

Scottish-Italian family set to put Picinisco on the food lovers' map in 2020



A Scottish-Italian family from Cockenzie in East Lothian is getting set to make Picinisco, Val di Comino, one of the top new travel destinations for food and wine lovers in 2020 after reviving the historic region between Rome and Naples.

Originally from Cockenzie in East Lothian, Cesidio, Selina, Sofia and Giovanni Di Ciacca have gone back to their roots to launch 'I Ciacca' in Picinisco. The area is also home to the ancestors of Doctor Who actor, Peter Capaldi, and pop star, Lewis Capaldi, while Val di Comino was home to the ancestors of Anita Roddick, Charles Forte and Lady Gaga.

As the latest Italian foodie travel destination, I Ciacca now includes Sotto Le Stelle – a boutique hotel with six individually-styled luxury guests suites; historic farmhouse cookery school; indigenous grape vineyards,

state of the art winery, and single estate organic olive grove, all set amongst the magnificent Comino Valley in the Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise National Park.

Taking the family name, I Ciacca has been established as an 'Albergo Diffuso'. This innovative concept of hospitality is helping to breathe new life into the small, historic Italian town of Picinisco and its surrounding countryside. Historical buildings have been lovingly restored across the village, heritage vineyard re-cultivated and local farm produce revitalised, in order to bring exceptional food and drink and authentic Italian hospitality back to this region of outstanding natural beauty.

Translated simply as 'Beneath the stars', Sotto Le Stelle is set within a former Bishop's Palazzo built in the ancient walls of Picinisco. The collection of one, two and three-bedroom suites benefit from a private balcony or dedicated terrace with elevated view over the Comino Valley and the family's olive groves.

For over 500 years, I Ciacca was home to generations of the Di Ciacca family, famed for its excellent farm produce and wine. Over time, members of the family left, emigrating to Scotland, England, France, Canada and America. In 1969, the last of the Di Ciacca family to live there died and the village was abandoned. Almost half a century later, the third generation Scottish-Italian family has returned to Italy to resurrect the lost hamlet.

The Di Ciacca's family heritage of quality food, hospitality and culture is well known in Scotland today. Cesidio Di Ciacca, the older brother of the Edinburgh restaurateurs, Carina and Mary Contini, grew up with his siblings above the family's ice-cream shop in Cockenzie that was founded by his grandfather in the 1920s.

Cesidio Di Ciacca's sisters are Mary Contini, Director of Valvona and Crolla Ltd in Edinburgh, and Carina Contini of Contini George Street, Cannonball Restaurant & Bar, and The Scottish Cafe & Restaurant at the Scottish National Gallery in Edinburgh.

I Ciacca has always been a place to teach and a place to learn. The new farmhouse cookery school now offers tailored courses and experiences for guests to learn about local agriculture and gastronomy, including courses on beekeeping, foraging, and how to make traditional cheese, artisan bread, pasta and olive oil – each accompanied by English speaking hosts. I Ciacca's organic natural larder is brimming with a unique range of speciality produce, including the family's very own single estate cold pressed extra virgin olive oil made with Picinisco olives.

Mr Di Ciacca said: "100 years since leaving to come to Scotland, we're immensely proud to be putting Picinisco, Val di Comino, back on the food lovers' map with the launch of I Ciacca.

"I Ciacca was home to generations of the Di Ciacca family for over 500 years. By breathing new life into our family's forgotten hamlet and the town, we're now able to offer a new generation of food and wine enthusiasts the chance to experience authentic Italian hospitality in an area of outstanding natural beauty.

"Our family's heritage of quality ice cream, food and hospitality since 1920 in East Lothian is still to be found Scotland today, including some of the best restaurants, cafes, delicatessens and wine merchants in Edinburgh.

"From I Ciacca we organise food and wine tours to learn about genuine local foods from pasta, pizza, cheese, prosciutto and other cured meats, to our own olive oil; and let's not forget wine - especially our very special Maturano."

The Di Ciacca family is also working with one of the world's top winemakers, Alberto Antonini, to produce a new range of speciality organic wines made from their own Maturano grapes – a unique, indigenous variety from Picinisco, almost lost and only recently brought back into commercial cultivation.