

# Glam

EMMA J. PAGE relishes contrasting experiences on the Italian island of Sardinia, where she discovers an enduring connection between people and place in both the rugged mountainous interior and on the glittering Costa Smeralda

PHOTOGRAPHS MARK ANTHONY FOX



**THIS PAGE** The restored bar at Romazzino, A Belmond Hotel on the Costa Smeralda, originally designed by Michele Busiri Vici in the 1960s. **OPPOSITE** Porto Cervo's Stella Maris church is by the same Italian architect

# rock





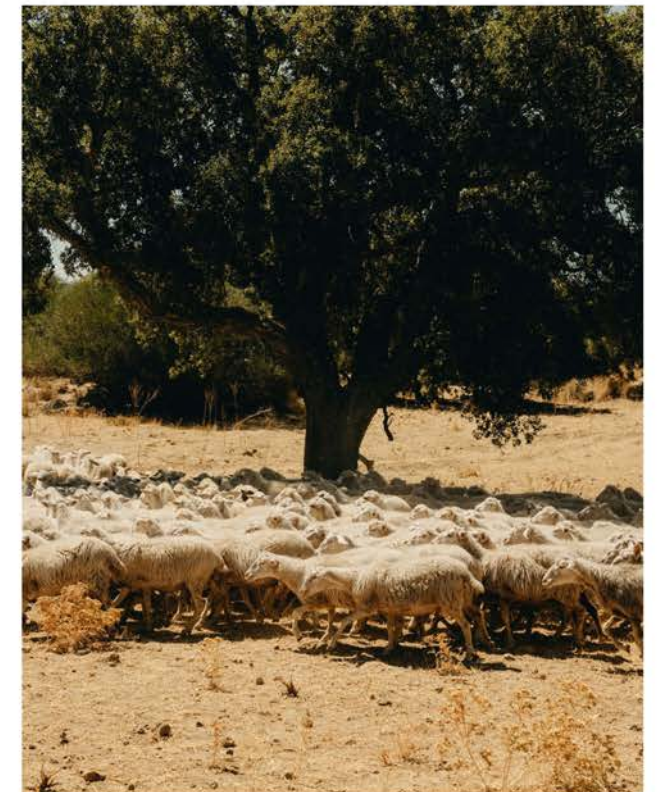


CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT The private pool in the garden of Su Gologone's Art Studio Villa. Vintner Francesco Mulargiu opening a grape-to-table wine at Su Tapiu. Su Gologone's shaded Bar Magico Tablao offers sunset views of the Supramonte mountains. One of the hotel's lounges. OPPOSITE On the outskirts of Orgosolo, Francesco Del Casino's *Sa Pandela* sculpture is said to represent celebration, peace and hope

Sardinians' loyalty to the land is sometimes transposed into surprising socio-political artwork







CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT In a cobble back street in Orgosolo, a small church remains in regular use. Su Tapiu's menu includes traditional dishes from Sardinia's Barbagia region, made using locally sourced ingredients. The church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Oliena's bunting-strung piazza. In Dorgali, a grocery store stocks an array of produce, including *fregula sarda* (a local pasta) and preserved vegetables in jars

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Family-run since 1949, this Dorgali grocery store also stocks locally made ceramics. The wall of a clinic in Orgosolo is decorated with a hand-painted mural depicting family scenes in a style typical of the town's street art. Indigenous Sarda sheep are found all over the island and provide milk for the Sardinian version of Pecorino cheese. Locals gather for early-evening aperitivi in Orgosolo



On the Costa Smeralda,  
famed for its turquoise  
waters, there is a powerful  
dialogue between  
land and architecture



One of the swimming pools at Costa Smeralda's Hotel Romazzino



Accompanied by the soft thrum of an acoustic guitar, a medley of voices soars and dips in symphony. They belong to a group of locals gathered at Su Gologone, an arty retreat in the foothills of the Supramonte mountain range, in the heart of Sardinia's Barbagia region. Friends and colleagues from nearby villages are celebrating a retirement, lounging at dusk on the garden's terraces, their aperitivi interspersed with folkloric chanting. We've travelled here across 100 kilometres of rugged landscape studded with cactus, pine, eucalyptus, juniper and olive trees, and yet my first impressions of the island – Italy's second largest after Sicily – will forever be associated with the soft but joyful cadence of spontaneous song.

The land is marked by a devotion to ritual, especially in Sardinia's sparsely populated central region, defined by huge sculptural rocks, arid amber terrain and vast mountain ranges peppered with ancient villages. Disparagingly christened Barbaria (meaning Land of the Barbarians) by the Romans because of its impenetrability, the area still observes the time-honoured traditions of weaving, sheep farming, gold production, pottery and wine making.

At Su Gologone, named after the nearby spring, all of these elements are celebrated. 'It's about not just offering a stay, but also designing a setting that expresses our identity,' says its owner, artist Giovanna Palimodde. 'Local materials, artwork, crafts and daily rituals are integral elements. We encourage guests to get deeply involved – whether it's in embroidering, painting, hiking or kayaking in the river.'

Following in the footsteps of her parents Peppeddu and Pasqua, who opened a restaurant here in the 1960s, Giovanna has grown the hotel piecemeal, adding a room here, an artist's studio there. As a result, every space seems to have sprung from the hillside organically. The gardens – still tended by Pasqua – are the linchpin. Planted with myrtle, wild thyme, rosemary and strawberry trees, they provide the backdrop for nightly suppers, whether a communal feast in the vegetable plot or *porceddu* (suckling pig) eaten on top of hay bales.

Art in all its forms is woven into this place, from the 18th-century vessels on windowsills to Sardinian masks, pastoral paintings by Giuseppe Biasi or large-scale murals by Liliana Cano, Giovanna's late mentor. Despite this being the biggest indigenous art collection on the island, there is nothing museum-like about it. Instead, it is part of the fabric of daily life, just like the bright cushions scattered on sofas and beds, woven by female artisans at the in-house craft studios.

This deeply agricultural land has spawned a rich culture of craftsmanship. At Corrias 1940 Calzoleria Pelletteria, in the village of Oliena, Franco Corrias produces sturdy shepherds' boots, women's shoes, cowhide backpacks and embroidered belts in a first-floor atelier, barely altered since it was set up by his father-in-law in 1940. There isn't a digital device in sight, but his handwritten logbook shows orders from Norway, Germany, Switzerland, Australia and Canada. A few kilometres away in Mamoiada, Andrea Pisu heats *panedda sarda* in his *caseificio artigianale* (artisan dairy). Later, after plying us with Cannonau, the hearty red wine of the area, he takes

us up to the hills to help herd his 150 sheep. Like his father before him, he's a one-man band, rearing livestock, making small-batch cheeses such as *nodini* ('little knots' of mozzarella), ricotta and *frughe*, to sell locally. A few steps away, at Su Tapiu, Francesco Mulargiu serves grape-to-table wines produced at vineyards close to where Andrea's sheep graze. They pair perfectly with dishes such as *lados* (Sardinian flat gnocchi) served with ragù and salty cheese.

Sardinians' loyalty to the land is sometimes transposed into surprising socio-political artwork, notably in Orgosolo's Cubist-style street murals, kickstarted by artist Francesco del Casino in the early 1970s. Now, hundreds cover walls and doorways, many depicting global issues, too, lending this former bandit town an edgy air. In the early-evening sun, men gather at tables outside for a drink, trading stories in Sardo, the local dialect, against a backdrop that feels like a spontaneous open-air exhibition, gesturing at us to join them.

All this considered, this is an island also associated with glamour. On the Costa Smeralda in the north east, famed for its white sand beaches and turquoise waters, there's a powerful dialogue between land and architecture. It was here, in 1961, before the arrival of electricity, that Aga Khan IV conceived the first broadly sustainable high-end holiday resort. With smart Porto Cervo at its heart, this area has a series of low-lying lime plaster buildings in white, sand and terracotta, designed to echo the curves of the landscape. The jewel in the crown is the Stella Maris church, created by architect Michele Busiri Vici in the 1960s and known for its undulating white forms, conical bell tower and monolith columns.

Another of his 1960s designs is the Romazzino, a hotel recently acquired by Belmond. Its whitewashed, terracotta-tiled buildings are defined by gentle curves and the cone-shaped entrances that frame the gardens and Tyrrhenian Sea beyond. Yes, the great and the good have stayed here, from Grace Kelly to Giorgio Armani, but it's the connection to the land that remains timeless. Here, too, Sardinia's craftsmanship is honoured, whether in the embroidered floral cushions that echo the island's elaborate costumes, the restored original hand-painted signage, or the natural-fibre outdoor sofas that recall the design of local fishing nets.

Just after sunrise one morning, when the hotel's walls are bathed in a golden light, we head out to the nature trail that unfurls between Pevero and Romazzino bays. The scent of Mediterranean scrub lingers in the air and, having reached a shady enclave, I spot a couple and their dog taking a swim in an otherwise empty cove. Umbrella pine needles crunch underfoot, lavender nods in the breeze and juniper branches hang low, weighed down by purple berries. I mull over the island's refusal to be conquered since the days of its earliest settlers at least three millennia ago. Perhaps the spun gold that is woven through the traditional costumes is an apt symbol of Sardinia itself: resilient yet pliable, beautiful yet complex; threaded with just the right amount of tension to balance the traditions of the past with the spiritedness of the present □

#### WAYS AND MEANS

Rooms at Su Gologone ([sugologone.it](http://sugologone.it)) cost from €290, B&B, and at Romazzino, A Belmond Hotel, Costa Smeralda ([belmond.com](http://belmond.com)) from €900, B&B. Easyjet ([easyjet.com](http://easyjet.com)) offers return flights from London Gatwick to Olbia airport from around £70.