

TRAVEL AS A NARRATIVE

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FROM LITERARY
EXPERIENCE TO
ARCHITECTURAL
SPACE

Where to next?

THE BOOK OF
NARRATIVE

02

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PREFACE

This research paper is part of the one-year research and design trajectory of Explore Lab, a graduation studio within the MSc Architecture, Urbanism and Building Sciences program at Delft University of Technology.

Explore Lab is a studio that encourages students to design their own curriculum by pursuing personal fascinations within the field of architecture. This approach leads to projects involving extensive research, culminating in both a research paper and a linked design proposal.

This part of the research aims to compile a collection of travelogues, novels, and travel memoirs that will serve as narrative foundations for translating literary experiences, emotions, and journeys into architectural design.

ABSTRACT

Inspired by the notion that people frame their lives and experiences through stories (Sartre 1938), this thesis delves into the role of narrative in architectural design, proposing that architecture is not merely a physical space but an intricate interplay of tangible and intangible elements that shape human experiences within built environment (Pérez-Gómez 2016). By beginning the design process with a narrative drawn from travelogues and memoirs, the idea is to create spaces that are both emotionally resonant and functional.

The project seeks to capture the essence of travel within built environments, translating the emotional and sensory journeys of travellers into architectural elements. Central to this exploration is the question of how a traveller's feelings, experiences, and reflections can be embodied in physical space, transforming architecture into a medium of storytelling.

Four key texts form the foundation of this study: *A Room with a View* by E.M. Forster, *Eat, Pray, Love* by Elizabeth Gilbert, *Driving Italy: A Cheeky Travel Memoir* by Rada Jones, and *Under the Tuscan Sun* by Frances Mayes. These works were selected for their vivid descriptions, personal journeys, and distinct settings, offering diverse perspectives on travel and cultural immersion. Through the analysis of key themes and excerpts, the thesis highlights how different experiential moments of a traveller can inspire architectural design.

Keywords: narrative, storytelling, translation, metaphors, atmosphere, experience, emotions, travel



Figure 1. *Val d'Orcia, Toscana* by Gavin Hayhurst

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01

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCING THE TRAVEL NARRATIVES

NARRATIVE FOUNDATIONS

"The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go."
- Theodor Geisel (Dr. Seuss)

This thesis explores the translation of literature into architecture, focusing on how travelogues and travel memoirs as narrative frameworks can guide the architectural process. These literary works, enriched with personal experiences, vivid landscapes, and cultural observations, provide a compelling narrative base for translating emotions and journeys into architectural elements. The project seeks to capture the essence of travel by using these stories as a guide, transforming the sensory and emotional experiences of travellers into spatial design.

The central questions guiding this exploration are how a traveller feels, what do they experience, how do they act, and ultimately, how can that sensory and emotional journey of a traveller be captured and embodied in physical space?

To anchor this study, four key books have been selected based on the following criteria:

- format: travelogues or memoirs that offer personal, reflective accounts
- descriptive richness: vivid portrayals of landscapes, people, and sensory experiences
- diverse narratives: a range of journeys, from self-discovery to cultural immersion
- defined Locations: clear setting that strengthen the narrative and provide a spatial context
- traveler's Perspective: emphasis on the subjective experiences of the protagonist

The following chapters provide insights into the selected books, along with key excerpts that inspire the architectural process. The chosen works are:

- *A Room with a View* by E.M. Forster
- *Eat, Pray, Love* by Elizabeth Gilbert
- *Driving Italy: A Cheeky Travel Memoir* by Rada Jones
- *Under the Tuscan Sun: At Home in Italy* by Frances Mayes

Rich in personal journeys and cultural encounters, these texts provide a narrative framework that guides the translation of emotional arcs - moments of wonder, reflection, connection... - into architectural elements that evoke similar experiences in physical space.

Through this approach, architecture becomes a literal medium for storytelling, where spaces are crafted to reflect the essence of travel: discovery, transformation, and connection. The following chapters will delve deeper into each book, highlighting key excerpts and themes that will later help inform the design process.

02

A ROOM WITH A VIEW

by E.M. Forster

GENERAL INFORMATION

SUMMARY

EXCERPTS FROM THE BOOK

GENERAL INFORMATION

Publication date: 1908
Publisher: Edward Arnold
Genre: novel
ISBN: 978-0-141-18329-9

A Room with a View is a novel by English writer E. M. Forster that explores the tension between societal expectations and personal desires, blending romance with a satirical critique of early 20th-century English society. Set in both Italy and England, the novel humorously explores issues of class, convention, and the constraints placed on women, especially regarding marriage and social roles. This mix of humour, romance, and social commentary has made it one of Forster's most celebrated works.

In 1998, *A Room with a View* was ranked 79th on The Modern Library's list of the 100 best English-language novels of the 20th century. The story gained further acclaim with its successful 1985 film adaptation by Merchant Ivory, which received multiple awards and solidified the novel's legacy in both literature and cinema.

The edition of the book used is *Forster, E.M. A Room with a View. London: Penguin books, 1990.* and the part of the book that was in focus for the needs of this research is *Part I* set in Italy.



SUMMARY

The story follows a journey of Lucy Honeychurch, a young Englishwoman torn between the expectations imposed by her class and her own desires for self-expression and love. Forster uses the contrasting settings to symbolize Lucy's internal struggle. Italy, with its vibrant landscapes and free-spirited characters represents passion, spontaneity, and a break from convention. England, on the other hand, embodies restraint, tradition, and societal obligations. Through these locations, Forster critiques the social hierarchies and gender roles of early 20th-century England, particularly the limited options available to women.

Part One: Florence and Awakening

Set in the early 1900s, the story begins in Florence, where Lucy Honeychurch is traveling with her chaperone and cousin, Charlotte Bartlett. Their dissatisfaction with their accommodations at the Pensione Bertolini - lacking a promised view - leads to an encounter with the unconventional Emersons, who offer their rooms. This gesture sets the tone for Lucy's awakening to new perspectives. While exploring Florence, Lucy befriends the eccentric Miss Lavish, who seeks to show her "the real Italy" but soon abandons her. Lucy repeatedly crosses paths with George Emerson, culminating in a shared experience witnessing a violent incident. This moment, marked by George's boyish sensitivity, creates an unspoken bond. A subsequent day trip to Fiesole heightens the tension, culminating in George impulsively kissing Lucy in a field of violets. The scandalized Charlotte decides they must leave for Rome the next day, cutting short Lucy's burgeoning self-discovery.

Part Two: England and Resolution

Back in England at her family home, Windy Corner, Lucy becomes engaged to Cecil Vyse, a pretentious Londoner. However, fate intervenes when the Emersons move into a nearby villa, orchestrated by Cecil in a misguided attempt to snub a local landlord. A chance encounter rekindles Lucy's feelings for George, leading to another kiss. George confronts Lucy, urging her to break free from societal expectations and embrace her true desires. Lucy ends her engagement to Cecil, only to be confronted by Mr. Emerson, who challenges her to acknowledge her love for George.

The novel concludes with Lucy and George eloping to Florence, where they find a new beginning, symbolized by a room with a view, embracing the freedom and authenticity they both sought.

The title itself is symbolic: the "room with a view" represents Lucy's longing for a broader, more meaningful life.

LOCATIONS



EXCERPTS FROM THE BOOK

It was pleasant to wake up in Florence, to open the eyes upon a bright bare room, with a floor of red tiles which look clean though they are not; with a painted ceiling whereon pink griffins and blue amorini sport in a forest of yellow violins and bassoons. It was pleasant, too, to fling wide the windows, pinching the fingers in unfamiliar fastenings, to lean out into sunshine with beautiful hills and trees and marble churches opposite, and close below, the Arno, gurgling against the embankment of the road. (p.13)

Over the river men were at work with spades and sieves on the sandy foreshore, and on the river was a boat, also diligently employed for some mysterious end. An electric tram came rushing underneath the window. No one was inside it, except one tourist; but its platforms were overflowing with Italians, who preferred to stand. Children tried to hang on behind, and the conductor, with no malice, spat in their faces to make them let go. (p.13)

Over such trivialities as these many a valuable hour may slip away, and the traveller who has gone to Italy to study the tactile values of Giotto, or the corruption of the Papacy, may return remembering nothing but the blue sky and the men and women who live under it. (p.13)

As to the true Italy - he does not even dream of it. The true Italy is only to be found by patient observation. (p.15)

*"A smell! a true Florentine smell! Every city, let me teach you, has its own smell."
"Is it a very nice smell?" said Lucy, who had inherited from her mother a distaste to dirt. "One doesn't come to Italy for niceness," was the retort; "one comes for life. Buon giorno! Buon giorno!" bowing right and left. "Look at that adorable wine-cart! How the driver stares at us, dear, simple soul!" (p.15)*

Tears of indignation came to Lucy's eyes partly because Miss Lavish had jilted her, partly because she had taken her Baedeker. How could she find her way home? How could she find her way about in Santa Croce? Her first morning was ruined, and she might never be in Florence again. A few minutes ago she had been all high spirits, talking as a woman of culture, and half persuading herself that she was full of originality. Now she entered the church depressed and humiliated, not even able to remember whether it was built by the Franciscans or the Dominicans. Of course, it must be a wonderful building. But how like a barn! And how very cold! Of course, it contained frescoes by Giotto, in the presence of whose tactile values she was capable of feeling what was proper. But who was to tell her which they were? She walked about disdainfully, unwilling to be enthusiastic over monuments of uncertain authorship or date. There was no one even to tell her which, of all the sepulchral slabs that paved the nave and transepts, was the one that was really beautiful, the one that had been most praised by Mr. Ruskin. (p.18)

Then the pernicious charm of Italy worked on her, and, instead of acquiring information, she began to be happy. She puzzled out the Italian notices-the notices that forbade people to introduce dogs into the church-the notice that prayed people, in the interest of health and out of respect to the sacred edifice in which they found themselves, not to spit. She watched the tourists; their noses were as red as their Baedekers, so cold was Santa Croce. She beheld the horrible fate that overtook three Papists-two he-babies and a she-baby --who began their career by sousing each other with the Holy Water, and then proceeded to the Machiavelli memorial, dripping but hallowed. (p.19)

That day she had seemed a typical tourist-shrill, crude, and gaunt with travel. But Italy worked some marvel in her. It gave her light, and -which he held more precious-it gave her shadow. Soon he detected in her a wonderful reticence. She was like a woman of Leonardo da Vinci's, whom we love not so much for herself as for the things that she will not tell us. (p.85)

03

EAT, PRAY, LOVE

by Elizabeth Gilbert

GENERAL INFORMATION

SUMMARY

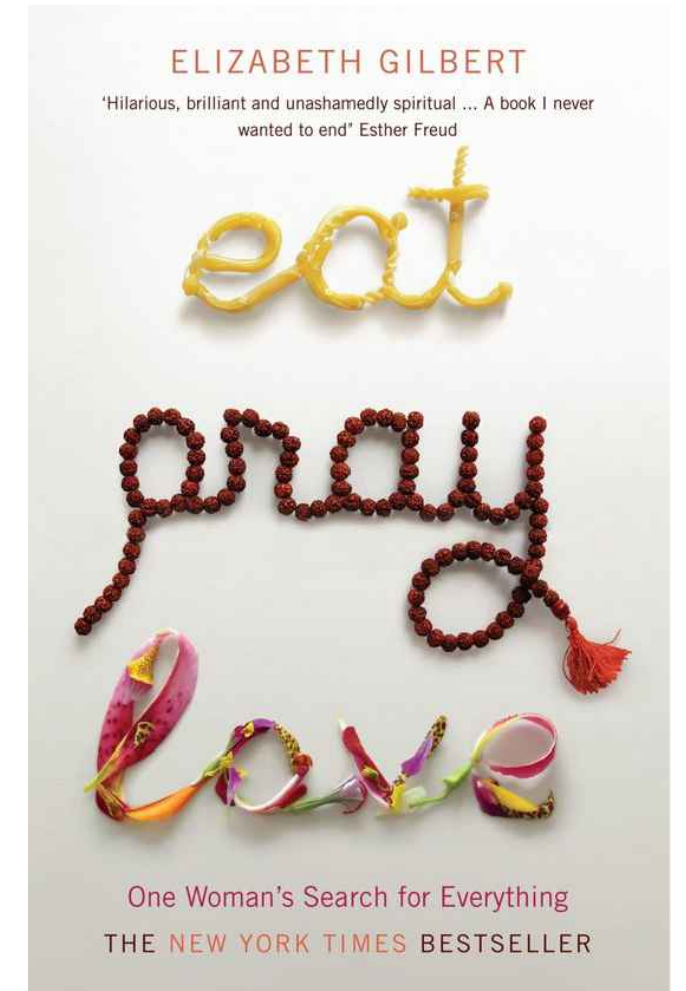
EXCERPTS FROM THE BOOK

GENERAL INFORMATION

Publication date: 2006
Publisher: Penguin
Genre: memoir
ISBN: 978-0-670-03471-0

Eat, Pray, Love: One Woman's Search for Everything Across Italy, India, and Indonesia is a memoir by American author Elizabeth Gilbert. This memoir recounts author's self-journey through a trip around the world after her divorce. The book achieved remarkable success, staying on The New York Times Best Seller list for 187 weeks. Moreover, a film adaptation, starring Julia Roberts and Javier Bardem, was released in 2010. In the same year, Gilbert released a follow-up memoir, *Committed: A Skeptic Makes Peace with Marriage*, where she reflected on her life post-*Eat, Pray, Love* and delved into the concept of marriage.

The edition of the book used is *Gilbert, Elizabeth. Eat, Pray, Love: One Woman's Search for Everything Across Italy, India and Indonesia. London: Bloomsbury, 2007.* and part of the book that was in focus for the needs of this research is *Part I. Italy.*



SUMMARY

After a painful divorce and a failed relationship, Elizabeth Gilbert sets out to rediscover herself, seeking pleasure, spiritual fulfilment, and a balance between the two.

Her journey begins in a rare prayer for guidance, sparking her spiritual search. A turbulent relationship introduces her to yoga and meditation, while a Balinese medicine man's prediction inspires her to plan the trip. She dedicates four months to Italy, immersing herself in her passion for food and the Italian language; four months to India, dedicated to studying at her guru's ashram; and four months on the island of Bali to Indonesia, seeking to find and maintain balance in her life.

The book unfolds in three parts, each focusing on one country and its corresponding theme.

Italy: The Pursuit of Pleasure

Liz's first stop is Rome, where she took up studying Italian and eating all the delicious food she could find. There, she relishes the freedom to enjoy life without obligations, finding pleasure in cappuccinos, pizza, and gelato. Along the way, she meets friends like Luca Spaghetti, Sofie and her language conversation partner Giovanni, who enrich her experience with laughter and companionship.

Despite the joy, Liz continues to battle the sadness from the heartbreak. She spends quiet moments reflecting on her life, using her time in Italy to heal emotional wounds and take a much-needed break from the turmoil of New York, offering her a chance to reconnect with herself through reflection and freedom from obligation.

India: The Search for Devotion

In India, Liz immerses herself in spiritual practice at an ashram, transitioning from indulgence to discipline. Meditation and the Gurugita chant help her find peace, while Richard, a blunt Texan, helps her growth with tough love. A breakthrough during a meditation retreat brings transcendent bliss and deepens her understanding of devotion.

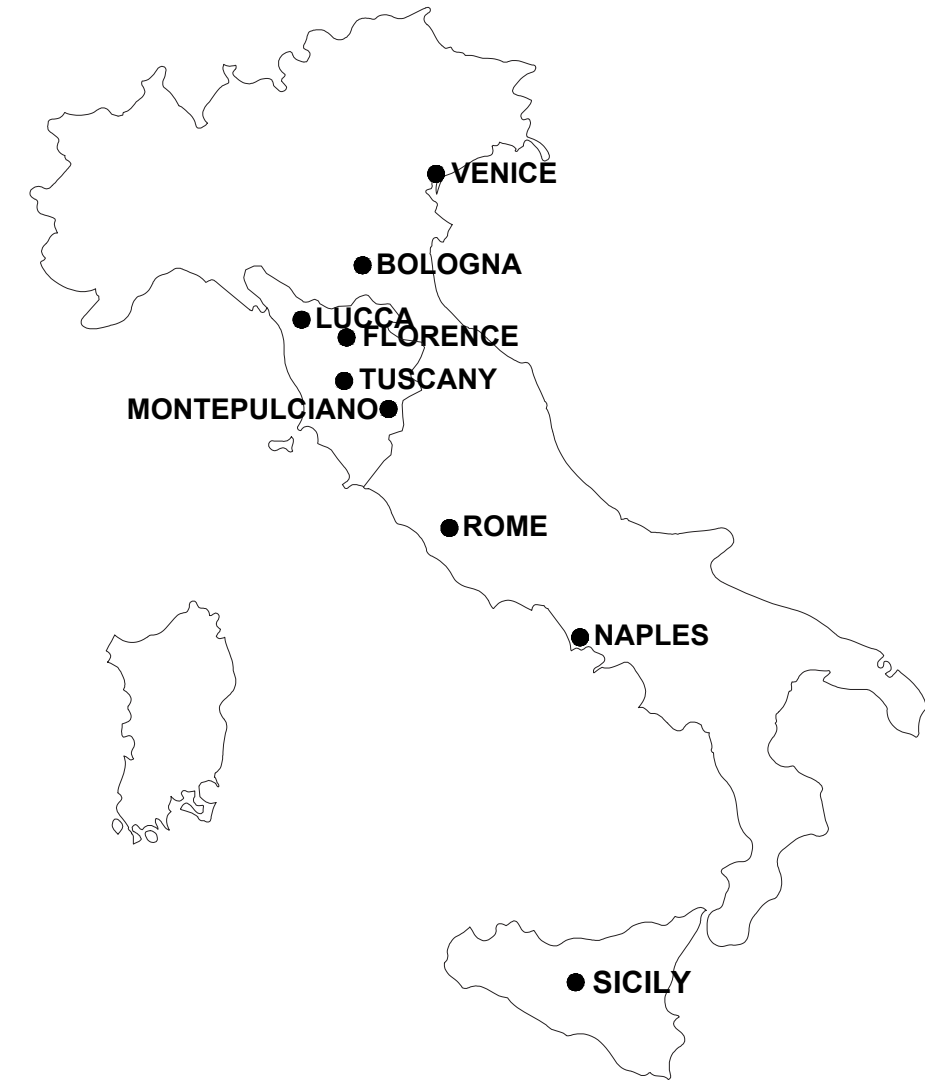
Bali: The Quest for Balance

In Bali, Liz seeks balance between Italy's pleasure and India's devotion. She reconnects with Ketut, a Balinese medicine man, and befriends Wayan, a local healer, both of whom guide her spiritual journey and help her reflect on her growth. She also meets Felipe, a Brazilian expat, and gradually embraces love again, completing her transformation.

By the end of her journey, Liz achieves a harmonious balance between pleasure, spirituality, and love, entering a new chapter of life with clarity and confidence.

The part of the book that was in focus for the needs of this research is *Part I. Italy* where Gilbert vividly describes her journey. In Rome, Liz embraces the city's charm, while Venice serves as a cultural gem where she reconnects with a friend. In Naples, the birthplace of pizza, she enjoys its vibrant energy and culinary delights. She also visits Sicily, Florence, and Tuscany, captivated by their scenic beauty and rich cultural heritage, embodying the essence of Italian tradition. Together, these locations frame Italy as a haven of pleasure, indulgence and rediscovery, reflecting Liz's journey of rediscovery.

LOCATIONS



EXCERPTS FROM THE BOOK

To make matters even more confusing, I'd also been dying lately to get over to Italy, so I could practice speaking Italian, but also because I was drawn to the idea of living for a while in a culture where pleasure and beauty are valued. (p.30)

I wanted worldly enjoyment and divine transcendence - the dual glories of a human life. I wanted what the Greeks called kalos kai agathos, the unique balance of the good and the beautiful. (p.30)

I wanted to explore the art of pleasure in Italy... (p.31)

Traveling is the great true love of my life. I have always felt, ever since I was sixteen years old and first went to Russia with my saved-up babysitting money, that to travel is worth any cost or sacrifice. I am loyal and constant in my love for travel, as I have not always been loyal and constant in my other loves. I feel about travel the way a happy new mother feels about her impossible, restless newborn baby - I just don't care what it puts me through. Because I adore it. Because it's mine. (p.43)

I have my own set of survival techniques. I am patient. I know how to pack light. I'm a fearless eater. But my one mighty travel talent is that I can make friends with anybody... (p.43)

In order to find the most beautiful dialect ever spoken in Italy, they had to reach back in time two hundred years to fourteenth-century Florence. What this congress would henceforth be considered proper Italian was the personal language of the great Florentine poet Dante Alighieri. When Dante published his Divine Comedy back in 1321, detailing a visionary progression through Hell, Purgatory and Heaven, he'd shocked the literate world by not writing in Latin. (p.47)

The Italian we speak today, therefore, is not Roman or Venetian (though these were the powerful military and merchant cities) nor even really entirely Florentine. Essentially, it is Dantean. No other European language has such an artistic pedigree. And perhaps no language was ever more perfectly ordained to express human emotions than this fourteenth-century Florentine Italian... (p.48)

The last line of the Divine Comedy, in which Dante is faced with the vision of God Himself, is a sentiment that is still easily understandable by anyone familiar with so-called modern Italian. Dante writes that God is not merely a blinding vision of glorious light, but that He is, most of all, l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle... "The love that moves the sun and the other stars." So it's really no wonder that I want so desperately to learn this language. (p.48)

Over the next six weeks, I travel to Bologna, to Florence, to Venice, to Sicily, to Sardinia, once more down to Naples, then over to Calabria. These are short trips, mostly - a week here, a weekend there - just the right amount of time to get the feel for a place, to look around, to ask people on the street where the good food is and then to go eat it. (p.101)

These weeks of spontaneous travel are a fantastic time, running to the train station and buying tickets left and right, finally beginning to really enjoy my freedom because it has finally come to me that I can go wherever I want. (p.101)

Despite Linda's initial confidence that we can govern this town, we get lost every day, and most especially at night, taking wrong turns toward dark corners that dead-end dangerously and directly into canal water. (p.106)

Yet I don't get depressed here. I can cope with, and even somehow enjoy, the sinking melancholy of Venice, just for a few days. Somewhere in me I am able to recognize that this is not my melancholy; this is the city's own indigenous melancholy, and I am healthy enough these days to be able to feel the difference between me and it. (p.106)

But is it such a bad thing to live like this for just a little while? Just for a few months of one's life, is it so awful to travel through time with no greater ambition than to find the next lovely meal? Or to learn how to speak a language for no higher purpose than that it pleases your ear to hear it? Or to nap in a garden, in a patch of sunlight, in the middle of the day, right next to your favourite fountain? And then to do it again the next day? (p.119)

I came to Italy pinched and thin. I did not know yet what I deserved. I still maybe don't fully know what I deserve. But I know that I have collected myself of late - through the enjoyment of harmless pleasures - into somebody much more intact. (p.121)

And I will leave with the hope that the expansion of one person - the magnification of one life - is indeed an act of worth in this world. Even if that life, just this one time, happens to be nobody's but my own. (p.122)

04

DRIVING ITALY: A CHEEKY TRAVEL MEMOIR by Rada Jones

GENERAL INFORMATION

SUMMARY

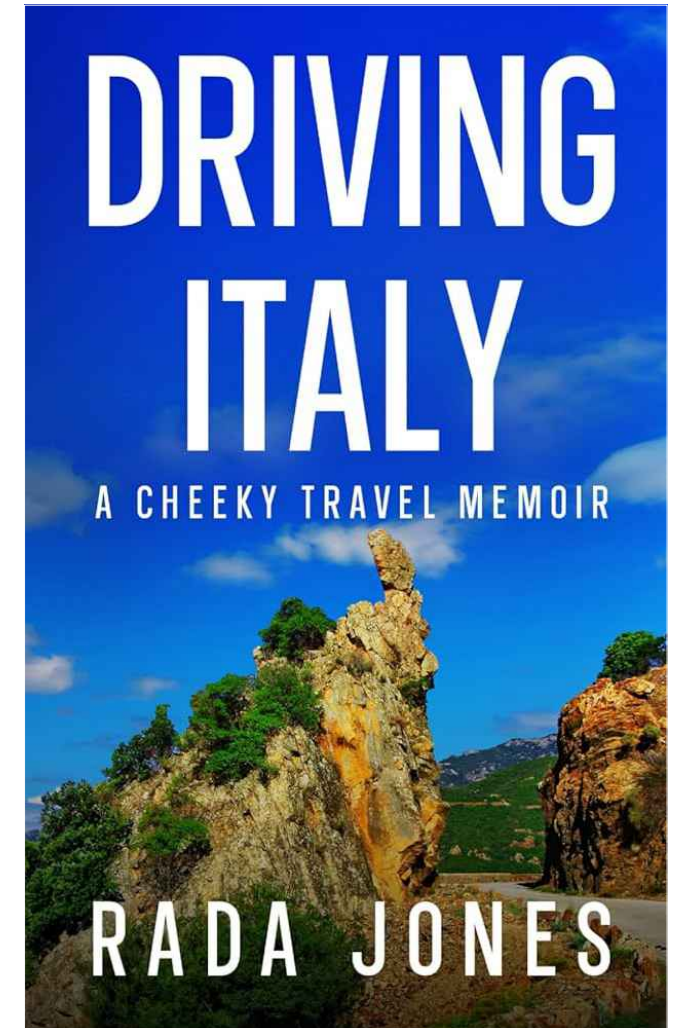
EXCERPTS FROM THE BOOK

GENERAL INFORMATION

Publication date: 2023
Publisher: independently published
Genre: travel memoir
ISBN: 979-8-355-98161-7

Driving Italy: A Cheeky Travel Memoir is a memoir by Romanian-American author Rada Jones. This humorous travelogue chronicles the adventures of a retired couple as they explore Italy by a car. The narrative follows their journey across ten thousand miles through diverse landscapes, from Paris to Corsica, Sardinia, Sicily to Italy. Along the way, they encounter various challenges, including navigating narrow streets, cultural quirks, and language barriers. Amid these challenges, they manage to immerse themselves in Italy's unique charm, sampling local cuisine (including mysterious dishes), and engaging with the country's rich cultural heritage. The memoir is infused with light-hearted commentary, witty observations, and the ups and downs of travel, making it a delightful exploration of Italy off the beaten path.

The edition of the book used is *Jones, Rada. Driving Italy: A Cheeky Travel Memoir. Independently published, Kindle edition, 2023.*



EXCERPTS FROM THE BOOK

I don't know much about being homeless. Still, I can tell you that gathering all your belongings in a car to drive into the unknown is deeply unsettling. (p.14)

After only ten days in Paris, I'd gotten used to "la vie Parisienne." We had "our" Francprix, "our" boulangerie, "our" favourite restaurant, "our" pharmacy. We'd built the beginning of a life, and that felt comfortable and comforting. (p.14)

But after the first day of driving, in which our proudest achievement was not killing anyone, we were too exhausted to enjoy Honfleur's overpriced charms. We found our cheap hotel and had a takeaway Turkish kebab for dinner, washed down with calva-dos. (p.28)

Without TV or the internet, we spent three days watching the colourful hot-air balloons float toward the sky at sunrise, reading old books, and walking around the châteaux. (p.43)

We talked, not always kindly. When you're addicted to the internet, not having the news at your fingertips is profoundly unsettling. You know that things are happening somewhere. Important things that matter to those you love and to you. Not knowing them hurts. Our internet withdrawal got us shaky and short-tempered. Our nerves got frayed, and all tolerance went out the window. We had a big fight. Whatever it was, it felt earth-shattering. A week later, I couldn't remember what it was about. (p.43)

First, this isn't exactly a vacation. It's a nomad lifestyle, and it comes with lots of work. (p.47)

Second, changing domiciles every other day leaves you no time to settle. You don't get to learn your temporary home's quirks and learn your way around to find the best boulangerie or shop at the farmer's market. You have no time to dry your laundry, sit on a bench to study the locals, or even rest. You're just a traveller without a home. (p.47)

Living in someone's home is fascinating. It's more voyeuristic than looking into people's houses through lit windows, though not quite as bad as watching some reality shows. You don't get to see the people, but you get to see their lives: you eat from their dishes, sleep between their sheets, and read their books. The most revealing thing is the fridge. You won't believe what you can learn about people by studying their fridge. And their pantry. Our hosts didn't live in luxury, but their place was functional, well-organized, and meticulously tidy. The hundreds of labelled jars of spices packed tightly in white IKEA drawers within drawers would have warmed an OCD sufferer's heart. (p.48)

Steve didn't like it. Living in someone else's space made him un-comfortable, so much so that I promised to get him a hotel room if he was still suffering in a couple days. He worried about spilling wine on the floor, damaging the wooden counters, and forgetting where to put which stuff. Me? I was too tired to care. (p.49)

But we'd run out. Soaked, frozen, and exhausted, we shuffled to our en-suite hotel room. We trudged in, dripping all over the floors. We ignored the half-dozen carabinieri with pistols on their hip.... (p.77)

We walked miles and miles (kilometers, I mean) in the rain, looking for a pizzeria. We found none. Everything was closed. We were about to lose hope when we saw a man fussing around a pizza oven.

"Pizza?" I asked hopefully.

"Si," he agreed. "A dieci-nove." At seven.

"At seven? But it's not even six! But why? Porche?"

"Solo dopo aver acceso il fuoco a legna nel forno..." I first have to light the wood-fired oven..." (p.77)

This is not like home. But if we wanted it to be like home, we should have stayed there. These people aren't about to change their ways to please us. So, to function, we'll have to adapt. (p.78)

When in Sardinia... we'll do like Sardinians do. We'll adopt the siesta, the late dinner, and everything else, and we'll live like they do. We'll try, at least. (p.78)

This new lifestyle of moving from one stranger's home to another every other day teaches you to be self-reliant. If there's something you can't live without, you'd better carry it with you. (p.98)

There's something seriously weird about living in other people's homes. We've never done it - in fact, I like my privacy so much that I even avoid staying with friends and family. But the hosting rooms' landscape has changed so dramatically over the last few years that you don't really have a choice. Booking.com and Hotels.com used to be 98 percent hotels, with a rare managed apartment thrown in for good measure. But these days, if you sort them by ranking -- which I do -- and by price - which I also do - 95 percent of the best-looking places are privately owned, whether they're B&Bs, apartments, or just odd rooms in people's homes. Add to that VRBO and Home Exchange, and you'll find yourself living in some stranger's home, drying yourself with their towels, sleeping on their pillows, and peeping in their sock drawers. (p.108)

That's half creepy and half mesmerizing, especially when it happens to be someone's actual house. (p.108)

EXCERPTS FROM THE BOOK

Compound the voyeurism with the ongoing sense of adventure since you never know how things work, from the induction stove to the recycling, and you find yourself in seriously kinky territory. (p.108)

Leaving Palermo was bittersweet. (p.124)

We'd spent nine days cooped-up in a minuscule apartment, listening to the rain and working on the last touches for my book. (p.124)

At times it felt like a lot. But when the rain stopped and we went outside, we had a blast! I loved the chaos of the markets, the people speaking with their hands, the cars so banged up they were narrower than they had started. I loved living in the very heart of the city, so I could come and go as I pleased a dozen times a day. And boy, was it fun to ditch the car for a week! (p.124)

We squeezed out of Palermo through the narrow streets choked with double-parked cars flashing their lights as usual. I fleetingly wondered if they had extra batteries to keep them going until they finished their business. We ended our Palermo visit just like we started, in utter chaos. But what fun! (p.130)

Tired of following instructions, Steve -- a rebel at heart -- turned right when Gwendolyn prompted him to turn left, so we got to drive all around Ortygia again. And again. (p.176)

By the time we reached our reserved garage, we were too exhausted to care. We parked and dragged as many bags as we could to our new digs two blocks away. (p.176)

The place was lovely - clean, pretty, well-organized, and tidy. But, like most places we've stayed in, it was windowless and freezing cold. The only pathetic heating contraption was a dehumidifier that needed draining every hour. (p.176)

I rushed back to the garage to get our trusted heater, and we weathered the night. Still, the following morning I was too cold to get up. (p.176)

When Steve woke up, he wasn't happy either. It had something to do with his socks. They'd somehow vanished in the shuffle, and he suspected me. Then he couldn't find the shampoo. (p.176)

The dank cold room may have played a part -- who knows? But a spark happened. I'd had enough. "How about going to Thailand? It's warm; we have a lovely place with windows and friends waiting for us." Steve gave me a shattering look, but I don't shatter easily. "This trip was lovely. It really was, for more than two months of it. But it's not warm, and it's not getting any better. If anything, it gets colder every day. We could do the rest of it next year. (p.176)

And I'm cranky. It's been a long day. (p.179)

We'd planned on Christmas in Malta. We got ferry tickets, I found us a lovely apartment in Valetta, and I made reservations for Christmas Eve dinner. It was all going swimmingly until we heard the French news on Italian cable TV and discovered that Europe had another wave of Covid. That didn't bode well for our travels. (p.179)

Discovering that Italy required Covid testing to let us back from Malta was the clincher. This had started bad, and it would likely get worse. Getting stuck on the border looked likely, but it matters which side of it you're on. I can live getting stuck in France if Thailand keeps us out. Or in Italy, if France says no. But living in Malta until the pandemic disappears? No, thanks. (p.179)

I don't know much about Malta other than it's an expensive, Catholic island the size of a washcloth that thinks highly of itself. I can do three days to a week, but forever? Sign me out. (p.179)

So we gave up the ferry tickets -- 200 euros, but worth it, if you ask me -- we cancelled the lovely apartment, and forgot about Christmas dinner. We switched gears and headed to mainland Italy. (p.179)

My heart was heavy. (p.180)

I didn't miss the apartment - I got a little tired of old basements redecorated into fancy B&Bs with sexy neon lights and music in the double shower but no daylight, ever. I'm tired of being cold and dragging myself back to the car a mile away to recover Steve's socks or a forgotten phone charger. (p.180)

I didn't miss Malta, either. I'm all for adventure, but lately, things have been a little tricky. Every time Steve looks at me crooked, I wonder if I'll need to carry him home. What home, you ask? Good question. So, heading toward home, whatever that may be, makes sense. (p.180)

EXCERPTS FROM THE BOOK

But I miss Sicily like I missed Corsica and Sardinia. Every time we leave to travel somewhere new, it breaks my heart to know we'll never be here again. (p.180)

Sicilians are lovely, the food is terrific, the wine doesn't suck, and the views are fantastic, provided you wear enough clothes. I'll miss Cefalu's beaches, Palermo's markets, Etna's snow, and Taormina's goat paths they call streets. I'll even miss Catania's fish market and the dark ashes falling from the sky, even though that was one of my least favourite places in Sicily. (p.180)

I'll also miss our adventures. We're no longer young but still love to explore and enjoy life. We delight in nice dinners and good wine and laugh at things nobody else understands. (p.180)

There are no hushed tones in Italy. Everything is loud, intense, and played in public for everyone to see. (p.186)

We left delighted, not only with the food but the owner's hospitality and the warmth of four generations of Italians sharing the pleasure of their lunch, the fire, and each other. It melted my heart to see the old man showing the toddlers how to warm their hands to the fire -- close, but not too close -- and the tired women's smiles. (p.186)

Just as we lamented that nobody else partook of the deliciousness, a party of ten showed up carrying a giant birthday cake, and the place came alive. Once again, in Italy, things are not what they seem. Sit tight and watch them happen. (p.194)

For the last week or so, things have been getting to us. It's late December, and we're tired of cold, dark, cramped apartments with lousy internet and Italian-only news on TV. Sick of wearing the same clothes, not too clean at that, for the last two months. Fed up with lugging our ever-expanding luggage -- half of its food and a quarter space heater - from parking spaces a mile away. We want a place to be warm and cozy, with our old books lying open on the side table, our slippers by the sofa, and Paxil purring in our lap. We want to be home. But we can't. (p.195)

The rich food and abundant wine requiring my daily attention shrunk my pants, while Steve got so skinny that I'm afraid a gust of wind will whisk him away. (p.195)

We miss Guinness, Paxil, and our son. We even miss Christmas shopping -- we can't buy anything because we can't carry it. (p.195)

We will stop to say hi to Vesuvius, then continue to our next temporary home. It's a agriturismo in Dolgio, a village too small to fit on the almost life-size map I'd bought at Feltrinelli, Italy's most famous bookstore. And, as always, we don't know what we'll find. Will we have heat? Wi-Fi? Hot water? (p.222)

The pool between the olive trees must be lovely in summer. But now, when the sun sets at 4:30, and a lively wind chases heavy clouds across the sky and whips them into rain every now and then, I'd trade that pool for a hot shower. (p.228)

I couldn't hope for a better place to shelter, and I'm grateful to be here. But not happy. This year has started poorly. My sore throat turned into a wet, heavy cough that robs me of my sleep. (p.228)

I decided I wouldn't like Tuscany. Everyone else did, and the hype was getting on my nerves. Tuscany this, Tuscany that - Tuscan cuisine, Tuscan wines, Tuscany's landscapes, Tuscan hill towns, art, culture, whatever. I decided it was just an overhyped version of Umbria with better PR. (p.245)

It was all hype. So, when we left Maria, Spritz, and Leonardo, I was determined to be unimpressed. (p.245)

It turns out I wasn't all wrong. Tuscany isn't necessarily better than Umbria. It has the same velvety green hills covered with vines and olive trees. The same hilltop towns with old stone houses hugging together like old maids in church. The same graceful cedar-shaded driveways and honey-coloured stone houses build to last. The same fluffy clouds chase each other over shifty skies, throwing fast-moving shadows over the ground below. (p.245)

But it's beautiful! I resisted her for the five minutes it took us to get from the highway to the back roads, and I got hooked. By the time we reached our sunny home in Montepulciano, a spacious apartment on the edge of town fitted with everything one could hope for and perfectly triangulated between a pasticceria, a bar-pizzeria, and a supermarket, I'd forgotten Umbria like I forgot last winter's snow. (p.246)

One day later, we no longer wanted to leave. (p.246)

Day one was lovely and sunny, so we wandered up and down Montepulciano's pedestrian-friendly narrow streets. We window-shopped stylish boutiques of many kinds, all hell-bent on lightening your wallet. (p.246)

Eating in Tuscany is always an experience. Not because of the food-- the food is always fantastic, and the wine washing it down is stupendous. But it's not about the food. It's about the people. (p.252)

It must have been 20 years ago that Steve and I visited Rome. For some reason -- probably a sale -- we stayed at Albergo Del Senato, a posh hotel right across from the Pantheon. The hotel was beautiful, and the view was stunning, but the tuxedoed doorman made me feel like a slob. Well deserved, too, since I travel like one -- no makeup, no jewellery, no high-heels. Often not even clean clothes. But, in that hotel, I felt like I didn't belong, so I avoided the door like the plague. I'd have jumped out the window if I could, but it was on the second floor. (p.252)

EXCERPTS FROM THE BOOK

"What is it about Italy that feels so good?" I asked Steve.

He shrugged.

"I don't know. Maybe because it doesn't put on airs?"

That's true. Unlike many places that shall remain unnamed, Italy doesn't put on airs. Italy is the country equivalent of the girl next door -- pretty, unpretentious, and easy to love.

"The food isn't bad either. As for the wine..."

No need to say more. We sampled Italy's wines like we were on a mission - maybe because we were. We have our favourites, some of them we never tried before, but there aren't many slouches. As much as I love Thailand, its wines, mostly imported and ten times more expensive, don't hold a candle to Italy's five-euro carafes of house wines.

"Not warm, though."

Steve nodded.

This was our biggest disappointment. Coming from upstate New York, where we count our minuses in Fahrenheit like trophies, we expected Italy to be, if not swimsuit worthy, at least balmy. And it was not.

Truth be told, even though it's January, we've had a few lucky lunches in the sun. We sat on cozy terraces shielded from the wind and watched the sea shimmer while sipping on some voluptuous red. Still, most of the time, we shivered -- whether walking the streets, eating in restaurants, or hoping our space heater wouldn't blow up the antique electric circuits yet again. (p.273)

ADDENDUM (p.277)

A few Italian words you'll want to know. Unsurprisingly, most of them have to do with food.

A presto: See you soon

A dopo: See you later

Adesso: Right now

Acqua: Water

Acqua frizzante: Soda water

Aiuto: Help

Amico: Friend

Amore: Love

Arancini: Deep-fried rice balls, stuffed with meat and cheese. Popular Sicilian street food.

Aperto: Open

Arrivederci: Goodbye

Arrosto: Roasted

Attento: Watch out

Baba: A sickly sweet Neapolitan desert - spongy cake soaked in sugary syrup and rum.

Bella: Beautiful

Bene: Good

Benvenuto: Welcome

Bolognese: Red pasta with meat and spices native to Bologna that's hard to find in the islands.

Bottarga: Dry mullet roe, much loved in the islands and Italy's south, that gets grated like parmegiano on top of many dishes. It's saltier than salt and fishier than a con man, and it takes some getting used to.

Buonanotte: Goodnight

Buongiorno: Hello

Buonasera: Good evening

Cagnulari: Aromatic, Sicilian red wine with dark fruit aromas of cherries and raspberries and floral and herbal notes.

Casa: House

Cannoli: Ricotta-filled fried pastry tubes. The good ones get filled as you wait, so they don't get soggy, and are rolled in crushed pistachios.

Carbonara: Eggy pasta with a creamy sauce flavored with pancetta.

Cassata Siciliana: Liqueur-drenched sponge cake layered with ricotta and fruit preserves, decorated with marzipan and candied fruits.

Cattivo: Bad

Cedre: Football-sized yellow citrus with a skin thicker than a rhinoceros. It's tart, but delicious with a sprinkle of sugar and a dusting of salt.

Cerasuolo di Vittoria: Sicilian red wine, the only one with a DOCG (Denominazione di Origine Controllata) status. It's a blend of strong-bodied Nero d'Avola, and fruity, light Frappato.

Chiesa: Church

Chiuso: Closed

Ciao: Bye

Cin cin: Cheers

Cinghiale: Wild boar. More common than pork in Umbria and Tuscany, often disguised as a pasta sauce.

Come ti chiami?: What's your name?

Come va?: How are you?

Coniglio in agrodolce: Rabbit in sweet and sour sauce. Traditional Sicilian dish that may include pine nuts, raisins, and chocolate.

Corposo: Voluptuous. In wines: Strong-bodied.

Cotechino: Thick pork-rind sausage traditionally served for New Year's eve.

Domani: Tomorrow

EXCERPTS FROM THE BOOK

Delizioso: Delicious. Requires kissing the tips of your fingers.

Falsomagro (fake lean): Sicilian meat dish. It looks like roast beef, but it's stuffed with prosciutto, cheese, and sausage stuffing rolled around hard-boiled eggs.

Granita: Sicilian semi-frozen dessert traditionally enjoyed for breakfast alongside an espresso and pastry. It's Sicily's answer to OJ.

Grappa: THE Italian spirit (as in alcohol), distilled from leftover fermented grape skins.

Grande: Big

Grazie: Thanks

Guanciale: Pork cheek. Bacon-like and not lean, but delicious.

La: There

Lepere: Wild hare

Limoncello: Lemon liquor from the Amalf coast. It's sweet, smooth, and goes down like a fiend.

Meusa: Spleen. Not existential. The eating kind, that you'll find in a sandwich alongside cooked onions.

Mi chiamo: My name is

Mi scusi: Sorry

Minne di Sant'Agata (Saint Agata's breasts): White - iced semispherical pastry filled with ricotta, dark chocolate and candied fruit. The red candied cherry on top makes it look like St. Agata's breasts that were severed for her refusal to abandon her faith. Bon appetit!

Moltz: Many

Molto: Very

Natale: Christmas

Nero d'Avola: Dense, dark Sicilian wine high in tannins that goes with rich meat dishes.

Nessun problema: No problem. It often means: Not my prob-lem. Your problem.

Oggi: Today

Pancetta: Italy's answer to bacon.

Pane rustico: Crusty sourdough bread, slightly flattened and baked in a wood-fired oven. Delicious eaten fresh from the oven with olive oil, salt, and ground black pepper.

Pane carasau: Paper-thin, double-baked Sardinian flatbread. It's so dry it can't go bad, so it used to be the Sardinian shepherds' staple. Works better as a cracker.

Parmigiana di melanzane: Fried eggplant layered with basil-flavored tomato sauce topped with mozzarella, pecorino, scamorza, or caciocavallo. Cheese, in short.

Pasticeria: Pastry shop

Per favore: Please

Peperoncino: Spicy small peppers, often pickled

Pepper: Pepper

Piacere: Nice meeting you

Piccolo: Small

Piu tardi: Later

Polpette: Balls. Of the eating kind. Sometimes meat, but in Sicily they're often swordfish.

Porche?: Why?

Porcheddu: Roasted suckling pig stuffed with aromatic myrtle served on a cork tray.

Porchetta: Rolled, roasted pork belly with a thick layer of crispy skin. Delicious!

Prego: You're welcome

Quello: That

Questo: This

Qui: Here

Roletini: Rolls of meat or fish with a flavored breadcrumbs stuffing.

Ricci di mare: Sea urchins, often served with pasta. They taste like fishy foie-gras, and they're delicious!

Risotto: A cheesy rice dish that's usually watery and often undercooked. Give it a miss.

Salice Salentino: Dark purple Italian wine from Salento made from thick-skinned Negroamaro grapes.

Scusa: I'm sorry.

Sfincione: Oven-baked flatbread topped with oregano, anchovies, tomato sauce, and cheese. The street vendors in Palermo sell it from their three-wheeled Piaggio food trucks.

Si: Yes

Stasera: Tonight

Strada: Road

Ti amo: I love you.

Trippa: Beef tripe. It has a peculiar slimy texture and honeycomb structure that make it unmistakable. Delicious in a warm sandwich with a squeeze of lime.

Un po: A little bit

Uno: One

Va bene? Are you OK?

Vai via: Go away, get lost

Via: Street

Vitello: Veal. Practically, it's a retired cow. Particularly muscular in the islands.

Vino rosso: Red wine. It's usually the house wine; otherwise, it has a name.

Zuppa: Soup

05

UNDER THE TUSCAN SUN: AT HOME IN ITALY by Frances Mayes

GENERAL INFORMATION

SUMMARY

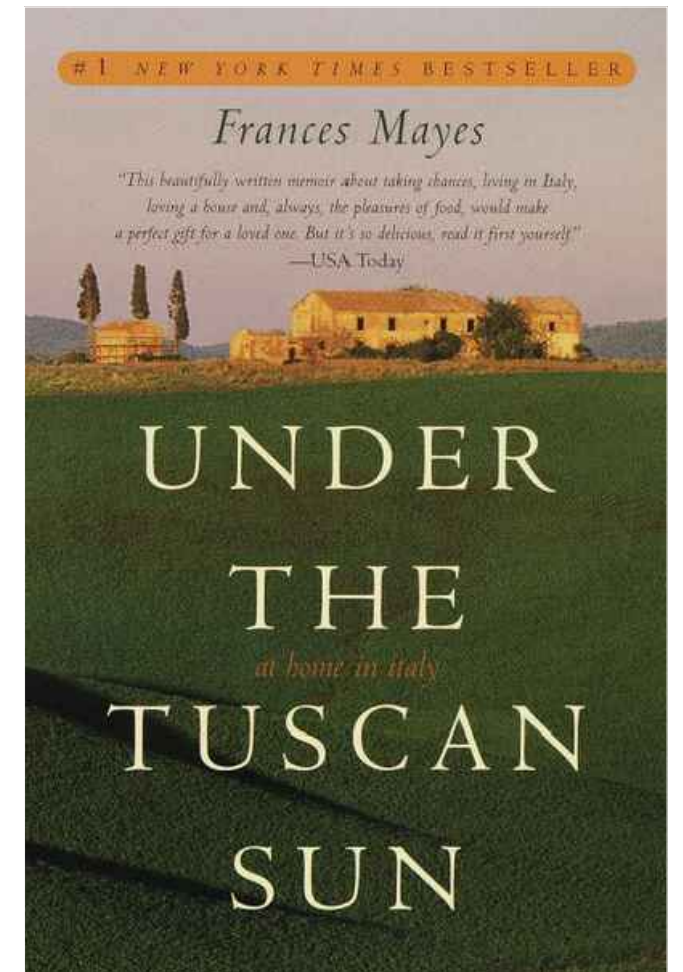
EXCERPTS FROM THE BOOK

GENERAL INFORMATION

Publication date: 1996
Publisher: Chronicle Books
Genre: memoir
ISBN: 978-0-7679-0038-6

Under the Tuscan Sun: At Home in Italy is a memoir by Frances Mayes, detailing her experiences of purchasing and renovating a villa in Tuscany. The book vividly chronicles her journey of transforming the house into a home, alongside explorations of the Italian countryside, its rich culture, and delicious cuisine. Published in 1996, the memoir achieved significant success, staying on The New York Times Best Seller list for more than two and a half years. 7 years later, in 2003, a film adaptation by director Audrey Wells was released, though it deviates significantly from the book's narrative, focusing more on fictionalized romantic elements. As of 2016, *Under the Tuscan Sun* was translated into 54 languages. Frances Mayes later authored several follow-up works, further delving into Italian life and her journey.

The edition of the book used is *Mayes, Frances. Under the Tuscan Sun: At Home in Italy. London: Penguin books, 2016.*



SUMMARY

The story follows Frances Mayes' journey of renovating her new Italian property, an abandoned villa named *Bramasole* (meaning "longing for the sun" in Italian), in the idyllic hills of Tuscany.

After a divorce, Frances, a writer and university professor, ventures to Italy seeking a change of scenery, drawn by its timeless charm, rich history, and breathtaking beauty. Her love for the Tuscan countryside begins with summers spent renting farmhouses, eventually sparking a dream of owning a home there. A spontaneous decision to purchase the neglected villa sets her on an adventurous path of restoration and immersion into Italian culture.

As she embarks on the renovation, Frances confronts numerous challenges: navigating Italy's complex real estate laws, adapting to local customs, collaborating with eccentric yet talented craftsmen... The project evolves into a labour of love--not only restoring the villa but also reviving the gardens, vineyards, and olive groves and so each step symbolizing renewal and rediscovery.

Amid the physical work, Frances delves into the rhythms of Italian life. She vividly describes exploring local markets, mastering traditional Tuscan recipes, and partaking in regional festivals. Moreover, the memoir highlights her interactions and relationships with the locals, fellow expatriates, and her partner, Ed, who shares this transformative journey. Together, they celebrate life's simple pleasures--harvesting olives, exploring historic towns, and hosting gatherings at *Bramasole*.

Throughout the book, Frances reflects on her personal growth and the profound impact of this new life. *Bramasole* becomes more than a home; it is a metaphor for her journey to heal, rebuild, and find joy in simplicity and authenticity. It's a sanctuary where she reconnects with herself, learns to embrace change, and discovers the pleasure of living fully in the present.

The book also paints a rich portrait of the beauty of the Tuscan landscape, with its picturesque hills and timeless architecture. This backdrop serves as a source of inspiration and tranquility, reinforcing the memoir's themes of transformation and resilience.

Ultimately, *Under the Tuscan Sun* is a heartfelt exploration of what it means to build a home - not just as a physical space but as a foundation for emotional and spiritual renewal. It captures the essence of Tuscany, offering readers a glimpse into a life reimagined and enriched by the simple yet profound joys of the Italian countryside.

LOCATIONS



EXCERPTS FROM THE BOOK

Restoring, then improving, the house; transforming an overgrown jungle into its proper function as a farm for olives and grapes; exploring the layers and layers of Tuscany and Umbria; cooking in a foreign kitchen and discovering the many links between the food and the culture--these intense joys frame the deeper pleasure of learning to live another kind of life. To bury the grape tendril in such a way that it shoots out new growth I recognize easily as a metaphor for the way life must change from time to time if we are to go forward in our thinking. (p.x)

Italy is thousands of years deep and on the top layer I am standing on a small plot of land, delighted today with the wild orange lilies spotting the hillside. (p.xi)

I open the blue book. Writing about this place, our discoveries, wanderings, and daily life, also has been a pleasure. A Chinese poet many centuries ago noticed that to re-create something in words is like being alive twice. (p.xii)

At the taproot, to seek change probably always is related to the desire to enlarge the psychic place one lives in. (p.xii)

A guest on holiday is intent on pleasure. (p.xii)

I am about to buy a house in a foreign country. A house with the beautiful name of Bramasole. It is tall, square, and apricot-colored with faded green shutters, ancient tile roof, and an iron balcony on the second level, where ladies might have sat with their fans to watch some spectacle below. But below, overgrown briars, tangles of roses, and knee-high weeds run rampant. The balcony faces southeast, looking into a deep valley, then into the Tuscan Apennines. When it rains or when the light changes, the facade of the house turns gold, sienna, ocher; a previous scarlet paint job seeps through in rosy spots like a box of crayons left to melt in the sun. In places where the stucco has fallen away, rugged stone shows what the exterior once was. The house rises above a strada bianca, a road white with pebbles, on a terraced slab of hillside covered with fruit and olive trees. Bramasole: from bramare, to yearn for, and sole, sun: something that yearns for the sun, and yes, I do. (p.1)

Italy always has had a magnetic north pull on my psyche. (p.3)

We visited weekly markets not just with the purchase of picnic peaches in mind; we looked carefully at all the produce's quality and variety, mentally forecasting birthday dinners, new holidays, and breakfasts for weekend guests. (p.4)

My idea of heaven still is to drive the gravel farm roads of Umbria and Tuscany, very pleasantly lost. (p.4)

Guidebooks describe Cortona as "somber" and "austere." They misjudge. The hilltop position, the walls and upright, massive stone buildings give a distinctly vertical feel to the architecture. Walking across the piazza, I feel the abrupt, angular shadows fall with Euclidean purity. I want to stand up straight--the upright posture of the buildings seems to carry over to the inhabitants. They walk slowly, with very fine, I want to say, carriage. I keep saying, "Isn't she beautiful?" "Isn't he gorgeous?" "Look at that face--pure Raphael." (p.7)

When I first saw Bramasole, I immediately wanted to hang my summer clothes in an armadio and arrange my books under one of those windows looking out over the valley. (p.9)

The undulant landscape looks serene in every direction. Honey-colored farmhouses, gently placed in hollows, rise like thick loaves of bread set out to cool. (p.16)

*The house, only two kilometers from town, feels like a deep country place. We can't see any neighbors, although we hear the man way above us calling *vieni qua*, come here, to his dog. (p.74)*

The table is set under a shady grape arbor. Cold salads, cold wine, fruit, a grand cheese soufflé somehow steamed on top of the stove. Heat shimmers around the olive trees in the distance. On the stone patio, we're cool. (p.76)

To live wholly in another country fascinates me. I'm curious how the trip or assignment to Italy turned into a lifetime for each of them and I ask Fenella, the international journalist, on my right, about this. "You can't imagine what Rome was in the fifties. Magic. I simply fell in love - like you fall in love with a person - and schemed to find a way to stay there." (p.76)

Every morning, Elizabeth goes into town, buys a paper, and takes her espresso at the same café. I'm up early, too, and love to see the town come alive. I walk in with my Italian verb book, memorizing conjugations as I walk. Sometimes I take a book of poetry because walking suits poetry. I can read a few lines, savor or analyze them, read a few more, sometimes just repeat a few words of the poem; this meditative strolling seems to free the words. The rhythm of my walking matches the poet's cadence. (p.79)

In town, too, Ed and I are beginning to feel more at home. We try to buy everything right in the local shops: hardware, electrical transformers, contact lens cleaner, mosquito candles, film. We do not patronize the cheaper supermarket in Camucia; we go from the bread store to the fruit and vegetable shop, to the butcher, loading everything into our blue canvas shopping bags. (p.80)

*By now they know what kind of bread we want, that we want the *bufala*, buffalo milk mozzarella, not the *normale*, regular cow's milk kind. (p.80)*

EXCERPTS FROM THE BOOK

Restoration. I like the word. The house, the land, perhaps ourselves. But restored to what? Our lives are full. It's our zeal for all this work that amazes me. Is it only that once into the project, what it all means doesn't come up? Or that excitement and belief reject questions? The vast wheel has a place for our shoulders and we simply push into the turning? But I know there's a taproot as forceful as that giant root wrapped around the stone. (p.85)

*I remember dreaming over Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, which I don't have with me, only a few sentences copied into a notebook. He wrote about the house as a "tool for analysis" of the human soul. By remembering rooms in houses we've lived in, we learn to abide (nice word) within ourselves. I felt close to his sense of the house. He wrote about the strange whirl of the sun as it comes into a room in which one is alone. Mainly, I remember recognizing his idea that the house protects the dreamer; the houses that are important to us are the ones that allow us to dream in peace. (p.85)*

For me, house, set in its landscape, always has been crypto-primo image land. Bachelard pushed me to realize that the houses we experience deeply take us back to the first house. In my mind, however, it's not just to the first house, but to the first concept of self. (p.86)

Southerners have a gene, as yet undetected in the DNA spirals, that causes them to believe that place is fate. Where you are is who you are. The further inside you the place moves, the more your identity is intertwined with it. Never casual, the choice of place is the choice of something you crave. (p.86)

That pure surge of pleasure, flash flood of joy - to find the electric jolt of the outside place that corresponds to the inside - that's it. (p.86)

Such flowers - jasmine, honeysuckle, gardenia-spell South, metabolic home, to my psyche. (p.87)

Here, I am restored to the basic pleasure of connection to the outdoors. The windows are open to butterflies, horseflies, bees, or anything that wants to come in one window and out another. We eat outside almost every meal. I'm restored to my mother's sense of preserving the seasons and to time, even time to take pleasure in polishing a pane of glass to a shine. To the house safe for dreaming. One end of the house is built right against the hillside. An omen of reconnection? Here, I don't dream of houses. Here, I am free to dream of rivers. (p.88)

When she first walked up to the house, she stopped and looked up for a while, then said, "How strange this will become a part of all our memories." I recognized that knowledge we sometimes get in advance when travelling or moving to a new city--here's a place that will have its way with me. (p.88)

As we drive out of the Rome airport, rain hits the windshield like a hose turned on full blast. All the way north we face foggier and foggier weather. When we arrive in Camucia, we head straight to the bar for hot chocolate before we go to Elizabeth's. We decide to unpack, have lunch, and face Bramasole later. (p.95)

We have a major incentive: At the end of June, my friend Susan has planned to be married in Cortona. When I asked why she wanted her wedding in Italy, she replied cryptically, "I want to get married in a language I don't understand." The guests will stay with us and the wedding will take place at the twelfth-century town hall. (p.99)

Market day falls on Thursdays in Camucia, the lively town at the bottom of Cortona's hill, and I'm there early before the heat sets in. Tourists pass right through Camucia; it's just the modern spillover from the venerable and dominant hill town above it. But modern is relative. Among the frutta e verdura shops, the hardware and seed stores, you happen on a couple of Etruscan tombs. (p.108)

On market day, a couple of streets are blocked to traffic. The vendors arrive early, unfolding what seems like whole stores or supermarket aisles from specially made trucks and wagons. (p.108)

I'm wending my way toward the produce but walk up to the bar for a coffee. Actually, I stop with an excuse to stare. People from surrounding areas come not only to shop but to greet friends, to make business arrangements. The din around the Camucia market is a lovely swarm of voices, many speaking in the local Val di Chiana dialect; I don't understand most of what they're saying but I do hear one recurring habit. They do not use the ch sound for c, but slide it into an s sound. "Shento," they say for cento (one hundred), instead of the usual pronunciation "chento." I heard someone say "cappushino," for cappuccino, though the usual affectionate shortening of that is "cappuch." Their town is pronounced not "Camuchia," but "Camushea." Odd that the c is often the affected letter. Around Siena, people substitute an h sound for c--"hasa" and "Hoca-Hola." Whatever the local habit with c, they're all talking. Outside the bar, groups of farmers, maybe a hundred men, mill about. Some play cards. Their wives are off in the crowd, loading their bags with tiny strawberries, basil plants with dangling roots, dried mushrooms, perhaps a fish from the one stand that sells seafood from the Adriatic. (p.110)

A friend says Italy is getting to be just like everywhere else - homogenized and Americanized, she says disparagingly. I want to drag her here and stand her in this doorway. The men have the look of their live - perhaps we all do. Hard work, their faces and bodies affirm. All are lean, not a pound of extra fat anywhere. They look cured by the sun, so deeply tan they probably never go pale in winter. Their country clothes are serviceable, rough - they don't "dress," they just get dressed. They wear, as well, a natural dignity. Surely some are canny, crusty, cruel, but they look totally present, unhidden, and alive. Some are missing teeth, but they smile widely without embarrassment. (p.111)

EXCERPTS FROM THE BOOK

The signora who lived here a hundred years ago could walk in now and start to cook. She'd like the porcelain sink, big enough to bathe a baby in, its drain board and the curved chrome faucet. I imagine her with a pointed chin and shiny black eyes, her hair swept up and twisted in a comb. She's in sturdy shoes that tie and a black dress with the sleeves pushed up, ready to roll out the ravioli. She'd be ecstatic, no doubt, to see appliances—the dishwasher, stove, and frost-free fridge (still a novelty in Tuscany), but otherwise, she'd feel quite at home. (p.114)

In my next life, when I am an architect, I always will design houses with kitchens that open to the outdoors. I love stepping out to head and tail my beans while sitting on the stone wall. I set dirty pots out to soak, dry my dishcloths on the wall, empty excess clean water on the arugula, thyme, and rosemary right outside the door. Since the double door is open day and night in summer, the kitchen fills with light and air. A wasp - is it the same one? - flies in every day and drinks from the faucet, then flies right out. (p.115)

My daughter showed every sign of breaking the legacy of my mother and Willie, whose talents destined my sisters and me to shelves of cookbooks, constant plans for the next party, and—ultimate test—even the fate to cook when eating alone. Throughout her childhood, except for an occasional batch of obsidian-like fudge, Ashley disdained the kitchen. Shortly after she graduated from college, she began to cook and immediately started calling home for recipes for chicken with forty cloves of garlic, profiteroles, risotto, chocolate soufflé, potatoes Anna. Without meaning to, she seemed to have absorbed certain knowledge. Now, when we're together, we, too, go into paroxysms of planning and cooking. She has taught me a great marinated pork tenderloin recipe and a buttermilk lemon cake. These familial connections give me a helpless feeling: Cooking is destiny. (p.116)

In Tuscany, where hunters long since have driven out most wildlife, the mint is more plentiful than deer. Maria Rita, at the frutta e verdura, tells me to use lemon balm in salads and vegetables, as well as in my bathwater. I think I would like cutting herbs even if I weren't cooking. The pungency of just-snipped herbs adds as much to the cook's enjoyment as to taste. After weeding the thyme, I don't wash my hands until the fragrance fades from my hands. I planted a hedge of sage, more than I ever could use, and let most flower for the butterflies. Sage flowers, along with lavender, look pretty in wildflower bouquets. The rest I dry or use fresh, usually for white beans with chopped sage and olive oil, a favorite of Tuscans, who are known as "bean eaters." (p.118)

I have pots of basil by the kitchen door because it is supposed to keep out flies. During the wall-building and well-drilling weeks, I saw a worker crush leaves in his hand and smear his wasp sting. He said it took away all the pain. (p.118)

Of all herbs, basil holds the essence of Tuscan summer. (p.119)

Many of her customers are tourists, stopping in for some grapes or a few peaches. A man buys fruit and makes motions of washing his hands. He points to the fruit. She figures out that he's asking her where he can wash it. She explains that it is washed, no one has touched it, but, of course, he can't understand, so she leads him by the elbow down the street and points to the public water fountain. She finds this amusing. "Where is he from that he thinks the fruit isn't clean?" (p.143)

Cortona merits almost seven pages in the excellent Blue Guide: Northern Italy. The writer meticulously directs the walker up each street, pointing out what's of interest. From the gates to the city, further excursions into the surrounding countryside are recommended. Each side altar in the duomo is described according to its cardinal orientation, so that, if you happen to know which way east is, after travelling the winding roads, you can locate yourself and self-guide through the nooks and crannies. The writer has even identified all the murky paintings in the choir area. Reading the guide, I'm overwhelmed once again by all the art, architecture, history in one little hill town. This is only one of hundreds of such former marauder lookouts, perched picturesquely for views now. (p.145)

Now that I know this one place a little, I read with doubled perception. The guide directs me to the acacia-shaded lane along the inside wall of the town, and I immediately remember the modest stone houses on one side, the view over the Val di Chiana on the other. (p.145)

Whatever a guidebook says, whether or not you leave somewhere with a sense of the place is entirely a matter of smell and instinct. There are places I've been which are lost to me. (p.146)

When I was there, I followed the guide faithfully from site to site, putting check marks in the margins at night when I plotted my route for the next day. On my first trip to Italy, I was so excited that I made a whirlwind, whistlestop trip to five cities in two weeks. I still remember everything, the revelation of my first espresso under the arcades in Bologna, remarking that it stung my throat. Climbing every tower and soaking my blistered feet in the bidet at night. The candlelit restaurant in Florence where I first met ravioli with butter and sage. The pastries I bought to take to the room, all wrapped and tied like a present. The dark leather smell of the shoe store where I bought (inception of a lifelong predilection) my first pair of Italian shoes.(p.146)

A quick look back - I see how far I have climbed. The wide-open Val di Chiana spreads a fan of green below me. On clear days I can spot Monte San Savino, Sinalunga, and Montepulciano in the distance. They could have sent smoke signals: big festa tonight, come on over. Soon I've reached the high town walls, and to get one more brush with the Etruscans, drive all the way to the last gate, Porta Colonia, where the big boggling Etruscan stones support the base, with medieval and later additions built on top. (p.150)

EXCERPTS FROM THE BOOK

In these stony old Tuscan towns, I get no sense of stepping back in time that I've had in Yugoslavia, Mexico, or Peru. Tuscans are of this time; they simply have had the good instinct to bring the past along with them. If our culture says burn your bridges behind, you-and it does-theirs says cross and recross. (p.152)

Soon we arrive in Montalcino, a town built for broad views along a bony ridge of hills. The eye seems to stop before the waving green landscape does. Small wine shops line the street. A table with white cloth and a few wineglasses waits right inside each door, as though inviting you in for an intimate drink with the proprietor and a toast to the great vintages. (p.163)

Our next base is a villa, now a small hotel, on the Acquaviva vineyard property outside Montemerano. Ed has cased the Gambero Rosso guide and spotted this tiny village with three excellent restaurants. Since it is central for most of what we want to see, we decide to stay put for a few days rather than checking in and out of hotels. A ree-lined drive leads to a park-sized garden with shady places to sit outside and look over the rolling vineyards. We have a room right on the garden. I push open the shutters and the window fills with blue hydrangea. We quickly unpack and take off again; we can relax later. (p.167)

We're falling into a deep relaxation and exhilaration by now, just what a vacation is supposed to be. (p.175)

"Would you like to go to Morocco?" Ed asks out of nowhere. "What about Greece? I never intended not to go to Greece." Seeing new places always brings up the possibility of other new places. (p.175)

In the morning we move on to Riva degli Etruschi, coast of the Etruscans. We can't get away from them. This beach does have the rented chairs but, since it joins the preserve, it's not as crowded. We're able to take a long, long walk on the beach followed by a siesta in our tiny individual cottage. We're near San Vincenzo, where Italo Calvino summered. (p.179)

In Tuscany, people are more law abiding. They may jump the gun but they do stop for signals. Here, the challenge is the medieval streets with inches to spare on either side of the car and the sudden turn a bicycle barely could make. Fortunately, most towns have closed their historic centres to cars, a boon all around because the scale of piazza life is restored. A boon for my nerves, too, as the twisted streets lured Ed and we have backed out of too many when they became impassable, all the locals stopping and staring as we reverse through their town. (p.186)

Most of our trips are on small roads. We've learned not to hesitate to take the unpaved roads if the route looks appealing. Usually, they're well maintained or at least navigable. We've been known to go off road to get to an abandoned thirteenth-century church and, as in the tiny towns, to back up when necessary. (p.186)

Ferragosto, at first, baffled us as a holiday until we began to understand it as a state of mind. We, gradually, have entered this state of mind ourselves. Ferragosto, August 15, marks the ascension of the corporeal body and soul of the Virgin Mary into heaven. Why August 15? Perhaps it was too hot to remain on earth another day. (p.189)

"There's no downside," I say firmly. The waterfall of problems with Benito, the financial worries, the language barriers, the hot water in the toilet, the layers of gunk on the beams, the long flights over from California - this is nothing compared to the absolute joy of being in possession of this remarkable little hillside on the edge of Tuscany. (p.195)

Ed calls up from downstairs, "look out the window." Snow fell in the night, just enough to dust the fronds of the palm tree and glaze the terraces with a sheen of white. "Beautiful! Turn up the heat." My bare feet feel icy. I pull on a sweatshirt, jeans, and shoes and run downstairs. The front doors are wide open, the frosty light pouring in. Ed scrapes a snowball off the outdoor table. I jump aside and it lands in the hall. The sleeping beauties have not yet emerged. We take our coffee to the wall, brush it off, and watch the fog below us moving like an opalescent sea. Snow on Christmas! Is this much happiness allowed? I secretly ask myself. Will the gods not come down and confiscate this health, abundance of cheer, these bright expectations? (p.218)

But it's fun to get off at the Florence station, which always brings me the fresh memory of my first trip to Italy almost twenty-five years ago, the exotic, smoky sound of the loudspeaker announcing the arrival from Rome on binario undici and the departure for Milano on binario uno, the oily train smells and everyone going somewhere. (p.241)

The Tuscan July heat is invasive to the body but not to the stone churches that hold on to the dampness of winter, releasing a grey coolness slowly throughout the summer. I have a feeling, walking into one, then another, that I walk into palpable silence. A lid seems to descend on our voices, or a large damp hand. In the vast church of San Biagio below Montepulciano, there is an airy quiet as you enter. Right under the dome, you can stand in one spot and speak or clap your hands and far up against the inner cup of the dome an eerie echo sends the sound rapidly back. The quality of the sound is not like the hello across a lake but a sharp, repeated return. (p.265)

Since I have been spending summers in Cortona, the major shock and joy is how at home I feel. But not just at home, returned to that primal first awareness of home. I feel at home because dusty trucks park at intersections and sell watermelons. The same thump to test for ripeness. The boy holds up a rusty iron scale with discs of different sizes for counterweight. His arm muscle jumps up like Popeye's and the breeze brings me a whiff of his scent of dry grasses, onions, and dirt. (p.266)

I move through this foreign house I've acquired as though my real ancestors left their presences in these rooms. As though this were the place I always came home to. (p.266)

EXCERPTS FROM THE BOOK

Neruda claimed there are only eleven subjects to write about. He doesn't say what they are, but one of them, and the most difficult, must be happiness. When I wrote the first chapters, they were for my own pleasure and my own sense of discovery. Everything was new: the language, the way Italians drove and dressed, what they ate and not what we thought they ate, how they loved the land, and how la familia was valued over everything else. (p.290)

I'll try, I told myself, simply to re-create this place in tactile, evocative words. The writing was spontaneous. When you're falling in love, everything is lit from within. Previously, I wrote only poetry but in those heady early Tuscan days, my lines kept expanding, my margins filling with notes. (p.290)

Everyday life in such a new old place changed some rhythm in my brain and body. I gave over and let the place shape me. (p.291)

There is no end to Italy. Several lifetimes of writing would not begin to exhaust such a place. Every time I return to Bramasole, I am washed in renewal and excitement. (p.291)

On the "no change" side, I still wake up every day and face a blank page. Writing continues to mean inventing a world one word at a time, and words never are to be taken for granted. (p.292)

Far more than the book's fate, life in Tuscany altered my compass. If I went there for the art, food, culture, and landscape, I stayed for the people who live with a vivacity toward every day. I'm seduced by the Italian ability to enjoy life. My neighbours and friends have a particular genius for celebration at the table. The pleasures of eating and drinking are never tortured into psychological struggles. Instead, the relaxation around food is extraordinary. No need to ask if you can bring an extra guest or two. Throw in another handful of pasta; grab a chair. So much is revealed by how food gets to the table—who prepares it (everyone in the family), who's seated (great-grandfather and two-year-old toddler), what's the dynamic at the table (shouting, talking all at once, singing, card playing afterwards). For me, product of a lavish Southern table, food was the defining point of turning me half-Tuscan. The life around the table reminds me of the South. Every time I pull up my chair to a friend's table, I know that I am home. (p.292)

Underlying all the qualities that make Tuscans at home in the world: Time. They have an ease with time that I, new-world person, never will fully grasp. People who own so much history must feel more comfortable in time. (p.292)

"It can't be that good," some have remarked. But it is. If only I had the ability to reveal how good I find life on my little hill-side. Not that Italy is perfect. Far from it. Nasty people exist (I've had run-ins with a few), politics are crazy, people struggle because of the economy, etc., etc. Despite negatives though, daily life seems full of promise. People still take time for visiting in the piazza, preparing great food, taking afternoon walks, doing what they please. (p.293)

I listened to the musical notes of water cascading into the ancient cistern, saw lilacs, dahlias, lilies, and secret reading spots among the olive trees. The beauty of the landscape saturated my days. It seemed dreamy. Almost surreal. And it still does. Is this much happiness allowed? (p.294)

These old hill towns retain an intense sense of community. If I were writing Under the Tuscan Sun today, some things would be different. The magnetic pull of the piazza would not. (p.294)

My husband's wild study where a painting of Dante looks down on the chaotic desk, the cool white bedroom with the iron bed draped with linen, my new kitchen with the big blue stove, the dining room that holds many memories of feasts with friends under the faded blue and apricot fresco we discovered long ago-- the house lives powerfully on its own and, so many years later, I feel powerfully alive inside its thick stone walls. (p.295)

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