We the Italians

October 2025

N.192

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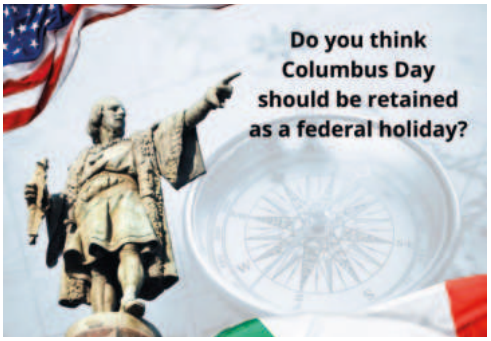

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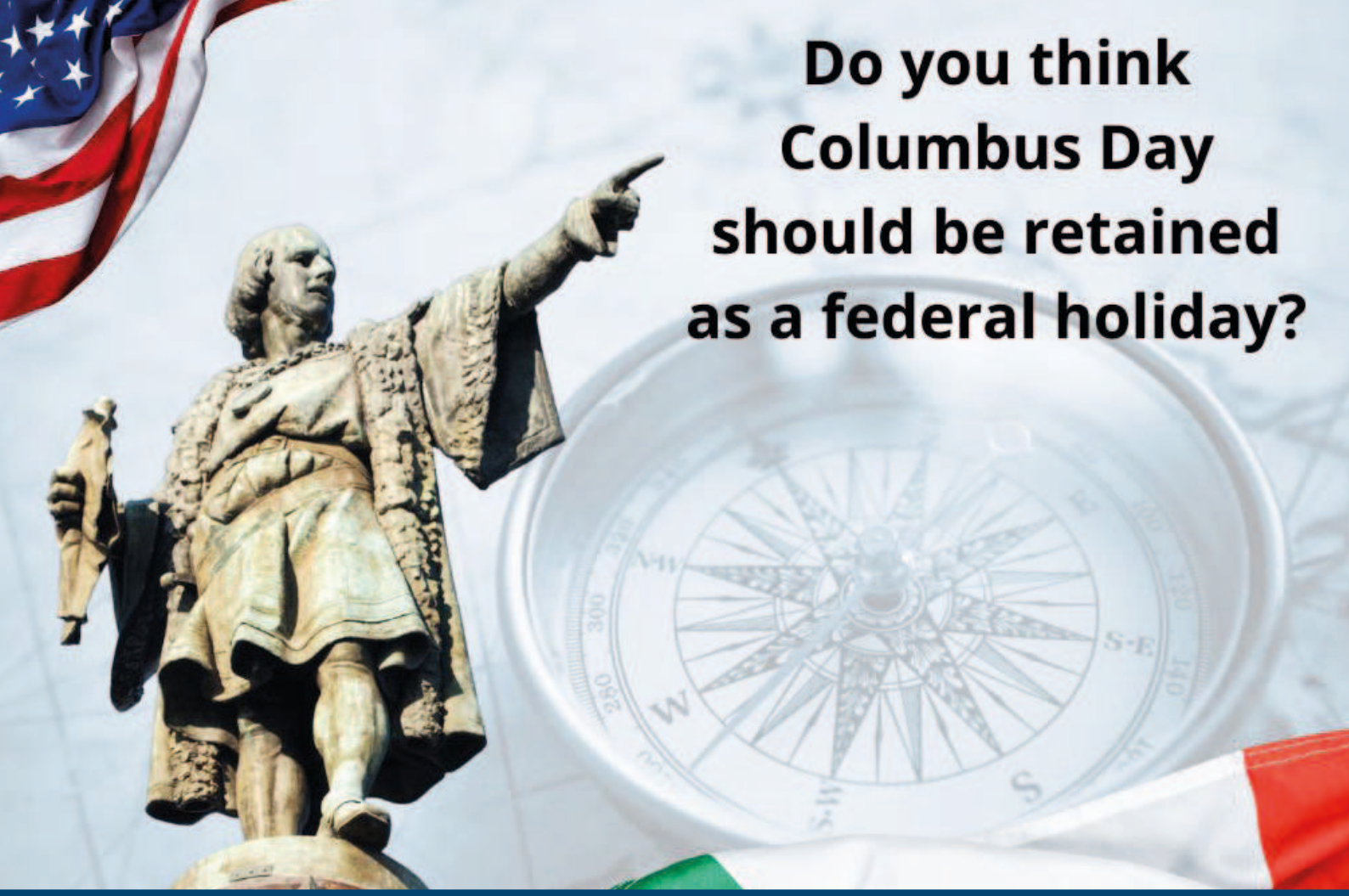


Editorial

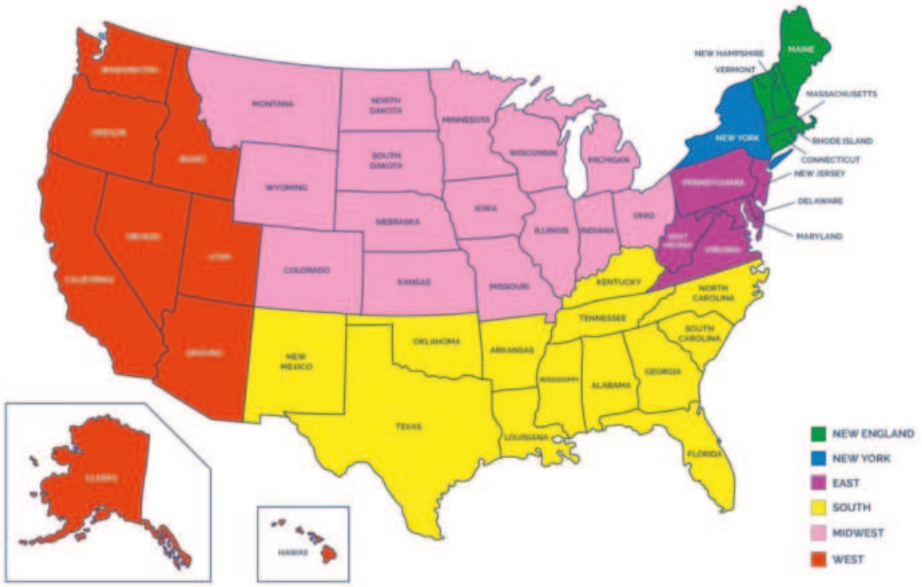
What's up with WTI #192

by Umberto Mucci

Dear friends,

As I write this editorial, the second survey prepared by We the Italians as part of the Italia America Reputation Lab is currently underway. This time, we are receiving valuable help from three Italian American organizations: **the Conference of Presidents of Major Italian American Organizations**, **the Italian Sons and Daughters of America**, and **the Italian American ONE VOICE Coalition**. We are truly grateful to them, and we hope that other associations will soon join us in helping to strengthen the voice of Italian Americans - a voice we intend to bring to the attention of Italian institutions.

The second survey focuses on **Columbus Day**, and the question is



very simple: **Do you think Columbus Day should be retained as a federal holiday?** By the time this issue of the magazine is published, Columbus Day will have passed and the survey will have already closed. We will share the results through our communication channels.

We're getting used to our new, beautiful website - and we hope you are too. There's so much to explore, and we'd like to give you a quick overview to help you navigate and discover all the rich content available. Please note that the U.S. regions we use have been reduced from nine to six. **New York**, **New England**, and **East** remain unchanged; **Great Lakes** has been merged into **Midwest**, **South East** into **South**, and **California** into **West**.

Here's a quick tour of the site's main sections:

- Latest News – Updated daily and divided into eight geographic subcategories: the six U.S. areas, a general American section called From USA, and another with the news from Italy.
- Podcast – Features our three AI-assisted podcast series: Italy in English (weekly, 8 news stories from Italy, in English); L'Italia in America (weekly, 6 news stories about Italy in America, in Italian); The Interviews (monthly, summarizing the monthly interview).
- Interviews – Includes all 331 interviews published so far, in both English and Italian.
- Magazine – Hosts all 192 issues of our monthly English-language magazine dedi-

cated to Italian excellence.

- **Books** – Offers previews and purchase options for the eleven books published so far by We the Italians.
- **We Love Columbus** – Contains three subsections: Columbus Day 2020, featuring the virtual celebration we organized five years ago during the COVID emergency; Italian Columbus Day, with the official text of the 2014 proclamation in which the Italian government designated October 12 as Columbus Day in Italy as well; News on Columbus, gathering all articles tagged "Christopher Columbus" – the most comprehensive collection on Columbus available anywhere, online or offline.

- **Team** – Presents everyone involved in We the Italians: from our daily collaborators to our magazine contributors, and our Ambassadors in the U.S., in Italy, and across thematic areas.
- **Events** – Showcases events we have organized or participated in, divided into Events in Italy, Events in the USA, and – fortunately now

inactive – the Online Events section, dedicated to the COVID period.

- Gala – Features descriptions, journals, photos, and videos from the three editions of our Gala, which will return – better than ever – in 2026.
- IARL – Dedicated to our spinoff, the Italia America Reputation Lab, developed in collaboration with our friends at Reputation Research and the Il Newyorkese network.

I'm about to leave for Washington, D.C., where I'll be happy to meet old and new friends during the celebrations – more meaningful than ever this year – of the **National Italian American Foundation**. My dear friends at NIAF are celebrating their 50th anniversary, and there will be many exciting events in addition to their famous Gala, which I'll have the pleasure of attending. It's important to thank NIAF for these first 50 years and to celebrate this milestone together with them.

After that, I'll be in New York, where – at the legendary **Red Sauce Studio** in Little Italy – I'll have the pleasure of launching a new collaboration, together with other Italian journalists in the Big Apple, with our friends from the remarkable **Italian American Podcast**.

This month we welcome a new Ambassador to our to the We the Italians team.

Stephen Alfieri is our new Ambassador in **Tennessee**. Stephen is a proud Italian American and dual citizen of Italy and the United States, who is committed to celebrating

Stephen Alfieri

and preserving his heritage. He is engaged in initiatives which allow him to share his love for his Italian Roots. Stephen believes in honoring tradition while encouraging modern thought, dialogue, cultural pride and connection to our Italian heritage. Through his service, he looks for ways to share his passion for the Italian heritage so that the Italian American identity continues to thrive in America and beyond.

Last but absolutely not least, I'd like to highlight another milestone anniversary, which we discuss in this month's interview with **Colonel Scott Horrigan**, Chief of Staff of the **U.S. Army Southern European Task Force, Africa (SETAF-AF)**, and former Commander of the **U.S.**

Scott Horrigan

Army Garrison Italy in Vicenza. This month marks 70 years of the American presence in Vicenza, and we at We the Italians want to celebrate it by sincerely thanking all the American service members currently stationed there – and, through them, all those who have served in Vicenza over the past seven decades. Thank you for your service, and for defending Italy.

Seventy years of Two Flags, One Heart.

And it doesn't stop there! That's why **we ask you to subscribe to We the Italians**.

It's all for now. Please stay safe and take care, and enjoy our magazine and our contents on our website. Stay safe and take care: the future's so bright, we gotta wear tricolor shades! A big Italian hug from Rome.

Italian wine

Trentino Alto Adige, the vineyards of the alps

We the Italians Editorial Staff

Trentino Alto Adige, perched between the Dolomites and the central Alps, is Italy's northernmost wine region – and one of its most distinctive. Vineyards climb terraces from 200 to 1,000 meters, hugging steep slopes where the climate shifts from valley warmth to alpine crispness. This mosaic of altitudes and exposures creates wines with clarity, balance, and unmistakable character.

Although the vineyard surface is only about 15,000 hecta-

res – less than 3% of Italy's total – the output is among the country's most respected. More than 98% of production qualifies as DOC, the highest proportion nationwide. Annual volumes reach around 1.2 million hectoliters, yet the emphasis is always on quality rather than quantity. The region's patchwork of microclimates means that each valley, hillside, and even single plot can produce wines with unique signatures.

Trentino in the south leans toward versatility. Its flagship grape is Teroldego, native to the Rotaliano plain. This red variety delivers deep color, vibrant acidity, and flavors of blackberry, plum, and spice. Structured yet approachable, it has earned recognition as one of Italy's great indigenous grapes. Marzemino, another local red, is lighter, with floral aromas and supple tannins – elegant and often enjoyed young. Pinot Grigio, widespread here, achieves remarkable precision: citrus, green apple, and a mineral streak that reflects alpine freshness. Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, planted at higher altitudes, form the backbone of Trentodoc, Italy's first sparkling wine appellation crafted with the classic method. Trentodoc today produces over 9 million bottles a year – crisp, refined bubbles that stand proudly beside Champagne.

Alto Adige, or Südtirol, presents a different profile. Roughly two-thirds of its vineyards are devoted to white grapes, and the results are stunning. Gewürztraminer is perhaps its most emblematic wine – aromatic, perfumed with rose, lychee, and exotic spice, yet balanced by cool-climate acidity. Pinot Bianco shows elegance and restraint, often with notes of pear and almond. Sauvignon Blanc thrives in higher vineyards, producing wines with vibrant citrus and herbal tones. Pinot Grigio here is taut and structured, proving that the grape can deliver much more than mass-market simplicity.

Red wines of Alto Adige are equally distinctive. Lagrein, grown near Bolzano, yields dark, powerful wines with flavors of blackberry, cocoa, and violet, structured by firm tannins. Schiava (known locally as Vernatsch) offers the opposite – light, fruity reds with delicate aromas of cherry and almond, perfect for everyday enjoyment. Together they illustrate the diversity of a small but varied territory: from bold, cellar-worthy reds to easy-drinking alpine styles.

The secret behind this diversity lies in terroir. Soils range from porphyry and quartz to limestone and dolomite. Sun exposure varies dramatically between south-facing terraces and shaded mountain valleys. Altitude brings cooler nights, preserving acidity and aromatic intensity. Annual rainfall averages around 1,000 millimeters, but winds like the Ora del Garda sweep through valleys, reducing humidity and protecting grapes from disease. This natural ventilation allows sustainable practices, and many growers now embrace organic or biodynamic viticulture.

History has also shaped the region's wine identity. Vines were cultivated here in Roman times, and medieval monasteries preserved traditions

on terraced hillsides. Centuries of Habsburg rule introduced Germanic varieties and cellar discipline. After World War I the region became Italian, blending Mediterranean influences with existing alpine heritage. Today, this dual legacy is visible in everything from grape choices to winemaking styles – a true crossroads of culture in a glass. Cooperatives are the backbone of production. Around 70% of growers belong to cooperative wineries, a necessity in a land where plots are tiny and slopes steep. These cooperatives, however, are not anonymous factories – many are recognized for excellence, bottling single-vineyard selections and pushing innovation. Alongside them, family estates and boutique producers experiment with old vines, high-altitude plantings, and new blends. The dynamic between collective strength and artisanal precision keeps the region's wine culture vibrant.

Numbers highlight the balance between tradition and innovation. Pinot Grigio accounts for about 15% of total vineyard area. Schiava still covers a large share of Alto Adige plantings, though in decline as Lagrein and international varieties gain ground. Gewürztraminer from the village of Tramin – the grape's spiritual home – is exported worldwide. Teroldego's reputation continues to rise, with more producers aging it in wood to reveal depth and complexity. And Trentodoc has become Italy's benchmark sparkling wine, praised for its mountain freshness and long aging potential.

Wine here is more than commerce – it is identity. Festivals in autumn celebrate the harvest with open cellars and tastings. Families gather around tables with canederli and speck paired with Pinot Bianco, or polenta with Teroldego. A glass of Schiava at a summer picnic, Gewürztraminer with apple stru-

del, Trentodoc for life's milestones – wine flows naturally through daily life.

Challenges remain. Climate change pushes cultivation ever higher, with experimental vineyards now above 1,000 meters. Heat waves test delicate varieties, while water management becomes increasingly urgent. Yet resilience defines Trentino Alto Adige. Innovative canopy practices, organic farming, and renewed focus on indigenous grapes promise a future where authenticity is preserved.

To taste a wine from these valleys is to drink the mountains – sharp air, bright sun, and centuries of dedication captured in a glass. Trentino Alto Adige may be small, but every bottle tells a grand story of altitude, precision, and cultural fusion. Few regions demonstrate so clearly how geography and history shape flavor. Here, vines do not simply grow – they thrive, speaking the language of the Alps with every sip.

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Italian entertainment

Feathers, Rebellion, and Love. Renato Zero turns 75

We the Italians Editorial Staff

In Italy, the 1970s were turbulent and complicated years: a time of change, revolution, and violence. Italian society was reshaping itself. Catholic Italy was discovering rebellion, and long-held beliefs were being questioned.

In those years, on the outskirts of Rome, a restless and daring young man would sneak out of his house dressed in ordinary clothes, then change in the entryway of some nearby building. Once transformed, he would roam the city wearing feathers,

heavy makeup, bright colors, and outfits that were undeniably provocative for the conventions of that era.

He was often beaten, insulted, and sometimes even arrested. His father was a police officer, and you can imagine the shock the first time he saw his son brought into the station – bloodied, dressed like David Bowie or another rebellious singer, openly and proudly challenging norms, clearly signaling his gay identity.

That young man was Renato Fiacchini. Since everyone called him "a zero," he turned the insult into his stage name: Renato Zero. It was the beginning of an Italian musical icon, who today turns 75.

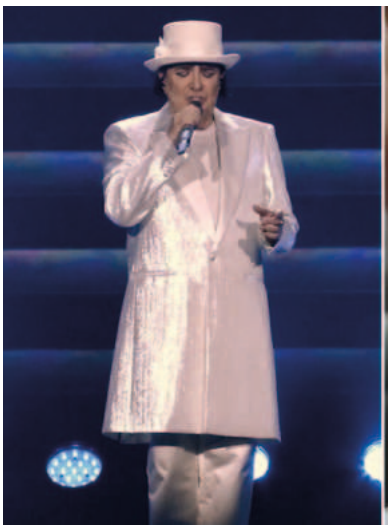
His fans number in the millions, and he gave them a name that stuck in history: he called them sorcini. In the 1980s, after one of his concerts, his car was surrounded by a swarm of scooters carrying wild, devoted fans. Looking at them from above, he affectionately described them as little "sorci" – the Roman slang word for mice. From that moment on, his fans proudly

carried that nickname.

Renato Zero has long stood out for his eccentric persona, theatrical flair, and deeply personal songwriting. Over a career that's spanned more than five decades, he's released more than 40 records and written circa 450 songs – each a window into the lives of outsiders, the invisible, the misfits. His music often explores themes of love, suffering, alienation, hope.

Zero's catalog boasts many hits beloved across generations. In "Il cielo," he grappled with human fragility faced with vastness. In "Triangolo," he wove ambiguous, daring narratives. "Mi vendo" remains enigmatic – a song open to multiple interpretations. "Il carrozzone" evokes life's journey as a traveling show, with all its characters and sorrows. His later works – "La pace sia con te," "Tutti gli zeri del mondo," "Chiedi di me" – shift between calls for peace, vulnerability, and authenticity.

Renato Zero's concerts are immersive events. He doesn't just sing – he performs. Costumes, theater,



emotion: his live shows serve as communal celebrations where fans sing, dance, and feel seen. Throughout his career, he has pushed the boundaries of spectacle while giving voice to those often ignored.

He has always insisted on refusing to age into irrelevance. Long ago he claimed he'd dress like a marionette if needed – to never become rigid, predictable, or lifeless. That creative restlessness has kept him vital.

As he steps into his 75th year, Zero isn't looking back – he's evolving. He plans to take his new album "Orazero" across Italy with 23 concert dates scheduled between January and April. Once again he's defying labels: he rejects being boxed by genre or trend, insisting that art must come from a place of purpose, not follower counts.

Critics and fans alike see him

as timeless. He has survived eras, outlasted fads, and continues to matter. His music resonates with young people as much as those who grew up with him – a sign that his art transcends generations.

His voice, once startling, remains potent. His lyrics, once provocative, still carry weight. His presence – always dramatic, always present – remains unforgettable.

He's not just celebrating a birthday. He's reaffirming a legacy. Renato Zero at 75 isn't fading – he's still creating, still daring, still insisting on connection. Anyone in Italy over the past 50 years who has fought to claim their sexual, cultural, or social identity owes a debt of gratitude to Renato Zero – who broke down barriers and shattered conventions with courage and audacity, passion and talent, and an endless love for life. In his own way, Renato Zero is an Italian hero.

Italian flavors

The chestnut of Monte Amiata

We the Italians Editorial Staff

On the slopes of Monte Amiata, a once volcanic peak rising between Tuscany and Lazio, chestnut trees dominate the landscape like silent guardians of history. For centuries these groves have shaped the lives, diet, and traditions of local communities. More than just food, the chestnut has been a lifeline, a cultural symbol, and now a protected product that links the past to the present.

The tree thrives between 350 and

1,000 meters above sea level, covering the mountain in dense woods. Villages dotting the slopes have long relied on the harvest. In the past, chestnuts were called "the bread of the poor" – a reliable source of nourishment when wheat was scarce or too costly. Families gathered the nuts, dried them, ground them into flour, and transformed them into polenta, soups, and cakes. Every recipe carried the memory of survival and ingenuity. Chestnut cultivation here follows the rhythm of the seasons. In spring, the woods awaken with fresh leaves and blossoms. Summer brings shade to hikers and animals. Autumn is the climax – the harvest season. Families and visitors take to the groves with baskets, bending to pick shiny brown fruits from the ground. The work is physical, but the atmosphere is festive. Conversations echo under the trees, children race to fill their baskets, and the scent of roasted chestnuts drifts from village squares.

The nut itself has distinct qualities. The Monte Amiata chestnut

has a glossy shell, a sweet and delicate flavor, and a firm texture. Several varieties are grown, each with small differences in size and taste, but all share a balance that makes them versatile in the kitchen. Roasted, they warm chilly evenings. Boiled, they become soft and comforting. Ground into flour, they turn into the base for rustic breads and desserts. One of the best-known sweets is castagnaccio – a flat cake enriched with raisins, pine nuts, and rosemary – that carries the flavor of tradition. Within the official protected designation, three main varieties stand out. The Cecio is small and round, known for its sweetness and suitability for roasting. The Marrone is larger, with an elegant shape and delicate taste that makes it perfect for confectionery and fine pastries. The Bastarda Rossa, with its reddish shell and slightly more robust flavor, lends itself to hearty cooking and flour production. Together, these three types represent the diversity of the mountain's chestnut heritage, each bringing a unique note to the local culinary repertoire.

Over time, the chestnut earned recognition not only for its cultural value but also for its quality. Local producers secured an official geographical indication, gua-

ranteeing that the chestnuts sold under the name truly come from Monte Amiata's groves. This status protects growers, reassures consumers, and preserves the link between product and land. It also highlights the careful cultivation methods – pruning, cleaning the woods, and maintaining biodiversity – that sustain the trees year

after year.

The landscape itself reflects this bond. Walking through the chestnut forests feels like stepping into an open-air museum. Some trees are centuries old, their twisted trunks and sprawling branches bearing witness to generations of farmers. Moss, lichens, and ferns thrive in the humid soil, while mushrooms appear in autumn alongside the fallen nuts. The forests are more than farmland – they are ecosystems where human stewardship and natural cycles meet.

Festivals celebrate this heritage. Each October, villages around Monte Amiata host chestnut fairs, drawing crowds to taste roasted nuts, soups, cakes, and liqueurs. Stalls line the streets with baskets of freshly picked fruit, artisans display wood carvings, and musicians play folk songs. The festivals are as much about community as about food – neighbors gather, visitors join in, and the mountain's identity is reaffirmed.

Rules guide the harvest to keep the balance intact. Collecting is usually allowed only on certain days and within specific areas, ensuring that the resource is not overexploited. Private groves remain protected, while communal lands invite participation under fair conditions. These measures reflect centuries of local wisdom – the recognition that the forest provides generously only if treated with respect.

For locals, the chestnut remains a symbol of resilience. It tells of

hard winters survived with little more than dried nuts and flour. It recalls the work of entire families who spent weeks in the woods gathering and drying the crop. It embodies a culture of simplicity, sharing, and gratitude for nature's gifts. Even as modern diets and economies have changed, the chestnut holds its place on tables, in stories, and in seasonal rituals.

For visitors, the experience is more than tasting a delicacy – it is entering a living tradition. Walking the trails among the groves, joining a harvest outing, or attending a village festival connects people to the mountain's rhythm. Every roasted nut carries the warmth of firesides and the echo of centuries. Every cake made with chestnut flour tells of resourcefulness and continuity.

Monte Amiata's chestnut is therefore not just an ingredient but a cultural landmark. It links the volcanic soil to the resilience of farming families, the cycle of seasons to the persistence of tradition. It is proof that food can be both sustenance and story, nourishment and identity.

The mountain continues to watch over its forests, and the forests continue to feed both body and spirit. To taste a chestnut from Monte Amiata is to take part in that story – one that began long ago and, with care, will endure for generations to come.

Italian land and nature

The Friulian Dolomites, wilderness at the edge of the Alps

We the Italians Editorial Staff

Tucked away in northeastern Italy, the Friulian Dolomites form a striking and less-traveled corner of the Alpine world. Jagged peaks, deep valleys, and an untouched atmosphere make this mountain range a paradise for nature lovers and adventurers seeking authenticity. Recognized as part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Friulian Dolomites are remarkable not just for their geology but also for the sense of wild solitude they inspire.

A Landscape of Stone and Silence

Unlike other Dolomite areas that

are shaped by tourism, the Friulian Dolomites have remained largely untouched. Their character is raw and dramatic – sheer cliffs rise like walls, while pinnacles and towers cut sharply into the sky. Valleys stretch between these stone giants, often reached only by narrow paths. This isolation gives the mountains a rare silence, broken only by the rush of streams, the call of birds, and the occasional echo of footsteps on rock.

The unique shapes of the mountains are the result of ancient marine sediments lifted and carved over millions of years. Sunlight changes their appearance throughout the day – golden at dawn, silver under midday skies, and glowing pink when evening sets in. To stand among them is to witness nature's artistry on a monumental scale.

A Protected Wilderness

At the heart of the range lies a vast nature park created to safeguard its ecosystems. The park is a refuge for wildlife that thrives in rugged environments – chamois leap across rocky slopes, ibex graze on high meadows, and eagles circle above the ridgelines. Rare plants cling to alpine ledges, flowering in bursts of color during the short summer season. The diversity here reflects both the harshness and the resilience of life in high mountains.

Human presence is minimal. Villages lie on the fringes, while the interior remains mostly without roads or modern development. This absence of infrastructure gives the park a feeling of remoteness unusual in Europe, making it a destination for those who want to step away from crowds and experience wilderness in its purest form.

Trails into the Wild

Exploration of the Friulian Dolomites begins on foot. A network of trails winds through valleys and ascends toward high passes, suitable for both casual walkers and seasoned trekkers. Some routes lead to alpine huts where travelers can spend the night, sharing simple meals and stories beneath the stars. Others climb to panoramic peaks where the horizon is a jagged sea of summits.

For those with technical skill, the range also offers climbing and mountaineering challenges. Vertical walls and narrow ridges test endurance and courage, rewarding climbers with unmatched views and the thrill of standing atop untouched pinnacles. In winter, snow transforms the landscape into a serene white world where ski mountaineering and snowshoeing reveal a different kind of beauty.

Culture on the Margins

Though the high valleys are wild, the communities that border the range carry centuries of tradition. Small mountain towns reflect the blend of Italian and Central European influences that mark this borderland region. Wooden houses, alpine pastures, and local festivals tell stories of resilience – of people living in harmony with the rhythms of the mountains. Visitors find hospitality in family-run inns and restaurants, where local cuisine mixes hearty alpine dishes with the flavors of Friuli's fertile plains.

A Living Heritage

Recognition by UNESCO highlights the global value of the Friulian Dolomites, but for those who live nearby, the mountains are more than a geological wonder – they are part of identity. Shepherding, woodcraft, and seasonal migrations have long defi-

ned life here, and echoes of these practices remain visible in pastures and trails. The park protects not only nature but also the memory of a landscape shaped by both people and time.

A Place for Reflection

The Friulian Dolomites appeal not only to hikers and climbers but also to those who simply wish to pause and reflect. The silence of a valley at dawn, the sight of clouds drifting among peaks, or the feeling of being far from modern noise creates a rare opportunity for introspection. Here, the mountains remind visitors of scale and perspective – how small one feels beneath cliffs that have stood for ages, and how freeing it is to walk paths that lead away from distraction.

Gateway to Discovery

Reaching the Friulian Dolomites

often means traveling through rolling hills and vineyards before the mountains suddenly rise on the horizon. This journey itself is part of the experience – a gradual shift from cultivated land to wilderness. Once inside the range, the outside world feels distant, replaced by an environment where time seems to move at a different pace.

An Invitation to Explore

The Friulian Dolomites are not polished or crowded. They are raw, demanding, and immensely rewarding. Whether through a multi-day trek, a climb on a limestone wall, or a simple walk through a valley, the reward is the same – a profound sense of connection with nature. This is a corner of the Alps where wild beauty still rules, offering travelers not just scenery but the experience of stepping into a world where stone, sky, and silence reign.

Italian traditions

The spirited dance of the Saltarello

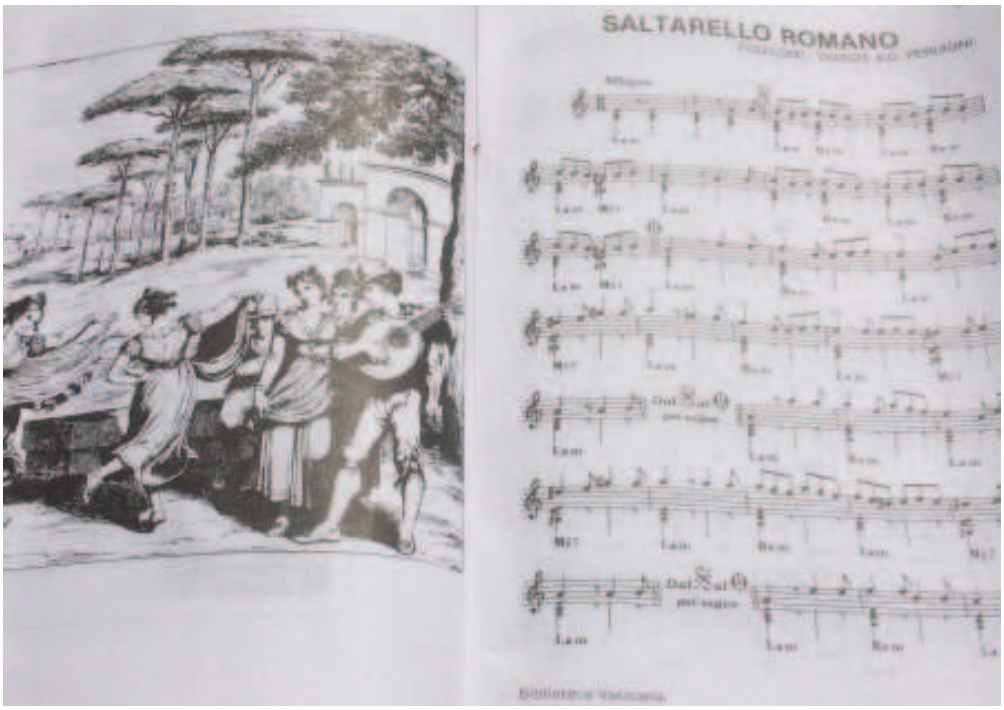
We the Italians Editorial Staff

Italy has always been a land where music and movement are woven into daily life. Among the many traditional dances that reflect this deep bond, one stands out for its energy, humor, and unmistakable rhythm – the Saltarello. Born in central Italy and once spread across the peninsula, the dance still carries the flavor of village squares, rustic festivals, and gatherings where music turned everyday moments into celebrations.

The very name of the Saltarello comes from the Italian verb saltare, meaning "to jump." That single word captures the essence of the dance: lively leaps, quick

footwork, and movements that shift suddenly between grace and playfulness. Unlike more formal court dances, the Saltarello has always belonged to the people. It was a way to release energy, flirt, and show off both rhythm and stamina, often lasting until the small hours of the night.

Traditionally, the Saltarello was accompanied by instruments that mirrored its vigor. Tambourines set the pace with sharp beats, while rustic flutes, accordions, and later guitars filled the air with melodies that rose and fell like waves. In some areas, the music featured string instruments like the calascione, a long-necked lute whose deep, resonant sound gave weight to the otherwise light and playful steps. The music often began at a moderate tempo, then accelerated, challenging the dancers to keep up. This change of pace added excitement, creating moments where the floor seemed to pulse with collective joy. The steps of the Saltarello are simple at their core but rich in variations. Partners circle each other, exchange playful advances, and break into sudden leaps. A dancer may tease with quick turns or mock retreats before springing forward again. Hands clap in rhythm, feet stamp to emphasize the beat, and the whole performance becomes a conversation expressed through movement. Because of this, the dance was not only entertainment – it was also a social ritual. Young men and women could exchange glances and gestures in ways that words might not allow.



The Saltarello differs depending on the region. In Lazio, near Rome, it often features strong stamping and a bold, earthy quality. In Abruzzo and Marche, it can be more light-footed, almost aerial, with leaps that suggest freedom and exuberance. Each area added its own accent, shaped by local customs and the instruments at hand. What unites all versions is the underlying spirit – a refusal to stay still, a constant push toward vitality and laughter. Through the centuries, the Saltarello has crossed paths with other musical traditions. During the Renaissance, its rhythms influenced courtly compositions, and traces of the dance appear in works written for noble audiences. Later, as guitars and mandolins became more widespread, the Saltarello adapted once again, blending old folk patterns with new sounds. Even today, contemporary folk groups experiment with it, mixing traditional percussion with modern fingerpicking techniques, showing how a dance born centuries ago can still inspire creativity.

Yet the Saltarello is more than a historical curiosity – it continues to live wherever people gather to celebrate community. At village feasts, folk festivals, and cultural

events, the familiar beat of the tambourine draws dancers into the circle. Elderly couples show the younger generation how to leap and stamp, while children try to imitate the rhythm with wide-eyed enthusiasm. The result is less about perfect choreography and more about shared joy.

Watching or joining a Saltarello today feels like stepping into a timeless current. The gestures are playful, sometimes exaggerated, but always full of heart. The dance does not require polished skill – only a willingness to let the rhythm move you. In that way, it remains faithful to its origins as a dance of the people, uniting generations through sound, movement, and laughter.

The Saltarello tells a story that words cannot capture alone. It is a story of flirtation and rivalry, of humor and freedom, of communities that used dance to affirm life even in hard times. Its rhythm continues to echo in the squares of central Italy, inviting anyone who hears it to leap, stamp, and surrender to the joy of movement.

Italian healthcare

Italy approves world's first law on obesity prevention and care

We the Italians Editorial Staff

Italy has taken a groundbreaking step in public health by approving the world's first national law specifically aimed at the prevention and treatment of obesity. The legislation, recently passed in the Senate, places the issue at the center of the country's healthcare agenda and establishes a long-term framework for how obesity will be recognized, managed, and addressed within the public system.

For the first time, obesity is officially treated not just as a lifestyle issue but as a chronic condition requiring medical attention. The law outlines measures for prevention, early diagnosis, and treatment, while also providing resources for research and education. It represents a significant cultural and institutional shift in how Italy deals with one of the most pressing health challenges of modern societies.

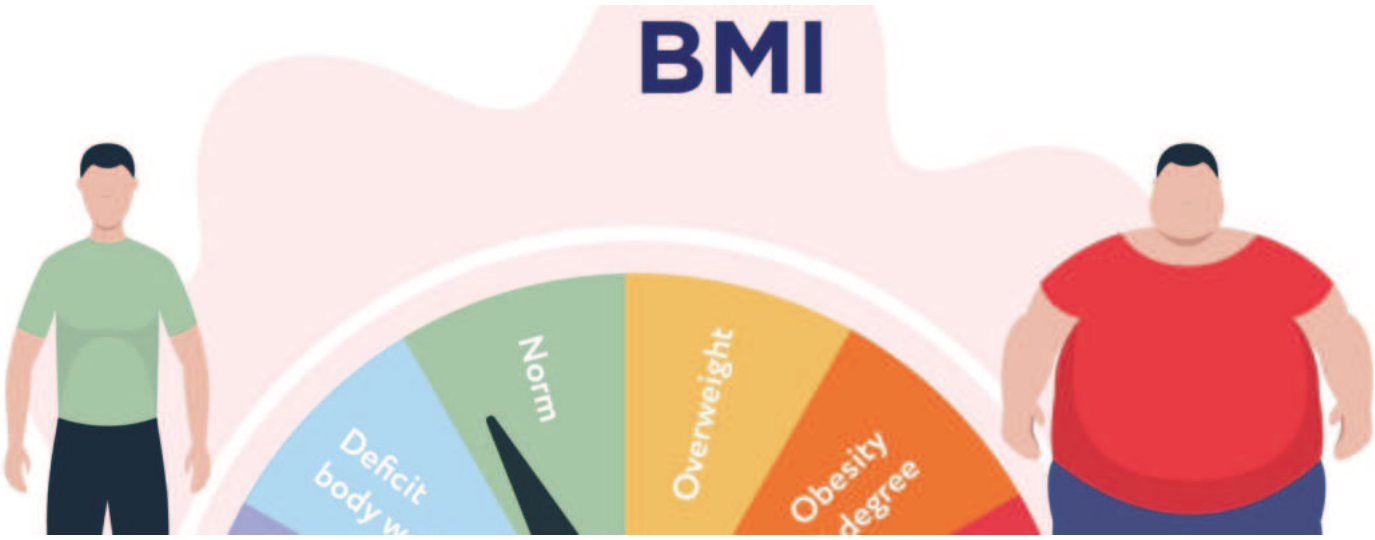
The plan involves creating regional networks dedicated to obesity care. These networks will bring together hospitals, clinics, family doctors, and specialized centers, ensuring that patients receive coordinated assistance. Children and adolescents are a particular focus – prevention campaigns will be expanded in schools, with special attention to nutrition education, physical activity, and psychological support.

An important feature of the law is its recognition of the economic and social impact of obesity. Beyond health complications such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and

certain cancers, obesity places a heavy burden on the workforce and national healthcare spending. By addressing the problem systematically, Italy hopes to reduce long-term costs while improving the quality of life for millions of citizens.

The legislation also sets up a National Commission on Obesity, which will oversee the application of the law, monitor results, and update strategies based on scientific evidence. Funding will be allocated to guarantee access to therapies and innovative treatments, including medications and surgical options where necessary. Importantly, the law stresses the need to fight stigma – people affected by obesity will be protected against discrimination and will have the right to adequate medical care without prejudice.

Public awareness campaigns are expected to be rolled out nationwide, promoting healthy eating habits and active lifestyles. At the same time, the food industry will face growing pressure to support healthier choices. While the law does not impose new restrictions on products, it signals a clear policy direction – encouraging collaboration between institutions, producers, and consumers to reduce obesity rates.



The approval of this legislation makes Italy the first country in the world to formally recognize obesity within its healthcare system at such a comprehensive level. Experts see it as a pioneering model that could inspire other nations to adopt similar frameworks. By integrating prevention, care, and social protection into one strategy, the law seeks to move beyond short-term campaigns and instead create a permanent infrastructure for fighting obesity.

Italy's approach reflects the urgency of the problem. According to recent estimates, more than 25 million Italians are overweight, and about 6 million live with obesity. The trend has been rising, particularly among young people, sparking concern about future health outcomes. With this law, the country signals that combating obesity is not only a matter of personal responsibility but a collective priority – one that requires coordinated action across healthcare, education, and society as a whole.
In placing obesity on the same level as other chronic diseases, Italy is betting on prevention as well as care. The hope is that by acting now, future generations will benefit from healthier lives, reduced medical costs, and a culture that values well-being over unhealthy habits.

Italian cuisine

Have Your Pasta and Eat it Too!

Amy Riolo

In the United States, October is also known as National Italian American Heritage Month, National Pasta Month, and National Book Month. This traditional pasta recipe adapted from my Italian Recipes For Dummies book is the perfect way to celebrate.

Maltagliati means poorly cut, and this pasta is traditional in the Emilia Romagna region of Italy, where it is especially appreciated in fall and winter. When prepared and eaten properly as a part of a healthful lifestyle, pasta can be as good for you as it is delicious.

Here are some tips for doing it right:

Choose the Best Quality Pasta

Look for whole and minimally processed grains, low temperature drying for health and texture, and bronze or gold dyes for texture. Making pasta from scratch is also a great idea. You can control the ingredients and get some movement!

Cook until Al Dente

In addition to providing better flavor and texture, when pasta is cooked less it has a lower glycemic index and the more nutrients the pasta maintains.

Dress Pasta Properly

Avoid jarred and canned sauces with additives like sugar, sweeteners, and sodium. Choose a nutritious dressing like a fresh pesto and think about dressing the pasta with forms of protein, vegetables, and legumes. Good quality extra virgin olive oil coaxes out more nutrients and lowers its glycemic load.

Serving Size

A proper serving size is ½ cup dried pasta, which makes 1 to 1 ¼ cup of cooked pasta. This is why it's a first course in Italy.

Eat with Others and Be Physically Active

Eating together and enjoying food communally contributes to better absorption of nutrients, improved digestion,

and enhanced well-being. Stay active by incorporating pleasurable physical activities, such as taking a walk after a meal to stay happy and healthy.

MALTAGLIATI CON FAGIOLI/HAND-CUT PASTA WITH BEANS

Prep time: 40 min
Cook time: 10 min
Yield: 4 servings

Ingredients

* 1 recipe (roughly 1/2 pound) Basic Pasta Dough (refer to the recipes below)
* 1/2 cup Amy Riolo Selections or other good-quality extra virgin olive oil
* 1 garlic clove, peeled
* 1 sprig rosemary, whole
* 1 small onion, finely chopped
* 2 teaspoons tomato paste
* 1 cup cooked borlotti or cannellini beans (see Chapter 3)
* Unrefined sea salt
* Black pepper, freshly ground, to taste
* 2 cups baby kale, roughly chopped
* 1/4 cup grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese

Directions

1. Start with pasta dough that has rested for at least 20 minutes. Roll out pasta dough to form a rectangle about 12-inches long.
2. Divide the dough into six balls and use a rolling pin to roll each ball out to approximately 24 inches long and -inch thickness or use a pasta machine according to directions.
3. Cut the pieces in half width-wise to make two 12-inch-long rectangular pieces out of each.
4. Cut the pasta with a knife or tear with your hands to obtain irregular shapes about 1-inch long. Place pieces in a single layer on floured cookie sheets until ready to cook.
5. To make the sauce, heat 2 tablespoons EVOO in a large, wide saucepan over medium heat. Add the garlic, rosemary, and onion, and cook until the onion turns golden, stirring occasionally, approximately 5 minutes.
6. Stir the tomato paste into the pan with a wooden spoon, allowing it to caramelize by cooking on the bottom. After the tomato paste begins to sizzle, thoroughly stir it into the other ingredients and add the beans and salt and pepper to taste.

7. Add water to about 1 inch short of covering the beans, and increase heat to high.
8. Bring to a boil, stir, and reduce heat to medium-low. Allow to simmer for 20 minutes, and then remove the rosemary and garlic. Carefully remove half of the soup with a ladle, and blend it until smooth in a blender or food processor. (Or use an immersion blender to slightly thicken the mixture right in the pot.)
9. Return the mixture to the heat, and stir in the kale. If needed, add water until the mixture is a creamy, soup-like texture.
10. Taste, and adjust salt and pepper. Increase heat to high, and after it boils, add the pasta pieces (or maltagliati) and cook for 5 minutes more, or until they are very tender.
11. Garnish with additional EVOO and cheese, and serve.

Tip: Making the beans in advance saves time with this dish. You could also make the pasta in advance and put everything together at the last minute. This dish is one of the few pasta dishes that tastes better the next day, so you could make the whole thing in advance. Just add additional liquid or vegetable stock, adjust seasoning, and reheat to serve.

BASIC PASTA DOUGH

Prep time: 15 min
Cook time: 30 min resting time

Yield: 4 servings (approximately 1/2 pound)

Ingredients

* 2 1/2 cups 00 (highly refined) flour or all-purpose flour, plus additional 1 cup for work surface
* 4 jumbo eggs (10 ounces total)
* 1 teaspoon salt

Directions

1. Place the flour in a mound on a clean, dry work surface. Make a hole in the center and break the eggs into the middle. Using a fork, carefully mix the eggs together and incorporate a little flour into the eggs at a time.
2. Add the salt and mix well by hand to form a solid dough.
3. ightly flour the work surface and knead and fold the dough energetically until it forms a smooth ball; see Figure 9-1. Using your hands or a floured rolling pin, flatten out the dough to form a 10-inch diameter disk. Cover and set aside to rest for 30 minutes. Refer to recipe above for shaping.

Italian territories

The Riviera del Brenta. A living canvas of villas and waterways

We the Italians Editorial Staff

Stretching between Venice and Padua, the Riviera del Brenta is more than a picturesque landscape – it is a place where history, art, and nature flow together along the course of the Brenta River. For centuries, this waterway has served as both a lifeline and a stage, carrying noble families, artists, and travelers through a setting that feels suspended in time. Today, the Riviera offers a blend of architectural splendor, timeless tradi-

tions, and authentic flavors that make it one of the Veneto's most captivating destinations.

A Waterway of History

The Brenta River has always been a natural corridor linking Venice to the mainland. In the 16th and 17th centuries, when Venice reached the height of its wealth, aristocrats and powerful merchants looked beyond the crowded city for retreats in the countryside. They transformed the banks of the Brenta into a Venetian extension – a place where villas rose like palaces in miniature, surrounded by gardens and frescoed halls that rivaled those of the Lagoon. The river itself became a grand boulevard on water, with boats carrying nobles to their estates during the summer months.

The Villas of the Riviera

The villas are the Riviera's most iconic feature. Built by renowned architects and decorated by painters of the Venetian school, these residences were designed not just as country homes but as symbols of prestige. Each villa tells its own story – some were the

scene of lavish banquets and theatrical performances, others served as quiet retreats for reflection and study. Walking or cruising along the Brenta, one passes façades that echo the grandeur of Venice's palazzi, but framed by the greenery of the countryside. Among the many villas, some remain private, others open their doors to visitors, offering a glimpse into a world where art and leisure once intertwined seamlessly.

Traveling by Boat

To truly experience the Riviera del Brenta, the best approach is to follow the river itself. Traditional boats once known as burchielli carried passengers from Venice to Padua, gliding slowly so travelers could admire the landscape and the villas lining the banks. Today, modern versions of those river cruises recreate the same sense of gentle discovery. Passing through historic locks and under low bridges, the journey allows one to appreciate not only the architecture but also the rhythm of life along the water – fishermen tending nets, cyclists tracing paths beside the canals, and the reflections of centuries-old façades shimmering on the surface.

A Land of Craftsmanship

The Riviera is not only about ari-

stocratic splendor – it is also a land of skilled craftsmanship. Over the years, the area became renowned for shoemaking, with workshops and factories producing footwear that reached markets far beyond Italy. This tradition of artisanal excellence continues, blending innovation with heritage. The combination of manual skill and creativity is part of the Riviera's identity, where work and beauty go hand in hand.

Flavors of the River and Land

No journey through the Riviera would be complete without tasting its cuisine. The river itself provides fish and freshwater delicacies, while the surrounding farmland yields seasonal vegetables and wine. Traditional recipes reflect a dialogue between Venetian influences and rustic simplicity – risottos flavored with local herbs, polenta served with savory sauces, and pastries that echo the festive traditions of the region. Dining here often means sitting in a trattoria along the riverbank, where the view becomes as memorable as the food itself.

A Living Heritage

The Riviera del Brenta is not a museum frozen in the past – it is a living heritage where communities still inhabit the villas, tend

the fields, and celebrate local festivals. Events often bring the history of the river back to life, with re-enactments of burchiello voyages or summer evenings filled with music and theater in villa gardens. The connection between the people and the river remains strong, a reminder that this landscape is shaped not only by architecture but also by human activity and memory.

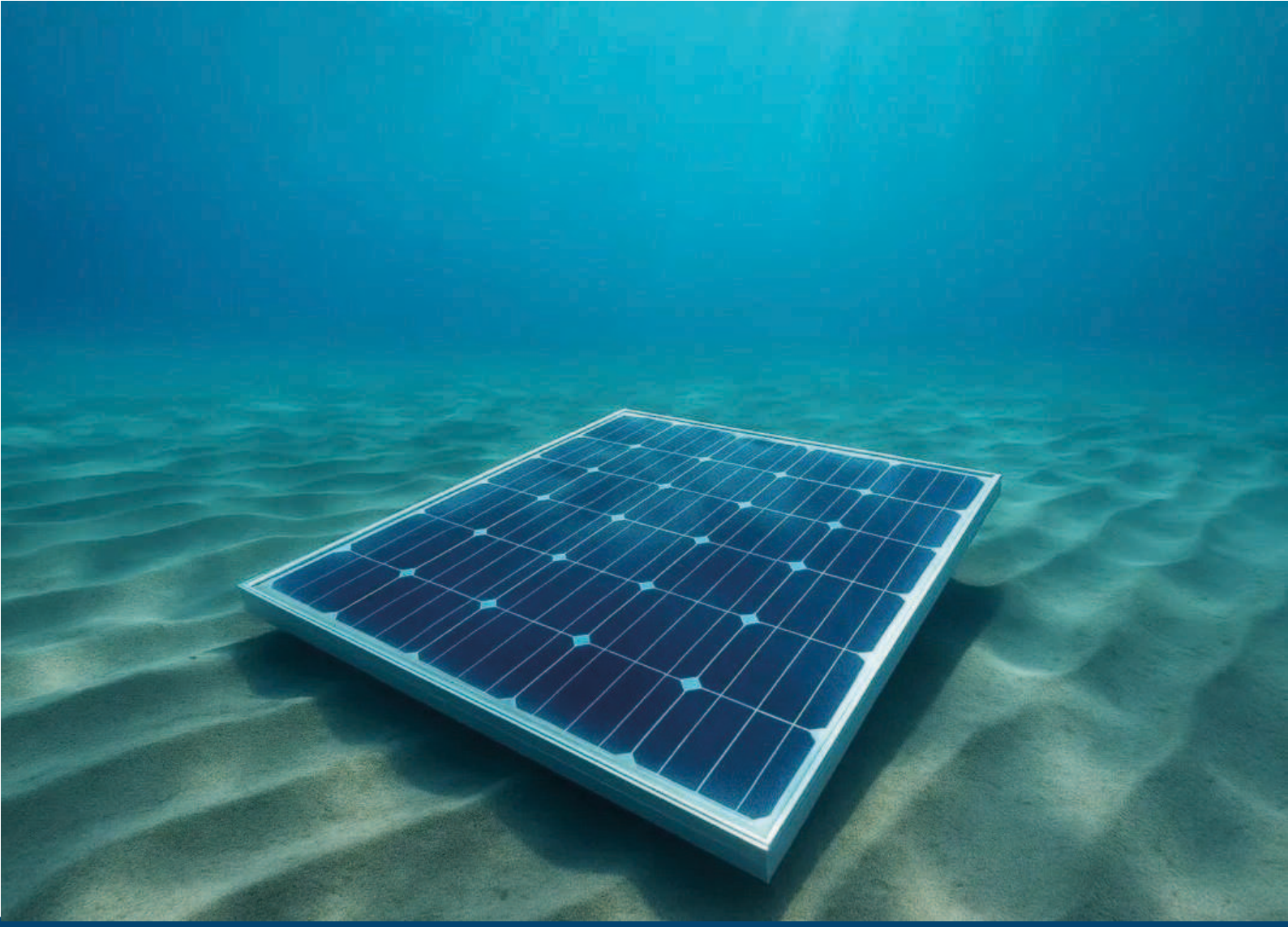
Gateway Between Two Cities

Geographically, the Riviera serves as a link between Venice and Padua – two cities with distinct identities. Venice dazzles with its maritime splendor, while Padua carries the intellectual prestige of its university and artistic treasures. The Brenta River, weaving between them, provides a transition from lagoon to land, from urban intensity to rural calm. For travelers, following the Riviera offers a way to experience both worlds while enjoying the serenity of the journey itself.

An Invitation to Discover

Visiting the Riviera del Brenta is like stepping into a painting where the brushstrokes are made of water, stone, and light. Whether wandering through frescoed halls, gliding past willow trees on a riverboat, or savoring a plate of local specialties, one feels the harmony of art and nature that defi-

nes this unique landscape. It is a destination that invites not only admiration but participation – an opportunity to slow down, to see beauty in detail, and to connect with a tradition that continues to thrive along the Brenta's gentle current.

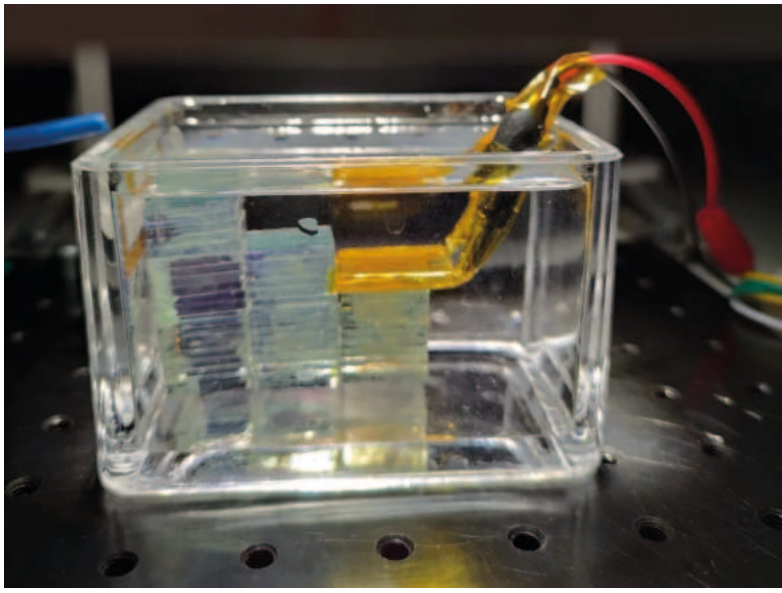


Italian sustainability

Placing solar panels on the seabed

We the Italians Editorial Staff

Italy has often been at the forefront of renewable energy innovation, from solar rooftops and building façades to floating panels on lakes. Now Italian scientists are pushing the boundaries even further - below the surface of the sea. The latest breakthrough comes from a research team working within CNR, the National Research Council of Italy, which has discovered how to adapt a special perovskite crystal so that it not only survives but actually thrives underwater.



The spark came when simulations suggested that a perovskite known as $FAPbBr_3$ could generate more energy beneath the sea than in open air. The ocean acts like a natural filter - red light is quickly absorbed, leaving behind a spectrum dominated by blue and green wavelengths. This perfectly matches the absorption properties of the Italian-developed perovskite. At the same time, the cool marine environment prevents overheating, a common issue for solar cells exposed to the sun on land.

Italian researchers quickly realized the implications. By modifying a material that had originally been tested for semi-transparent windows and architectural panels, they had stumbled upon a technology with potential to revolutionize power generation in marine environments. The project was carried out through collaboration between several Italian institutions, including CNR-ISM, CNR-IPCF, the University of Roma Tor Vergata, and BeDimensional, a company specializing in advanced materials.

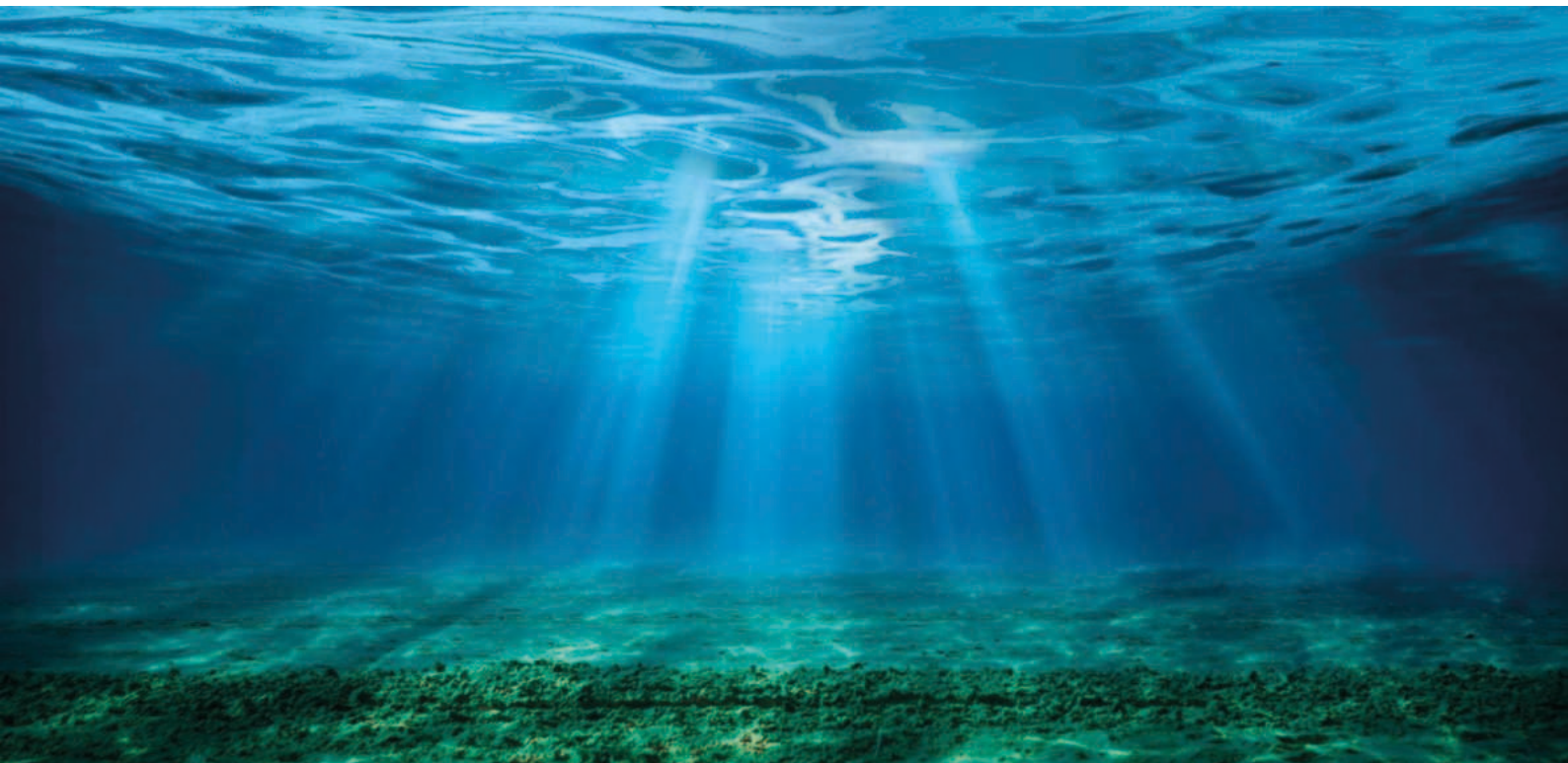
One of the toughest problems was durability. Perovskites are sensitive to water and also contain lead. To address this, the Italian team developed an innovative protective layer - a hydrophobic polymer adhesive

that seals the solar cells from seawater. When the encapsulated devices were left in saltwater for more than ten days, the release of lead was extremely low - far below international safety thresholds. This protective design shows how Italian engineering can tackle not just performance but also environmental responsibility.

The immediate applications are not massive undersea solar farms, at least not yet. Instead, the first targets are small-scale but highly impactful. Underwater sensors, cameras, and monitoring devices often rely on batteries that are expensive and complicated to replace. With Italian-designed perovskite cells, these instruments could operate for long periods without external power sources. In effect, Italy could supply the energy backbone for the emerging underwater Internet of Things.

Of course, challenges remain. One major issue is biofouling - the growth of algae, barnacles, and tiny marine organisms on submerged surfaces. These can block sunlight and reduce efficiency. Developing coatings or treatments that keep the panels clean without harming the ecosystem is the next major step, and Italian labs are already studying solutions.

This project highlights Italy's ability to innovate in renewable energy. From the rooftops of cities to offshore platforms and now the seafloor, Italian research is expanding the boundaries of where solar power can go. If successful, the country could not only contribute to global decarbonization but also set the stage for an entirely new industry - harvesting solar power beneath the waves.



Italian sport

Italy on top of the Volleyball world

Federico Pasquali

The year 2025 will be etched into Italy's sporting memory as the year when Italian volleyball reached the height of its greatness. Both the men's and women's teams captured the World Championships, completing a double triumph with no precedent in Italian sports history and few equals anywhere in the world. The heroes of this success are, of course, the athletes themselves - Italy boasts some of the best volleyball players on the planet, and its national leagues are often compared to an "NBA

of volleyball." But behind those champions stand two of the most accomplished coaches the sport has ever seen.

The men's national team is led by Ferdinando "Fefè" De Giorgi, born in Squinzano, in the Salento area in the Puglia region, in southern Italy. With the World Championship victory in the Philippines this past September, De Giorgi has secured his place among the all-time greats. After winning three World Championships as a player with the famed "Generation of Phenoms" (1990, 1994, 1998), and another title as head coach in 2022, he brought Italy back to the very top in 2025. Five world titles - three on the court, two from the bench - something no other coach in any team sport has ever achieved. His career is woven into the very fabric of Italian volleyball, a golden thread running through decades and generations.

On the women's side, the head coach is Julio Velasco, born in La Plata, Argentina, to a Peruvian father and an Argentine mother of English descent, later becoming an Italian citizen. Velasco - nicknamed "the philosopher" - is the man who in the 1990s transformed the destiny of Italy's men's team, and

in recent years has done the same for the women. After guiding the Azzurre to their first-ever Olympic gold medal in volleyball at the Paris 2024 Games, and to Nations League victories in 2024 and 2025, he crowned his run by leading the women to the world title this September. Winning with the men, winning with the women, winning everywhere: Velasco is more than a coach. He is a thinker of the game, a master of mindset, the one who taught entire generations that volleyball is not only about technique, but also about culture, character, and responsibility.

There is also a deeper bond linking these two coaches. Back in the 1990s, when Velasco was building the men's team into a global powerhouse, De Giorgi was right there on the court, the flawless setter and heartbeat of that squad. Thirty years later, the roles are reversed: Velasco with the women, De Giorgi with the men - both world champions, both symbols of an Italy that refuses to stop winning.

Never has it been truer to say that Italy is the capital of world volleyball. Two World Championships in the same year, combined with Olympic gold in Paris 2024 for the women, form a mosaic no

Julio Velasco

Fefè De Giorgi

other country can match. It's more than a sporting triumph - it's the victory of a movement that has grown, renewed itself, and looked forward without losing sight of its roots.

The year 2025 is not just about medals. It is proof that Italian volleyball has built a winning model, able to span generations and constantly rewrite its own story. De Giorgi and Velasco, the two faces of this epic tale, remind us that sports are not only about points and sets—they are about passion, culture, and identity.

Interview with Scott W. Horrigan

Happy 70th birthday to the American presence in Vicenza, the United States standing in defense of Italy

Umberto Mucci

At We the Italians, we have always been deeply grateful to the American military, and we always will be. Our gratitude comes from personal, military, economic, and cultural reasons. The Italian city that welcomes the largest number of American citizens – 12,000, many of whom are service members – is Vicenza. This year marks the 70th anniversary of the American presence in Vicenza, and we are proud to do our part in showing our appreciation.

Thanks to the wonderful Anna Ciccotti, outstanding Public Affairs Officer at US Army Italy Garrison, and to the Vicenza team for the photos (Tony Abruscato, Paolo Bovo, Rick Scavetta), we are pleased to share with our readers an interview with Colonel Scott W. Horrigan, Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army Southern European Task Force, Africa (SETAF-AF), and former commander of the US Army Italy Garrison in Vicenza. Thank you for your service, Colonel, and through you, thanks to all the American service members who have helped defend our country.

Welcome on We the Italians, Colonel. To begin, I'd like to ask which U.S. State you're from, and how your military career has developed over the years.

Yeah, what state I'm from, that's a tough question. I've been all over. I was born in Ohio, but I've lived in Florida and in California for a short time, but I would call home the Midwest region.

Growing up, I ended up settling down in Iowa. I graduated high school there. I went to college and that's where I joined the officer program and found my way into the Army.

I'm an infantry officer, and that's always what I wanted to be. I grew up in infantry formations, serving in great historic divisions like the 10th Mountain Division and the 25th Infantry Division in Hawaii.

I got some great opportunities to work for some incredible folks. I spent a lot of my time, as a lot of fellow soldiers my age did, in Afghanistan and Iraq. In fact, there was probably a time in my life where I had spent more time deployed than I had with my wife. That's the tough part about being an American soldier, at least at my age, where you went through 2001 to 2020 just on a constant rotation. So the opportunity to come here to Italy and serve as the installation commander and then as the chief of staff of SETAF are absolute highs in my career track.

You are the Chief of Staff of SETAF (U.S. Army Southern European Task Force) in Vicenza. This October

with Giacomo Possamai, Mayor of Vicenza

marks an important anniversary: SETAF was established exactly 70 years ago, in 1955. Could you please share with our readers the history of this American command in Italy?

Our 70th birthday here in Vicenza will be an important milestone.

If we think about 1955, it is a really long time ago. The mission of SETAF-AF was extremely important then just as it is now. Back in 1955, you can imagine Cold War era, what the U.S. Army, more importantly what NATO needed was deterrence options against a threat.


HORRIGAN
U.S. ARMY
CAMPIONE D'ITALIA
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SETAF at that time was a deterrent and a protective force to NATO's southern flank. And while that mission has evolved over the decades with the end of the Cold War, SETAF still remains very important to the U.S. Army and to NATO.

About 2008, SETAF became SETAF-AF, the Africa piece of it, to amplify the fact that this headquarters is isn't just Southern Europe, it is also Africa and the shared challenges that the US with its European partners have that can come from the Africa, whether it's migration, terrorism, all those types of challenges.

Vicenza is not a new place for you - you previously served here as Commander of U.S. Army Garrison Italy. Can you tell us what that experience was like for you?

When I found out I was going to be the garrison commander, it was like finding out I just won the lottery, both me and my family.

Any US family or soldier that comes here to Italy, the chances are Italy was their number one choice. Because it's such in high demand. Everybody wants the experience of coming and living in Italy for a few years. Everybody feels very proud for that opportunity, whether you're a young 19-year-old soldier or you're old and married and with kids and a guy like me.

I loved being a garrison commander. My job was to wake up every single day and think about how to create a better community, not just an American community because what I never wanted was an installation of four walls and barbed wire that separated the American community from the Italian community.

What I wanted was a cohesive community between the American population and the Italian population in which there was an exchange. Not just the opportunity to work on the base, but everything from utilities to our bank accounts, to our sports and our kids. Everything comes on and off the installation. It is a very kind of back and forth relationship.

My job as the garrison commander was to find ways to do that because I knew we would

Sonia Paoloni

be better off if the Italian community felt welcomed on the base and we would certainly be better off if Americans were welcomed into the Vicenza community.

Have many Italian Americans served under your command? Do you remember one in particular?

I'll name one, it's easy. It's Sonia Paoloni, who is my director of strategic planning in the garrison. She grew up in Pennsylvania, in the Philadelphia area, but her parents were from here in Italy, and they came back to Florida. So she knows the language. She knows the culture.

She is one of the best examples of of an Italian American who returns here, loves Italy, probably never wants to leave, but she's given that gift to her husband who is not Italian American, and she shares her roots with everybody around this continent, and it's just really truly exceptional. We have a lot of examples like that here in this installation.

Vicenza is the Italian city with the highest number of American residents. How well is this large American community integrated into the city and local life?

This is not the only reason why I love Vicenza, but it's definitely one of them. The other reason is the city, which is beautiful. Vicenza has a population of roughly 110.000, 12.000 of those people living here are Americans.

Living in Italy is different than anywhere you'll live in the United States. Most of our people don't know the language. They don't know the culture. They don't understand that dinner starts at 8 p.m. They don't understand it'll take three hours to get through dinner.

So, how do you how do you come here as an American and thrive in Italy is really an important question. The garrison does a lot of different things to help acclimate the American community as soon as they arrive: more than just Italian language classes, we have built tools to help introduce them, for instance, to the small communities. You know, those small towns

of only a few thousand people, they're famous for that one Sagra a year, and everybody knows them for that reason.

The Community Alliance Plan (a partnership plan that brings together local municipalities and US military units assigned to Vicenza) is a big program that we've shepherded over the last couple of years. And we've partnered units with communities. And so the commander partners with the mayor and together they think about how to bring the American community into the Italian community for those type of great shared events.

I have personally been to more festivals and sagras than I can count, especially in this part of the year because we're entering that season. My favorite is the one in Grisignano, because my kids can go and it's just super fun.

We feel a lot of warmth from the Italian community just being allowed to come into their events and not be isolated here. We don't want the American base to be isolated, we want a shared experience. And I want a young Italian kid who graduates high school here in Vicenza to be proud of the fact that there were Americans in his city. And I want the American soldier to be proud that they got to know an Italian and experience the Italian way of life.

In Vicenza, the U.S. Army operates within three Italian military installations. The garrison that hosts U.S. Army Italy is named after Major Carlo Ederle. The one that hosts SETAF is named after Lieutenant Renato Del Din, and the Longare installation after Alpine Corporal Major Matteo Miotto. What lessons do these Italian heroes offer to U.S. soldiers?

Carlo Ederle

I think it's absolutely fantastic that we recognize our Italian comrades who have fallen sometimes in conflicts like Matteo Miotto supporting the U.S. mis-

sion in Afghanistan. And then to think about Renato del Din and the sacrifice he made in World War II and his heroism and the courage that he displayed, that is inspirational for a soldier.

Renato Del Din

I think as a soldier, I don't just look at American heroes to find inspiration. I can absolutely look at our partners across Europe and the heroes they have. So I'm proud to live and work on places named after del Din and Miotto. And I'm also proud to visit bases named after American heroes like William O'Darby who served here near Lake Garda with the 10th Mountain Division.

William O'Darby

I think it's great that we remember them and take the opportunity to make sure those bases are named after great Italian heroes who through our partnership were so important to get us to where we are today.

What are the things you and your family appreciate most about Vicenza and about Italy?

Matteo Miotto

Col. Horrigan's family

I think I've definitely been forever changed by the wine and the cuisine. But more than just the obvious of that, my boys and I hike almost every single weekend, and we go up, whether it's as far as the Dolomites, or out to a small community close by about 15 minutes away named Monte Viale, where we hiked the small ridge lines of that area. And whether you walk by a piazza, and you get to see a nice little old church that a community is still using or whether you're getting to see the view associated with that, that's pretty special. Those aren't opportunities you can find everywhere in the world. So I am never bored here in Italy.

In your view, what is the future of relations between Italy and the United States? And how might the U.S. military presence in Vicenza evolve in the years ahead?

When you look back on the Italian and the American shared history, I don't believe there's any chance that the American army departs Italy. It's just too strong of a friendship. It's too many shared interests between NATO, national security, and heritage and cultural sharing that we do. That relationship will always be strong.

The missions may change. The threats to our collective security may adapt and those will necessitate change. But presence here in Italy will always, in my mind, exist. If not because of our shared history, certainly because of our commitment to NATO. So I don't know how we're going to evolve: I do know that the threats are evolving. We will always have a role in Africa for the US army. Maybe we will also expand our potential portfolio of missions here in Europe to support NATO on the eastern flank. So I don't see SETAF, the 173rd Airborne Brigade or any of our other units here going anywhere else. There's just too much shared history that we have.

Is there anything I haven't asked you that you would like to share with our readers?

Well, one of my favorite events of the year is meeting with our retired service members who have retired here in Italy. And they have done it for a whole bunch of reasons. Maybe they married an Italian, but often it's because they love Italy so much. And they will do some sort of long-term visa

stay, and they will retire, they will buy a home, and they will just continue to stay here in Italy forever. Because they love to do that more than return to wherever they were in the US.

That's how I think important Italy is when people just want to stay here and they are looking for those opportunities. That's pretty unique. You don't see that in other places around the world where the US Army exists. And I think that also says something about the Italian American friendship that has existed for so many decades.

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Italian art

Polittico della Rovere, a renaissance jewel in Savona

We the Italians Editorial Staff

In the oratory of Nostra Signora di Castello in Savona, a remarkable altarpiece stands as both a devotional object and a symbol of civic pride. Known as the Polittico della Rovere, this multi-panel work was painted around 1490 by Vincenzo Foppa and Ludovico Brea. Its survival through centuries of political upheaval and architectural change makes it not only a masterpiece of Renaissan-

ce art but also a resilient witness to history.

The vision of a powerful patron

The polyptych was commissioned by Giuliano della Rovere, a towering figure in the late 15th century who would later become Pope Julius II. At the time, the della Rovere family was eager to affirm its influence in Savona, their place of origin, by sponsoring monumental works of art. Through this commission, Giuliano demonstrated his devotion while also consolidating his family's prestige. The polyptych thus embodies the dual role of Renaissance patronage - fostering genuine spirituality while asserting dynastic power.

Two masters at work

The altarpiece is the fruit of collaboration between two distinguished painters. Vincenzo Foppa, one of the leading figures of Lombard painting, was admired for his command of perspective and his careful use of light and shadow. Ludovico Brea, active in Liguria and along the Provençal coast, favored softer forms and vibrant colors that appealed to local taste. Their combined efforts created a balanced composition - Foppa providing structure and solemnity, Brea infusing warmth and expressive detail. Together they produced a work that is both stately and accessible, intellectual and emotional.

From cathedral to oratory

The original setting for the Polittico della Rovere was Savona's cathedral on the Priamar hill. When that church was demolished in the 16th century to make way for Genoese fortifications, the panels were removed and eventually transferred to the oratory of Nostra Signora di Castel-

lo. Over the following centuries the work faced many challenges - fires, renovations, and even threats of wartime destruction. Each time, however, careful custodians preserved and restored the polyptych, allowing it to remain a living part of Savona's heritage.

Sacred themes and artistic language

The structure of the polyptych follows the traditional format of multiple registers, with saints and holy figures presented in separate but connected panels. At the center, the Virgin and Child preside with serene dignity, surrounded by prophets and apostles. The figures are painted with attention to detail - flowing drapery, luminous skin tones, and subtle facial expressions that bring them to life.

The golden backgrounds recall medieval traditions, yet the handling of perspective and volume reflects Renaissance innovation. Each saint seems rooted in space, modeled by light and shadow rather than existing as a flat icon. This fusion of old and new styles gives the work a transitional character - linking Gothic formality with Renaissance naturalism.

A mirror of its time

The polyptych not only illustrates sacred stories but also mirrors the aspirations of its era. In late 15th-century Liguria, art was a way to assert civic identity and spiritual devotion. By commissioning such an ambitious project, Giuliano della Rovere tied his personal legacy to the cultural life of his native city. The altarpiece thus reveals how art could serve multiple purposes - inspiring prayer, decorating sacred space, and celebrating political power.

Resonance today

For modern visitors, the Polittico della Rovere offers more than historical curiosity. Standing before its panels, one can sense the devotion that inspired its creation, the artistic dialogue between Lombardy and Liguria, and the resilience that has allowed it to endure. It continues to attract admiration not only as a religious treasure but also as a milestone in the story of the Italian Renaissance.

Legacy of endurance

Few works capture so clearly the intersection of faith, art, and power as this Savona polyptych. Its preservation across centuries of upheaval testifies to the value placed on it by generations of custodians. Today, the Polittico della Rovere remains a proud emblem of the city - a work that unites the ambitions of its patron, the genius of its painters, and the enduring devotion of a community that safeguarded it through time.

Italian good news

Groundbreaking gene therapy helps blind patient regain sight in Italy

We the Italians Editorial Staff

A 38-year-old Italian man has become the first person in the world to benefit from an innovative dual-vector gene therapy for a rare inherited eye disease. Treated in July 2024 at the University of Campania "Luigi Vanvitelli" in Naples, the patient was diagnosed with Usher syndrome type 1B, a genetic disorder that causes congenital deafness and progressive vision loss.

The therapy, developed by the Telethon Institute of Genetics and Medicine (TIGEM) in Pozzuoli, addresses a major challenge in gene therapy: the gene responsi-

ble for Usher 1B, MYO7A, is too large to be delivered by a single viral vector. Scientists solved this by splitting the gene in half and using two separate adeno-associated viral (AAV) vectors. Once injected into the subretinal space, the two gene fragments recombine within the cells, restoring the production of the essential protein.

The procedure was performed under general anesthesia and involved injecting the therapy directly beneath the retina. Recovery was fast: improvements in both near and distance vision were observed within two weeks, and the patient also regained the ability to see in low-light conditions within a month.

One year after treatment, the patient—referred to as "Antonio" in some reports—has regained useful vision. He can now recognize faces, read subtitles on TV from across the room, navigate his workplace, and walk outside at night

without assistance. He described the change as "more than just seeing again—it's like starting to live again."

Between October 2024 and April 2025, seven additional patients received the therapy at the same center as part of the phase I/II clinical trial LUCE-1, sponsored by AAVantgarde Bio, a biotech company founded in 2021 as a spin-off of the Telethon Foundation. Early data show that the treatment is safe and well-tolerated. No serious adverse events were reported, and mild eye inflammation in some patients was successfully managed with corticosteroids.

Alberto Auricchio, director of TIGEM, noted that this result is the outcome of over ten years of research supported by the Telethon Foundation. He emphasized that this dual-vector platform could be used for other inherited retinal diseases involving large genes that previously couldn't be targeted with gene therapy.

Francesca Simonelli, who led the ophthalmology team, called the therapy "technically simple but clinically revolutionary," offering real hope to patients who until now had no treatment options. A second cohort of patients is scheduled to begin treatment soon.

Italian culture and history

Vicoforte sanctuary and its elliptical dome, the largest in the world

We the Italians Editorial Staff

Nestled in the rolling hills between mountain air and vineyard slopes in the province of Cuneo, in Piedmont, the sanctuary at Vicoforte draws visitors into a realm of devotion, mystery, and architectural audacity. The centerpiece is a vast elliptical dome – the largest of its kind in the world – crowning a basilica that

mixes baroque ambition, spiritual legend, and structural boldness.

The sanctuary's origins are modest. In the later centuries before the 1600s, a small devotion grew around a painted image of the Virgin Mary and Child on a humble pillar in a forested valley. A local legend says a hunter once struck the image by accident – and that the Madonna miraculously bled. Repentant, the hunter left his arquebus and contributed to building a chapel, which attracted pilgrims over time.

By the late 1500s local religious leaders and rulers embraced the site. In 1596, a formal project was launched to build a grand sanctuary around the original pillar. The plan grew ambitious – not just a church, but a monumental temple in which the faithful, and possibly rulers, might be laid to rest. The work progressed in stages, with interruptions, pauses, and reimagining as political support shifted and architects died.

In the 1700s the Mantuan architect Francesco Gallo took up the challenge of creating a daring

dome over the sanctuary's central space. He designed an elliptical structure with major and minor axes that stretched tens of meters. The geometry was risky – no precedent existed for masonry domes of this shape at such scale. When the time came to remove the supporting scaffolding, Gallo himself reportedly descended into that scaffold to take it down – an act of faith and confidence, since many believed the dome might collapse.

Inside, the dome's vault is blanketed in frescoes over 6,000 square meters, painted as a single visual program. Angels, celestial realms, allegories, and religious narratives swirl overhead, creating a unified spiritual drama. Mattia Bortoloni and Felice Biella were among the artists who brought those walls to life, working in a concerted vision of baroque space and light.

Today, visitors can join a guided ascent high above the sanctuary floor – climbing nearly 60 meters to traverse narrow walkways and peer out through lantern windows. The climb reveals the dome's inner curve up close, with its interplay of arches, ribs, and painted surfaces, and offers views over the rooftops of Vicoforte and the surrounding valleys. It's a rare chance to see architecture from the inside out – to understand how form and structure support art and meaning.

The sanctuary itself is framed by

the palazzata – a symmetrical ring of buildings and porticoes built around the forecourt. They once housed pilgrims, clergy, and functions related to liturgy and hospitality. The surrounding complex includes cloisters, chapels, and monastic wings that echo the structure's long development.

In time the sanctuary was elevated in status – it became a basilica, a symbol of regional pride and spiritual focus. Among its sacred contents are tombs belonging to important figures, including members of royal houses. In recent years, the remains of the last Italian king and his queen were moved to resting places within its walls – adding a modern chapter to its ancient narrative.

Walking inside, one senses layers of time. The central pillar still bears the mark, visible to pilgrims who venerate it as the origin of the sanctuary's devotion. The dome vault towers overhead, its scale reminding visitors not only of human ambition but also of patience, faith, and craftsmanship. The sanctified geometry of the dome contrasts with moun-

tain horizons, the light filtering through windows, and pilgrimage rituals in the nave below.

This is not a frozen monument. The sanctuary continues to host services, visitors, and special climbs during selected months. Reservations are needed for the dome ascent, and groups are often led by volunteers who guide carefully over narrow bridges and stairs. The climb is physical and symbolic – faith given in motion, art given in risk, devotion given in altitude.

Vicoforte's sanctuary shows how a humble pillar can inspire a grand architectural vision, how legend and engineering may combine, and how beauty can be raised toward the heavens. The elliptical dome remains both marvel and question – how far can human hands reach into the sky before the weight of wonder becomes a burden for stone?

Standing there, gazing upward,

visitors see not only frescoes and ribs, but centuries of devotion, bold design, and a community that dared to build an impossible dome. The sanctuary of Vicoforte is a place where faith wears architecture – and where every ascent, every frescoed vault, every engineered curve speaks of the tension between gravity and grace.

Italian historical trademarks

Toschi Vignola, 80 years of Italian taste and tradition

Associazione Marchi Storici d'Italia

Toschi Vignola has been part of the Associazione Marchi Storici d'Italia since 2022 – a recognition of its constant contribution in bringing the authenticity and quality of Made in Italy to the world. Founded in 1945, Toschi was born out of a desire to preserve and enhance the typical fruits of its region, turning them

into iconic specialties that, over the years, have delighted millions of consumers in more than 80 countries.

From the very first jar of cherries in liqueur to today's wide range of products – from candied Amarena cherries to dessert toppings, syrups, and traditional liqueurs such as Nocino di Modena, Fragolì, and Lemoncello – Toschi Vignola has successfully combined tradition and innovation while always maintaining its artisanal spirit.

The company's story began in 1945, when brothers Giancarlo and Lanfranco Toschi, faced with an abundant cherry harvest, turned to alcohol preservation to avoid waste. What started as a simple family practice soon became a winning business idea: the first industrial production of cherries in liqueur, launching a growth journey that would span decades.

In the 1950s, the company expanded its range by adopting sugar preservation methods, introducing liqueurs, syrups, and Amare-

na Toschi – which quickly became the brand's emblem and a symbol of Italian taste. In 1953, a historic friendship brought together two Italian excellences: Giancarlo Toschi and Enzo Ferrari initiated a collaboration that tied the Toschi brand to the legend of the "Rossa di Maranello." World champion driver Alberto Ascari became the face of a special limited-edition gift box: a Ferrari F1 miniature containing three Toschi liqueur bottles. It was the first example of a co-branding strategy that strengthened the company's reputation, linking it with the worlds of high quality and performance.

With the opening of a new plant in Savignano sul Panaro in the 1960s, Toschi entered the global market, exporting to Germany, the United States, South America, and Australia. Vision and creativity defined the 1970s, when the company officially launched a product that remains iconic today – Frutta Spiritosa. The catchy jingle "Toschi la Frutta Spiritosa" was heard in the first television commercials of the era. Other products destined to become classics included the traditional Toschi Nocino di Modena, Nocello, and the line of toppings for ice cream and desserts.

In 1981, Toschi promoted an initiative celebrating local pride: the Premio Ciliegia d'Oro (Golden Cherry Award), established by the Vignola Study Center under the company's sponsorship. The award is presented annually to individuals of Emilian origin who have distinguished themselves in fields ranging from social commitment to culture, industry, and sports. World-renowned figures among the winners include Enzo Ferrari, Luciano Pavarotti, Luca di Montezemolo, and Massimo Bottura – a recognition that highlights Toschi's deep connection to its region and values of excellence.

The 2000s marked a new era of innovation and diversification, with the launch of Toschi La Gelateria, the company's artisanal gelato division. Responding to new consumer needs led to the development of the Zero+ line – with no added sugars and zero calories – and the ongoing experimentation with new ingredients for gelato production. In 2021, the KeToschi range of bases and pastes stood out by embracing the ketogenic trend – low in sugar and rich in fiber. The most significant innovation comes in 2025 with the launch of Amarena Toschi Zero+, the first candied Amarena cherry

with no added sugar. The unmistakable traditional recipe is combined with plant-fiber technology to create a product with 50% fewer calories – without adding sugar or replacing sweetness with intensive sweeteners.

Today, Toschi Vignola is led by the third generation of the family, carrying the torch while never forgetting its roots. The recent restyling of the company's image and product lines reflects the brand's strengthened global presence and the identity that has made it unique.

With 80 years of history, Toschi Vignola can rightfully be considered a benchmark for quality, authenticity, and taste – with a solid identity, strong local roots, and a constant eye on the future.

Italian handcrafts

Cork in Sardinia between tradition, sustainability, and design

We the Italians Editorial Staff

Cork isn't just a material in Sardinia – it's a living craft shaped by forests, families, and slow, careful work. On the island's northeastern shoulder, especially in Gallura, cork oak groves spread across granite hills where sea winds toughen the bark and give it character. Here, artisans have learned to read a tree the way a shepherd reads the weather, balancing respect for nature with the practical know-how to turn bark into beautiful, durable objects.

Everything starts in the forest. Cork oaks grow for decades before they're ready for the first harvest – a careful stripping that

happens in summer when sap rises and the bark releases more easily. Skilled cutters mark panels with a precise axe, lift them away in broad sheets, and leave the living layer intact so the tree can regenerate. Each tree rests for about nine years before the next harvest. That cycle – patient, predictable, sustainable – underpins the entire Sardinian cork economy. The result is a raw material that's light, elastic, water-resistant, and uniquely warm to the touch.

The journey from bark to object is a sequence of traditional steps. Fresh cork seasons in the open air, then gets boiled to sanitize, soften, and stabilize the sheets. The boards rest again – moisture needs to equalize – before they're flattened and sorted by density and quality. For generations, stoppers were the flagship product, graded by hand and eye, destined for wine bottles across Europe. But Sardinia's cork craft has long reached far beyond stoppers. Artisans slice, laminate, and shape cork into trays, boxes, wall

panels, and furniture components. They turn it on the lathe for bowls and candlesticks, carve it for nativity scenes, and combine it with leather, linen, or wood for fashion accessories. Architects and designers prize cork for acoustic panels and thermal insulation – a natural solution that's breathable, hypoallergenic, and pleasantly tactile.

Aesthetics matter. Sardinian makers often leave traces of the bark's original texture as a design statement – a rugged surface paired with clean lines – while others sand and burnish to a silky matte. Natural pigments and wax finishes keep the palette earthy and understated. The island's visual language shows up everywhere – spiral motifs inspired by Nuragic stones, wave patterns echoing the coast, stylized leaves drawn from the maquis. Nothing feels mass-produced; each piece carries the slight variations that come from handwork and small-batch processes.

The social fabric around cork is just as important. Family workshops anchor many towns, passing techniques from parent to child. Local schools and training centers teach harvesting safety, tool handling, and product design – a practical blend that keeps the craft relevant. Cooperative networks help small shops share machinery, pool orders,

and access export markets. Seasonal rhythms steer the year – harvest crews in summer, finishing and fabrication through fall and winter – while fairs and village festivals showcase new designs and celebrate old skills.

Sustainability isn't a buzzword here – it's built into the ecosystem. Cork oaks protect soil from erosion, shel-

ter biodiversity, and capture carbon. Properly managed groves resist drought better than many monocultures, and periodic harvesting actually stimulates the tree's regenerative bark growth. Waste is minimal – offcuts become granulate for flooring, insulation, yoga blocks, and even technical components for footwear and sports gear. In a world of synthetics, Sardinian cork offers a fully recyclable, long-lasting alternative that ages with grace.

Tourism adds another dimension. Visitors can tour groves, watch stripping demonstrations, and step inside workshops where the air smells faintly sweet and woody. Boutiques in coastal towns sell refined pieces – coasters and jewelry for carry-home gifts, sculptural lamps and wall art for design lovers. Many travelers don't just buy a product – they meet the maker, hear the backstory, and take home something that connects them to a landscape and its people.

The craft faces challenges. Climate change brings heat waves, pests, and more frequent fires – all threats to cork oak health. Rural depopulation makes it harder to recruit young harvesters for a physically demanding job that requires precision and patience. And in the beverage world, synthetic and screw-cap closures compete on price and logistics. Sardinian producers are responding with better forest stewardship, selective breeding of resilient

oaks, and certifications that verify traceability and responsible management. In the workshop, innovation means CNC-assisted cutting paired with hand finishing, new composites that blend cork with natural fibers, and collaborations with contemporary designers who push form while honoring the material's limits.

What keeps the tradition resilient is its adaptability. The same qualities that made cork essential in the age of sail – buoyancy, resistance to salt and rot – now suit it to modern needs like sound control, energy efficiency, and wellness-driven interiors. Artisans lean into that flexibility, crafting products that are light yet strong,

minimalist yet warm, sustainable yet stylish. Whether it's a flawlessly turned bowl, a grid of wall tiles that soften a room, or a bottle stopper that seals a celebration, Sardinian cork carries the island's identity –

rugged, resourceful, and quietly refined.

In short, cork craftsmanship in Sardinia is more than a set of techniques – it's a culture rooted in long cycles and skilled hands, in forests that breathe with the seasons, and in objects that marry utility with beauty. As the market changes and the climate tests the land, this tradition endures by doing what it has always done best – working with nature, not against it, and letting the material lead the way.

Italian economy

Italy, credibility is back on the table

Fabrizio Fasani

For decades, Italy was viewed with suspicion by international markets and European institutions. Our country was too often described as fragile, unstable, doomed to live with a massive public debt and sluggish growth. It's no coincidence that the international press branded us the "sick man of Europe" – a heavy label we carried for years.

Today, however, the picture looks different. This isn't about a sudden miracle, but rather about a shift in perception rooted in

hard numbers, signals of stability, and recognition from rating agencies and investors.

To understand just how significant this change is, we need to look back. In the postwar years, up until the mid-1970s, Italy experienced a true "golden age": the economy grew on average 5.5 percent a year, fueled by unprecedented industrial expansion. Starting in the 1980s, however, the pace slowed. Productivity lagged behind our European partners, regional divides deepened, and bureaucracy weighed down competitiveness.

The 2008 global financial crisis and the subsequent eurozone crisis left deep scars, putting Italy under close watch alongside Greece and Portugal. In that context, the word "Italy" always implied additional risk – an extra premium to finance our debt, far higher than what was required of France or Germany.

That's why what's happening today carries enormous symbolic weight. For the first time in decades, Italian 10-year government bonds are yielding the same as French ones – about 3.47 percent. The French daily Le Monde called it a historic alignment, recalling that not long ago the spread with Paris could exceed 400 basis points. In other words, markets no longer see Italy as an anomaly to be penalized but as equal to one of Europe's traditionally strongest economies.

The shift is also reflected in rating agency assessments. In September, Fitch upgraded Italy from BBB to BBB+, with a stable outlook. It's the first upgrade in years – and not a gesture of goodwill. The agency based its decision on the reduction of the deficit, which fell in 2024 to 3.4 percent of GDP compared to a forecast of 3.8, and on greater political stability. In its statement, Fitch

highlighted "growing confidence in Italy's fiscal trajectory" and a "stable political backdrop" as factors strengthening our position. Equally telling was the comment from Filippo Mormando, strategist at BBVA, who noted that Italy has shown "a consistent and credible commitment to fiscal consolidation" – proof that bolsters our reliability.

A comparison with our European partners makes the picture even clearer. Germany, long the continent's economic engine, saw its GDP contract by 0.3 percent in the second quarter of 2025. France posted modest growth of 0.3 percent, but beneath that lie structural weaknesses and domestic political turmoil. Paris, too, was downgraded by Fitch, from AA– to A+. Italy, while posting a slight –0.1 percent in the same quarter, was rewarded for the direction it's heading rather than for the short-term number.

Of course, debt still weighs heavily. In 2025 it surpassed €3 trillion, about 137 percent of GDP, with forecasts pointing to 138 percent by 2026. But the point is that markets no longer focus only on the size of the debt. They look at how consistently a country manages it, whether it can keep it sustainable, and whether its institutions are stable. This is where

Italy has made a difference – convincing investors that today the risk is lower than in the past.

This new standing has profound consequences. It means Italy is no longer seen as the problem to be contained, but as a reliable partner capable of offering solutions. It means that in Brussels we no longer arrive as tolerated guests but as players who sit at the table with real weight.

There's also another dimension – less about numbers, more about geopolitics – that shouldn't be overlooked. Italy has once again become a bridge. A bridge between North and South Europe, at a time when the continent risks splitting over austerity versus flexibility. A bridge between East and West, in an era when global tensions force Europe to confront shared security and defense challenges. And above all, a bridge between Europe and the United States – a natural role for a Mediterranean country that counts the Italian American community as

one of its greatest strengths. This is crucial: our restored economic credibility not only strengthens Italy inside the EU, but also boosts the transatlantic dialogue. A solid, trustworthy Italy makes relations with Washington stronger, better supports the case for Made in Italy in American markets, and gives Italian Americans a positive story to share with pride.

Yet one essential truth remains: credibility is not a final destination, but a form of capital that must be guarded. Markets can grant confidence quickly – and just as quickly withdraw it if they sense inconsistency. That's why turning this new image into concrete reforms will be critical: a more efficient justice system, a modernized public administration, a more dynamic labor market, and stronger investment in innovation and education. Only then can trust be turned into lasting stability.

After years of harsh judgments, we can finally say it with pride: Italy is no longer Europe's weak link. It's a solid partner that has earned credibility – and now must use it responsibly. For Italian Americans, that's an extra reason to be proud. Not only for the beauty, art, and products that still showcase the greatness of our country, but also for the certainty that behind it all stands a stronger, more authoritative state.

It's proof that Italian roots, so often defended and celebrated abroad, don't rest in fragile soil but in ground that has regained stability, dignity, and a leading role on the geopolitical stage.

Italian street food

The Pugliese Bombette, a small bite with a big flavor

We the Italians Editorial Staff

In the heart of southern Italy, where the Valle d'Itria rolls out its whitewashed towns and the Murgia dei Trulli rises with its unique conical houses, a small but mighty dish has captured both local loyalty and visitor fascination: the bombetta pugliese. This is no ordinary cut of meat. It's a bite-sized pork roll - usually made from capocollo (coppa), the prized cut from the upper neck of the pig - filled with local cheese, seasoned simply with salt and pepper, and grilled to perfection. Compact and plump, each one fits easily into the palm of your

hand, but its flavor delivers an explosion that more than lives up to the name “bombetta,” or “little bomb.”

Traditionally, bombette are prepared in the fornelli of Puglia - special butcher shop ovens where customers can buy meat and have it cooked on the spot. In many towns, these small grills or wood-fired ovens stand just steps away from the butcher’s counter, turning raw cuts into sizzling meals in minutes. In the past, locals would stop in for a quick bite - what we now call “street food,” long before the term became trendy.

Bombette’s story begins in the 1970s and ’80s, when resourceful butchers looked for ways to use thin leftover slices of meat. Instead of letting them go to waste, they rolled them around cubes of aged cheese, sprinkled them with pepper, maybe added parsley, and skewered them for the grill. The result was irresistible - juicy inside, slightly crisp outside, and full of savory aroma.

Although pork is now the signature choice, early versions sometimes used veal or even horse meat, especially in rural areas. The filling has also evolved: while the classic calls for canestrato pugliese, a sheep's milk cheese aged for months in cool caves or cellars, many cooks now use caciocavallo or other regional varieties. Regardless of the cheese, the key is its ability to soften and release flavor without completely melting away. One of bombette's charms is its size. Each one measures no more than about two inches long, making it perfect for eating in one or two bites. Too big, and the texture changes; too small, and it loses the juicy center that makes it special. Their rounded shape is not just aesthetic - it helps the meat cook evenly while keeping the filling snug inside.

While home cooks may throw bombette on a backyard grill, purists insist the fornello method is unmatched. Here, skewers are placed vertically rather than horizontally over coals. This means the fat trickles down slowly, basting the bombette beneath it instead of dripping directly onto the fire. The result is a cleaner taste and a

juicier bite. The aroma that fills a Pugliese butcher shop during cooking is enough to make anyone hungry, even before the first bite. Outdoor grilling has its own charm, especially during summer gatherings. Over hot embers, bombette develop a crisp edge and smoky note that pairs beautifully with fresh bread. Many locals enjoy tucking them into a crusty roll, letting the cheese and pork juices soak into the bread for an indulgent street-food sandwich.

Although small in size, bombette have a big cultural footprint in Puglia. Entire festivals are dedicated to them, with stalls lined up in town squares, sizzling skewers filling the air with irresistible scents. Skilled grill masters work with almost theatrical flair, turning skewers and calling out to customers in a mix of sales pitch and local pride. These events are more than food fairs - they're celebrations of community, tradition, and the enduring bond between butcher and customer.

The dish's exact birthplace is a friendly point of debate, but one city - Martina Franca - has embraced the title of "home of the bombetta." Whether or not it was truly

first, the town has made the recipe a signature, and travelers can find bombette on menus in restaurants, at street stands, and, most authentically, at fornelli still run by families who've perfected the technique over decades.

Though the original remains the benchmark - pork capocollo, canestrato cheese, salt, pepper - modern interpretations are everywhere. Some add strips of pancetta for extra richness, others tuck in sun-dried tomatoes, onions, or a pinch of chili flakes. A few swap in smoked scamorza for a deeper flavor or blend cheeses for a unique melt. Creative fillings might even include truffle shavings or herbs from the family garden.

The unspoken rule, however, is that the ingredients must be of high quality. A bombetta is too simple a dish to hide flaws - good pork, aged cheese, and fresh seasoning make all the difference. When done right, the meat stays tender, the cheese softens without spilling out, and the whole thing delivers a balanced bite that's both rich and clean.

The beauty of bombette lies not just in taste but in timing. Straight off the grill, they're too hot to bite into without caution. Patience pays off: wait just long enough for the juices to settle, then take that first mouthful. The combination of savory pork, creamy cheese, and subtle spice is satisfying in a way that feels both rustic and refined.

Today, bombette are more than a quick snack - they've become a culinary symbol of Puglia. They tell a story of resourcefulness, tradition, and pride in local flavors.

Italian Citizenship Assistance

Applying for Italian Citizenship by Residency

Italian Citizenship Assistance

Of Italy's numerous pathways to citizenship, one of the most common is through naturalization, or residency. Citizenship via this route requires that the applicant legally reside in the country for a certain period. In this article, we will cover the regulations for citizenship by residency, as well as a few extraordinary circumstances that affect it.

Time requirements

The amount of time needed to legally reside in Italy in order to qualify for citizenship by naturalization depends on a few factors.

For non-EU citizens, the time of stay is 10 years. This drops down to 4 years for EU citizens. If you have an Italian-born parent or grandparent, the time requirement is only 2 years, though see below, because some regulations have recently changed.

In order to reside in Italy longer than 90 days, if you are not an EU citizen, you will need to procure a visa (EU citizens are allowed to live in Italy beyond this period by declaring residency at a municipality). There are many long-stay visas available to fit a variety of circumstances: the student visa, elective residency visa, investor visa, and the new digital nomad visa. To apply, you will need to submit an application with all the required documents to your local Italian consulate. Then, once you have arrived in Italy, you will then need to get a residence permit at the nearest immigration office (questura). In most cases, the residence permit can be renewed so long as the applicant continues to meet its requirements.

Application process

Once you have resided in Italy long enough to meet the requirements, you can submit the necessary documents through the Italian Ministry of the Interior's website. You will need to provide the following documents:

- A copy of your birth certificate, professionally translated and legalized (an Apostille will suffice for many countries, but check local requirements)
- Background check(s)—for U.S.

citizens, this includes both an FBI background check and checks from each state you have resided in since the age of 14
- Proof of payment of €250
- Residency certificate
- Marriage certificate (if applicable)
- A marca da bollo (revenue stamp) of €16
- Income tax returns from last three years
- Certificate of knowledge of the Italian language at least at the B1 level (see below for more on the language requirement)
- Copies of permesso di soggiorno, passport, and Italian identity card.

After your application has been approved, you will need to submit the original documents at your local Prefettura.

Those with Italian ancestry

As we mentioned in an earlier article, those who have Italian ancestry might find themselves unable to apply for citizenship by jure sanguinis, per the new regulations, but could instead apply for citizenship by naturalization through an expedited process. This had been a 3-year residence period in Italy, but due to the changes made by Law 74/2025 on May 23rd, 2025, this was shortened to 2 years. However, this only applies to individuals with Italian-born parents or grandparents.
Language requirements

As of March 7th, 2025, a change was

also made to the Italian language requirement for those applying for citizenship through naturalization or marriage. As of 2018, this is a certificate of knowledge of Italian at the B1 level or higher. However, recently, it was decided that to provide no exceptions to this requirement for those with a serious inability to learn the langauge was unconstitutional. This includes individuals with disabilities, illnesses, or advanced age.

How long does citizenship take to get recognized?

Processing time for citizenship by naturalization takes up to 2 years, with the possibility of extending to 3 years. If your citizenship is approved, you will need to take an oath of allegiance within 6 months of the approval.

Will citizenship pass to your children?

The acquisition of Italian citizenship

by minor children depends on how the parent acquired Italian citizenship as well as when. In the case that the parent naturalized as an Italian citizen before the child was born, then the child can receive Italian citizenship jure sanguinis so long as the parent has continuously resided in Italy for 2 years after he or she became an Italian citizen.

If the parent acquires Italian citizenship after the child was born, then the child can become an Italian citizen if he or she was cohabitating with the parent at the time of citizenship acquisition and so long as the child has resided in Italy for at least 2 continuous years. Finally, there is the case of persons born in Italy to non-Italian parents who do not acquire Italian citizenship. Provided that such persons have resided in Italy continuously, they can apply for citizenship at the age of 18 by presenting a request to the Ufficio di Stato Civile at their municipality of residence.

Conclusion

Due to recent changes in citizenship laws, new regulations have been put into effect regarding citizenship by naturalization. This article has sought to provide an overview of the process and what those changes look like, but if you need further help with your application, don't hesitate to contact Italian Citizenship Assistance at info@italiancitizenshipassistance.com.

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Italian curiosities

Beneath Palermo's hidden rivers

We the Italians Editorial Staff

Palermo is a city that dazzles visitors with its golden light, bustling markets, and layered history. Yet under the streets and palaces, another world flows quietly – a network of underground aqueducts that once carried life-giving water through the Sicilian capital. These channels, known as qanats, were carved centuries ago and still whisper stories of engineering genius, cultural encounters, and the challenges of survival in a dry land.

The idea of channeling water underground did not begin in Sicily. The technique has roots in the

Middle East, where arid climates demanded clever ways to capture and move water. When Arab rulers governed Palermo in the 9th and 10th centuries, they introduced these systems to harness the groundwater of the Conca d'Oro valley. Skilled workers dug tunnels with patient precision, sloping them gently so that water could travel from springs in the hills down toward gardens, fountains, and homes.

A qanat is more than a tunnel. Vertical shafts were opened every few yards to provide ventilation and access for maintenance. These shafts also gave workers light as they chipped away at limestone with simple tools. Crawling through the low, narrow passages was grueling work – not for the faint of heart. Yet the reward was remarkable: a constant, pure flow of water that turned Palermo into a garden city. The citrus groves, with their famous oranges and lemons, were made possible by this hidden irrigation network.

Over time, several major qanats were built around Palermo. Some ran under noble estates, feeding lush gardens that became symbols of prestige and wealth. Others supplied public fountains and, later, helped fill the great basins of monasteries and convents. The system blended function with beauty, tying the rhythms of daily life to the hidden veins of the earth.
Walking today through these underground passages is like stepping back into a forgotten dimension. The air is cool and damp, the walls etched with centuries of pickaxe marks. Visitors sometimes kneel or crawl to follow the channels, guided by the faint sound of trickling water. The shafts above create sudden shafts of light, whe-

re moss and roots hang like fragile curtains. In some stretches, the passage widens enough to stand, but the sense of enclosure never disappears.

Palermo's qanats are also tied to cultural memory. Local stories describe workers who descended into the narrow shafts, their bodies covered in mud, eyes stung by humidity. These men were nicknamed 'ngruttati – literally, "encrusted ones." It was a hard, dangerous trade. Accidents were common, and the physical strain left its mark. Yet their labor sustained an entire city, making possible the lush gardens that once gave Palermo the nickname "paradise on earth."

The qanats reveal more than just practical engineering. They reflect a philosophy of balance with nature. Instead of dominating the land with massive dams or heavy machinery, the system quietly cooperated with geology. The tunnels did not waste water – they preserved it from evaporation in Sicily's hot sun. This respect for natural limits feels especially relevant today, as modern societies confront new water shortages and climate challenges.

Over the centuries, many qanats fell into neglect. Changes in technology, urban expansion, and shifting water needs made them less central. Some were blocked, others collapsed, and still others disappeared under new construction. Yet parts of the network have survived, and in recent years there has been growing interest in protecting and exploring them. Environmental groups and local associations have organized tours that allow visitors to descend into the cool darkness and discover Palermo's watery secret for themselves.

The experience is not only physical but emotional. To descend into a qanat is to leave behind the noise of scooters and crowded piazzas, entering instead a hushed

space where time slows. You hear drops echoing off stone, feel the earth's chill seep into your skin, and imagine the hands that carved these walls more than a thousand years ago. Emerging again into the Sicilian sunlight, you realize how fragile and precious water is – and how deeply it has shaped the city's destiny.

Today, Palermo's qanats stand as both monuments and warnings. They are monuments to the ingenuity of past civilizations that blended cultures and technologies to build something enduring. At the same time, they remind us that water is not infinite. As droughts spread across the Mediterranean, the ancient channels whisper lessons about stewardship, patience, and respect for nature's rhythms.

For Palermo, these underground rivers are part of its identity – hidden, complex, and resilient. They carry the memory of Arab farmers, Norman rulers, and Sicilian workers whose sweat shaped a living city. To walk their paths is to connect with Palermo's true heartbeat, not only above ground in its lively streets, but also below, where water still flows through the stone veins of history.

CIE

Italian innovation

Italy's digital ID overhaul, from paper and passwords to smart cards

We the Italians Editorial Staff

Italy is preparing for a sweeping shift in its digital identity infrastructure, marking the end of traditional paper IDs and universal login credentials in favor of a more secure, streamlined system centered around the Electronic Identity Card (CIE).

From August 3, 2026, the classic paper identity card will no longer be valid for international travel. While it will remain usable domestically until it naturally expires, travelers will be required to use either the CIE or a passport.

Italy still has millions of paper ID

cards in circulation, with estimates suggesting over five million active within the country and another 6.5 million held by Italians abroad. Altogether, up to twelve million documents may need replacement.

Transitioning to the CIE means embracing a modern, chip-embedded card that meets European identity standards. It stores biometric and personal data securely, easing verification both at borders and in digital platforms. Citizens request the CIE through their local municipality; after authentication, the card typically arrives by mail within six working days and costs around €22, including fees.

While SPID, the digital identity system based on credentials from private providers, will still function, its role is changing. Some providers have already begun charging for SPID - though Poste Italiane remains the only major provider offering it free of charge. Nonetheless, the direction is clear: SPID will gradually be phased out, to be replaced by the more secure, government-backed CIE.

Alongside this move, Italy is introducing the IT Wallet, a digital repository that will live inside the IO app. Users will be able to store and access documents - such as driver's licenses, medical cards, disability permits, ISEE certificates, and academic credentials - in a single, secure digital wallet. Starting in 2026, the IT Wallet is set to align with the European Digital Identity (EUDI) Wallet, enabling Italians to use their identity across EU borders.
CIE offers multi-level authentication for increasing security: Level 1: username and password - basic but easiest. Level 2: credentials plus one-time verification codes via SMS or app. Level 3: requires physical CIE use via NFC or smart card reader for top-level access.

EU Digital Identity Wallet

Millions of Italians will soon need to update both physical documents and authentication methods, triggering a historic shift in how identity and access are managed - aiming for convenience, security, and better interoperability across Italy and Europe.

Italian design

Cassina design, from the Andrea Doria to a historic anniversary

Alberto Improda

Cassina stands as an icon of Italian design, and this year the company celebrates a milestone anniversary of great importance. The "Amedeo Cassina" company was founded in 1927 in Meda, in the Brianza district north of Milan, Lombardy, by brothers Cesare and Umberto Cassina. In 1935, it became "Figli di Amedeo Cassina." The Great Depression and World War II made its early years especially difficult, but in true Brianza fashion the company pressed forward and began to take root.

The turning point came in the

1950s, when Cassina entered the world of cruise ship furnishings. For the Andrea Doria - the legendary ocean liner of the Italia Navigation Company - the young Brianza firm produced more than 500 exquisite pieces, outfitting reading rooms, dining halls, and cabins. It was aboard the Andrea Doria that Cassina's creations first set sail for the United States.

The Andrea Doria project also led the Cassina brothers to meet Giò Ponti, one of Italy's greatest architects and designers, who would play a decisive role in the rebirth of Italian design after the war. This marked the beginning of a fruitful collaboration: for Cassina, Ponti created one of his most celebrated designs, the 646 chair, better known as the Leggera, followed later by the Superleggera.

In 1954, the first edition of the Compasso d'Oro took place - the award that officially marked the birth of Italian design. Cassina won its first Compasso d'Oro with the 683 chair, designed by Carlo De Carli.

The company's success continued into the 1960s. After Giò Ponti came collaborations with a host of world-renowned designers, architects, and artists, from Andrea

Andrea Doria

Branzi to Mario Bellini, from Rodolfo Dordoni to Philippe Starck.

Fast forward to today. Cassina, already looking toward its centenary, celebrates a major anniversary in 2025: the 60th year of production of its iconic pieces by Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret, and Charlotte Perriand - designs that have become part of the company's very DNA.
In 1964, Cassina acquired the worldwide exclusive rights for the serial production of their first four pieces, with production officially beginning in 1965. Since then, Cassina has been the only company authorized to manufacture the models of these three masters, working closely with the Fondation Le Corbusier, Pernette Perriand-Barsac, and Jeanneret's heirs.

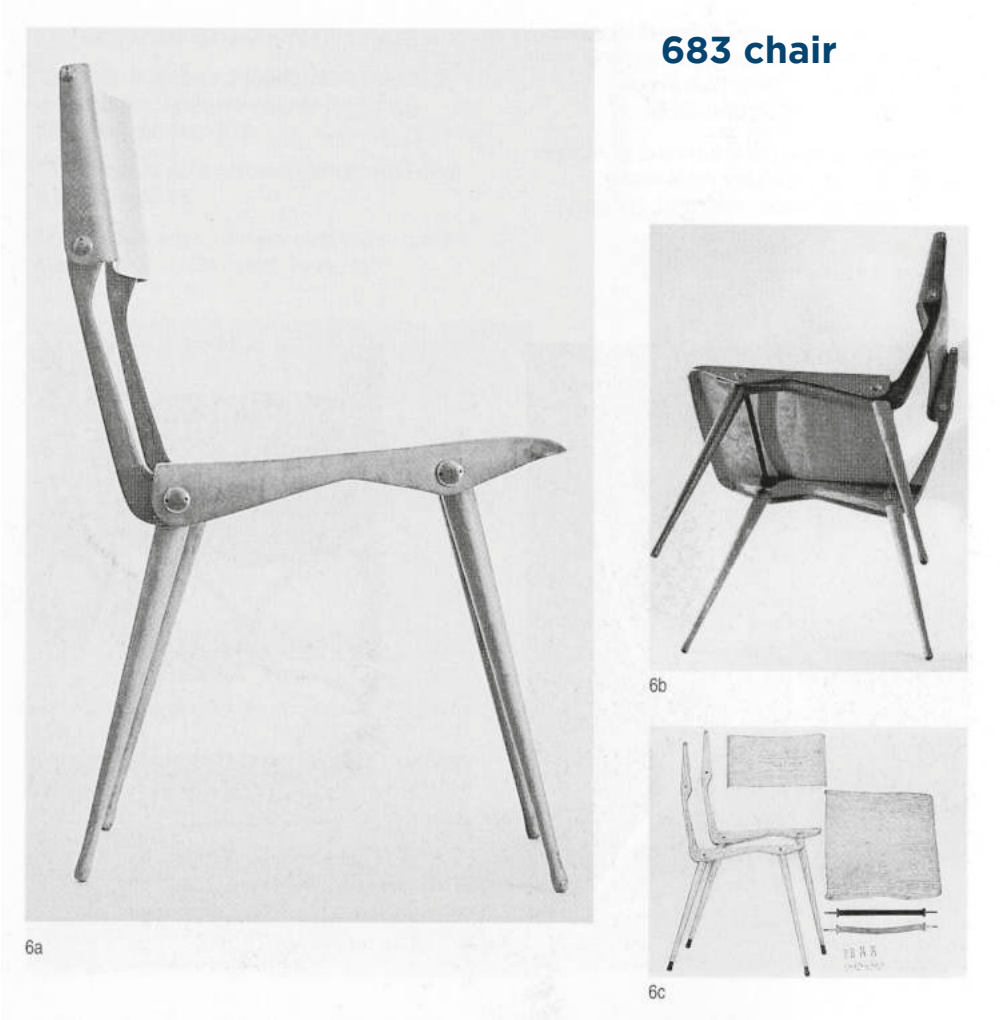
For Milan Design Week 2025, the four legendary LC models - the LC1 Fauteuil dossier basculant, the LC2 Fauteuil Grand Confort, petit modèle, the LC3 Fauteuil Grand Confort, grand modèle, and the LC4 Chaise longue à réglage continu - were unveiled in three new monochrome-inspired versions. These special editions preserve the aesthetics, proportions, and essence of the originals, but the tubular steel frames are finished in a glossy red, blue, or

Giò Ponti

green, paired with lush velvet and leather upholstery.

Color is the centerpiece of this anniversary collection. The 2025 limited editions explicitly celebrate the importance of color in the philosophy and work of the three great creators. From their earliest projects, color played a

646 chair



vital role - from Le Corbusier and Jeanneret's iconic buildings such as the Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau and Maison La Roche, to the furniture the trio first presented to the public at the 1929 Salon d'Automne in Paris.

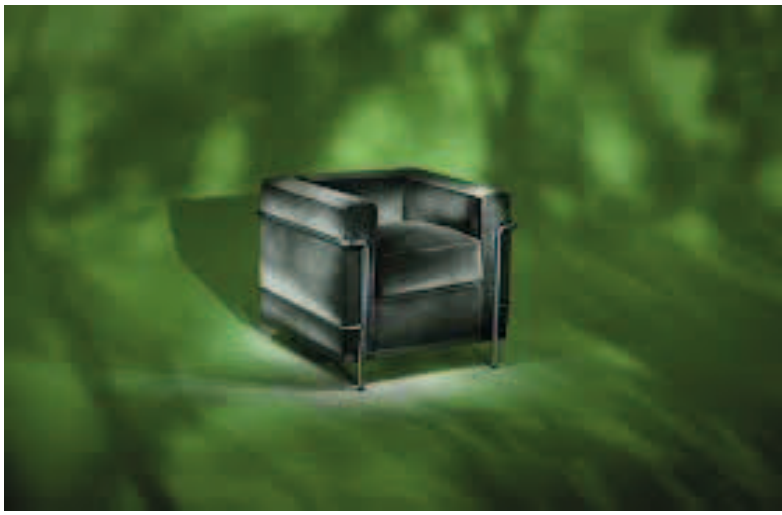
Le Corbusier, beyond being an architect, was also a painter, constantly studying color. His exploration of chromatic harmony sought to create balance and visual unity, developing combinations that felt coherent and seamlessly integrated with their surroundings. Charlotte Perriand and Pierre Jeanneret shared this vision, applying the same sensitivity to furniture design so that finishes interacted with each other and with the spaces they inhabited.

In 1978, Perriand expanded this exploration with Cassina by introducing the first colored editions to the company's I Maestri collection.

The 2025 anniversary editions reinterpret these masterpieces with a contemporary spirit, also emphasizing sustainability. The LC2 and LC3 armchairs are presented in a new "durable" version, produced with eco-friendly, circular materials. Cushion padding now incorporates recycled polyester fibers, while the foam elements use polyurethane with a percentage of bio-based polyols.

Cassina's 2025 celebration of these iconic pieces - anchored in Color - brilliantly bridges Past and Future, Tradition and Innovation.

As Pablo Picasso once said: "Colors, like features, follow the changes of the emotions."



LC2 Fauteuil Grand Confort petit modèle.

LC3 Fauteuil Grand Confort grand modèle

LC4 Chaise longue à réglage continu

Italian proverbs

Gallina vecchia fa buon brodo

We the Italians Editorial Staff

Gallina vecchia fa buon brodo literally translates “An old hen makes good broth”. It is a traditional Italian proverb that points to the value of old age – praised as the time of wisdom gained through long experience. The saying comes from the peasant world of rural Italy, where an old hen, though tough and requiring long cooking to soften its meat, produces a broth that is especially rich and flavorful.

The expression seems to have very ancient roots. In fact, it already appears in medieval Latin, recorded in the 14th century Liber de coquina: “veta gallina bonum ius facit.”

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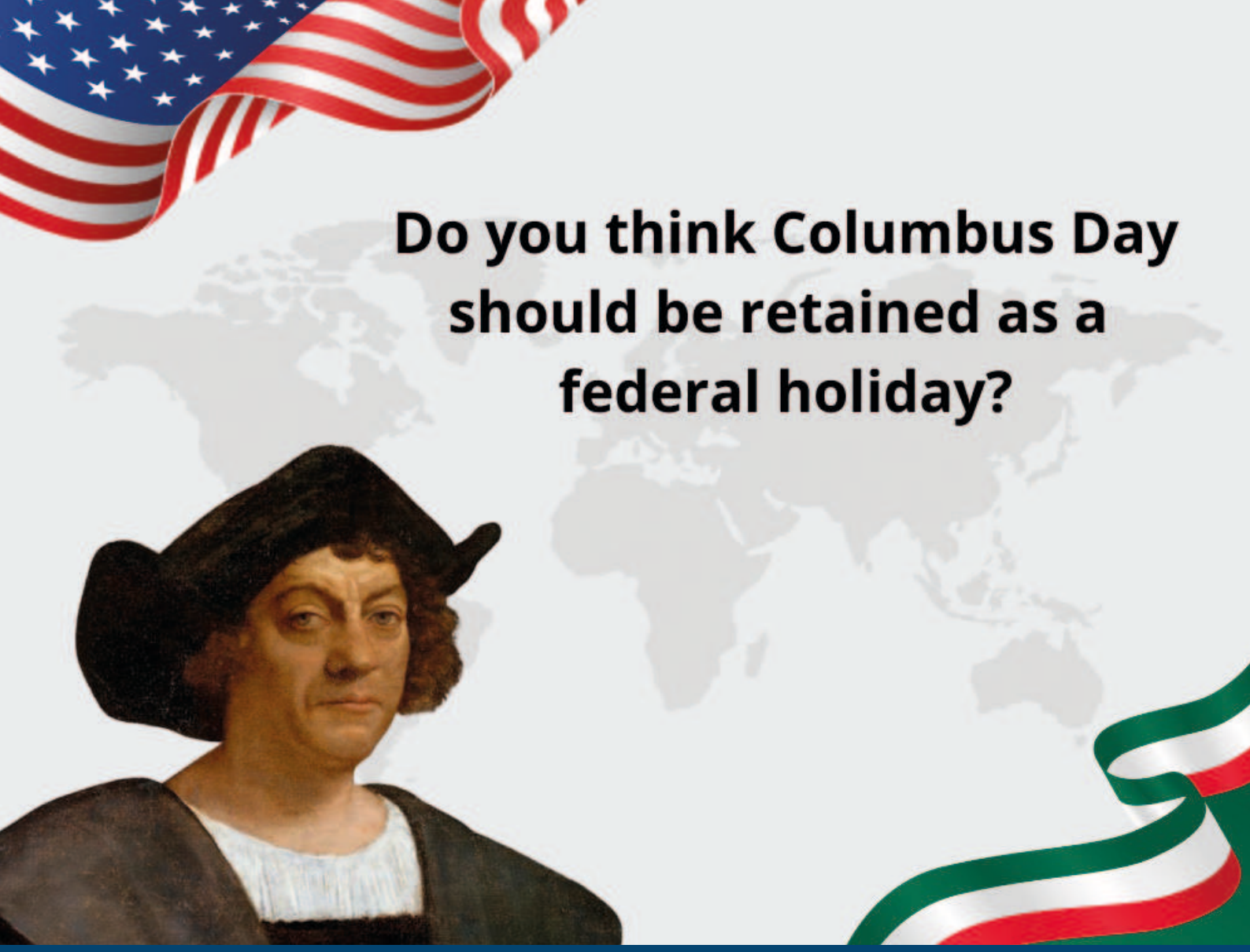

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