

THIS MONTH

May 2010

In the **Italian news** this month the PM welcomes “attractive immigrants”, unruly skiers face jail and a TV chef is sacked for recommending cat meat...



OIL REFINERY SABOTAGE “DEATH BLOW” TO RIVER PO

A huge oil slick caused by suspected sabotage at a refinery near Milan has wreaked environmental havoc on the Lambro and Po rivers. Officials, describing the spill as a “criminal act”, say someone deliberately opened valves on a tank at the plant in Villasanta. The slick, several kilometres long and involving at least 260,000 gallons of oil, flowed down the Lambro and into the Po. Hundreds of ducks and other birds were killed as frantic efforts were made to contain the oil before it reached the Adriatic. Barriers were set up in the Lambro but they were overcome by what *Corriere della Sera* called a “tide of unstoppable oil”. As *Italia!* went to press, civil defence chief Guido Bertolaso promised “not a drop of oil will reach the sea”. The WWF called the spill into the Lambro a “death blow to a river that has been in a shameful state of degradation for decades”. Lombardy spokeswoman Cinzia Secchi said the valves “were opened by someone who was familiar with the plant and knew how to operate them”.

Photography © iStock Photo and PA Photos



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SKIERS FACE JAIL

The Italian government wants to jail skiers and snowboarders who cause lethal avalanches. The proposals follow eight deaths on Italian slopes in the space of a weekend. Off-piste skiers are being blamed for the avalanches that caused the deaths. “There have been far too many incidents on the slopes,” said tourism minister Michela Vittoria Brambilla, announcing a plan for prison terms for the most serious cases – and a €5,000 fine for those who ignore conditions warnings or venture off-piste.

TOMB SELL-OFF

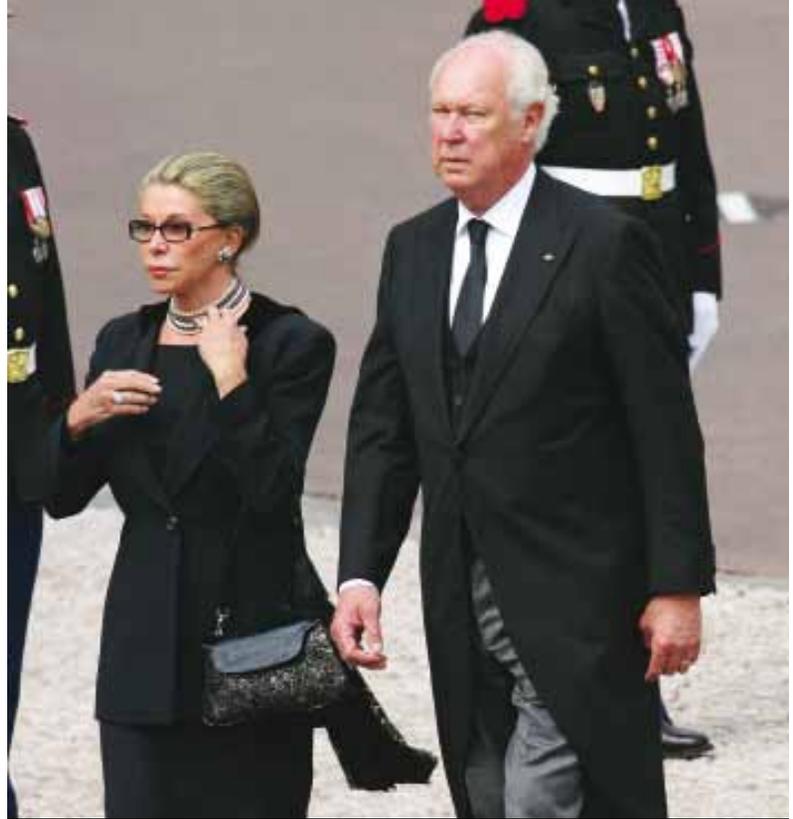
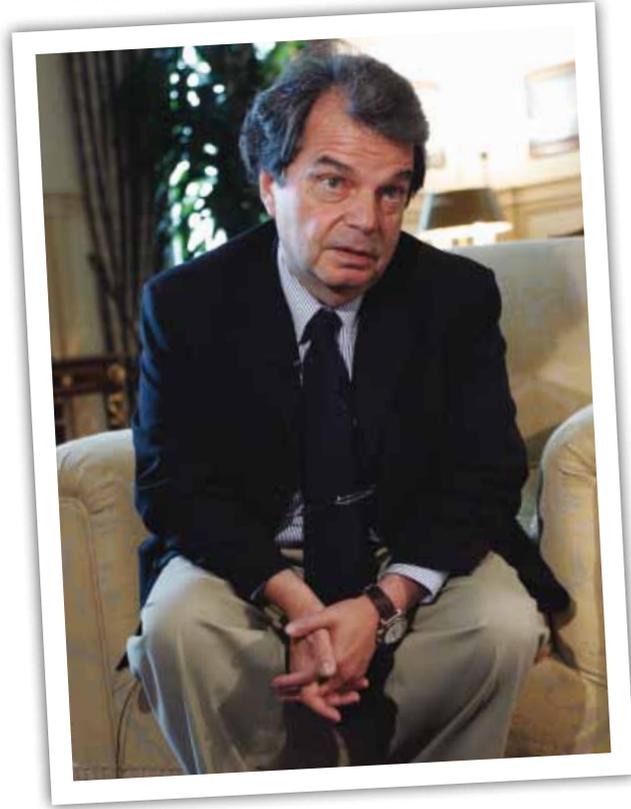
A tomb in Rome’s Verano cemetery – described as “classical style with decorative elements in white travertine and Carrara marble, able to house ten” – has been sold for €940,000. The tomb was one of 34 plots sold off to raise cash for the Rome graveyard organisation Ama. The successful bidder, who was not identified, can look forward to resting in peace alongside the likes of Roberto Rossellini and Luchino Visconti. The tombs were either empty or belonged to people Ama was unable to trace.

“DUMB SOUTH”

A professor at the University of Ulster has courted controversy by claiming the south of Italy is less developed than the north because its inhabitants are less intelligent. Professor Lynn’s paper in the journal *Intelligence* claimed IQ levels decrease as you travel south. Sicilians are apparently the least intelligent Italians; the most intelligent, he says, are in Friuli. Neapolitan councillor Amedeo Labocetta has offered the academic a free holiday in the south so he can expound his ideas to locals.

NAME AND SHAME

The latest initiative in the Italian government's public sector efficiency campaign says state employees who deal with the public will in future have to wear name tags. Civil service minister Renato Brunetta (below) had the idea to make it easier to identify and report workers for rude or unhelpful service. The supervisors of employees who fail to wear their name tags will risk a fine. Brunetta says his discipline crackdown has reduced public sector absenteeism by 40 per cent. However, the policy is unpopular with public sector employees themselves and there was widespread absenteeism for a strike in December.



PRINCE WINS FIGHT OVER 'THRONE'

After a bitter court battle between two warring cousins, Prince Victor Emmanuel (above) has been declared the rightful heir to the throne of Italy. The Italian monarchy was abolished at the end of the Second World War, but that hasn't stopped Duke Amadeo of Aosta pressing his claim. Now a court in Tuscany has ruled that the Savoy royal title can now only be used by Prince Emmanuel – who allegedly punched the duke in the face after a dinner held by King Juan Carlos of Spain – and his son, the winner of reality TV show *Dancing with the Stars*, Prince Emmanuel Filiberto. The court decided the duke came from only a "junior branch" of the royal family. A jubilant Prince Emmanuel, said: "The judge understood the vile and harmful action that Duke Amadeo had construed against me, which has been rightly punished." A furious Duke Amadeo vowed: "Naturally I don't agree with the judgment and I'm going to appeal."

Italy tops the OECD rankings for the leisure gap between the sexes, says a new report. Italian men have on average 80 minutes a day more free time than women, according to this organisation of 30 developed countries.

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ITALIAN FILM FEST IN SCOTLAND

This year's edition of the Italian Film Festival Scotland takes place from 16 until 25 April in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Dundee. The festival will show contemporary Italian films from world-class directors such as Giuseppe Tornatore, Michele Placido, Marco Bellocchio, Francesca Archibugi and Davide Ferrario, plus plenty more, including celebrations to mark the 50th anniversary of Fellini's classic film *La Dolce Vita*. For more details visit www.italianfilmfestival.org.uk

NEW CALABRIA DEVELOPMENT

New apartments at the San Rocco II Beach Club in Isca Marina, Calabria start from €57,000. This stunning new development has a small number of one-bedroom apartments available. Located just two minutes' walk from a beautiful sandy beach and restaurants, the village is just a few minutes' walk away. These make ideal holiday homes or for rental income. For more information on units available contact 'The Italian Collection' from Cresta Villas – www.theitaliancollection.co.uk



In March, the renowned Italian opera singer and Grammy winner Andrea Bocelli (interviewed in issue 62 of Italia!) was honoured with his very own star on Hollywood's prestigious Walk of Fame.

FELINE CUISINE

A TV chef has caused outrage among cat lovers by suggesting that moggies are good to eat. Beppe Bigazzi, 77, was suspended indefinitely after waxing lyrical about cat meat – apparently best prepared by leaving it under running water for three days to tenderise it before stewing. “I’ve eaten its delicious white meat many times,” he told viewers. Health minister Francesca Martini condemned the remarks as “offensive to the growing number of people who care about the way we treat animals”. Bigazzi tried to explain himself: “I was just trying to explain a saying from where I come from about the eating of cats. In the 1930s and 1940s they were very popular.”



BERLUSCONI WATCH

Silvio Berlusconi is in hot water again – this time for joking that Italy's doors are only open to attractive immigrants. The Italian PM was holding talks with his Albanian counterpart Sali Berisha. Berisha looked uncomfortable as Berlusconi chuckled at a press conference: “We will only accept pretty girls from Albania.” The remarks were immediately seized on by opposition MPs. “Once again Berlusconi just doesn’t give up on his barracks humour,” said Paola Pellegrini. “Even in the face of tragedy such as immigration by desperate people, the prime minister repeats his obsession with woman reduced to fresh meat to be consumed. He is an indecorous old man.”

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NEW UMBRIA DEVELOPMENT

If you're looking for a home in Italy, here's a great new opportunity. Between Mugnano and Fontignano this is a quietly and panoramically located stone and brick farmhouse not far from Perugia. The property includes three restored apartments and a barn. The building features open-beamed ceilings and all units include private garden and common use of the pool and parking area. Prices from €190,000 (Ref PG5091). For more information visit www.diamanteimmobiliare.co.uk



WEBSITE WATCH
Wine advice



WWW.DECANTER.COM

‘The route to all good wine’, or so claims this website’s tagline. This is the online platform for the renowned wine magazine *Decanter* and it does, indeed, contain a great wealth of wine knowledge, advice, recommendations and competitions. This is a great port of call for wine lovers, from the expert to the novice – anyone looking to learn more about their favourite tipples.



WWW.JANCIS ROBINSON.COM

Famed wine expert Jancis Robinson has been writing about wine since 1975, and this website sees her distill her considerable knowledge for our benefit. It includes

thousands of articles to view for free, plus there are 40,000 wine reviews and even more information that is just available for members of the site. All in all, very informative and appealing.

WWW.WINEANORAK.COM

Jamie Goode, the wine columnist for the *Sunday Express* is the man behind this excellent website. This is a very comprehensive source for wine discovery, featuring a wide range of interesting articles, with features that would be of interest to everyone from the casual sipper to the vintage expert. Great to browse.



ITALIA!'S *top picks*

Winery tours, posh lights, artichoke treats and a great gift book are this month's **Italian treasures** to covet

VISIT THIS!



WINE TIME

Distilleria Bottega is an award-winning Italian wine-maker and grappa producer based in Bibano, 27 miles north of Venice. It produces more than 200 products including grappa (the famous Alexander grappa), wines and liqueurs. The distillery is offering a brand new wine tour, perfect for wine and spirit lovers from all over the world. You can visit the premises (a charming 19th-century manor house), taste the wines, visit the glassblowing factory and spend some time in Venice too. Find out more at www.alexander.it or email enoturismo@alexander.it to organise your own specialised experience.



BUY THIS!

LET THERE BE LIGHT

Mediterraneo creates unique works in Murano glass and has just launched new lighting pieces. If you have the cash to splash, these lights are akin to having a piece of Italian art in your home and each is developed entirely to specification and handmade to order. The Egon chandelier (pictured, a princely £9,590) is no exception, so you can choose your own preferred colour combination and make the piece totally unique. Also available are smaller statement pendant lights in fabulous shades of blue – the Tito Mini Fili Pendant (£1,810) and Murano glass drop Alice Pendant (£7,200). For more information see www.mediterraneodesign.com or call ☎ 020 7720 6556.

EAT THIS!

STALKING ITALIAN

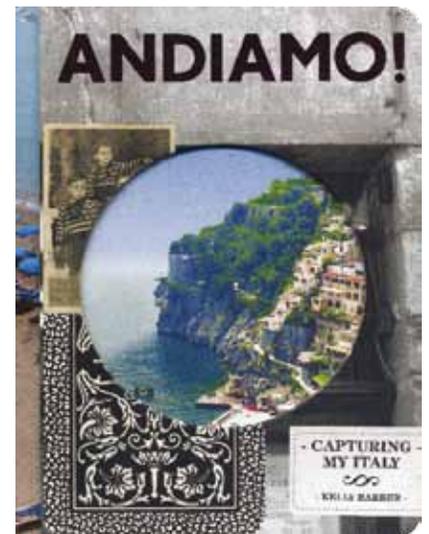
Seggiano makes the bold claim that “contrary to what one might believe, the stalks are one of the best parts of the artichoke”. With this in mind, this product should whet your appetite for our feature on artichoke hearts on page 70. The stalks (£5.95 for 210g) are from the Arcobaleno team in Maremma, southern Tuscany: Luca farms the artichokes while wife Emanuela and mother Lida create their range of foods, preserved in extra-virgin olive oil from their own trees. Emanuela preserves the subtle flavour of the artichoke in this *gamboni* (stems) recipe. The artichokes have to be picked young, before the stalks get stringy; they are cooked gently in a marinade then preserved in the oil. Enjoy as *antipasto* with bread or bruschetta. For more information visit www.seggiano.co.uk



READ THIS!

A JOURNEY FROM YOUR SOFA

Photographer Kelly Barber documents her solo travels around in Italy in this beautiful gift book. *Andiamo!* (£9.99, Hardie Grant Books) is a largely pictorial and beautifully illustrated journey around Italy, which features striking photographs of the country's diverse sights, plus brief anecdotes and observations that help to bring the journey to life. This hardback tome is a very unusual and enchanting volume that combines a personal experience of Italy with the universality of the nation's well-loved scenes and landmarks.



Italian Mortgage Best Buys

Type of Mortgage	Maximum LTV	Starting Rates from	Interest Only	Monthly payments
Variable rate	70%	2.40%	No	€1312
Variable rate	70%	2.00%	Yes	€604
Fixed rate	70%	4.20%	No	€1341
Re-mortgage	70%	2.40%	No	€1312

Based on a total amount of €150,000 and a 20 year term, rates correct as of 16/05/10

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