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NEWS & VIEWS AROUND FLORENCE

Knight Frank 

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James is back in town

Tuscany plays host to next Bond film



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Marred by doubt

Contamination scare travels far




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Up Close & Personal

An interview with


JAMES TAYLOR



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Inside the Designer Zone

by Rachel Northrop



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Spontaneous sounds

Locals getting 'personal' with music

What better way to enjoy the resonance of live acoustics than in the comfort of your home? Word has quickly spread throughout the city as many Florentines are being introduced to an American and English musical phenomenon: the house concert. Based on the 'secret gigs' gaining popularity in the US and UK, a house concert is a spontaneous get-together of musicians and music lovers in a private residence or other intimate, informal setting where the audience and performers can interact. The audience, usually about 40 to 50 fans sitting wherever there is room, hears roughly 45 minutes of a live, acoustic performance of pop, folk or rock music. Sometimes the audience knows the artist's identity beforehand, and sometimes it remains a secret until a just few moments before the concert. Spectators eat, drink and mingle before and after the performance.

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photo by Gianni Ugolini Photographer

CLANDESTINE GRAPES?

Regional wineries face accusations of fraud

Just weeks before Vinitaly, an international wine fair showcasing Italian wine to the world, three prominent local wine producers have come under investigation for alleged wine fraud. Following the recent indictment of one of Tuscany's oldest wine producers, the Marchesi de' Frescobaldi, accused of using grapes from the southern Italian regions of Apuglia and Basilicata in estate wines produced in Montespertoli, authorities are checking regional wineries to ensure that quality standards are being met.

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TUSCANY AND TIBET

Tuscan leaders call for peace

From musicians to politicians, Tuscans are drawing attention to the plight of Tibet. Continued calls for peace in Tibet have been voiced by major public figures in the region, starting with Tuscan president Claudio Martini.

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Spontaneous sounds Locals getting 'personal' with music

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Both musicians and fans alike find the experience more fulfilling than the standard, large-scale concert or impersonal pub.

With the Florence launch of Salotto Live in February 2007, the phenomenon has not only spread to Milan and Rome but the musicians are ever more impressive. As Florentines are increasingly opening up their apartments, offices and studios to host live performances, local organizers Claudio Ricoli and Paola lafelice continue to be faithful to the original philosophy of the house concert: the location of each performance remains a closely guarded secret until just a few hours before the concert begins.

Ricoli and lafelice also follow house concert protocol. Concerts generally run between 8:30pm and 10:30pm, so that neighbours are not disturbed. Although an entrance fee is not obligatory, attendees usually donate about 10 euro to help finance the event. Some also bring a bottle of wine to help wash down the food offered.

The performances are organized virtually, from reservations, which are made online, to confirmation, which is sent by text message.

The first people to book receive the address of the venue. As Ricoli explained in an interview with DJs from Radio Viva FM, the event is not a party, but a bona fide concert, which is 'inclusive, not exclusive, mainly because it functions on a first come, first served basis'.

In speaking with *The Florentine*, lafelice described why they became involved: 'We do it exclusively for passion, mainly, because it is very time-consuming to organize these itinerant concerts and interest in them keeps growing...all of the donations we receive are used to cover organizational costs so it is difficult to earn anything from the events organized—so yes, we definitely do it due to a passion for music, but also to create a more intimate setting where fans can freely interact with musicians and vice versa'. Boasting more than 40 concerts to date, Salotto Live risks becoming an essential element of Florentine nightlife.

Those interested in attending house concerts can reserve a place online at the Salotto Live website: www.salottolive.it. Those interested in hosting a house concert can email info@salottolive.it.

CLANDESTINE GRAPES? Regional wineries face accusations of fraud

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Suspicion is now fixed on Tuscany's most prestigious big red, Brunello. In Montalcino, a small hilltop town outside of Siena, local authorities have temporarily blocked wine production and sales in three prominent Brunello estates: Frescobaldi, Antinori and Argiano. And the list could get longer.

Currently under scrutiny by the prosecutor's office in Siena, the estates are being investigated for blending French grapes, mainly Merlot, Carbernet Sauvignon and Petit Verdot in their Brunello wines. According to authorities, some seized Brunellos could have been blended with about 10 to 25 percent French grapes, also allegedly grown in Montalcino. As a result, police have sequestered vineyards, barricades and bottles for the duration of the probe.

The three wineries yield approximately one third of all annual Brunello production. Many in the wine sector fear that the scandal will cause irreversible harm to the image of Brunello.

Tuscany at Vinitaly

For years, Tuscany has been a focal point of the annual Italian wine fair held in Verona, where, in a vast exhibition space of 1200 square metres, 100 estates from Arezzo, Grosseto, Lucca, Massa-Carrara, Pisa, Prato, Siena and Empolese-Valdelsa showcase their top wines to the world. The additional 720 Tuscan wine operators who will be present at the event, which runs from April 3 to 7, will focus on the wide range of indigenous Tuscan grapes, high-quality wine making and the many diverse and unique *terrior* that characterize the region. Along with wine tasting opportunities at individual stands, visitors can stop at the AIS Toscana wine bar to taste award-winning regional wines.

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