

Nordelaia

PIEDMONT

Respecting tradition while pushing boundaries, the experimental menu at Nordelaia pairs seafood and vegetables with meat-based sauces.

Words: Emma Love • Photography: © Riccardo Gasperoni

Piedmont in northwest Italy is renowned, both for its autumn truffles and as one of the country's great winegrowing regions. It's also where the Slow Food movement – which aims to promote local gastronomic traditions and a leisurely pace of life – first began in the 1980s. Which perhaps explains why many of the long-established restaurants here veer towards the classic, with similar meat-focused dishes often appearing on the menus. Nordelaia, a 12-room hotel recently opened just outside the hilltop village of Cremolino in the Monferrat countryside, is offering something quite different.

It has two restaurants: the casual Bistro and L'Orto, a destination fine-dining experience centred around seasonal vegetables and seafood. "The Bistro serves traditional classics that are a little lighter," explains British Head Chef Charles Pearce of dishes such as vitello tonnato (cold sliced veal with a creamy tuna mayonnaise-like sauce), beef-filled agnolotti pasta and heavenly tiramisu, made with Krumiri biscuits rather than the usual Savoiardi sponge

fingers. "L'Orto was a risky move because we're in Piedmont, which has a strong meat-based food culture," Pearce continues. "The owners originally wanted a vegetarian restaurant but that might not have gone down too well with the locals."

Instead, he and Consultant Chef Andrea Ribaldone, who has held several Michelin-stars throughout his career, decided to make the most of the hotel's proximity to the sea by incorporating fish. That's not to say that guests won't find meat flavours on L'Orto's four tasting menus, which include a six-course Walk in the Garden vegetable-focused option and a 10-course chef's menu. "We love cooking meat so we treat vegetables in the same way with heavy meat-based sauces," says Pearce. One particularly memorable dish for instance, is cabbage cooked on a barbecue, served with a chicken stock-based jus and dusted with powder made from the fermented outer leaves, the latter touch being part of his drive to become 100% zero-waste.

As you would expect, all the produce is





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sourced nearby – which is where Ribaldone comes in. “Andrea is from the area so he showed me the way by putting me in touch with local producers and artisans, and coaching me on the typical ingredients used,” says Pearce, who has been working as a chef in Italy for eight years. Suppliers include cheesemonger Marco Bernini in Alessandria, farmers in Castellazzo Bormida and a fish merchant in Liguria. The sourdough for L'Orto is made in-house (the six-strong chef team, all under 30, work between both restaurants) but for the Bistro, it's made by prisoners in Alessandria, another idea of Ribaldone's that engages with a social community project.

While the majority of the bedrooms, a living room-style space and spa are located in an 800-year-old farmhouse sensitively redesigned by London-based interiors studio These White Walls, the two restaurants are set in an adjacent newbuild designed by local architects Tunesi Studio Genova. Arched windows the height of the three-storey building are inspired by the

vaults once used to store wine and echo the shape of the casements in the spa. “We took the arches as a recurring theme, enlarging them and placing them on the front of the building,” explains Rose Murray, founder of These White Walls, who has restaurant form with her design for Hide in London's Mayfair. “With the light coming in across every level and the views, we want guests to feel like they are sitting in the picture postcard.”

The surrounding five hectares were planted with Pinot Noir, Dolcetto and Barbera vines by the previous owners, from which the hotel is already producing its own wine with the help of respected enologist Dr Donato Lanati, and there's a kitchen garden behind the main swimming pool. This landscape, says Murray, was the inspiration behind the restaurant interiors. “Each level relates to a different layer of the garden, so the ground floor Bistro feels earthy and rooted with a palette of clay-like reds and blackened greens.” At one end there's an aquamarine marble bar with decorative floor





tiles from Marazzi; at the other, dried flower arrangements hang from the ceiling above black tables with brass-tipped legs by Savi, a sage velvet sofa and dark wood chairs with burnt orange seats, both made by local artisans.

Upstairs in L'Orto, the look is almost Scandi-Japanese with clean lines, bespoke blonde wood display cabinets and blush pink metro tiles on the walls of the open kitchen. "This space is more twinkly to represent looking out at budding flowers and fluttering insects," confirms Murray. "It's not a traditional menu, there's experimentation with the food and we aimed to reflect that in the contemporary feel of the interiors." White tables and chairs with blush pink seats are from contract furniture supplier UHS, the glass globe ceiling lights are from Interia Light and leaf-shaped porcelain plates are sourced from French ceramic manufacturer Jacques Pergay – all adding to the delicate, airy feel.

It's not just the interiors that echo the innovative approach in the kitchen: the wine

list is also deliberately unexpected. "At the beginning when I was asked to create the wine list, I looked at producers in Langhe where there is a lot of Barolo and Barbaresco – the names that I know," recalls restaurant manager Francesco Trombelli. "Then, when I started looking in the immediate area, I discovered a notable movement of biodynamic wine around Ovada so we decided to include more of what is made in this territory. The idea is to showcase small producers; that's why we write the number of bottles produced next to each entry." The list is concise – currently 120 bins, 75% of which are from Piedmont while the remainder, mainly whites, are from Italy and France – and alters depending on the menus.

Both restaurants have been designed to offer something out of the ordinary that draws in not just guests staying at the hotel but locals too. "The reaction has been really good," concludes Pearce. "As soon as people get into the menus at L'Orto they say that they don't even think about the meat." Which of course is exactly the idea.



IN A BITE

Architecture: Tunesi Studio Genova
Interior Design: These White Walls
F&B Consultant: Andrea Ribaldone
Head Chef: Charles Pearce
F&B Manager: Francesco Trombelli
Head Sommelier: Fabio Formica
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