

HOUSE
& GARDEN

Splendid isolation

ARTA GHANBARI RELISHES THE SIMPLE PLEASURES OF LIFE ON THE UNSPOILT ITALIAN ISLAND OF CAPRAIA, WHERE THE IMPOSING FORTE SAN GIORGIO OFFERS A LUXURIOUS STAY FOR TRAVELLERS SEEKING TO RELAX IN A SPECTACULAR SETTING



PHOTOGRAPHS: FRANCESCA MARI, GEMINI D'AMICO, USA TODAY

Off the Tuscan coast, Capraia is a paradise for those who define luxury by the simple pleasures in life: wide open spaces, time and stillness. With just 1km of road connecting the port and town further up the hill, little has changed on this small volcanic island over the centuries, largely thanks to its protected status as part of the Tuscan Archipelago National Park.

Refreshingly understated and unedited for tourism, this locally dubbed 'wild' island lives up well to its reputation – with a population of 400 or so living largely on what can be grown on the land and caught in the sea, supplemented by weekly ferry deliveries from Livorno. There are just a handful of excellent seafood restaurants and casual cafés, and not much else besides miles of ancient hiking routes, panoramic views of nearby Elba and Corsica, and crystal-clear beaches below volcanic cliffs. That's all you'll need.

Within the walls of the towering 16th-century Genoese castle that watches over the island lies a deeply comfortable family home, which has been painstakingly restored to retain its original features while updating the maze of rooms for modern living. Recently, this has been opened up by the family to travellers looking for a truly escapist holiday steeped in history. Despite its fortress status, San Giorgio delivers luxury in authentic Capraian style with a series of mini apartments, providing 11 bedrooms with their own private bathrooms, living areas, kitchens and terraces as well as two swimming pools.

Upon arrival, past the 15th century *palmenti* wine presses carved into the rock under the fort and up the original stone steps to the central *piazzetta* from which everything leads off, the scale of it all makes the mouth drop and the head tilt. But there is nothing ostentatious about the design or decoration. This is due largely to the taste of the owner, who has spent the past 11 years filling the rooms with a stylish mix of mostly 20th-century furniture, sourced in London and Kent, and a few contemporary pieces – creating a personal, lived-in home from home that the family has returned to year after year. Similarly, the choice of natural materials – repurposed Venetian balustrades, local stone on ceilings and terraces, teak and rosewood furnishings – helps to create airy, spacious interiors that don't detract from the views.

Guided only by moonlight, an hour's walk from San Giorgio up a valley lies the agroturismo of Valle di Portovechio, serving local dishes made using fresh ingredients from the garden. From here, views of the fortress and village cascading down the hillside in the silvery light stop you in your tracks. Isolationists will rejoice in the pleasing emptiness and rugged landscape, with more stars visible than people.

Forte San Giorgio is available to rent exclusively through *The Thinking Traveller*, from €24,560 per week. Visit thethinkingtraveller.com/fortesangiorgio



OPPOSITE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP The dramatic 16th-century fortress stands in a spectacular setting. The main dining area off the piazzetta.

A view over one of the two pools. The desk area in a bedroom is framed by original frescoes on the wall.

THIS PAGE FROM TOP A view over the village to Forte San Giorgio. The light, airy bedrooms are furnished with a stylish mix of vintage furniture and fine linens.

La Garitta is one of the best seafood restaurants in Capraia