

Evening Standard

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**A SANGSTER
SCORNE**

THE REVENGE OF
THE TROPHY WIFE

HOT PLATES

WHO'S LAUNCHING
RESTAURANTS
IN 2008?

Gothic romance

The weird world of Helena Bonham Carter and Tim Burton

MARTIN FREEMAN FREAKS OUT **PLUS** KYLIE, RACHEL WHITEREAD & ROGER MOORE

When I was 18 I lived in a small apartment up eight flights of grey marble stairs overlooking the Piazza San Pietro in Vincelli. In preparation for an impending Classics degree, I would make frequent visits to the Colosseum and the Forum, where I would stroll about the crumbling stones, or sit on a truncated pillar and marvel at the fact that Julius Caesar himself had once passed this way. Being of a romantic disposition, I also walked the Via del Corso dreaming of the lavish interiors behind the hulking granite walls of the Renaissance palazzi there. I could not have imagined that, over a decade later, I would have the keys to the heavy wooden doors of one such residence.

My husband and I were staying at the Residenza Napoleone III, essentially a very smart B&B, in the 16th-century Palazzo Ruspoli on Via Condotti. Our three interconnecting rooms had intricately hand-stencilled walls, thick ceiling beams, Renaissance paintings and sumptuously upholstered furnishings - some so fragile that a pine cone had been secured to the seat so guests knew not to use them. Our bedroom consisted of an elegant four-poster bed and, behind a huge painting, the doorway to a tiny marble and gilt bathroom, where the previous residents, Emperor Napoleon III and his mother Hortense de Beauharnais, the former queen of Holland, would have performed their ablutions.

The Ruspolis, who trace their ancestry back to

Charlemagne, still live in the Palazzo, and a bottle of the Chianti Lilliano from the family estate had been left for us. My first urge was to spend our entire trip here, drinking wine from antique crystal, masquerading as an idle member of Rome's aristocrazia nera, but Mike had only ever spent one day in Rome, when, after

being turned away from the Vatican for wearing trainers, his friend stole the lire he had been saving to visit the Keats-Shelley House to buy Big Macs.

There was a lot to fit into two days. Naturally, our first priority was lunch. Outside the day was crisp, Romans in furs filled the streets still festooned with festive lights, and men roasting chestnuts had set up stalls on every street corner. We ate a quick meal of fritto misto and pasta with artichoke and shavings of fresh white truffle at Matricianella, a bustling trattoria, before embarking on my itinerary. I have always thought that the most evocative place to begin a whistle-stop tour of Rome is the Pantheon, the temple dedicated to all the gods by Augustus's hard man, Marcus Agrippa, and later renovated and given its cavernous rotunda by the Emperor Hadrian. It was described by historian William Thomas in 1549 as 'the perfectest of all the antiquities', is still intact nearly 2,000 years after its construction and has been used as a place to meet and shelter by Romans ever since. Then it was on to the Piazza Navona, once an athletics stadium founded by Domitian, now a square with Bernini's dramatic Fountain of the Four Rivers at its centre; and Campo dei Fiori, its market

NEED TO KNOW RESIDENZA NAPOLEONE III

DECOR Grand and exclusive. Four flights of marble stairs lead up to the apartments, which are decorated in opulent 17th-century style with parquet floors, heavy silk curtains, chandeliers and Ruspoli family antiques.

ROOMS There are three separate apartments: the main three-room residence (below and right); the Roof

Garden suite with a huge balcony; and a further room, the Blue Room, that has just been renovated. Wi-Fi, fax machines, a stereo and plasma screens are concealed behind

Renaissance paintings, and in our room there was a DVD projector and a collection of DVDs including *Roman Holiday* and *Gladiator* signed by Ridley Scott. We also had a tiny kitchen complete with crystal champagne flutes and minibar.

BATHROOMS Small, marble and decorated with prints. Plenty of Bulgari products.

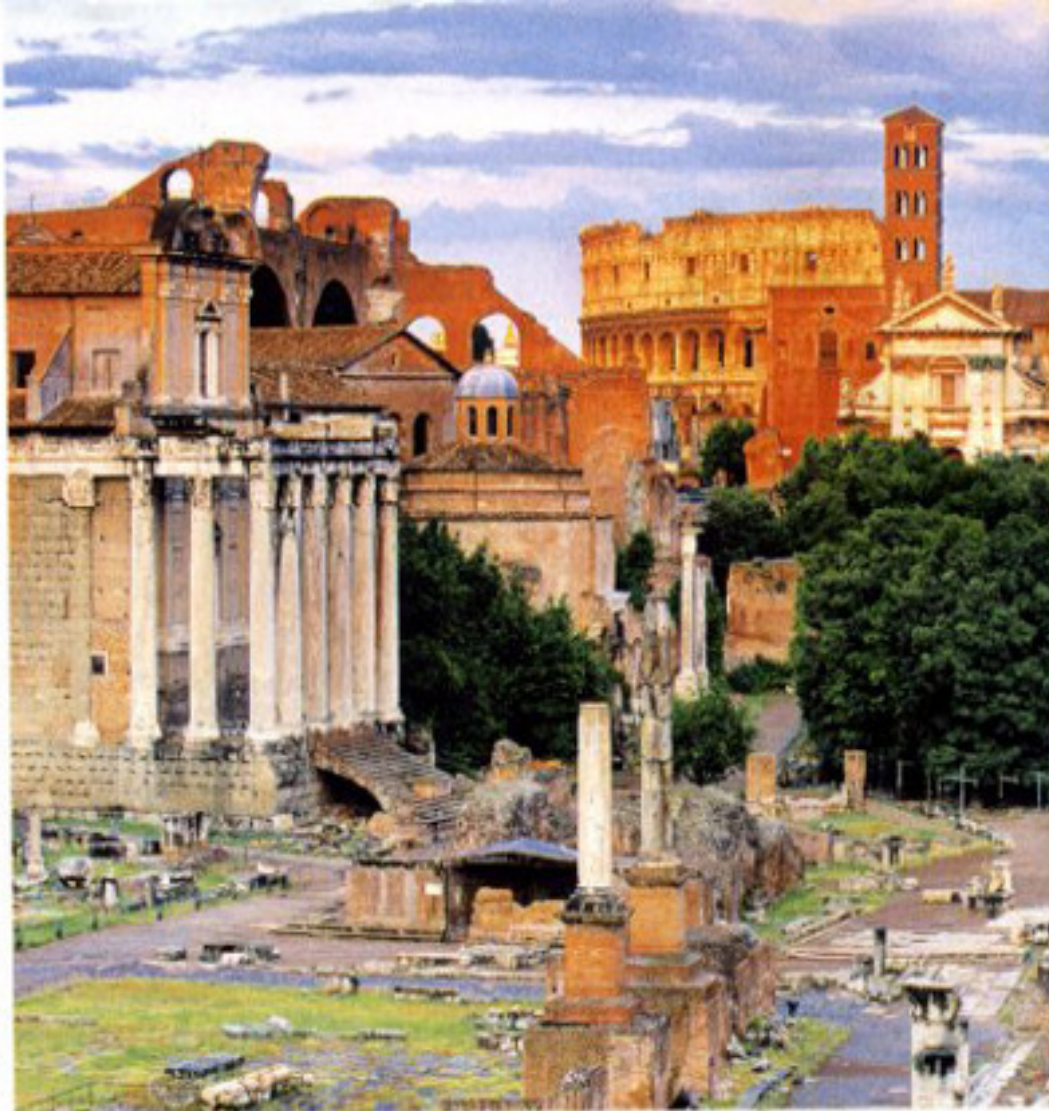
FOOD There is an extensive breakfast menu, from eggs and bacon to Lelizia Ruspoli's homemade tisanes, served at a table beautifully decorated with candelabras and Bulgari silverware. Diners can also be prepared on request. One night we made our own pasta feast in the kitchen and ate it in the wonderfully grand dining room with flickering candles and a roaring fire.



SPECIAL TREATS Guests have their own butler to cater to their every whim, from booking taxis to lighting the fire.

FELLOW GUESTS You will never see them; staying here really feels like being a guest in someone's house.

TARIFF From €730 a night.
La Residenza Napoleone III,
Largo Goldoni 56, 00186 Rome,
(06) 39 347 733 7098;
www.residenznapoleone.com





Left: the Forum.
Below: the remains of a
statue of Constantine II at
the Capitoline Museum



selling knobbly pumpkins and courgette flowers.

By now dusk was falling, signalled by the arrival of circling flocks of swallows. Walking via the Trevi Fountain, the white marble brightly lit, the sound of the spouting water drowned out by the chatter of the crowds massed in the square so tiny it is at odds with the vast grandeur of its famous monument, we made our way to the Galleria Borghese, recently reopened after years of renovation, which was conceived by Cardinal Scipio Borghese as a party villa and a place for his impressive collection of art. We saw, among others, Titian's *Sacred and Profane Love* and Raphael's *Lady with a Unicorn* before venturing back out to the landscaped

Borghese gardens and a chilled, foggy darkness.

Dinner was in Testaccio, a residential district, with two friends who had moved to Rome having set up an olive tree adoption scheme in Le Marche. The location was the uninspiring-sounding Oasi della Birra (oasis of beer), which turned out to be a grotto-like basement where one could order huge plates of salami and cheese of every type. I ate so much speck, lardo, scamorza and prosciutto, the only solution was to walk back to our hotel. Rome's monuments are at their most beautiful by night when the crowds have abated and the noise of traffic and wailing police sirens has died down. After pushing our heads through the bars at the church of Santa Maria in Cosmedin to see La Bocca della Verità, I led Mike up the wide steps of the Cordonata, past the equestrian statues of Castor and Pollux, to the Campidoglio, the square designed by Michelangelo and once the point from which scoundrels were thrown to their death on spiky rocks beneath.

The following morning we woke to find that breakfast had been laid out on the dining table, decorated with heavy silver cherubs and tealights, and a fire lit in the fire-

place. There was more to see, of course: Augustus's ivory-white Ara Pacis in its new glass home designed by Richard Meier; the queues outside the Vatican (sadly Mike was to miss out on this once again); and the narrow back streets of Trastevere. As the light faded and the time for our departure drew close, we arrived at the Doria Pamphilj Gallery off the Via del Corso. Like the Palazzo Ruspoli, this remains a home for the Doria Pamphilj family, one of whom is an Englishman, Don Jonathan, who

was plucked from an orphanage 40 years ago, at the age of two, to become heir to the family fortune.

It is a place of gilt and frescos, with masterpieces by Reni, Carraci and Lorrain fighting for space on the walls. The famous *Portrait of Pope Innocent X* by Velazquez has its own antechamber and, after inspecting this, we turned back to see that, with the onset of evening, all the chandeliers had been turned on and the corridors glittered as if they were studded with jewels. I only wished I still had that little apartment at the top of all those stairs, then I could have stayed forever.



OUT AND ABOUT IN ROME

GETTING THERE EasyJet flies to Rome Ciampino from Gatwick, from £56 return (www.easyjet.com).

WHERE TO STAY The Ferragamo family recently opened the **Portrait Suites**, a 14-room townhouse on Via Condotti (www.rome-suites-portrait.com). Rocco Forte's **Hotel de Russie** is a luxurious hotel near the Piazza de Spagna with its own gardens and butterfly sanctuary (www.hotelderussie.it). The **Hotel Santa Maria** in Trastevere is a renovated monastery with comfortable rooms at a fair price (www.htsantamaria.com).

WHERE TO EAT AND DRINK **Matricianella** on Via del Leone has good seasonal dishes and is popular with the locals. **Pasticceria Valzani** on Via del Moro sells a delicious array of pastries and chocolates. **Da Sabatino** on the pretty Piazza di Sant'Ignazio serves perfect Roman dishes. **Da Augusto** on Trastevere's Piazza de Renzi is an old-fashioned, delicious and cheap trattoria. Michelin-starred **Vivendo** on Via Vittorio E Orlando offers a more refined experience. **Oasi della Birra** on Piazza Testaccio serves every kind of cured meat and cheese imaginable. **Bar della Pace** on Via della Pace is a Roman institution, great for people-watching.

WHERE TO SHOP **Via Condotti** has all the high-fashion Italian staples such as Fendi, Prada and Gucci. The market at **Campo dei Fiori** sells flowers, cheeses and cured meats. For antique prints and posters, go to the market at **Piazza Fontanelle Borghese**. **Il Museo del Louvre** is a dusty and esoteric bookshop and art gallery with a huge archive of old photos on Via della Regatta.

WHAT TO DO The best thing is to take a map and walk. The **Pantheon**, **Forum**, **Colosseum** are all amazing monuments, and the renovated **Dormus Aurea** (Nero's Golden House), with remains of his circular dining room, is fascinating. For artefacts, the **Capitoline Museum** is the place, with classical bronze and marble statues, mosaics and sarcophagi. For Renaissance wonders, the **Vatican** houses the **Sistine Chapel** and **Pietà** by Michelangelo, and apartments decorated by Raphael. The **Galleria Borghese** has a collection of Caravaggios. The **Ara Pacis** monument, set up by Augustus, is beautiful. In spring the steps at the Piazza di Spagna are decked with flowers. In summer take a walk along the crumbling **Appian Way**, lined with mausoleums. The crypt beneath the **Church of Santa Maria della Concezione** is decorated with the bones of 4,000 Capuchin monks.

Film buffs will recognise the **Trevi Fountain** from *La Dolce Vita* and **La Bocca della Verità** from *Roman Holiday*.

CELEB SPOTTING Gwyneth Paltrow (left) and Russell Crowe (right).

