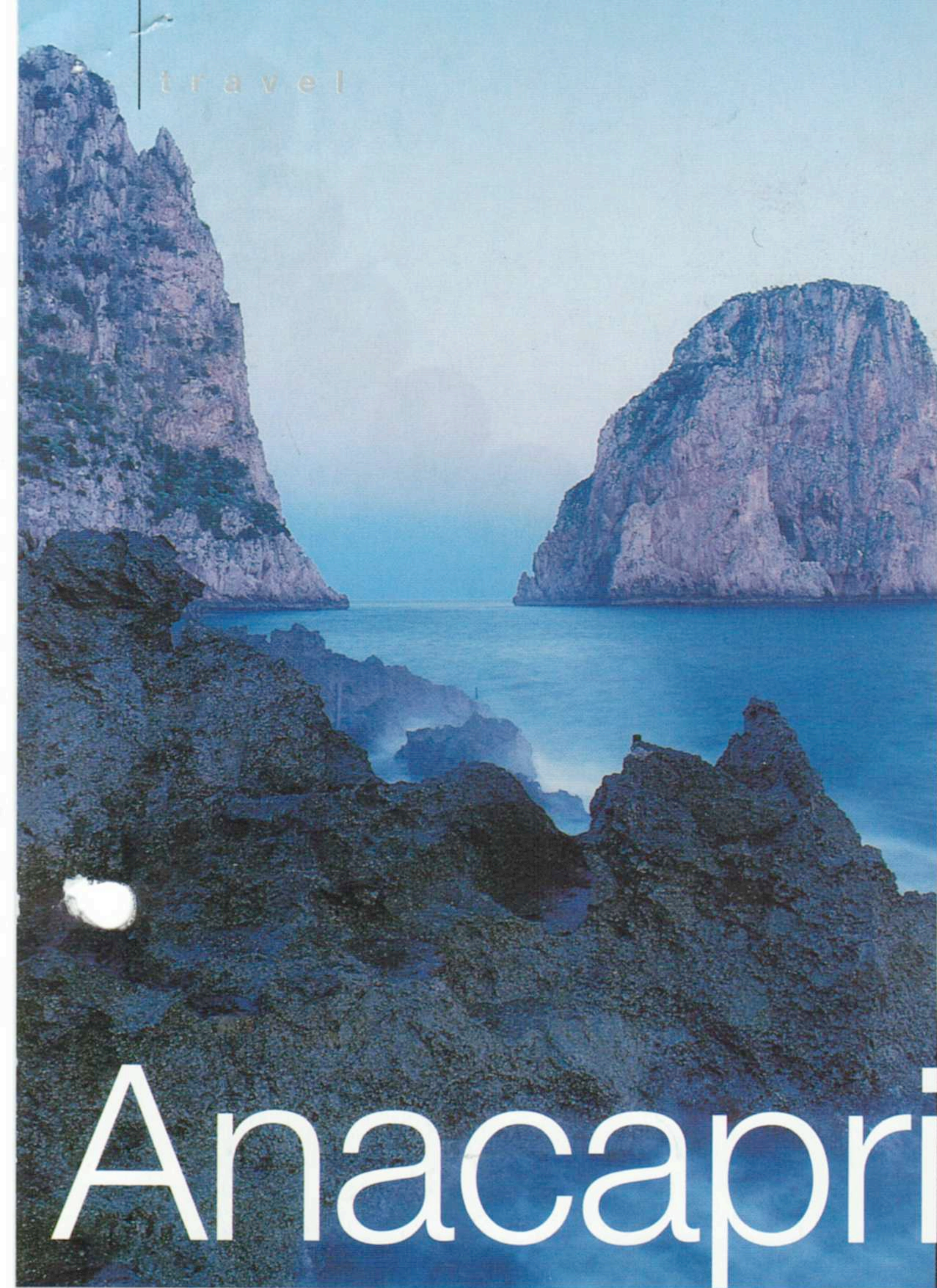


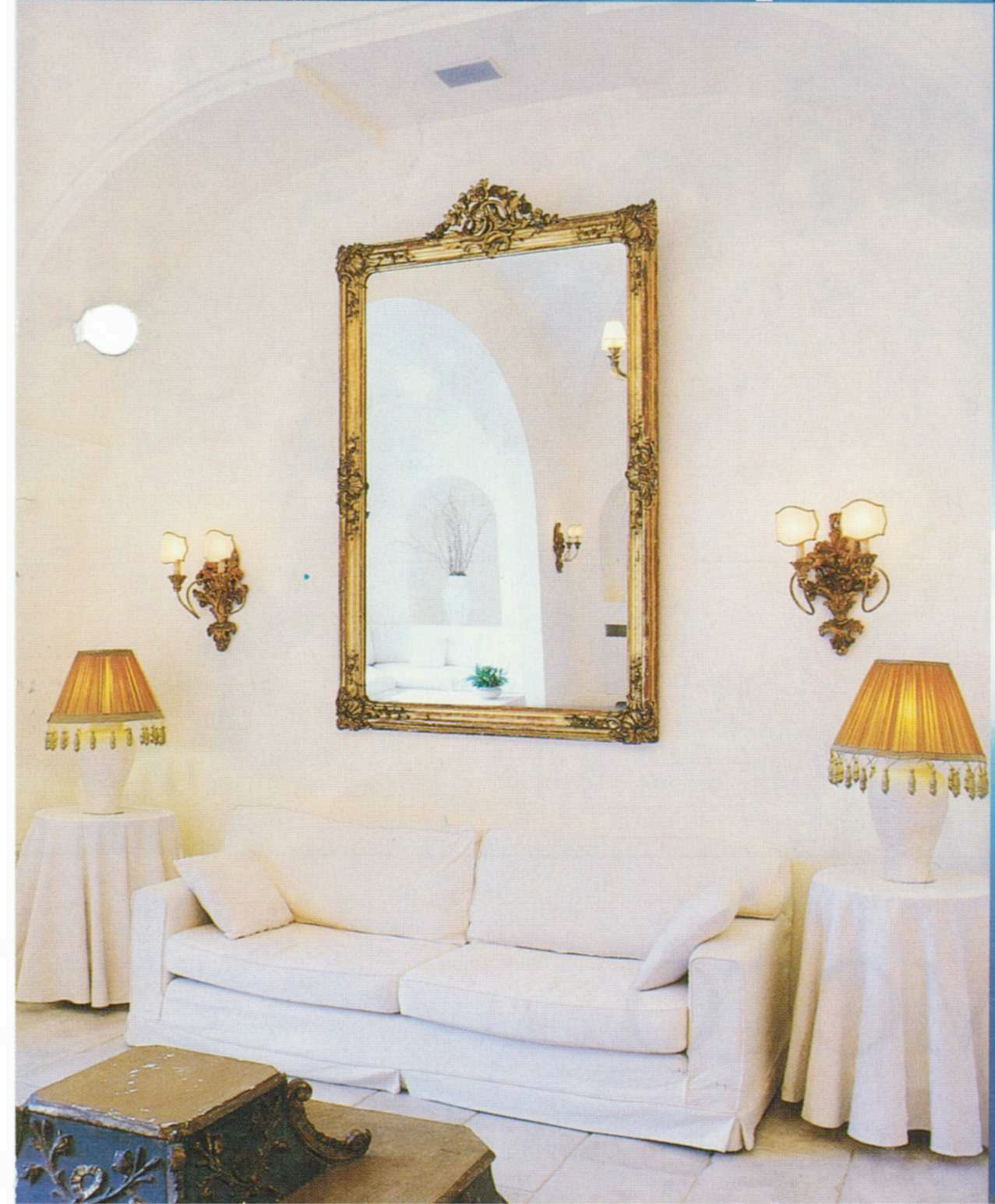
travel



Anacapri



The discreet face of Capri – a tiny town on the west side of the island is turning into the new elite address



The stunning view from Villa San Michele. Left:

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PHOTOS: ANDREAS ACHMANN

At first glance from the deck of the Traghetto, Capri looks like a cute, haphazard pile of colourful houses between two soft hills upholstered in lemon trees, broom and myrtle, right in the middle of a deep blue sea. A typical Italian landscape – it is a perfect mix of exquisite nature, with a sense of history, delicious cuisine and an insidious yearning for the golden sixties, when Italy was the cradle of the Dolce Vita and Capri its capital. The days when Jackie O. ran barefoot across the Piazzetta to have Capri trousers tailored by the dozen at La Parisienne, when Aristoteles Onassis put the Christina into harbour, and Gianni Agnelli drank his aperitif at Tiberio's wearing an open-necked shirt and a medallion the size of a plate around his neck. Though the names of protagonists have changed, Tiberio still serves the best Martini, and the tiny Piazzetta has lost nothing of its former glamour.

Everything is as it should be. Expectations are fulfilled and Capri really does seem to fit with all the clichés you read in so many magazine articles and books. But there's one detail that makes the island stand out from any other holiday destination, something that hits you as soon as you arrive in the Marina Grande. Something that, for Italy, is really unusual: everything works perfectly! The islanders, who are so friendly, so modest, so genuinely happy and content, seem to come from another dimension. How many spots of paradise Italy has been blessed with – and how often they've fallen prey to local indifference and arrogance. Not so in Capri. Everybody here – from the taxi driver in his glinting vintage car to the pizzaiolo to the carabinieri to the sales girl on the via Le Camerelle – knows just how lucky they are: living on the 'pearl of the Tyrrhenian Sea' is special. They all work hard to ensure that this luck never changes, or if so, only for the better.

One of them is Dr. Tonino Cacace, the charismatic proprietor of the enchantingly beautiful Capri Palace Hotel & Spa and Anacapri's biggest promoter. This tiny town perched high up on Monte Solaro previously lacked style. Today, thanks first and foremost to Cacace, it's developing into a centre of glamour. The calm of Anacapri and the discretion of the Palace attracts more and more international stars who are able to relax here absolutely undisturbed. Each suite has its own private swimming pool, and if guests so wish, Cacace will even go and collect them from Naples by yacht or helicopter. "Capri's a fantastic place and horrendous at the same time," he says. "The crowds of day-trippers, the VIP hunting – that's why I want to protect my guests." And in Anacapri, protected they are. Cacace likes to tell how Harrison Ford was able to stroll through the narrow alleyways without attracting the



White predominates in the Capri Palace Hotel

The fabulous outdoor swimming pool





The painter Velasco stayed for a month in the Palace and painted portraits of guests and staff.

Left: Francesco Mussinelli, Maitre of L'Olivo and Velasco's painting

Top middle: Eta in the 'School for Legs'

Top right: The island liqueur Limoncello

Below: Piazza Umberto I

least bit of attention and felt like a free man, or how he showed Lorin Maazel the fantastic music seagulls and waves make. Julia Roberts was the only one who felt like throwing herself into the street-life of Capri, and so he took on the role of chaperone and screened her from hordes of fans all the way down via Le Botteghe and via Le Camerelle. Whenever Cacace speaks of Capri, its history, and the walks that always end with a fantastic panoramic vista, his bright eyes shine with delight. This enthusiasm is so genuine that it's contagious. Even Professor Canonaco, who's managed the Beauty Farm at the hotel since 1995, was forced, after initial scepticism, to capitulate before the island's beauty. "Magnetism" is how he describes the mysterious, attractive force that enticed even Roman emperors here. "You have to admit it's strange that so many lives have crossed and so many fates have been played out here on this island that's scarcely bigger than a rock."

Professor Canonaco now lives here for six months a year and helps to ensure not only that his guests are surrounded by beauty, but that they also become more beautiful themselves. The "School for Legs" offers a treatment to help rid legs of unsightly cellulite using a combination of seaweed mudpacks and tingling Kneipp baths. In the white corridors, between white pillars, you bump into one after another of the Professor's "pupils" wearing long, white bathing robes, looking relaxed and pampered.

More than clients of an anonymous hotel, those who stay at the Capri Hotel & Spa are guests of Cacace's elegant residence. Indeed, everything here bears Cacace's hallmark: he took personal charge of renovating the former family-owned Europa Hotel. He chose the furniture – all antique – and decided that everything had to be white. He also chose and mixed the hotel music and had the original idea of inviting an Italian artist for a prolonged stay in the hotel every year. The resulting paintings then adorn the white walls. After Salvatore Garau, Velasco took up residence in this stylish house, mainly painting portraits of the Palace staff. Professor Canonaco hangs above the bar, Francesco Mussinelli, headwaiter of the restaurant L'Olivo, above the piano. More than employees, they're part of a family. Take Eta, for example, the curly-haired girl at the reception desk, or Edoardo, who's been concierge there since 1963. When, as you leave, he asks if you wouldn't like to stay a little longer, all you can reply is: "Yes – for ever."

