

# majestic disorder

ARTS + CULTURE



*MUSIC*  
Moroccan Gnawa

*FOOD*  
Biodynamic Farming

*CULTURE*  
New Delhi Street Art





# Beyond Organic

Exploring biodynamic agriculture in Italy

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When working on a farm, you expect an early start to the day. So when we were told Dimitri was unforgiving to those who are late, we heeded the advice explicitly. Fortunate for us, our start time was much later than his 4:30am.

As the farm's miller, he has to be up well before sunrise to light and stoke the wood-fired oven so it's ready for an assortment of breads and pizzas when the rooster starts crowing.

Blazing at a temperature of 300°C when we arrived, it was near instantaneous watching the flatbread dough puff up to perfection. As a reward for our diligence, Dimitri sliced up a cheese and green onion pizza that had us salivating with each bite as the extra virgin olive oil exuded its scrumptious flavor.

But grains, cheese and olive oil are 'only a fraction of what's produced at Fattoria La Vialla. More importantly though, is *how* everything is produced on the family-owned farm in the Italian heart of Tuscany.

Sustainability and genuine craftsmanship runs through every facet, from cookie packages hand tied with a red ribbon to operating with a carbon neutral emission, as evaluated last year by the University of Siena.

When Piero and Giuliana Lo Franco arrived in 1978, they purchased the first small abandoned

farm, named Ca' dell'Oro. Their simple plans were to resurrect a small vineyard, make a kitchen garden and put the few olive trees around the house "back on their feet."

Thirty-eight years later with 24,000 olive trees and 304 acres of vines, the farm has evolved beyond their wildest dreams. Fattoria La Vialla has since passed down to their three sons, Gianni, Antonio, Bandino and their families.

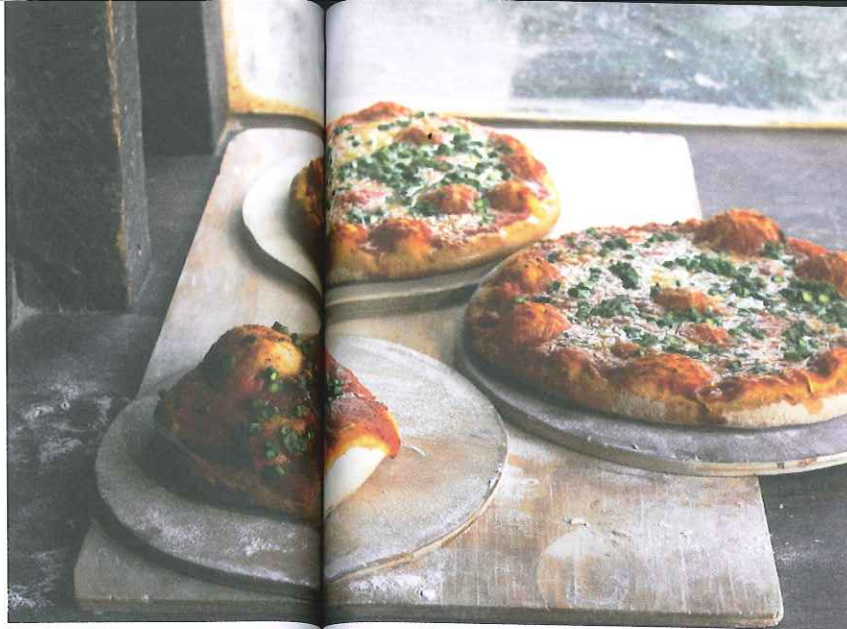
Situated on the east side of the quaint town of Castiglion Fibocchi, just an hour outside of Florence, the 3,316-acre estate has epic views of sweeping hills and lush countryside.

The calming isolation, tranquil landscape and lack of strong wifi connectivity were the perfect ingredients for an antidote to our metropolitan imbalance.

As soon as we walked onto the *piazzetta*, past the fig trees, we were immersed in Fattoria La Vialla's organic, biodynamic farming process carried out from planting to harvesting.

Biodynamic agriculture is an alternative and holistic process that goes a far step beyond organic farming with emphasis on environment preservation, the utilization of manures, composts and not farming with chemicals. Adding another methodical layer to this system is synchronization with the lunar





cycle, using an astrological sowing and planting calendar.

The biodynamic farming process promotes a spiritual, ethical and ecological connection to land and product. This ethos and process are similar to centuries-old traditions of Tuscan farms where they had the foresight of clean optimization — they were just doing it before labels like organic and sustainable existed, as we were told.

Our introduction to biodynamics was with manure. Bandino was on top of the hill filming the cow horn composting technique. There are videos posted regularly on the farm's website discussing their agriculture, as well as a live webcam to check in and be part of the commitment to transparency.

Cow horn composting involves scooping manure into cow horns and burying it for six months to be unearthed in the spring, correlating to the lunar planting calendar. The undisturbed period allows manure to turn into compost, perfect for planting soil, while the cow horns aid in the transformation of the manure into humus.

Techniques of centuries past are illuminated within the Museum of Old Farming Traditions curated by local resident Giancarlo del Pasqua. For over 40 years Giancarlo has been collecting and recovering artifacts, some centuries old, from around the town and greater province of Arezzo.

These treasures detail the arduous process of agriculture before mechanization and



Prized amongst the collection are the various ploughs. The equipment is symbolic as Fattoria La Violla derives its name from this tool. In farmers' jargon, "violla" means small plough and "fattoria" means farm and wine estate.

As we drove through the estate to our next destination, we passed by many of the homes available to rent for a week or more. With over 23 restored and secluded farmhouses available, this rural escape is idyllic.

We arrived at the latest addition to Fattoria La Violla — the olive mill completed in 2013 that is central to the farm's CO2 absorption cycle. Sustainability was paramount throughout the construction of this meticulous mill, which uses rain water as system cooling before filtering and depositing water back into the nearby reservoir for field irrigation.

The olive oil produced is of the highest extra virgin quality, but an interesting byproduct being researched is the vegetation water extract from the olive cold-pressing.

The Lo Francos' grandmother, Caterina, regularly drank the extract filled with antioxidants and said it's what kept her young — she lived to be 100. The University of Milan is currently studying the extract to determine its health benefits.

Come harvest time in the fall, the olives and grapes will be handpicked from the groves and vineyards, primed to become the most exquisite oils and wines. A delectable feast will be prepared as beautiful fall foliage provides a backdrop. And as our journey observed, the seeds have been sown this year for a fantastic forthcoming harvest.

Fattoria La Violla x majestic disorder

