

the GREAT escape

Hotelier Marie-Louise Sciò remembers growing up with the jet set at Il Pellicano

My father was a regular guest at Hotel Il Pellicano, for years before deciding to purchase it in 1977. He wasn't in the hotel business, but when he heard it was for sale—afraid that the new owner would change it—he decided to buy the hotel himself to ensure that its glamorous and magical spirit was preserved. Since birth, I grew up in hotels; enjoying endless summers at the stunning Hotel Il Pellicano on Italy's Argentario coast and weekends and memorable Christmases at La Posta Vecchia outside Rome. The latter was a passion project for my father, who purchased it from John Paul Getty, complete with the largest private collection of Renaissance furniture.

Natural and artistic beauty, and the beautiful people who came with it, have always surrounded me. As a child, I was very curious. I would sit and watch the adult world with awe; the behaviors,

dressers, and styles fascinated me. I'd listen to conversations about Charlie Chaplin and his days at Il Pellicano, alongside other silver screen stars and fabulous guests (the Missonis, Elkanns, and Taschens) and their travels and parties all over the world. Amid long cigarette holders, live music, Pucci dresses, turbans, and kaftans, incredibly elegant men and women seemed to enjoy life to the fullest.

Friday evenings meant glittering, gala nights. After a softly lit dinner, everyone would gather around the pool filled with flickering, floating candles to dance. I would hide behind rosemary bushes and spy on these parties, which I wasn't allowed to attend. I'd stay there for hours, until the nanny would come and find me with a torch. Night after night, I would sneak out in my pajamas to get a glimpse of the enchanting world of the hotel's guests.

Hotels are the perfect place to get in trouble, and so we did. Along with my brother, I would emulate my heroine, Eloise, the little girl who lived at The Plaza Hotel with her nanny.

PHOTOGRAPHY: SLIM AARONS/GETTY IMAGES AND GIADA MARIANI

SEA VIEW THE ROCKY BEACH AT IL PELLICANO IN PORTO ERCOLE IN A PHOTO TAKEN BY SLIM AARONS





BEACH LIFE IMAGES OF IL PELLICANO, INCLUDING SHOTS TAKEN BY SLIM AARONS THROUGHOUT THE DECADES, AND PORTRAITS OF A YOUNG MARIE LOUISE (BELOW LEFT) AND THE FOUNDERS OF THE HOTEL, MICHAEL GRAHAM AND PATSY DASZEL (BELOW RIGHT), ALSO TAKEN BY AARONS

“I would *hide behind the rosemary bushes* and SPY on these parties, which I *wasn’t allowed* to attend”

We threw lobsters into the swimming pool in hopes of saving them; hid in a hotel room for 24 hours until the police were called; threw white paint on the Posta Vecchia façade to make it more “fun-looking,” had roller-skating parties on the Roman mosaics in the basement, and drew on the Fortuny curtains with an indelible marker.

Of course, Slim Aarons had the best stories of them all, many of which he documented in his iconic pictures. He photographed the international jet set; Il Pellicano was and still is on their route. Aarons’ arrival meant capturing glamour at its finest. Both day and night he photographed the stylish world that traveled to my home.

Today, the hotel still very much feels like it did when I was a child, except that I am no longer a spectator hiding behind the bushes in my nightgown. Now, my stories are part of the hotel’s DNA. The Pellicano’s outdoor living rooms have become my adult playground, and the offices, which I was once not allowed to enter, are where I launched my career.

Growing up, I didn’t plan on working in hotels. I studied architecture at the Rhode Island School of Design and by chance got into my father’s business. A few years after graduating, he asked me to design a bathroom at Il Pellicano. I remember walking into the hotel and telling him he needed to refresh the whole place to make it more accessible and contemporary to the changing world. He simply said, “Do it.” I was terrified to make a mistake. One thing I was certain of was that, just like my father, I wanted to maintain and respect the history of the hotel.

Understated luxury and style was what I grew up with and that was my approach to the new life of the hotel. I brought that to every aesthetic. Il Pellicano is a very special place for very special people: worldly globetrotters from all different backgrounds. Here, artists, designers, architects, moguls from media and film, and people in fashion and finance all mingle together. They share a taste for timeless luxury and have no need to be seen or impose their wealth or power. It’s a magical spot, not only to me, but also to the tribe of Pellicano lovers all over the world. □