

Santa Barbara

MAGAZINE

Special Issue

Homes &
Gardens

PERSONAL
STYLE

Carolyn Miller

The Hodges

Paul Hendershot

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Minton & Spidel

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CARDYNN ESLEY-MILLER

GETAWAYS

Nestling in Napa

"I WOKE UP ONE MORNING, went out on the patio and thought I was in Tuscany," says a recent visitor to **Auberge du Soleil**, a cozy Napa Valley inn. Small wonder—the view from the hill is spectacular with groves of olive trees spread out below. It brings out the *bellissima* in anyone. The Auberge du Soleil, under the same ownership as the San Ysidro Ranch, expresses its understated elegance in several different ways. For one, there are only 50 rooms, all very cozy. Each has a fireplace (firewood laid daily). The bathrooms are oversized and airy and, best of all, have big, soft towels and thick terry cloth robes. Outside, you can partake of almost any activity imaginable—hiking, biking, golf, tennis, horseback riding or just sunning at the infinity pool. If you get tired of all that leisure activity, drive over to nearby Calistoga and get packed in mud at the famous hot springs. (800) 348-5406, (707) 963-1211, www.aubergedusoleil.com



MAMMA MANGIA

AFTER THE 1,000-FOOT CLIMB TOWARD Ravello, the van parked outside the hotel **Palazzo Sasso**, a 12th century palace-cum-luxury hotel, and I became cognizant of my surroundings: a marble open-air entrance, Moorish arches and—in the distance—sweeping views of Italy's most famous getaway, the Amalfi Coast. It was clear this hotel was worth every one of its five bright stars.

I had been to the Amalfi Coast once before, but never to Ravello, which turns out to be one of the few places you can escape the tourist mania that plagues this otherwise stunning coastal region. (The steep approach and narrow roads) (CONTINUED ON PAGE 104)





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GETAWAYS

(MAMMA MANGIA CONTINUED)

mean you'll rarely see tour buses.) Walking through the gardens of Villa Rufalo, an 11th century residence where Wagner found inspiration for the second act of *Parsifal*, I could imagine the Arabian-style residence hosting a crew of wealthy traders. Ravello's rich music tradition and quiet beauty even lured Gore Vidal to park his pen here, where he regularly adds to the city's celebrity quotient, joining such guests as Sting, Rupert Everett and Susan Sarandon.

There was one famous local many insisted I meet: Mamma Agata, once head chef to Humphrey Bogart and Jackie Kennedy, who offers private cooking classes in her home. Stepping through her corn husk-green door, I met the embodiment of a true Italian mother. Generously proportioned, Mamma Agata thought her hands could make up for our sharing no common language. While melodiously narrating her motives (wanting to fatten skinny Americans), she whipped up countertops full of regional dishes in the closet-sized kitchen—lemon chicken, pasta Arabiatta, tomato bruschetta. As I sat on her terrace, surrounded by lemon groves (her husband even makes his own limoncello, the local lemon liquor), Mamma delivered a never-ending stream of homemade dishes—so fresh it was like eating the sun. **NICOLE ALPER**
Palazzo Sasso, www.palazzosasso.com.

flying high

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