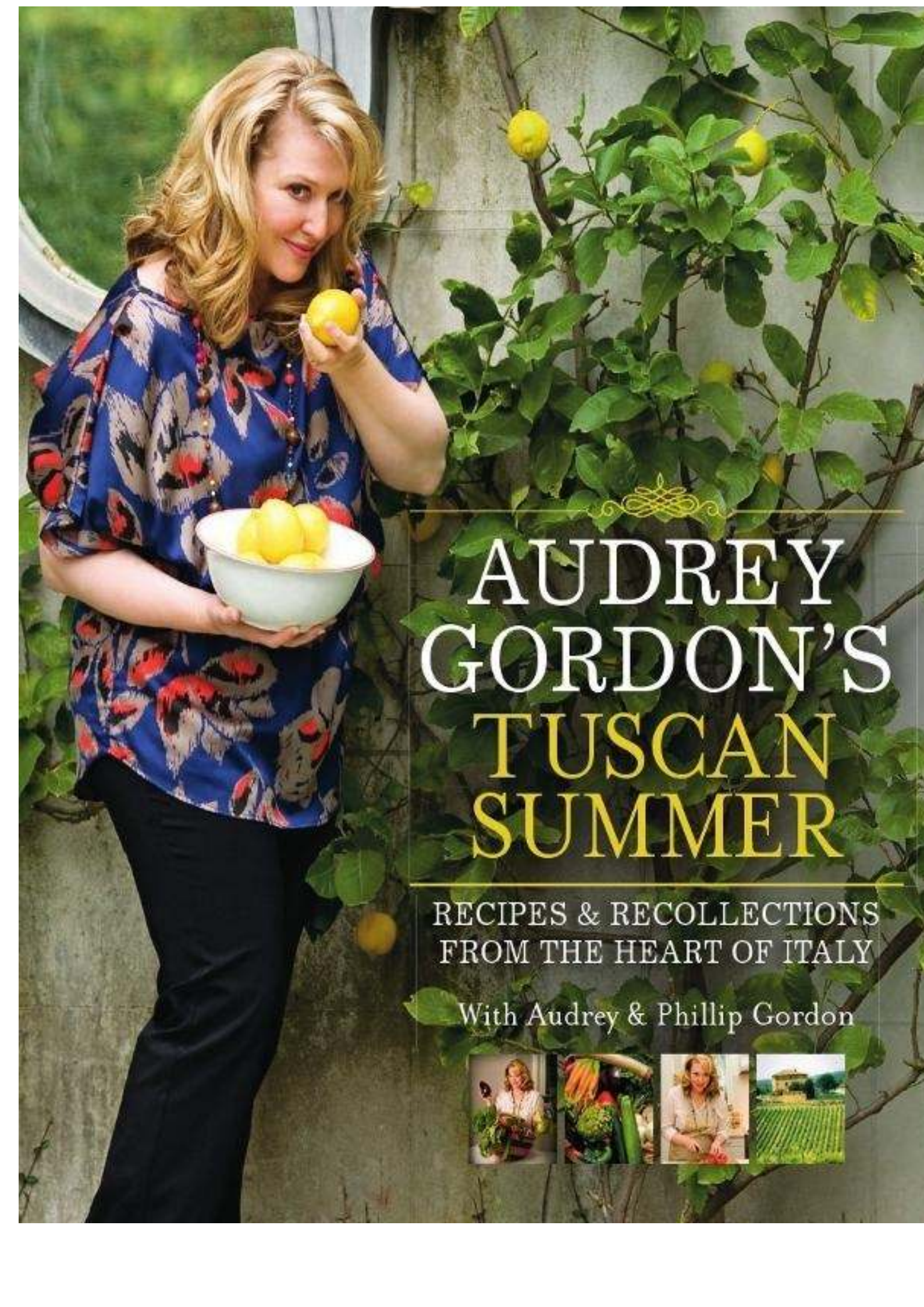


AUDREY
GORDON'S
TUSCAN
SUMMER

RECIPES & RECOLLECTIONS
FROM THE HEART OF ITALY

With Audrey & Phillip Gordon





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DEDICATION

EUNICE MAY FROTTLEY (1923–2004)

Many of the recipes in this book are family heirlooms handed down to me by my grandmother, who was a simply wonderful cook. As a young bride, she kept a comprehensive journal of favourite recipes clipped from magazines, as well as numerous lists she had compiled, with fascinating headings such as 'Interesting Herbs' or 'Dazzling Desserts'. She even had a section labelled 'Things to Never Try Again', which contained a recipe for borage-ginger soup, along with a photograph of the coal delivery boy.



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Why Italy?



Maggio may



Giugno june





Luglio july



Agosto august



Postscript



At the end of this book I've left a page or two for notes. If you think you've got something to add that hasn't been covered perfectly adequately already, then feel free to defile the book. But I suggest you think twice before doing so.

This book is not directed at celebrity super chefs or *haute cuisine* high flyers dazzling diners in their Michelin-starred restaurants. It's written for you, the ordinary cook, stuck at home with insufficient bench space and a set of chipped mixing bowls. My fervent hope is that it will inspire you, and give you the confidence to believe that you can be a wonderful cook or, at the very least, an adequate one.

This book is meant as a guide, not a set of strict rules to be deviated from at your peril! There's no need to slavishly follow my every measurement and step. Doesn't a violinist playing Beethoven occasionally add a few notes to the score? Or an aircraft pilot about to take off sometimes skip a pre-flight safety check or two? Of course! And so should you.

I'm a no-nonsense chef. If a recipe calls for squash and I think thinly sliced courgette will work just as well (not to mention add a peppery crunch), then I'll just go ahead and do it. That's what cooking should be about. Going with one's impulses and to hell with the consequences! That said, I've had years of practice and I simply can't be held responsible for any inevitable disappointment that might arise from your attempts at improvisation. If you are a novice in the kitchen, I'd strongly urge you to follow my recipes closely. And, no matter how experienced you might be, please pay careful attention to each instruction. You'd be amazed at the number of people who read 'gently simmer' and then proceed to 'simmer gently', or who think there's no real difference between chopping tomatoes roughly and chopping them coarsely.

Finally, this book is not meant to be a monologue. I want you to imagine I'm there in the kitchen *with* you, helping, guiding, prodding and – only occasionally – rapping your knuckles with the handle of an egg whisk.

Audrey
XXX

GRAZIA!

A book like this doesn't happen without a jolly lot of hard work. The following are just a few of the many people I would like to thank, as well as a few who are included for purely contractual reasons.

✦ First and foremost, my darling husband, Phillip. You are the egg in my omelette. Thank you, thank you, thank you!

✦ My wonderful photographer Desiree Coffts – *molto grazia!* What this woman can do with a glazing brush, a bottle of glycerine and some soft light is nothing short of extraordinary.

✦ Fiona Steed for designing the book so beautifully. Even if some of your amazing ideas (such as printing each recipe on edible rice paper) proved a little too visionary for certain publishers to fully appreciate, let alone agree to provide the funds for, they were nothing short of inspirational and I look forward to working together again.

✦ My food stylist Jo French for her invaluable help and eye for detail. Even when we thought everything looked perfect, she was always able to find some fault – and that is a gift.

✦ My creative designer Angela Pryor, who scoured the second-hand shops of Tuscany for authentic tableware and kitchen appliances. The fact that we were able to use so few of the items she secured in our photo shoots is in no way a reflection on the quality of her work.

✦ My commissioning editor, Hugh Creighton, who not only encouraged and carefully guided this book but also put up with my frequent phone calls complaining about the lack of publisher support. Hugh, never blamed you *personally* for the budgetary constraints that threatened to derail this wonderful project. Yes, I was cross but I now realise that you are just a very small and relatively unimportant cog in the overall book business. So thank you for doing what you could.

✦ Fiona Scarfe and Siobhan Mullens made useful suggestions.

✦ Leslie Reed, less so.

✦ Tamara Feros, my editor, whose attempts to remove anything she deemed 'extraneous' from this book were as persistent as they were misguided. Ta.

Thanks also to my personal assistant, Claire Bayley, who was with me for over seven years and would still be today if she could just display a slightly more flexible and less strident tone when dealing with other people.



And finally, to the people of Tuscany, who welcomed us into their lives with such a generosity of spirit. Every time we ate together they wanted to share their knowledge and passion for food. In the end it's not *your* recipe or *their* recipe, it's one that belongs to anyone with a love of cooking. (That said, all recipes in this book are mine and any attempt to reproduce them without written permission from my publisher will be met with legal action).

THE RECIPES

I'm not interested in taste from a food-snobbish, status sense (please, I'm just not interested, so stop going on about it!). I am, above all, a practical cook. I realise that the average person doesn't have the time or money to go out and buy a massive list of exotic ingredients and then spend seventeen hours in the kitchen sweating over a pestle while waiting for the lime coulis to reduce.

The recipes in this book are simple, rarely calling for anything more than a few bowls, some saucepans, a set of poultry shears and – on one or two occasions – a nitrogen infuser. What's more, I'm no purist either. If my recipe calls for stock and, instead of slaving for hours over a boiling pot of bones, you want to pick up some shop-bought concentrate – then go right ahead. Provided you can live with this sort of compromise, the decision is entirely yours.

A word on ingredients

There's no need to worry if you can't make it to an authentic Tuscan market! Fortunately, Italy now exports many of its finest products, so anyone can enjoy making these dishes at home. A few specialities, such as lard from Colonnata or sheep's bile from Pienza, cannot be obtained unless you are willing to import the raw ingredients or build your own slaughter pit (see my website for specifications), but most of the recipes in this book consist of easily obtainable items.



While every effort has been made to ensure that the recipes in this book are accurate, I can take no personal responsibility for errors or omissions that may have occurred. I'm *still* getting correspondence related to my last publication which included the instruction to season a dish with 'freshly ground black people'. (Honestly, I sometimes I think readers go out of their way to be offended, don't you?). The fact is, I have *many* dark skinned friends and would never wish to see use

to enhance the flavour of foods.

KITCHEN NOTES

Measurements

While there is no shortage of measuring cups, spoons and kitchen scales on the market, I prefer to go by instinct. Pick up a handful of plain organic flour. Does it feel like 10 grams to you? Then it probably is. It's the same with butter and granulated sugar, although slightly less so.

Conversions

The recipes in this book use metric measurements. To convert from metric to imperial, as a general rule, halve the amount and add 1 egg.

Dry

1 cup = 2.4 handfuls

A smattering = 3 scatterings

A smidgen = ½ a blob

Wet

1 glug = 2½ nips

A splash = ½ a splodge

Serving sizes

Each recipe in this book is designed to serve four people. If you are cooking for big eaters (or Americans), you might consider doubling the amounts.

A word on knives

It is absolutely essential that you use the correct knife for the job. A vegetable knife should not be used for paring, any more than you'd cut bread with a carving knife. You don't see a surgeon removing someone's appendix with a meat cleaver, do you? (Although I have heard some absolute horror stories about public hospitals!) It's the same when deflourating artichokes. I find it absolutely heartbreaking to witness an otherwise promising meal being *ruined* during the preparatory stages by carelessly chosen cutting implements. Know your knives. Sharpen them. Love them.



Food hygiene

Hands are the most common way of carrying bacteria from one food to another. When running my restaurants, I always made it a rule to wash my hands with an anti-bacterial cleanser, especially after touching the waste bin or any of the casual staff.

A word on organic ingredients

Throughout this book I advocate the use, where possible, of organic ingredients. Not only do they have more flavour, but food grown organically is so much better for the environment. Yes, I know it might be a little more expensive but when it comes to the future of our planet, it's a small price to pay. And to be honest, I find that food often tastes better when you've paid that little bit more for it, don't you?

SHUTTING UP SHOP

I am, officially, exhausted. It's hard to believe that my husband, Phillip, and I have been running our award-winning restaurant now for almost eleven years, originally as Audrey's (with moderate success) before making the change to audrey's, at which point there was no holding us back!

These past twelve months, in particular, have been somewhat trying. Managing the business, shooting the pilot for my new television series, book signings, countless meetings and public appearances – it was a schedule neither of us could maintain for much longer. Things got so hectic around Christmas that Phillip and I even found ourselves having to prearrange times to make love! Not exactly the most spontaneous or romantic situation, especially when – due to last-minute complications – one of us was often not able to be there.

We closed the door on audrey's on 24 April, reopening it the following day to let the couple at table 17 out, before closing again for good. I can tell you now, shutting the restaurant was not easy. In fact it was almost like a death in the family – only no one was fighting over the sideboard. The hardest thing was telling our staff, many of whom had been with us for more than a decade. All I can say is thank God for emails – I simply couldn't have faced looking into their eyes.



That said, I feel I've walked away at a good time. I'm proud of what we've achieved over the past decade. Yes, there have been the awards, too many to mention here (you can visit my website for a complete list). And the accolades. Simon Hadwell of the *Guardian* once described our 64-course degustation menu as 'a must-eat event for serious foodies'. But it's more about what we've contributed to the world of food. While I don't take sole credit for putting *vino cotto* back onto the international culinary landscape, there's no doubt our pioneering use of this long-overlooked ingredient has greatly helped restore its rightful place. (I have to laugh at the number of so-called 'cutting edge' establishments that have since blindly aped this trend, thinking no one will remember who actually started it!)

More than all of this, however, what I'm most proud of is the way audrey's made high-quality, innovative cuisine accessible to everyone. Naturally, we had our core clientele of discerning diners, but Phillip and I always made a point of encouraging *ordinary* people to eat at our restaurant. Obviously not on weekends, and we tended to seat them towards the back, but they were most

definitely allowed in.

The other motivating factor for closing was the sense that, in many ways, there was nothing more to be achieved. When you've taken out *Table* magazine's 'Best Inner City Ambience' gong three years running, where do you go? I am passionate about food, and will throw myself into any aspect of its promotion, whether cooking for a restaurant full of hungry diners, hosting a Master Class or simply endorsing a new range of fragrant bin liners. But I didn't want to ever reach the stage where this passion began to fade.

I'll be honest, there were a few times when I came perilously close to feeling a sense of ennui. I can clearly remember one wet Wednesday afternoon when I'd rushed across town for a corporate product launch, arriving cold and exhausted. I was in the middle of demonstrating a twin-drawer Dishlex to a group of kitchenware distributors from Luton when I suddenly had a near mental meltdown. I can recall thinking, 'What's the point?' Back home later that night, I told Phillip my worries. Stepping out of the shower, I said to him, 'I think I might be losing my love of food.' The darling took one look at me naked and dripping wet on the bath-mat and replied, 'I can promise you that hasn't happened.' Still, it was a close shave – and clearly time for a change.



That's when the two of us got talking. What if we took a break? Packed everything up and headed someplace where the pace of life was a little slower. Phillip has vivid memories of travelling through France during his gap year, and his eyes lit up as he spoke of the narrow streets, historic chateaux and of course, the women with their elegant clothes and stylish good looks. Which is why I decided on Italy, or Tuscany to be more precise.

The trip would be a chance for us to step out of the limelight, to get away from the pressures of public life and enjoy a quiet, private break together. And then write a book about it.

We spoke to a few friends about the idea of 'disappearing' for a few months and they were all surprisingly supportive. In fact, before we knew it we found ourselves the guests of honour at a lavish going away party organised by our dear chums Claire and Martin Loveshaw. It was a truly special night, in no way diminished by their uninspired choice of finger food (mini quiches anyone?), and we received some wonderful going away gifts.

Naturally, we told everyone to make sure they came to visit, although Phillip was suitably selective when handing out our actual address (most people just got a post office box). Then, with a final '*arrivederci*' toast, we were on our way.



‘Do you ever have one of those days when you simply don't feel like cooking, and even the thought of getting out the frying pan seems all too much? I don't.’

WHY ITALY?

I love Italy. For hundreds of years, if not centuries, the people of Italy (Italians) have been living here. And without doubt the culinary heart of this amazing country would have to be Tuscany. Some of the world's finest olive oil, wines, smallgoods and cheeses come from this fertile region abutting the Ligurian Sea.

In addition to food, there's also the culture of Italy to embrace. This is the land of artists: Michelangelo, Botticelli, Mussolini, not to mention Leonardo da Vinci and my very own 'old master' Phillip. Our trip would give him the chance to pursue his art, something that's had to take a back seat while we ran the restaurant. Phillip's a terribly gifted painter and there couldn't be a better place than Tuscany for him to exercise his muse.

GETTING AWAY

Of course, getting away proved more difficult than we first thought. We had to reassure nervous colleagues that we were only a phone call away, tie up various business deals and organise somewhere to stay. Then there was the packing up at home! As our house-minding service was not able to start for several weeks, we decided to leave the rabbits locked in the laundry with plenty of water and lettuce. We took a similar approach with Phillip's mother.

Much of our luggage was sent on ahead but we still found ourselves at Gatwick in mid-May with some rather over-sized suitcases. I usually find the staff at the check-in counter pretty understanding but wouldn't you know it, we got the employee from hell (or, to be more accurate, Hyderabad). I'm not sure if young Sanjeet was deliberately trying to make life difficult, but frankly I found the concept of someone of her background penalising me for taking too much out of *my own country* just a little hard to take.

Several hours (not to mention gin and tonics!) later, Phillip and I touched down at Fiumicino, collected our hire car – a rather sporty Fiat (when in Rome ...!) – and set off, with Phillip behind the wheel and me beside him as navigator.

The road signs were terribly confusing and my last-minute cries of 'left' and 'right' meant that Phillip was changing lanes like a modern-day Fangio, much to the annoyance of other drivers. After about half an hour we realised we were lost. Worse, we were still in the airport car park.

Maggio

may



18 May

I can tell you, it was an enormous relief when we reached our hotel, the stylish Piazza Pallazzo, and we wasted no time in depositing our bags and heading out to explore. It had been almost three hours since either of us had eaten (apart from a few packets of crisps in the car), so food was very much priority *numero uno*. And where else to enjoy our first meal but at one of Rome's signature restaurants, Gilberto's. By the time we arrived, the place was pretty full, as was Gilberto himself, a larger-than-life character who – despite success and fame – still makes a habit of personally greeting his patrons. Now that's service!

After a quick *aperitif* at the bar, Phillip and I were seated. I wasted no time in ordering that most quintessential of Roman dishes, oxtail stew. As the steaming plate was placed before me, I knew that at last, we had arrived!



The Piazza Pallazzo has genuine period charm. Each of its 66 rooms boasts antiques such as Etruscan rugs, four-poster beds, vases and dial-up internet.



Funny, isn't it, how inconsiderate people can be? When it's obvious one is about to take a photo they still insist on wandering into the shot!

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