

Behind independent minds - Salvatore Madonna, CEO & Owner

Becoming a hotelier meant going back to his childhood roots for this passionate Italian. Staying true to his family heritage on the Tyrrhenian coast, Salvatore Madonna defines luxury as living authentic local experiences – which is just what his elegant Tuscan seaside hotels, Hotel Byron in Forte dei Marmi & Hotel Plaza e de Russie in Viareggio, deliver in spades.

Whilst Hotel Byron & Hotel Plaza e de Russie are very much a family business, Salvatore also considers it a “love affair” – like all doting partners, he takes pride in his other half and goes to great lengths to ensure the course of love does run smooth, from personally selecting different bottles of wine for the hotels restaurants on his travels in France and Italy, to handpicking pieces of contemporary art which can be found all over the walls of Hotel Byron and Hotel Plaza e de Russie. There is much poetic symmetry between the man behind this two hotels and its namesake, in their extensive travelling across Europe, their enamoured relationship with Italy, and their appreciation of the arts.

From the Romantic movement to the Renaissance, Salvatore keeps good company in Pietrasanta, a favourite with sculptors throughout the ages, thanks to its local stone and marble. Michelangelo himself drew much inspiration from the area, in addition to sourcing materials for his impressive works. But there is so much more in Versilia than its marble, from the Apuan Alps and the stretches of sandy white beaches to the vineyards and wineries, it's easy to see why Salvatore came back to his birthplace.

What was the inspiration behind the hotels, and where do you continue to find sources of inspiration?

I am trying to offer our guests the “buen retiro” sensation, a peaceful place where people can relax in a smooth atmosphere, surrounded by the international jet set where the Italians are still the majority.

How would you describe your own perfect luxury experience?

While what is luxurious for one person can't be so different from another, for me is closely connected with the chance to use the time to learn and experience something authentic and real, something different from my daily routine and what I am used to.

A day in the life of Salvatore Madonna...

I love to wake up in one of our sea-facing rooms – it is so peaceful and at the same time so powerful to see the sea, to smell it and to hear it as soon as you wake up. Every morning I have a cappuccino and a slice of homemade cake by one our Michelin-

starred chefs. The best way to see Versilia as a local is by bicycle, which is how I make my way to the centre of the village to read my newspapers and catch up with the town's familiar faces.

One of my favorite things to do is to either take out a boat or to hike up to the quarries in our incredible Apuan Alps, where Michelangelo himself used to climb in order to find the right piece of marble for his sculptures. On my way back, there is nothing better than a lazy lunch in one of the beach clubs – my go-to is the tasty local pasta dish spaghetti alle arselle (spaghetti with baby clams). In true Italian tradition I usually have an afternoon nap, under the shadow of a cabana on the beach.

Before dinner I love to go to Pietrasanta, a small art village where many artisans are working marble and bronze, for a nice aperitivo with some friends, including gallery owners and artists. The perfect end to my day would be a moonlit get-together in one of the beach clubs facing the sea.

What do you think sets your properties apart from other boutique hotels?

As an independent boutique hotels, we provide guests with an authentic Italian atmosphere – you can't create authenticity, it has to come from the people, the area, and celebrating what it means to be local. Making connections is important everywhere you go, but in Italy, at Hotel Byron & Hotel Plaza e de Russie, we like to make you family.