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The Sicilian Film Festival on board of the MSC cruise ship "Lirica" on March 16th

Sicilian Culture Cruise All Sold Out

Incredible request for the world's first Traveling Film Festival



The success of the Sicilian Film Festival

The success of the inaugural Sicilian Film Festival in 2006 was very encouraging. It is now renowned throughout the United States and the world and is already quoted in encyclopedias like Wikipedia among the most significant and notable festivals. This festival is a creation of **Emanuele Viscuso**. Everything started when The **Ragusani Nel Mondo** association requested to show some movies made by Sicilian directors in Florida. Sicilians, Italians, Americans, and people from every ethnic background enjoyed the festival equally and felt as part of a large family. The Sicilian Film Festival is quickly becoming a showcase for the fruits of Sicilian cultural creativity and offers its supporters a unique and personal opportunity to take part in the creation of this international festival.

The Italian region of Sicily bestowed the special honor of "Sicilians in the world: Ambassador of Culture" on Emanuele Viscuso this past April as a sign of its support and approval of his efforts to establish the Festival. He received this honor along with 17 other people of Sicilian origin from throughout the world, representing various aspects of culture and different vocations. His name also appears, again on Wikipedia, in the list of the most relevant Sicilian-Americans.

Dream or true ?

How to describe a film festival during a 11 days cruise starting from Fort Lauderdale, Florida and passing through Jamaica, Colombia, Panama, Costa Rica and Honduras on a ship containing 2400 "interested in Sicilian culture" people? A dream? A incredible event? An unrepeatable occasion? A joke? Probably something very special. At least.

This cruise started to be a real thing just five minutes after a phone call between Emanuele Viscuso, Sicilian Film Festival president, and Salvo Mule', special events free lance for MSC Cruises.

Few months of preparation and the cruise is here, leaving from Fort Lauderdale, FL on March 16th 2007 and coming back on March 27th. Below the schedule.

16th	Fort Lauderdale, Florida		7:00 pm
17th	At Sea	----	----
18th	Ocho Rios, (Jamaica)	1:00 am	7:00 pm
19th	At Sea	----	----
20th	Cartagena (Colombia)	8:00 am	5:00 pm
21st	San Blas (Panama)	9:00 am	6:00 pm
22nd	Cristobal (Panama)	8:00 am	6:00 pm
23rd	Puerto Limon (Costa Rica)	8:00 am	4:00 pm
24th	At Sea	----	----
25th	Roatan Islands (Honduras)	7:00 am	2:00 pm
26th	At Sea	----	----
27th	Fort Lauderdale, Florida	8:00 am	

What is the Sicilian Film Festival ?

Usually, if you were to think of people of Sicilian origin in the world of cinema, you would think of **Vittorio de Seta**, or, Oscar winner **Giuseppe Tornatore**. However, the famous director Frank Capra was born in a town outside of Palermo; and Italian-American **Vincente Mannelli's** grandfather was Sicilian, as was even **Susan Sarandon's** mother! **Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa**, author of "The Leopard"; Camilleri, author of the highly successful television series "**Commissario Montalbano**"; music composer and film director **Battiato**; and, last, **Emanuele Crialese** whose film, "**Nuovomondo**" represented Italy at the 2007 Oscars, are others who are also of Sicilian origin and standouts in the world of cinema. The international recognition of this cinematographic talent is important for the country of Italy (and, of course, its large region, Sicily); and, now, thanks to the efforts of the Sicilian Film Festival, Sicilian artists have a legitimate vehicle to better display their genius to the world.

In addition to promoting Sicilian cinematographic culture, the Sicilian Film Festival is a promoter of culture in general and, especially here, Sicily has much to offer. **Archimedes**, the ancient Greek mathematician was Sicilian. **Jawhar as-Siqilli** (the Sicilian) founder of Cairo on 969 was Sicilian. Nobel prize winners **Salvatore Quasimodo** and **Luigi Pirandello**; composer **Vincenzo Bellini** and artist **Antonello da Messina**; writers **Leonardo Sciascia** and **Vincenzo Consolo**; and, let's not forget **Giovanni Verga** and **Vitaliano Brancati** were also Sicilian. Italy's most popular showman **Fiorello**, is also Sicilian. Aicon Yachts, among Italy's primary shipbuilder, is a Sicilian company.

The Sicilian Film Festival, therefore, will be an international showcase for all of the best of Sicily, including its culture, history, art, music, food, and people.



The MSC ship Lirica

The on-board cultural program

A press conference will open the trip with the disclosure of a detailed program still open to surprises. **Emanuele Viscuso** is keeping almost secret the contents of the cultural activities on board. But we have here some anticipation. Among the movies, will be seen "**Lettere dalla Sicilia**", directed by **Manuel Gilberti**, and "**Musikanten**" by **Franco Battiato**. Among the short movies "**American Diary**" by **Andrea di Falco** and "**Fedra**" by **Salvo Bitonti**. Also music will be presented. As a matter of fact, together with recorded pieces by Sicilian groups as "**Vucciria**", "**Sun**" and others, **Emanuele Viscuso** himself will perform a **piano concert**. **Viscuso** has a long story as music composer and performer in theaters and TV shows. This cruise will represent his official return to the stage.

A big part in this cultural event will be the Italian food with special underlining of the rich **Sicilian cuisine**. In fact Sicilian food and wines, but not only, will be served to the lucky guests.

Art openings will not be missing: two **photo exhibitions** will be organized. One featuring "**Palermo Palaces**" with pictures by **Emanuele Viscuso**, and another one called "**Homage to Gino Calcinella**" a great photographer from Siracusa who passed away last year.

In addition to films, music, art and food a special corner will be dedicated to poetry lovers with readings from the Sicilian Nobel award **Salvatore Quasimodo**. A documentary of all this will be shouted during the events and projected in Miami Beach at the regular events of the Sicilian Film Festival in May.

Magnificent interiors of Palermo's Palaces photographed by Emanuele Viscuso

Live like a Princess in Palermo

The artist reveals their secrets. Some palaces open to hospitality.



Palazzo Conte Federico Photo Emanuele Viscuso



Palazzo Conte Federico Photo Emanuele Viscuso

"Don't go to Palermo with an itinerary, go with an open heart," pleads fashion designer Domenico Dolce. The co-founder of Dolce & Gabbana speaks of his home town with a passion shared by its patrician residents. Since the recent revival of Palermo as a tourist mecca, many leading families have decided to open their ancestral homes - and even their hearts - to the public. While most palaces are willing to hold wedding receptions and grand dinners, a select number now welcome paying guests. Even prestigious princes need to keep a (regularly restored) roof over their heads, and have to count the cost of cleaning priceless chandeliers and portable altars. Sicily nurtures the seductive illusion that you are a treasured guest rather than a common tourist. But it may not be an illusion: Sicilian hospitality is legendary, as suffocatingly sweet as the local cassata sponge cake. These sumptuous palaces are genuine homes, even if it is a gothic pile with a baroque ballroom and medieval kitchen. As such, the pleasures are deeply domestic, with the chance to saunter from one scene to another, from balconies as private as boudoirs to the bustling market beyond the portals. Set amidst a jumble of eastern-style souks, tiny squares and scented gardens, these noble palaces present secret snapshots of the city. The families are a delightful mixture of the imperious and the genuinely imperial, of desiccated old fogeys and dynamic entrepreneurs. Among the charming princesses and courtly, tweed-clad princes lurk occasional crashing snobs bound to their family tree. Rivalry is rife, if expressed in genteel terms, with gentle shrugs laced with wicked asides. Some nobles manage to move with the times while others are mired in the past, living off splendid memories when the Sicilian nobility was awash with servile retainers. But nowadays, even princesses remember to turn out the lights and turn down the bed-covers. Fortunately, Sicilian hospitality and family pride succeed in making duty seem like pleasure rather than an irksome chore. Life has moved on, and the liveried footmen may be borrowed, but the generous city spirit stays the same. Palazzo Conte Federico, for all its grandeur, is the palace that most feels like a much-loved family home. Set close to the Cathedral, this beguiling medieval and baroque affair is built on a stretch of the Roman-Phoenician city walls.



Palazzo Conte Federico Photo Emanuele Viscuso



Museo Archeologico Photo Emanuele Viscuso

The palazzo is typically Sicilian in being a subtle blend of styles, as much a happy hybrid as the marriage of its owners, who combine Austrian sense with Sicilian sensibility. The gracious ancestral owner is Count Federico, a vintage car enthusiast and rally driver who can trace his lineage back to the great Emperor Frederick II, a 12th-century leader, law-maker, musician and scientist who led the cultural renaissance in the South. The ravishing Countess Federico, a vivacious soprano from Salzburg, plays supreme hostess to his absent-minded professor, enchanting guests with operettas and Neapolitan melodies. By contrast with her husband, the unaffected Countess, along with their enthusiastic sons, are happiest cycling around Palermo. Still, in vintage car rallies, the Countess acts as her husband's navigator and lucky mascot, as he wins when she's on board. Racing driver friends of Michael Schumacher recently stayed at the palace and thanked their hosts with a rare set of tyres for the Count's vintage car. A perfect evening at the palace combines music, feasting and fantasy in princely proportions. Before cocktails by candlelight in the Arab-Norman tower, fortunate guests can stroll through the state-rooms and admire the suits of amour in the knights' hall. Dinner is based on exotic recipes dating from when Sicily was under Arab-Norman rule, and the centre of civilised Europe. Other dishes date from an 18th-century Sicilian heyday when noble families maintained private French chefs. A concert in the baroque ballroom includes music on a piano once played by Wagner, in a palace appreciated by Verdi. Privileged guests can then sink into the baroque bedroom or wallow in a gorgeous medieval suite, complete with canopied tester bed. Palazzo Aiutamicristo, a neighbouring and equally stunning historic home, also seems to be in safe hands. As the regional president of the Italian National Trust, Baron Calafati di Canalotti is passionate about his heritage. Indeed, a recent restoration of the roof led to the discovery of a medieval coffered ceiling buried beneath later additions. The palace was built by a Pisan merchant who pioneered banking in Sicily and traded wool, cheese and cereal from London to Barcelona. The Pisan merchant used his wealth to create a monument to his greater glory, employing master-craftsmen from France, Spain and all over Italy. As a result, the palazzo can boast guests as grand as Emperor Charles V, who stayed here in 1535 because Palermo's royal palace was not considered impressive enough. *Continues on the last page*

This whole exhibition will be regularly featured for the Sicilian Film Festival, Miami edition, at the **Bruce Lurie Art Gallery**, located in the Miami Design District at 900 NE 1st Avenue, Miami, Fl. 33137 P : 305-573-7373. Email : info@luriegalleries.com

Incredibly successful at Florida Grand Opera "La Sonnambula" by Sicilian composer Vincenzo Bellini

American Soprano Leah Partridge Sings Lead Role. Operatic Legend Renata Scotto Directs

Miami, FL – January March 10, 2007 - Florida Grand Opera (FGO) completed the season with the new production of Vincenzo Bellini's *La sonnambula*. Performances begun on **February 10 (7 p.m.), continued on February 13, 16, 21, 24, and February and ended up at** the Broward Center for the Performing Arts in Ft. Lauderdale to perform on March 1 and 3. A delegation from the **Sicilian Film Festival** was officially present at February 24 performance with the president **Emanuele Viscuso** and executive vice-director **Maddalena Monti**. Asked by a journalist of **Sun Post**, Viscuso didn't hesitate in describing this production as "perfect". "Perfect acting, beautiful voices, impressive set, music and everything. Simply perfect!" He said. And added: "Promoting this event is a pleasure and an honor for me. As a matter of fact, the Sicilian Film Festival has among its goals to promote Sicily, Sicilian culture and everything coming from this beautiful Mediterranean island. Too many times Sicily has been known more for mafia than for its culture - says Viscuso - and it is now the time to repair this gap."

This production, with new sets and costumes designed by Carlo Maria Diappi for FGO's opening season in the Ziff Ballet Opera House, reunites soprano **Leah Partridge** and director Renata Scotto, who last worked together in FGO's acclaimed 2003 production of *La traviata*, and is conducted by Richard Bonyngue, whose wife, Dame Joan Sutherland, was also a famous Amina.

Renata Scotto, famous for her portrayals of Verdi, Puccini, and *bel canto* heroines at the Metropolitan Opera, La Scala, and major theaters worldwide, made her debut as director at the Met in 1986 with *Madama Butterfly*, which she subsequently staged for Verona, Genoa, and Ancona in Italy, and Palm Beach Opera, Dallas Opera, and FGO in the United States. Her FGO directorial debut was *Tosca* with Deborah Voight (2001), followed by *La traviata* (2003), an opera she first directed in a new production for New York City Opera (1995), telecast on "Live from Lincoln Center," for which she won an Emmy Award. With an active schedule as director and performer, she is also a renowned teacher, and has presented master classes at the top schools and vocal programs throughout the world.

One of the leading opera conductors of the last half century, Maestro Bonyngue has conducted in the world's leading opera houses in Europe, North and South America, Australia and New Zealand as well as the Far East. He has received world-wide acclaim as a scholar of *bel canto* opera and for leading the renaissance of 18th and early-19th century musical theater, such as *Les Huguenots* (Meyerbeer), *Semiramide* and *Sigismondo* (Rossini), *La fille du régiment* and *Lucrezia Borgia* (Donizetti), *Thérèse* (Massenet), *Orfeo* (Haydn), and *I Masnadieri* (Verdi), among many others.

Carlo Maria Diappi, a long-time collaborator of director Renata Scotto, originally trained as an architect in Milan, Italy. He has created productions for all the prestigious theaters of Italy, as well as for theaters and festivals throughout Europe. Besides opera, drama, and ballet, he has also designed costumes for several movies.

The 2007 Sicilian Film Festival in Miami Beach

The second annual Sicilian Film Festival will take place in May 2007 after the special preview on the cruise. Many interesting and internationally-oriented events will accompany the Sicilian Film Festival. Our international operating committee, formed of leaders in the Italian and Sicilian community such as Alberto Rusconi, Franco [Battiato](#), Domitilla Alessi, Camillo Ricordi, [Pino Farinotti](#), Carlo Castellaneta, Claudio Angelini, Pierleone Marzotto, Alessandro Quasimodo, Margherita Pirri Ardizzone, Matteo Platania and institutions such as the University of Perugia, the Experimental Center for Cinematographic arts in Rome, the Leo Matiz Foundation in Bogota and others are working collaboratively to create and promote the Sicilian Film Festival throughout the world.

The great city of Miami, Florida will host the Sicilian Film Festival again in 2007 together with other cities all around the world. Miami will provide the Festival with the ability to continue to be an international fair for Sicilian culture and a cultural meeting place for all Italian-American communities and groups in America. Participants will be treated to a variety of events including films in Italian with English subtitles, parties, presentations, exhibitions, concerts, and other unique experiences. The Festival has already received a high degree of interest from potential sponsors in America and abroad. The idea of the Sicilian Film Festival has also spawned initiatives around the world and in Sicily, such as a Organ Music Festival in the churches of Castelbuono, outside of Palermo, Sicily. In cities such as New York, Los Angeles, Toronto, Bogota, London, Paris, and Lisbon, delegations of the Sicilian Film Festival are being organized to expand the Festival internationally. And, MSC Cruises (www.msccruises.com) has recently proposed to show a preview of the Sicilian Film Festival aboard a special cruise for Italian-Americans in March 2007. (Please also see www.italiancruise.org for information about the cruise).

One of the major attractions at this year's Festival will be Franco Battiato's film "[Musikanten](#)"* a film inspired by the life of Ludwig van Beethoven. Also, the director Manuel Giliberti will be at the Festival to present his film, "[Lettere dalla Sicilia](#)"*, a story about an 18th century English family's visit to Sicily. In addition to the films and the film trailers, actual theater, musicals, photographic exhibits, and other events are also planned for this year's Festival. Thanking the support of a pool of Sicilian publishing houses and starting from Miami, the festival is also opening a series of corners with Italian books to serve all the local Italian community.

No important cultural event would be possible without the gracious help of sponsors, friends and supporters

Sponsor the Sicilian Film Festival!

We need your help

The second-annual Sicilian Film Festival will take place this March and May and include:

- A special preview during a South Caribbean cruise in March
- A Festival dedicated to Sicilian film and culture in Miami and Miami Beach, Florida in April
- a series of cultural events all over the world.
- The preparation of the Organ Music festival in the churches of Castelbuono

The realization of the 2007 Sicilian Film Festival is a very ambitious effort and no important cultural event would be possible without the gracious help of sponsors, friends and supporters, including Italian, Italian-American, and related associations and cultural organizations. I would like you to consider the possibility of being part of this project as much more than an ordinary spectator, but also as a sponsor or a promoter of this special event in your local area.

As you may already know, the Festival is organized as a non-profit corporation, *The Sicilian Cultural and Film Festival*, and all the proceeds of the event will be donated to this entity so that the Festival can continue to be a major attraction for all *people passionate about Sicily* and its culture in the future. Please read about last year's Festival sponsors on

www.sicilianfilmfestival.com/sponsors.html

Your support in becoming a sponsor and promoting the *Sicilian Film Festival* would be a great help to us in making this year's Festival a tremendous success.

The *Sicilian Film Festival* thanks you in advance for your support and cooperation and will remember well all those who assist in our efforts to promote Sicilian culture around the world.

Please, read the files

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on our website www.sicilianfilmfestival.com (go to "Sponsors") and feel free to contact us for exposure.

Thank you

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PERONI
ITALY

Magna Grecia Art

Another successful pre-event of the Sicilian Film Festival dedicated to Greece and “Magna Grecia”

Greece was the historical background of Sicily 2000 years ago. On Sunday February 25 a pre-event of the Sicilian Film Festival dedicated to Greece and “Magna Grecia” (as the whole area including Sicily and south Italy was called at that time) was hosted in the house of the president of the SFF Emanuele Viscuso located at 8300 Hawthorne Ave. Miami Beach, FL 33141. The house is under restyling and the final look will be neoclassic but Greek columns are already decorating its entrance. No better place for such a party.

One hundred V.I.P.s including Sanford Ziff, Tamara and Ariel Elia, Sicilian Baron Carlo Amato and baroness Irela, Viviane Ventura and many others, all white dressed, attended this event featuring artists and works inspired by Greece and Magna Grecia. The artist Anastasia The Great, organizer of the event, prepared a Greek lunch served with Greek wines while a Greek musical background was entertaining the guests.

Anastasia The Great, Angela Crucitti, Herbert Hofer and Emanuele Viscuso himself featured their art works dedicated to Greece.

The next event held at Villa Viscuso will be the **final fundraising party benefiting the Sicilian Film Festival in May**. For info go to: www.sicilianfilmfestival.com or call 305 7104593.



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The future appearance of Villa Viscuso in Miami Beach



Continuing from page 4 “Live like a princess in Palermo”

As with many city palaces, the fierce exterior gives few clues as to the treasure trove within, from gothic crenellations to baroque balconies. The palace is built around an exotic 15th-century private courtyard encircled by a delicate loggia overlooking a giant palm tree. The fabulous frescoed ballroom is still in use, even if the baron's eccentric grandfather preferred it as his personal cycling track, proving himself to be an eternal boy racer even in later years. The ballroom's bold rococo frescoes depict an allegory of princely virtues, encompassing valor and glory, nobility and justice, peace and prudence. But when this idealisation of princely power becomes too much, the intimate guest suites can provide a cosy retreat. The suave baron and his hospitable wife make guests welcome in a couple of charming bedrooms, decorated in period style, but indoor cycling is no longer permitted.

Palazzo dei Marchesi Ugo delle Favare, set on Piazza Bologni, one of the grandest squares in the city, is a stone's throw from the lovely Arab-Norman Cathedral and raucous city markets. Whether there to inspect the blood-stained swordfish or the sun-kissed tomatoes, designer-clad baronesses are as common a sight as genuine fishwives. But beyond the haughty baroque façade of Palazzo Ugo, the mood is far more restrained. Baroness Luisa Camerata is the public face of a cultured, low-key family. As a prominent lawyer in Palermo, the baron prefers to keep a lower profile, as does their sultry daughter, a serious student of agronomy. The family estates are there in the background and will need to be tended for future generations. The majestic palace has been in the family since its 18th-century heyday as a society salon. The sumptuously furnished drawing rooms are a reminder of these times, as is the yellow silk dining-room, adorned with myriad mirrors. Guests are accommodated in tastefully furnished apartments reached via a lovely summer terrace. This secret hanging garden is built on the foundations of the city's original Phoenician walls.

Palazzo Raffadali, just around a palatial corner, is still lived in by the princely Raffadali family. As leading lights of the historic houses association, the family battle against death duties in a crusade to preserve the island's heritage, including their home. Despite being in the city centre, the Gothic palace overlooks the remains of a lemon grove. After a dynastic marriage, the family annexed the neighbouring palace, and turned the result into a sophisticated showcase of 17th-century taste. Since then, the palace has been well-restored, despite losing a wing to a fellow aristocrat. The family seat boasts an Empire-style guest bedroom, complete with ancestral family crib and one of the grandest beds in Palermo. Pious guests are also catered for in Palermo Palaces. The Raffadali, like many families, have an ornate portable altar, a relic from Bourbon times when the nobility needed a flexible chapel while absent from their country villas - which naturally came complete with a private chapel.

On formal occasions, the Prince and Princess host period receptions, with costumed actors reciting scenes from *The Leopard*, the classic Sicilian novel set in aristocratic circles. Demure noblewomen dance, do needlework, or cluster around the grand piano while preening coyly behind fans. Yet Princess Stefania is keen to stress the family's normality: "We don't use five sets of knives and forks for dinner every day". Their dapper son, Prince Bernardo, gamely poses by a portrait of a phenomenally ugly ancestor, dubbed "a hippopotamus in muslin" by comedian Arthur Smith.

Palazzo Alliata di Pietratagliata, a stately medieval palace, lies just beyond the boisterous Vucciria market, a reminder that in Palermo all classes happily cohabit. The jumble of styles is also typical of Sicily, which marries gothic, baroque, neo-gothic and art nouveau in this atmospheric historic home. Dynastic marriage has been at the heart of the enterprise ever since the 16th-century Prince of Baucina commissioned the palace, which was later bought by the Dukes of Alliata. As fate would have it, the families were reunited through the marriage of the present Princess Alliata to the Prince of Baucina. On paper, at least, it is a marriage (and palace) made in public relations heaven. While personifying the new breed of professional princesses, the imperious Principessa Signoretta Alliata is proud of being a "double princess" and eager to recount tales of prestigious guests and priceless heirlooms. In the palace, the piece de resistance is the frescoed ballroom, adorned with a Murano glass chandelier, the largest 18th-century chandelier in the world. The chandelier was recently cleaned in honour of a visit by Queen Beatrix of Holland after the Prince of Baucina declared that no queen could be received with dirty chandeliers.

The savvy princess runs upmarket stately homes tours around Palermo as well as offering rural stays on Masseria Mongerrate, her country estate, and, from September, accommodation in the family's palace in Palermo. The fortified farmhouse and rolling hills are emblematic of the sprawling feudal estates that covered Sicily until land reform acts curtailed aristocratic privilege. Even so, the family's Mongerrate estate still pays for its keep, with horses, cows, ducks and geese as much part of the landscape as the low-slung Madonie mountains and distant views of the sea.

Villa San Marco is the most Mediterranean of historic homes, with a turreted main villa framed by botanical gardens and citrus groves. This delicious 18th-century villa in Bagheria, just outside Palermo, was the summer home of the princes of Mirto, and is still lived in by their descendants. Palazzo Mirto, the family's town residence, was donated to the city as an eclectic period museum. It remains a perfectly preserved time capsule of 18th-century life, just as the Palermitan nobility left it. By contrast, the villa started out as a fortified watchtower, as witnessed by the small drawbridge. However, the harsh mood was softened in the 17th century, when Sicilian gardens and terraces turned the estate into a pleasure palace. In the 1940s, the villa welcomed Tomasi di Lampedusa, the writer of *The Leopard*, the literary swan-song of the Sicilian nobility. As a cousin of the owners, he had free rein to indulge his gift for nostalgia, casting his eye over the ancestral carriages and the baroque children's portrait gallery.

In a romantic courtyard overlooking the hills, today's guests can still savour his family memories first-hand. The carriages are still on show in the stables, while the original country-style kitchen remains, hung with Sicilian ceramics and brass pots. Don Vincenzo and Donna Camerata di Casalgismondo take pride in their past, but have added touches of their own, including a colonial-style gazebo where cocktails are served. The former staff quarters are now open to guests, with verandahs overlooking the exotic garden, and breakfast served beside the pool. Decorated in period country style, both of these apartments can accommodate up to six people.

Villa Tasca is the grandest residence of the famous Tasca D'Almerita family, one of Sicily's most prestigious wine dynasties. The villa, set between the historic centre and Monreale, is linked to Regaleali, the Conte Tasca d'Almerita wine estate in the countryside. Since the old Count Tasca's death a few years ago, the wine estate has been put on a more professional footing, but is still run by the family, who also hold cookery courses. The prosperous dynasty, who owned part of Palazzo Aiutamicristo until 1996, have recently opened their romantic 16th-century villa and

gardens to guests. The family has several frescoed suites available, as well as a library and billiards room, with the services of a butler and chauffeur on hand in case the odd pop star or footballer comes to stay.

In the 1780s, patrician owners added crenellated towers and a grand staircase, as well as a classical parterre and water gardens. In 1855, the Tasca family remodelled the grounds in Romantic style, with winding paths, fountains, a swan lake, and tropical gardens. (In familiar Sicilian fashion, Beatrice Lanza brought the title and her conveniently ennobled husband, Lucio Tasca, brought the money). The Tasca vision remains intact, with a palm-lined avenue leading to a lake and a giant banyan tree, the spot where Wagner was supposedly inspired to compose the end of Parsifal. Whether contemporary composers find inspiration or not, the wine should be worth drinking.

In Palermo's palaces, it may be a case of taking in lodgers in order to restore crumbling loggias. But, given a sultry night, swaying palms and a princely bedroom, the city works its seductive spell. Palermo then becomes a playground for the senses - possibly with a Gothic en-suite bathroom attached.

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