello del Nero, a gorgeous winding drive, especially just before sunset, is through Tignano (go left from the hotel) to Barberino Val d'Elsa.