

NOVEMBER  
2023

# ITALY



OLIVE HARVEST | THANKSGIVING ITALIAN STYLE | TUSCANY



A&M CLUB

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**I am not afraid of the darkness.  
Real death is preferable to a life  
without living.**



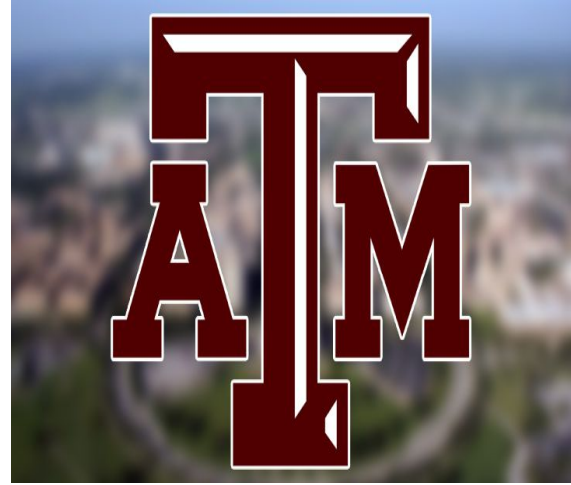
**VASCO DA GAMA**

# CIAO A TUTI AND HOWDY, AGS!

*H*ere we are. November.

Seems like just yesterday I was writing my letter for summer.

Time has a way of flying by and November is the quickest of all. By the time we're two weeks into the month, it's already time for Thanksgiving. And after that it's a race to the Christmas Holidays, New Years celebrations and then we're done! Thank goodness.



## **Thanksgiving in Italy: A Different Tradition:**

Thanksgiving, a cherished holiday for many, is not traditionally celebrated in Italy. However, the concept of gratitude and family gatherings is deeply ingrained in Italian culture. This month, we explore how Italians celebrate this time of year, emphasizing gratitude for the harvest and the pleasures of the table. We also share insights into restaurants and venues that offer special Thanksgiving-inspired feasts for those who wish to celebrate this American holiday while in Italy.

## **Olive Harvest Challenges in 2023:**

Our world is changing, and Italy's olive harvest faces unique challenges in 2023. Climate fluctuations, pests, and economic pressures have had a significant impact on olive groves across the country. In our in-depth review, we shed light on the issues faced by olive farmers and the potential consequences for the production of one of Italy's most cherished treasures – olive oil.

We also take a visit to the iconic region of Tuscany, and a wonderful recipe for *Pappa Al Pomodoro*, highlight one of our members (Darren Crisp '92) who moved from Texas to Tuscany and found his passion through starting a business building custom bicycles, plus much, much more.

We hope you enjoy the format and if you have any questions let us know. We are committed to bringing you engaging and insightful content, and we look forward to sharing the wonders of Italy with you in the pages of each issue. As always, your feedback and suggestions are highly valued, and we encourage you to reach out with your thoughts and ideas. Be sure to download the material. Over time the issues will roll off and not be available for review. June will roll off this month.

The club can also use some help. Please check out **page 43** for areas where we need support. Feel free to pass along any photos, news articles, announcements, births, graduations, Silver Taps, career changes or any other news you would like to share with the club. Let me know if you would like to get involved.

Thanks, Ciao and Gig'em!

Ryan '91



# PANE COMUNE

## BRIEF HISTORY BEHIND THIS SALT LESS TUSCAN BREAD

*T*here are many stories about why the bread in Tuscany is without salt, but the most popular one is that salt was heavily taxed during the Middle Ages in Tuscany so Tuscans opted to go without in their daily bread. There are also rumors stating that in the 12th century, the city of Pisa placed an embargo on salt to the city of Florence.

Now, you might be wondering why Tuscan bread is still made without salt. Well the reason is, Tuscan food tone has very rich sauces that pair well with a simple bread lacking salt. A salt less bread helps you focus on the flavors of the dish, including topped with extra-virgin olive oil.

It's generally called *pane comune*, or common bread. You may also hear it referred to as *pane sciapo*—bland bread. In Tuscany, it's also called *pane toscano*, or Tuscan bread. What ever you call it, it pairs well with Tuscan meals.



# TEXAS A&M CAMPUS REMEMBERED



## ANIMAL INDUSTRIES BUILDING

*T*he Animal Industries Building (1932) was designed by campus architect S.C.P. Vosper and dedicated as a memorial to “the pioneer livestock men of Texas” on December 10th, 1936. The eclectic classical revival architecture has brick pilasters separated by tile and cast stone panels. The column capitals depict images of farm animals, and exterior motifs represent skulls, animal heads, ears of corn and cornucopias. The two-story cast stone entrance is flanked by elaborate ironwork lighting fixtures and ornamented by Texas cattle brands. Interior tile work reflects the exterior “animal” motifs. This and Scoates Hall were planned to be a part of the never completed agricultural quadrangle.









# ARE ZUCCA (PUMPKINS) A FRUIT OR A VEGETABLE?

*A Texas A&M AgriLife horticulturist settles the debate.*

Inquiring minds might want to know, is the orange orb a fruit or vegetable? The answer may surprise you. A pumpkin is, in fact, a fruit. Dr. Joe Masabni, Texas A&M AgriLife Extensions Services vegetable specialist in Dallas, said scientifically speaking, pumpkins are a fruit simply because anything that starts from a flower is botanically a fruit.

Usually, fruits and vegetables are named according to how they are consumed. How people eat them versus how people see them is often different.

"We tend to identify them in relation to whether we eat them as a dessert, salad or food," Masabni said. Consider a cucumber or tomato. People don't typically eat those as desserts; they eat them in a salad or cooked in a meal, so they became classified as vegetables, even though they are officially fruits. "Pumpkins are a tricky one," he said, "because some people make soups or stews from pumpkins, which is a meal, while others make pies, which is a dessert. So that can sometimes be confusing."

To read and find out more about why zucca is a fruit click [this link](#).

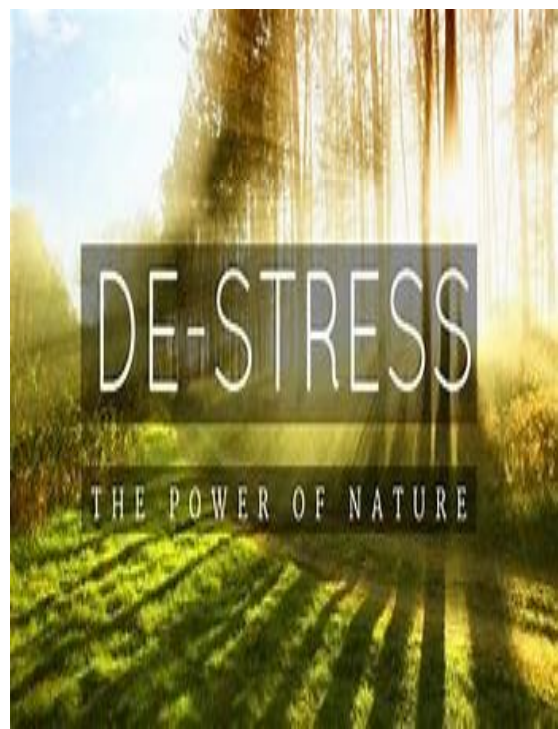
## CONNECTION WITH NATURE LINKED TO LONGER, HEALTHIER LIVES

*Studies show that green spaces like parks or trails in urban environments can improve mental and physical health in powerful ways.*

Nature is the daily pill we all need to live healthier lives, and Texas A&M University is laying the groundwork to lead the nation toward its healing powers.

The conversation about nature, green spaces, even houseplants' abilities to wash away stress, anxiety and heal physical ailments has been gaining momentum for years, but Charlie Hall, Ph.D., professor and Ellison Chair in International Floriculture in the [Texas A&M Department of Horticultural Sciences](#) is organizing to bring it to the forefront for a nation in crisis.

Mental and physical health in the U.S. is at crisis levels, he said. Hall and a growing number of scientists, health care professionals and green industry leaders hope to change individual behaviors and stakeholder attitudes related to nature and natural spaces. To read more about how connecting with nature improves health click [here](#).



# TEXAS A&M LAW SCHOOL

## RANKS NO. 1 IN TEXAS BAR PASS RATE

*The Fort Worth-based school's first-time bar pass rate also stands as highest in the state for the past decade.*

*T*he Texas A&M University School of Law is ranked No. 1 in the state in the 2023 Texas Bar Exam pass rates.

The school's overall Texas Bar Examination pass rate for first-time test takers in 2023 was 94.63%, followed by the University of Texas with 92.56% and Texas Tech University with 91.6%.

Texas A&M School of Law's first-time bar pass rate also stands as the highest in the state for the past decade.

"The law school continues to make Texas A&M proud as it climbs the rankings at a ridiculously fast rate," said Mark A. Welsh III, interim president of Texas A&M University. "This latest accomplishment reflects the quality of education and strong support our faculty and staff in Fort Worth provide to our students who will go on to do incredible things not only in the field of law, but also in their communities, the state and our nation. If you really need help, get an Aggie lawyer!"

The latest results showcase the law school's strides in elevating student preparedness for the bar exam. Since 2020, the law school has been among the top two highest-scoring law schools in Texas for first-time bar pass rates. The law school also produced the highest individual scorer on the bar exam twice in the last four years.

"I was ecstatic, but not surprised, that the students' hard work paid off in such an impressive way. They exceeded my expectations," said John Murphy, instructional professor and director of academic support and bar passage. "We've been working hard to become the leading Texas school in bar success — even while not 'teaching to the test.' That work is bearing fruit and is merely one aspect of the law school's mission to be the best law school in Texas by every metric."

The Fort Worth-based law school's success on the bar exam, among other factors, has contributed to significant improvements in employment outcomes for graduates. The school's Class of 2022 ranked first in the nation for "gold-standard" jobs, with a placement rate of over 98 percent.

"The level of commitment our faculty and students show cannot be understated. They have truly raised the bar," said Robert B. Ahdieh, dean of Texas A&M Law and vice president for professional schools and programs. "We are all thrilled with the outcomes, but these results reflect a bigger story of how our graduates not only gain a high-quality legal education but are also poised to compete with the best across our state and the nation. We look forward to seeing how their success will shape our local and national community."

The school is marking its 10th anniversary of joining the Aggie family this year. Since the university's 2013 acquisition of the law school, Texas A&M Law has produced hundreds of Aggie legal professionals, brought together a world-class faculty, and taken its place as [one of the nation's leading law schools](#).

To read more about the ranking click [here](#)

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# SUPPORT AGGIES AND TEXAS A&M NOV. 14 ON PASS IT BACK DAY

*The Association's day of giving aims to reach a goal of 2,800 donors.*



On Nov. 14, Aggies and friends of Texas A&M anywhere in the world can take part in Pass It Back Day, The Association of Former Students' 2023 day of giving to support the Aggie Network, aiming to reach a goal of 2,800 donors.

## **What happens Nov. 14?**

Everyone can participate in Pass It Back Day by making a gift of any size; inviting friends and family to take part; spreading the word on social media; sponsoring a student's Century Club membership and more.

All day, live updates will appear on [tx.ag/PassItBackDay](https://tx.ag/PassItBackDay) as gifts come in from around the world and appear on the map.

## **What does Pass It Back Day support?**

Each year, these gifts help The Association of Former Students provide support to Texas A&M and its current and former students:

- Hundreds of students receive Association scholarships and student assistance funds.
- Big Event, Muster, Fish Camp, the Corps of Cadets and many more A&M organizations and traditions receive Association support. So do academic programs that help set students up for success.
- The Association connects former students worldwide through programs such as A&M Clubs, Class Reunions, local Musters, the "Find An Aggie" former student directory and more.

## **Want to be more involved with Pass It Back Day?**

Social media ambassadors are crucial to the event's success, and they get a special toolkit to help spread the word. You will need to fill out a quick form to sign up.


To learn more about Pass it Back Day and ways you can get involved or donate, click [this link](#).



# PASS IT BACK DAY

# US ARMY SELECTS TEXAS A&M ENGINEERING FOR EXTREME ENVIRONMENTS CENTER

*The Army Research Laboratory has selected A&M for a center focused on discovering new materials for use in extreme conditions.*

ushing the boundaries of science and innovation, a research team from Texas A&M University, in collaboration with the Army Research Laboratory, and teams from the University of California, San Diego (UC San Diego), and the Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech), used the last year to develop a faster, more accurate and cost-effective method of discovering high-entropy alloys (metals produced by combining various types of materials).

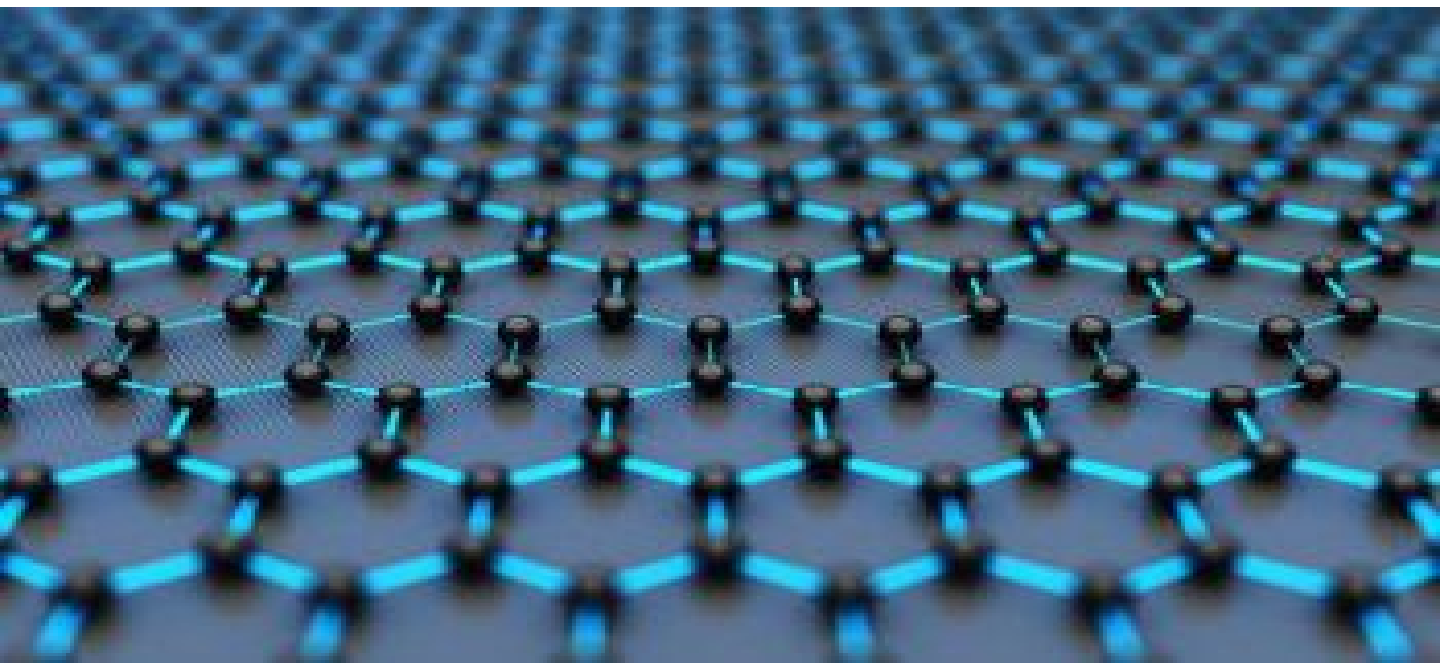
After developing a machine learning framework that discovered a high-entropy alloy with enhanced strength, durability and resistance to extreme environments in record time, the Army Research Laboratory has selected Texas A&M for a [High-Throughput Materials Discovery for Extreme Environments Center \(HTMDEC\)](#).

“In the army, and all branches of the military, they are seeing a new landscape — the challenges, obstacles and technologies they must worry about are changing more rapidly than ever before,” said Dr. Raymundo Arróyave, principal investigator and professor in the Department of Materials Science and Engineering at Texas A&M. “Before it may have taken decades to develop an alloy for the next vehicle, tank or ballistics protection technology, but as the landscape evolves, we must innovate at an accelerated pace.”

## **Extensive Collaboration**

This effort required two dozen students, faculty from three universities and 10 research groups, showcasing the importance and power of collaborative research efforts. Under the leadership of Dr. Ibrahim Karaman, the department aims to foster growth in these relationships through the center, benefiting the materials science and engineering fields and the university.

To learn more about the research into the high-performance alloy compositions that would withstand extreme environments, click [this link](#).





# A LOOK BACK AT NOV. 18, 1999

## TEXAS A&M BONFIRE COLLAPSE

For generations of Aggies, the Texas A&M Bonfire — the tradition of burning six tiers of timber before the annual football game against t.u. (University of Texas a.k.a. t-sips) — was sacred. Students would cut and stack the logs and light up the evening sky before the annual football game between A&M and t.u. It was an unmistakable display of the Aggies' burning desire to beat the t-sips.

That all changed 24 years ago at approximately 2:42 a.m. on November 18, 1999, the annual Aggie Bonfire collapsed during its construction, killing 12 people and injuring 27.

The 59-foot-high (18 m) stack, consisting of about 5,000 logs, collapsed during construction. Immediately after the collapse, emergency medical technicians and trained first responders of the Texas A&M Emergency Care Team (TAMECT), a student-run volunteer service, who staffed each stage of construction, administered first aid to the victims. TAMECT alerted the University Police and University EMS, who dispatched all remaining university medics, and requested mutual aid from surrounding agencies. In addition to the mutual aid received from the College Station and Bryan, Texas EMS, Fire, and Police Departments, members of Texas Task Force 1, the state's elite emergency response team, arrived to assist the rescue efforts.

Within minutes of the collapse, word of the accident spread among students and the community. Before sunrise, the accident was the subject of news reports around the world. Within hours, 50 news satellite trucks were broadcasting from the Texas A&M campus.

Rescue operations took over 24 hours; the pace was slowed by the decision to remove many of the logs by hand for fear that using heavy equipment to remove them would cause further collapses, resulting in further injuries to those still trapped. Students, including the entire Texas A&M football team and many members of the university's Corps of Cadets, rushed to the site to assist rescue workers with the manual removal of the logs. The Texas A&M civil engineering department was also called on to examine the site and help the workers determine the order in which the logs could be safely removed, and, at the request of the Texas Forest Service, Steely Lumber Company in Huntsville, Texas, sent log-moving equipment and operators.

Thousands came from around the state attended Silver Taps and later for a memorial service to pay their respects to the victims, including former President George H.W. Bush.

Those who died were:

**Miranda Adams** from Santa Fe  
**Michael Ebanks** from Carrollton  
**Jamie Lynn Hand** from Henderson  
**Timothy Kerlee** from Tennessee  
**Bryan McClain** from San Antonio  
**Jeff Don Self** from Arlington

**Christopher Breen** from Austin  
**Jeremy Frampton** from California  
**Christopher Lee Heard** from Houston  
**Lucas Kimmel** from Corpus Christi  
**Chad Powell** from Keller  
**Nathan Scott West** of Bellaire

On November 18, take a moment to remember these Aggies who died from the Bonfire collapse and remember their sacrifice.

**HERE!**

For a complete review of the bonfire collapse click this link to see:

***Playing for The 12: An oral history of the 1999 Aggie Bonfire collapse and win over Texas.***







# CYCLING

In  
Italy

An Odyssey of Beauty,  
Culture, and Freedom





Cycling through Italy is more than a mere journey; it's an odyssey that takes you through a tapestry of landscapes, cultures, and traditions. It's a symphony of wheels spinning through picturesque countryside, ancient towns, and vibrant cities.

Italy's diverse terrain is a cyclist's dream. From the jagged peaks of the Dolomites in the north to the sun-kissed coastlines of the Amalfi Coast and Sicily in the south, every pedal stroke reveals a new and breathtaking panorama. Rolling vineyards in Tuscany, tranquil lakes in Lombardy, and meandering roads through olive groves in Puglia provide a kaleidoscope of scenic delights.

Cycling in Italy is not just about the destination; it's about immersing yourself in the local culture. As you pedal through charming villages and towns, you'll encounter the heart and soul of Italy. Stop at a café in a piazza to savor a strong espresso and watch daily life unfold around you. Strike up conversations with locals who are always willing to share stories, recommend hidden gems, or simply offer a friendly - ciao.

Italy's rich history is etched into its landscapes and architecture. Cycling allows you to explore ancient ruins, medieval fortresses, and Renaissance masterpieces up close. Imagine cycling through the streets of Rome, passing by the Coliseum and the Roman Forum, or riding along the cobblestone streets of Florence, where every corner reveals a piece of art and history.

Italian cuisine is renowned worldwide, and cycling provides the perfect excuse to indulge. Taste authentic dishes like handmade pasta, wood-fired pizza, and gelato in the regions where they originated. Explore local markets to sample fresh produce, cheeses, and wines. Italy's food is a celebration of regional flavors, and every bite tells a story of tradition and passion.

Cycling offers a unique sense of freedom and connection with the environment. Unlike other forms of travel, it allows you to experience Italy at your own pace, savoring the moments that captivate your senses. Whether you're coasting along the azure waters of Lake Como or ascending the challenging hairpin turns of the Stelvio Pass, the bicycle becomes an extension of yourself, and the road an open canvas.

Cycling through Italy is not just an adventure; it's a transformative experience that nourishes the body and soul. It's about forging a deeper connection with a country that has given the world art, culture, and culinary delights. It's about discovering hidden treasures, making lifelong memories, and relishing the simple joy of the journey.

As you pedal through Italy, you'll come to understand that it's not just a destination; it's a love affair. It's a love affair with the landscapes that take your breath away, the cultures that welcome you with open arms, and the flavors that tantalize your taste buds. Cycling in Italy is an ode to beauty, culture, and freedom an unforgettable voyage through a country that has mastered the art of living.

So, grab your bicycle, embrace the open road, and let Italy reveal its magic one pedal stroke at a time.



Cycling group on vacation near one of the ancient arches in Volterra, Italy - Summer 2022



# RACCOLTA DELLE ULIVE

While summer is the most popular time to visit Tuscany, many travelers will agree that Autumn is one of the most exciting and unforgettable moments in the year. Harvest season is in full swing which means new wine and olive oil tasting, and the hunt for winter white truffles begins.





Tuscany is considered one of the **leading producer** of extra-virgin olive oil in the world. This

region in Central Italy is blessed with luscious olive groves and rolling vineyards, growing several types of olives, including the four main varieties: Frantoio, Moraiolio, Leccino and Pendolino. You'll often hear Italians refer to extra-virgin olive oil (EVOO) as **oro verde** ("green gold"). Unlike regular olive oil, extra-virgin is pressed without heat and chemicals, making it the most **expensive and desirable oil in the world**.

As October came to an end and the crisp autumn breeze began to envelop the Tuscan hills, it marked by one of Italy's most celebrated traditions: **the olive harvest**. For a foreigner to these traditions, the sheer quantity and variety of one of Italy's longest living condiments can seem baffling. For many Americans, their 32-ounce bottles of Trader Joe's are replaced with one of the many seemingly infinite, uniquely shaped and delicately packaged bottles of Tuscan oil. Upon exposure to this cultural aura, one is quickly educated on the nuances of its production. **But beyond the varietal intricacies of this staple in Italian cuisine, olive oil holds a powerful cultural standing in the Italian community.**

### WHEN IS HARVEST TIME IN TUSCANY?

It's not possible to state an exact date for the *vendemmia*, the harvest; it depends on what the weather has been for the previous year. But, generally, the grape harvest in Italy takes place between late August to mid October. It can vary in each region however this is a good rule of thumb. The olive harvest generally is from mid October through November.

### Tapping the green gold

In Italy, the extra-virgin olive oil harvest traditionally begins at the start of September and concludes mid-November. This is the best time of year for la raccolta ("the harvest"), as olives showcase the perfect ripeness desired by producers to deliver a harmonious blend of pungent fruitiness and earthy olive oil. In our area, the olive harvest often begins toward the end of September through early November. This earlier harvest time means that the olive hasn't ripened as much, which means less oil and the special peppery taste of Tuscan olive oils – something that is unique to the region and that Tuscans are very proud of.

While the art of harvesting olives is enjoyed and embraced by all Italians, the process is also very exhausting. Despite that modern development has introduced man-made machines to facilitate the process, **most of the intricate work of the harvest is done by hand.**

A hand-held olive harvester called a rostello helps to speed up the removal of olives from the trees, and placed in baskets tied to the waist or leaving them to fall on big rolls of net tightly wrapped around the tree trunks. Olives are **gathered from the baskets and nets** and the process of removing leaves and branches begins. This important step is performed by hand to guarantee precision, as twigs and leaves might influence the flavor, composition and color of the oil during the pressing.

### Producing the green gold

The scale of extra-virgin olive oil production goes beyond a singular row of trees. La raccolta leads to the distribution of one of the world's most **popular cooking ingredients**, with olive oil even gaining a valuable reputation in cosmetics and skincare. All olives gathered are pressed at a communal mill (frantoio). The atmosphere at the mill during the harvest is usually festive and full of joy. It's a great chance to socialize with local farmers and find out more about farming in the region.

While the atmosphere at the oil mill is as unique and festive as picking the olives, nothing quite compares to the love, sweat and effort put into working the groves. Families and friends work long days together to harvest Italy's substantial olive groves, honoring a **regional tradition** passed down through generations and for generations to come.

## 2023 Harvest predictions

*I*n many regions of Italy, the 2023 olive harvest will see a far worse yield than in previous years. For

instance, this year, the northern regions are expected to have an average decline of 30 per cent in production and, in the most unfortunate circumstances, experience a decrease of even 70 per cent. While the geography and regions of different olive oil productions always display variability, central Italian regions are likely to follow similar trends to those of the north. Francesco Lollobrigida, The Minister of Agriculture, Food Sovereignty and Forests in Italy predicted that the yield this year would see a **decrease of about 40 to 50 percent across all regions.**

To provide the best extra virgin olive oil, you need to be aware of the land, the olive trees, and to know how to care for the trees and to keep them strong and healthy. The eventual quality of the oil can be affected by many factors like the climate, pruning, fertilization, and, of course, a variety of olive trees. All of these elements affect the type of harvest, maturation, and so much more.

External factors, such as weather conditions, greatly influence the quality and quantity of an olive harvest. Strong winds, hail or frequent rain can cause the olive seedlings to fall off their branches. In central Italy, we all remember the heavy rain this May, when many cities and towns were flooded in Emilia Romagna and Marche and the Arno river threatened to flood Florence. These heavy showers caused flowers to fall from trees, hence fewer remaining buds that could become olives. In addition, the prolonged dry spells this summer reportedly stunted the growth of olives, which in many cases have grown less than usual. As a result, expectations for the upcoming harvest are that it will be significantly smaller than in previous seasons.

Our local olive press explained that the reduced yield will result in an average decrease in profits of about 30 per cent for olive oil producers (compared to the average for the last three years). However, they added that it is unwise only to consider this figure because different regions were affected in varying degrees. For instance, landowners in areas of lower altitudes struggled more than those who were in the higher hills or mountains. **As a result, the decrease in this year's profits ranges from as little as 20 to a staggering 70 percent.** As far as prices of the *sfuso* (wholesale units of olive oil) are concerned, there should be an uplift in prices for Tuscan oil between 5 to 35 percent. The increase for store-bought olive oil should be similar to these figures.

In 2022 we had about 12 inches of rain at our home, spread out during the year with most rainfall occurring in late summer. This allowed for the fruit to pollinate during the spring bud break and to fully ripen in the late summer with much needed moisture.







A real example of this impact is in our olive grove. This year we saw 11 inches of rain through May and very little since. The rain we experienced in the spring came during bud break which impacted the pollination process. This year's production will be much less than in years past throughout the entire Italian peninsula. It will result in higher-than-normal cost since there will be a scarcity of Italian EVOO and even more scarcity for organic oil.

We always encourage olive oil consumers to know who produces their oil to ensure they know where the oil comes from and how it is made.











# FROM TEXAS TO TUSCANY: DARREN CRISP'S JOURNEY TO CRAFTING DREAMS ON TWO WHEELS

In the world of custom bicycle frame building, where precision, craftsmanship, and a deep passion for cycling converge, one name stands out prominently - Darren Crisp of Crisp Titanium. His mastery of the art of creating bespoke titanium bicycle frames has earned him a reputation as a true artisan in the cycling community.

Titanium is known for its exceptional qualities in the bicycle world – it's lightweight, durable, and has a unique ride quality that's both lively and comfortable. Darren recognized the potential of this remarkable material and made it his canvas. His frames, meticulously handcrafted from titanium tubing, are not merely bicycles; they are functional works of art that reflect his dedication to perfection. One of the hallmarks of Darren's work is his unwavering commitment to precision. Every frame that bears the Crisp Titanium name is a testament to his attention to detail. From meticulously mitered tube junctions to flawless welds, each frame is a masterpiece of engineering. This commitment to precision ensures that each bicycle performs flawlessly, providing the rider with an unparalleled cycling experience.

In the world of bespoke bicycle frame builders, *Crisp Titanium* is a name that resonates with artistry, precision, and a deep love for cycling. What sets him apart is not just his mastery of titanium frame building but the remarkable journey that took him from the heart of Texas to the enchanting landscapes of Tuscany, Italy.

Crisp's journey began in the sprawling landscapes of Texas, where the love for cycling took root in his heart. In his late teens Darren moved to Texas and growing up in the Lone Star State, he developed a profound appreciation for the freedom, adventure, and pure joy that cycling brought into his life. He rode and raced bicycles growing up, as well as, during and after college. Darren graduated from Texas A&M in 1992 with a degree in Environmental Design and Architecture. During his studies he spent a semester abroad at the Santa Chiara Study Center in the city of Castiglion Fiorentino, Tuscany, Italy. Here he found a deep appreciation for the architecture and artistry found throughout Italy and felt the first urge to return after graduation. Little did he know that this passion would eventually lead him to Italy, the very epicenter of cycling culture.

After graduation Darren entered the business world working for an architectural firm. Here he continued to think about returning to Italy. His story takes a remarkable twist when he decided to make the move to return. Italy, a country steeped in cycling history and renowned for its craftsmanship, called out to him. It was a bold move, one that would change the course of his life forever.

In Italy, he saw not only an opportunity to pursue his passion but also a chance to immerse himself in a culture that revered cycling as a way of life. It wasn't easy. Finding work was challenging. He did everything he could to make it work. Washing dishes, working at the school where we once studied. He did all he could to make his dream a reality.

Upon arriving in Italy, Darren embarked on a journey of craftsmanship and discovery. He studied the art of frame building under the guidance of experienced Italian artisans, absorbing centuries of knowledge and tradition.



It was here, in the heart of Tuscany, that he honed his skills and developed a profound understanding of the unique qualities of titanium.

With unwavering dedication and a deepening expertise in frame building, Darren founded Crisp Titanium. The brand, synonymous with precision and artistry, quickly gained recognition among cyclists worldwide. His frames, crafted from the finest titanium, became a testament to his commitment to quality and excellence. Darren was able to apply his background in architecture and the details needed to capture the precision required to build the perfect frame for his clients to ensure they are pleased with his work.

What sets Crisp Titanium apart is its bespoke approach. Darren collaborates closely with each client, understanding their unique riding preferences, needs, and dreams. Each frame is a personalized work of art, meticulously tailored to the rider's specifications. This level of customization ensures that every Crisp Titanium bicycle is an extension of the rider's soul.

While Darren embraces traditional frame-building techniques, he is also an innovator at heart. He constantly pushes the boundaries of what is possible with titanium, experimenting with different tube shapes, butting profiles, and geometry. This spirit of innovation has led to the creation of frames that not only perform exceptionally but also have a distinctive aesthetic appeal.

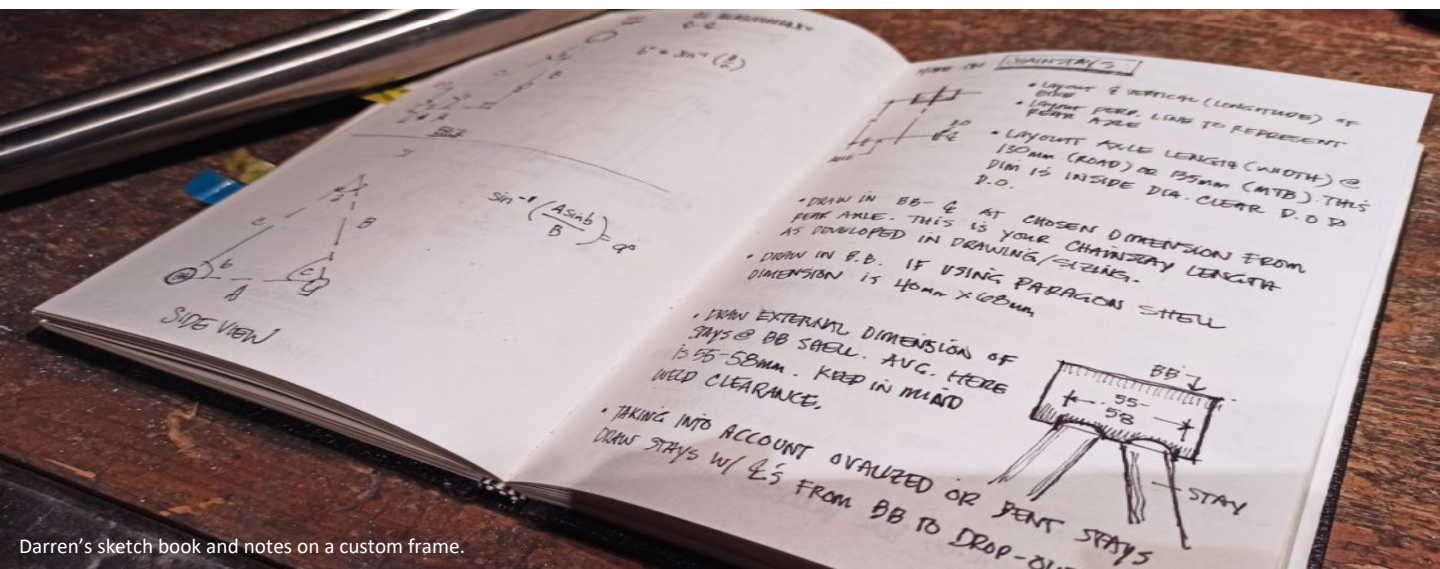
Darren's journey from Texas to Italy not only embodies the pursuit of a passion but also serves as a bridge between two cycling cultures. He brings the craftsmanship and attention to detail of Italian frame building, applying his education from his time in Aggiedland to an international audience, blending the best of both worlds.

Darren's story is a testament to the power of following one's passion, even if it leads to unexpected places. From the wide-open roads of Texas, from the numerous roads in the Brazos Valley home to Texas A&M, to the rolling hills of Tuscany, his journey is a remarkable example of how dedication, craftsmanship, and a love for cycling can come together to create something truly extraordinary.

As he continues to craft bespoke titanium frames for cyclists around the world, Darren remains a living embodiment of the Aggie spirit - one that transcends borders and speaks to the universal joy of pedaling through life's adventures. His legacy is not just in the bicycles he creates but in the inspiration he provides for all who share his love for chasing your dreams and the love of the open road.

You can follow Darren on Instagram at: [crisp titanium](https://www.instagram.com/crisp_titanium)

To learn more about Crisp Titanium click the following link: [crisptitanium.com](https://www.crisptitanium.com)



Darren's sketch book and notes on a custom frame.





Italy



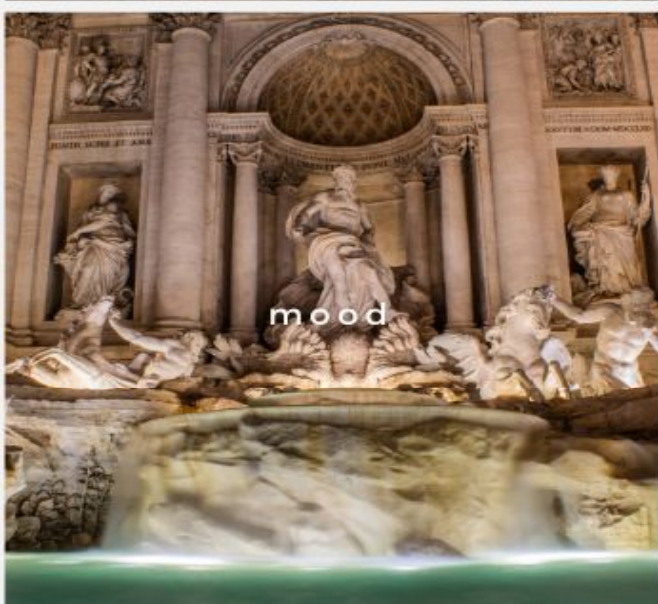
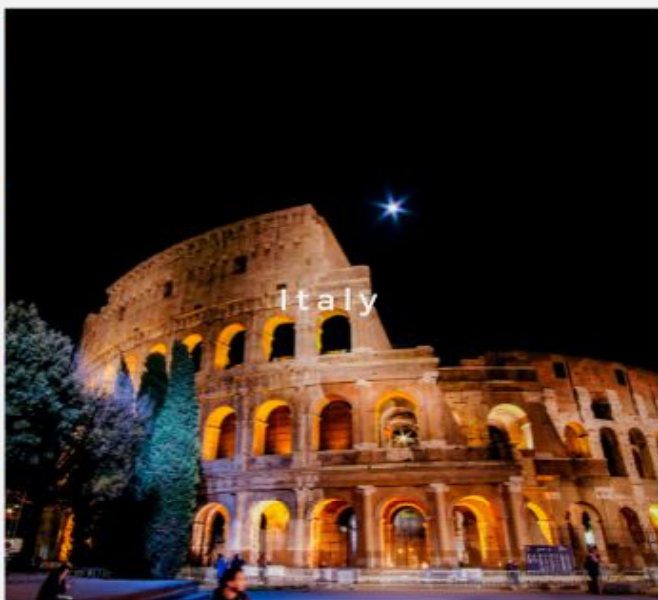
perfectly



imperfect











# La Festa del Ringraziamento: Italian "Thanksgiving"

*T*hanksgiving is a decidedly American holiday, rooted in history. In this country of immigrants, Italians in America celebrate Thanksgiving, calling it La Festa del Ringraziamento (Festival of Thanks).

For the hundreds of thousands of Italians to have immigrated to the US over the years, Thanksgiving is a time to gather and celebrate being Italian Americans, giving thanks, and breaking bread with their loved ones. As with most Italian holiday feasts, an Italian Thanksgiving will consist of several courses, and last hours. Depending on the region from which Italians come, there will be different dishes on the Thanksgiving table.

Let's explore the many different variations of an Italian-American Thanksgiving dinner, truly a fine example of the melting pot of America.

## **Do Italians Celebrate Thanksgiving?**

Not exactly. Italians do not have a national holiday that celebrates *American* Thanksgiving. However, you will find plenty of Italians toasting the holiday with their expat friends and family at a home or restaurant. Italians do love a celebration!

## **Are There Italian Thanksgiving Traditions?**

Most American Thanksgiving traditions aren't celebrated in Italy, for cultural and logistical reasons. Italian Thanksgiving traditions tend to revolve around the Thanksgiving meal.

## **How is American Thanksgiving Celebrated Differently In Italy?**

It's Not Celebrated At Lunchtime On Thursday. In fact, it doesn't even necessarily happen on Thursday. While the American Thanksgiving is always celebrated on the fourth Thursday of November, it's not a national holiday in Italy, which means... adults have to go to work and kids go to school!

Italians celebrating the holiday often move the meal to the Friday or Saturday following the official Thanksgiving. That way, it's a more relaxed occasion and guests are more likely to be able to attend. If you're set on having the meal on Thursday, it will need to be in the evening – after work and after school.

## **You Won't Watch American Football**

Few Italians follow American football – this is soccer (*calcio*) land after all! If you're craving American football, try a streaming service or hop into an Irish pub – they often stream international sports. With the difference in time zones, the Thanksgiving football games are on in the evening and night in Italy.

## **You Won't Watch The Thanksgiving Day Parade**

Watching the Macy's Thanksgiving day parade has been an American tradition since 1924. It's not an Italian tradition, but if you want to watch it, you'll need to use a VPN and stream it through an American network.

Want to relive Macy's Thanksgiving day parades of the past? Or introduce your Italian friends to the parade? Check out this video [link](#) reliving 95 years of the parade.

## **Volunteering On Thanksgiving Isn't A Tradition**

Some Americans volunteer on Thanksgiving, usually preparing or serving Thanksgiving meals to those in need. Volunteering isn't a part of the holiday here because having a Thanksgiving meal isn't common. That doesn't mean you can't volunteer though! There are always organizations in need of help.

## **No Black Friday Shopping Madness**

While Black Friday *is* becoming a big sales day for brick and mortar and online stores in Italy, it's nothing like the crazy shopping day in the United States. The discounts tend to be light (10-25% off) compared to the United States, so no fights break out over televisions or discounted toys.

## **Where To Eat A Thanksgiving Meal**

Many expats cook the Thanksgiving dinner at home, but in larger cities a few restaurants will create a set menu for the holiday.

If you aren't invited to a Thanksgiving dinner, but want to check it out, try a restaurant meal. **You'll most likely need to reserve your meal at least a week in advance** so the restaurant can gather uncommon ingredients and prepare the meal.

For example, in Florence, just a few of the places you can celebrate Thanksgiving at include:

[Ristorante Accademia](#) – serving Thanksgiving dinner since 2000, classic, traditional menu

[The Four Seasons](#) – high-end, glamorous Thanksgiving dinner

[The Place](#) – Tuscan style Thanksgiving dinner

Melaleuca Café – a healthy, creative menu and an incredible pie selection

[Harry's Bar](#) – elegant menu, somewhat traditional

## **Thanksgiving Facts To Share With Your Italian Friends**

The first Thanksgiving was celebrated in 1621 and lasted for three days.

The first Thanksgiving included the Plymouth pilgrims and the Wampanoag Native Americans. It celebrated the successful fall harvest.


Turkey probably wasn't served at the first Thanksgiving.

Abraham Lincoln made Thanksgiving an official national holiday in 1863.

Thanksgiving is always celebrated on the 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday of the month of November.

Now that you know about Italian Thanksgiving traditions, it's time to celebrate the holiday!

***Buona festa del ringraziamento!***



Every time I try to eat  
healthy, along comes  
Thanksgiving, Christmas,  
New Years, Summer,  
Friday or Wednesday and  
ruins it for me.





# AYIN TOVA

{Eye-in toh-vah }| Hebrew

“good eye” to cultivate a mindset of gratitude, generosity and kindness, recognizing the inherent goodness in all things.

Seeing the world through a lens of compassion and understanding; choosing to focus on the beauty and positivity that surrounds us rather than dwelling on negativity and strife.





TUSCANY

DISCOVERING THE TIMELESS BEAUTY OF  
THIS ICONIC REGION



# TUSCANY

*I*n the heart of Italy, Tuscany is a region that effortlessly combines iconic landscapes, rich history, and exquisite cuisine. This enchanting region is a visual delight, with its rolling hills, charming cities, and picturesque countryside.

Florence, the capital of Tuscany, is a living testament to the Renaissance era. The city's historic center is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, adorned with architectural marvels like the Florence Cathedral, also known as the Duomo, and the Palazzo Vecchio. The Uffizi Gallery houses a peerless collection of Renaissance art, including masterpieces by Botticelli, Leonardo da Vinci, and countless others. Stroll through the cobbled streets and visit the Galleria dell' Accademia to admire Michelangelo's masterpiece, David. Don't forget to savor the delectable local cuisine at one of Florence's quaint trattorias.

Florence's streets are like an open-air museum, with each corner revealing a piece of history. Wander across the Ponte Vecchio, a medieval bridge lined with charming jewelry shops. Don't forget to savor the local flavors at traditional trattorias, where dishes like ribollita and pappa al pomodoro tantalize the taste buds.

Siena, a medieval gem is another jewel of Tuscany, boasts a perfectly preserved medieval cityscape. The Piazza del Campo, with its unique shell shape is a UNESCO World Heritage Site renowned for its annual Palio horse race, is the vibrant heart of the city. The Siena Cathedral, a stunning example of Italian Gothic architecture, beckons with its intricate facade and breathtaking interior.

Siena's narrow, winding streets lead to hidden treasures, from artisan shops to cozy cafes. Be sure to indulge in gelato from Gelateria di Piazza, consistently rated among Italy's best.

Pisa, known worldwide for its iconic leaning tower, Pisa offers more than just a photo opportunity. Visit the Piazza dei Miracoli to see the Leaning Tower, the Cathedral, and the Baptistery. Discover Pisa's rich maritime history and wander through the charming streets along the Arno River where you can take leisurely walks and dine at waterside restaurants.

Montepulciano boasts beautiful views and is also one of the most famous towns in the whole region. Its notoriety comes from the local varietal of grape named used to make the award-winning Montepulciano wine, known for its rich and full-bodied flavor. Italian, reflects this unique fusion of linguistic heritage.



Villa Pozzolo - Tuscany Italy



Volterra is another of the most popular towns to visit, built high up in the west of the region and surrounded by a historic wall that is thought to have been built in the 13th century. With classic red-tiled roofs and plenty of medieval architecture, this is a location for fans of Italy's ancient history as well as those who like Renaissance buildings. There are churches, museums, galleries and an Etruscan acropolis all to be explored in Volterra, but the wide range of attractions aren't the only thing that makes this such a busy part of the region. It's one of the most beautiful Tuscan hilltop towns because of its vantage point and the spectacular views of the countryside that can be seen from many parts of the historic centre.

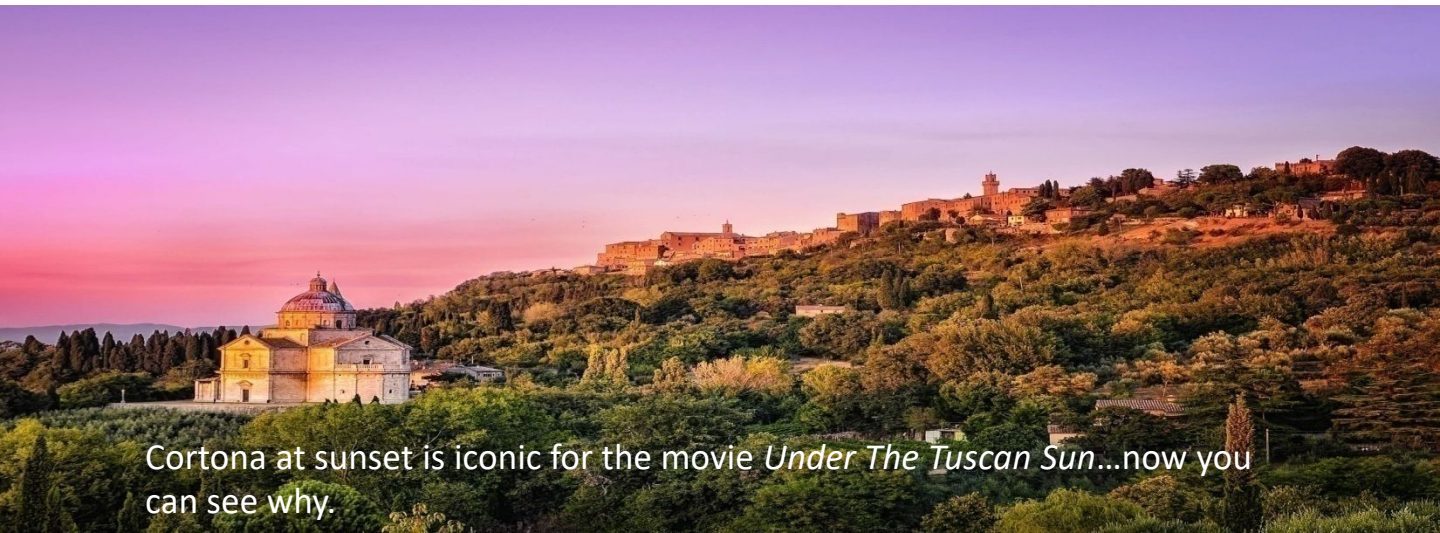
Lucca is a very popular town for travelers visiting this region, which is well-regarded as one of the most beautiful places in Tuscany. With colorful white and yellow houses, over 100 churches and architecture from almost every historic era, it's a fantastic part of Italy to visit and experience a classic medieval town. Lucca is surrounded by fortified city walls that were built in the 16th century and have been maintained so that they are still standing today. You can walk the fourteen-kilometer circuit provided by the walkways on top of these walls to truly experience the town and its surrounding scenery, admiring what makes it such a beautiful location.

Monteriggioni is more of a village or hamlet than a town thanks to its very small size, but it's certainly a location with a lot to offer its visitors. This beautiful hilltop settlement is full of tiny little gardens, shops, houses and piazzas that are just as pleasant to look at as the miles of surrounding Tuscan hills and forests.

Located in the southeastern part of Tuscany, Cortona is one of the best Tuscan towns to visit if you're looking for a location that won't be overrun with tourists. Its position on the edge of the region means that it isn't as frequently visited as other popular locations, but this lack of crowds is thought by many people to make the town even more beautiful.

With views of the Chiana Valley and Lake Trasimeno, Cortona is perched 600 meters above sea level and is a quintessential hill town in Tuscany that is particularly perfect for watching the sunset. There are plenty of wonderful things to see inside the town itself, with numerous churches, museums and towers as well as lots of winding streets of historic red-roofed houses.

Cortona is best-known for its inclusion in the famous book and film *Under the Tuscan Sun*, as well as the delicious red wine that is produced from vineyards near the town. Many people stop off in the hilltop town on their way to or from wine tasting experiences, completing their discovery of the region with a classic local meal accompanied by Tuscan views of the hills.



Cortona at sunset is iconic for the movie *Under The Tuscan Sun*...now you can see why.



Volterra is a walled mountaintop town. Its history dates from before the 8th century BC and it has substantial structures from the Etruscan, Roman and Medieval periods. It's also where we call home.



Volterra skyline just before a winter storm – February 2016

Tuscany is synonymous with wine, and the Chianti region is its epicenter. Take a scenic drive through vineyards, stopping at wineries for tastings of world-renowned Chianti Classico. The picturesque landscape of rolling vineyards and charming villages like Greve in Chianti, Rada in Chianti, Pignano, San Gimignano. Arezzo and its monthly antique market and countless other hilltop towns are sights to behold. The Bulgari wine region near the coast is exploding on the wine scene and should not be missed for the true wine aficionado.

Val d'Orcia, this UNESCO World Heritage Site is a photographer's paradise. The Val d'Orcia boasts stunning landscapes with rolling hills, cypress trees, and rustic farmhouses. Visit the town of Pienza for its pecorino cheese and Montalcino for its exquisite Brunello wine.

Dive into the heart of Tuscan cuisine by taking a cooking class in a traditional farmhouse. Learn to prepare homemade pasta, Tuscan ribollita, and tiramisù. It's not just about eating; it's about immersing yourself in the culinary traditions of the region.

For total relaxation, head to the thermal baths of Saturnia. The natural hot springs offer therapeutic benefits and are set amidst a stunning backdrop of cascading waterfalls and lush greenery.

If you are seeking a beach location, look no further than the five coastal villages of the Cinque Terre. They will not disappoint but be forewarned, wear your walking shoes.

Pitigliano, Montefioralle, Suvereto, Fosdinovo, Barga, there are so many wonderful locations in Tuscany it would be impossible to list them all. There is one thing that is common throughout the region. Tuscany, Italy, invites you to slow down, savor every moment, and embrace the timeless beauty that surrounds you. Whether you explore the art-filled cities or explore the idyllic countryside, Tuscany will leave an indelible mark on your heart. This region's charm lies in its ability to transport you to a bygone era while offering modern comforts and unforgettable experiences. So, pack your bags, and let Tuscany's magic captivate your soul.



# DUOMO DI FIRENZE

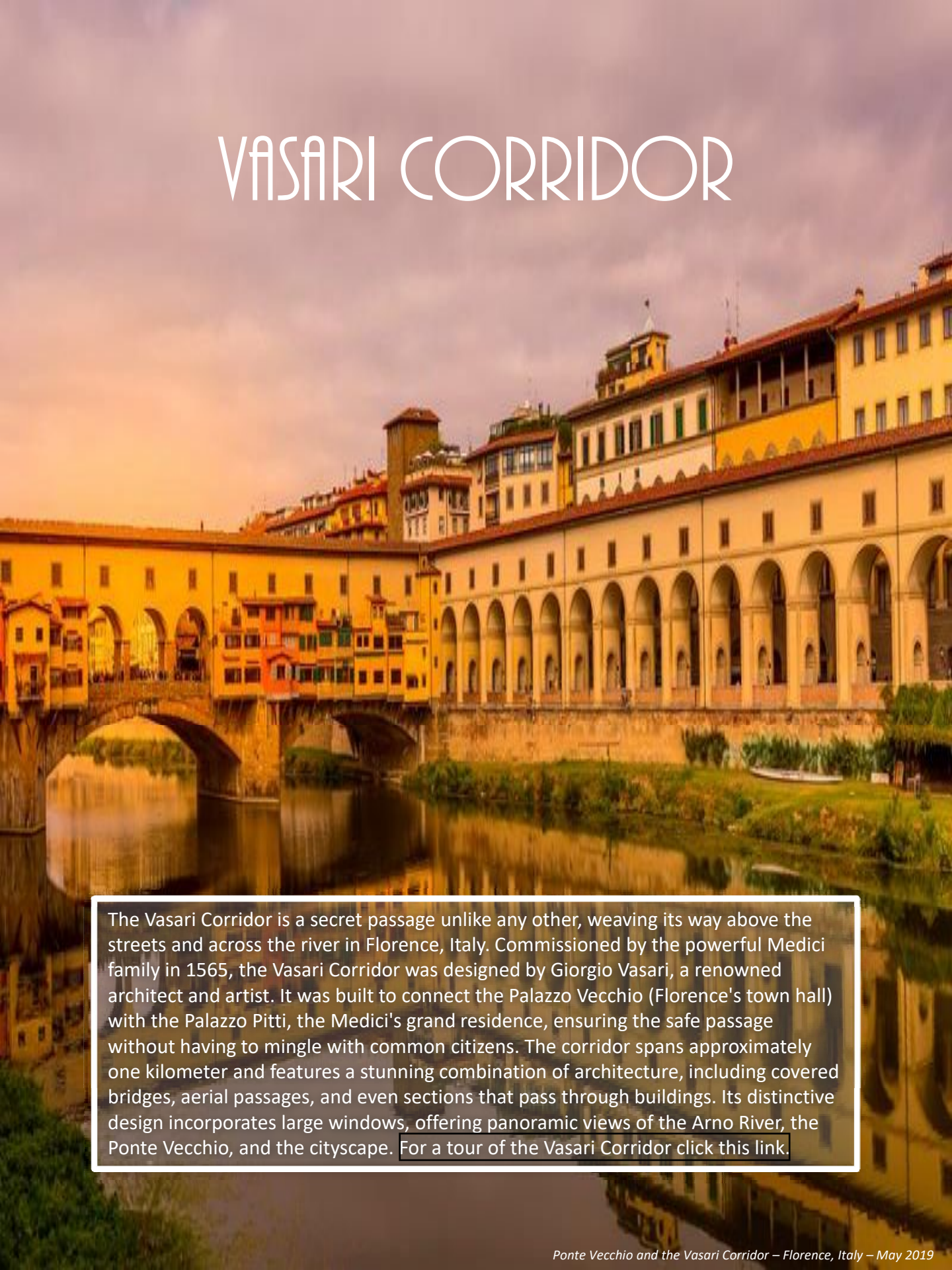
An aerial photograph of the Florence Cathedral (Duomo di Firenze) at sunset. The large red-tiled dome is the central focus, with its intricate brickwork and white stone ribs visible. The sky is a deep orange and red, reflecting the setting sun. In the background, the city of Florence is visible, with its dense collection of buildings and the distant hills of the Tuscan region. The overall mood is serene and historic.

**Florence Cathedral** (Italian: *Duomo di Firenze*), formally the **Cathedral of Saint Mary of the Flower** (Italian: *Cattedrale di Santa Maria del Fiore*, is the cathedral of Florence, Italy. It was begun in 1296 in the Gothic style to a design of Arnolfo di Cambio and was structurally completed by 1436, with the dome engineered by Filippo Brunelleschi. The exterior of the basilica is faced with polychrome marble panels in various shades of green and pink, bordered by white, and has an elaborate 19th-century Gothic Revival façade by Emilio De Fabris.

The cathedral complex, in Piazza del Duomo, includes the Baptistery and Giotto's Campanile (bell tower). These three buildings are part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site covering the historic centre of Florence and are a major tourist attraction of Tuscany. The basilica is one of Italy's largest churches, and until the development of new structural materials in the modern era, the dome was the largest in the world. It remains the largest brick dome ever constructed.



# VASARI CORRIDOR



The Vasari Corridor is a secret passage unlike any other, weaving its way above the streets and across the river in Florence, Italy. Commissioned by the powerful Medici family in 1565, the Vasari Corridor was designed by Giorgio Vasari, a renowned architect and artist. It was built to connect the Palazzo Vecchio (Florence's town hall) with the Palazzo Pitti, the Medici's grand residence, ensuring the safe passage without having to mingle with common citizens. The corridor spans approximately one kilometer and features a stunning combination of architecture, including covered bridges, aerial passages, and even sections that pass through buildings. Its distinctive design incorporates large windows, offering panoramic views of the Arno River, the Ponte Vecchio, and the cityscape. [For a tour of the Vasari Corridor click this link.](#)

# Pappa al Pomodoro





# Pappa al Pomodoro

## *(Tuscan Bread & Tomato Soup)*

Pappa means pap (soft food), which is what this soup is. If you ever needed proof that stale bread needn't go to waste, this soup is it. And this stale bread recipe can be made with canned tomatoes, so you can make it throughout the year. When the weather is hot, you can also serve this at room temperature.

### INGREDIENTS

- 1 pound stale country bread
- 2 tablespoons Riparbella extra virgin olive oil
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 2 to 3 garlic cloves (to taste), minced
- 1½ pounds ripe tomatoes, peeled, seeded, and chopped, or 1 (28-ounce) can, with juice
- 1 tablespoon tomato paste
- Pinch of sugar
- ¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes (optional)
- Salt and freshly ground pepper
- 4 cups water
- 2 to 3 tablespoons slivered fresh basil

### DIRECTIONS

1. If your bread is too hard to cut, douse it with water first. Then remove the crusts and cut into cubes. You should have about 7 cups.
2. Heat the oil in a large, heavy soup pot over medium-low heat. Add the onion and cook, stirring, until tender, about 5 minutes.
3. Add the garlic and cook, stirring, for about a minute, until fragrant.
4. Add the tomatoes, tomato paste, sugar, red pepper flakes, and salt and pepper, and cook, stirring occasionally, until the tomatoes have cooked down, about 10 minutes. Taste and adjust seasoning.
5. Stir the bread cubes into the tomatoes. Add the water, half the basil, and about 1 teaspoon salt. Bring to a simmer and simmer, stirring and mashing the bread, for about 10 minutes, until the soup is thick, like oatmeal.
6. Stir in the remaining basil, taste and adjust seasoning.

Serve hot, warm, or room temperature.

***Buon Appetito!***

# ASK AN ITALY AGGIE - 12 QUESTIONS

## DARREN CRISP '92

### 1. Tell us a little about yourself. Where you grew up, what your interests were, family, pets?

*A: I'm originally from Houston, Texas, and my childhood was marked by frequent moves due to my parents' government jobs. Our family journey took us to various places, including Virginia, Mississippi, and Louisiana, before we circled back to Texas, where I eventually enrolled at TAMU. I've developed a deep appreciation for the South, and it's something you truly grasp once you've lived or worked elsewhere – the genuine warmth of Southern Hospitality.*

*During my youth, I had a passionate love for biking. To fuel this hobby, I stayed busy by mowing lawns and babysitting to earn money for bike parts. Like any typical kid, I dabbled in other sports too, finding enjoyment in basketball, tennis, skateboarding, and water-skiing. During my formative years, we resided on a reservoir in Mississippi, making skiing and fishing a regular part of our weekly, if not daily, routine.*

*My first official job, believe it or not, was a pizzaiolo for a family-owned business in Mississippi. It's almost as if it was destiny, foreshadowing my eventual journey to Italy. At that job, my starting wage was \$3.20 per hour, and after a year of hard work, I was granted a remarkable pay raise to a whopping \$3.25. I was just 15 years old at the time, but these fat sums would bankroll my bike-pimping routine at unprecedented levels. Throughout my life, I've also held various roles, including pumping gas, unloading railroad cars underground, operating a forklift, and waiting tables.*

### 2 Why did you choose to attend Texas A&M, how did you select your major and why?

*A: As luck would have it, my parents moved back to Texas starting my junior year in high school. I was not too happy about that decision, as I was extracted from some of my favorite years of "growing up". I left friends from my relatively small school and community and started my last two years back in Kingwood, TX. My graduating class was 10x the size of my previous, so I just became a number and "the new guy". They actually put all the new kids in classes together at my school, ostracizing us from the get-go. I did end up making great friends there, too, but we never really felt like we fit in. While we were in a common situation, we felt like outsiders.*

*I got good grades in school, frequently straight-A's, but there was so much competition to get into university that I started to think I'd never make it. I wanted to go to A&M, but my SAT's were pretty average. My grandfather and Uncle both went to A&M, so it was my goal to continue the family trajectory, but I really didn't have the goods. I was accepted provisionally for the summer program. Once I got my foot in the door, I did really well, and continued into the fall program.*

*Architecture was a natural path for me. I liked spending time alone and I really liked drawing. When I was younger, I watched them build a house on the lot in front of ours and I was absolutely enthralled with the process. After they would finish for the day, I would walk over to the lot and study the drawings that were left on the saw horses. I was mesmerized by the "manual" on how to build a house...the graphics, the text. I had never seen or heard anything like that. It was all handmade, no computers, only manual drafting, but beautifully executed. Somehow all those beautifully organized drawings came to life over a series of weeks and months. It was around that time that I started changing my handwriting to mimic architectural prints. I would ride my bike around the neighborhood, becoming more aware of the building process and becoming evermore fascinated with how a house is built. This continued for years and when I got to A&M, there was not much thought given to other avenues of study.*

### 3. Could you share some of the key milestones or experiences that have shaped your career?

*A: One of the most transformative experiences in my life was undoubtedly the TAMU Study Abroad Program in Italy. It served as a catalyst for profound self-reflection, prompting me to reevaluate deeply ingrained life choices and beliefs that I had previously taken for granted. This immersive experience facilitated profound personal growth and sparked a fundamental shift in my worldview. While this transformation wasn't a conscious decision on my part, being exposed to an entirely different culture and society naturally reshaped my perspective on the world. Over time, this experience has proven to be one of the most influential in my life. I consider myself incredibly fortunate that Texas A&M provided this opportunity through the School of Architecture. Even today, I continue to welcome students from various A&M schools to my shop. Through these encounters, I aim to impart a small piece of my own journey, hoping to leave a positive impression on the students as they explore this breathtaking place.*

*The tragic events of 9/11 marked a profound turning point in my life. At that time, I was deeply engrossed in my fifth construction project in New York City, with our job site situated in direct view of Ground Zero. In the lead-up to this project, I had made multiple trips between New York and Italy to conduct measurements, participate in planning meetings, and collaborate with the local labor*



union. Our scheduled return to commence construction with my dedicated team was set for September 12<sup>th</sup>. Little did I know how drastically my life would change in the wake of that fateful day. The impact of 9/11 was devastating on a personal level. I mourned the loss of friends and colleagues, as the steel fabrication sector, to which I belonged, was urgently summoned to assist with the rescue efforts. Subsequently, my perception of travel underwent a profound shift, entangled with feelings of fear and uncertainty. Even to this day, I grapple with the lasting effects it had on me. Despite the emotional challenges, I've continued to visit New York City with my family for vacations, and we always make it a point to spend time at the memorial. My wife and I cherish the memories of spending time in the towers on our earlier trips, as evidenced by the tickets from the viewing deck dating back to 2001. Every subsequent journey has been a personal struggle for me to forge new, positive experiences in the vibrant city, fostering more joyful memories and preserving the significance of this place in my life.

#### 4. What do you most miss about College Station and what do you miss the least?

A: **Most:** Being Red-Ass. I loved the football games, the yell-practice. My friends and I would paint our faces and I built some Fightin' Texas Aggie Bonfires..Whoop!! Working in Northgate, hanging out at Northgate..pretty much anything at Northgate

**Least:** architecture school all-nighters....OMG..I never slept my senior year..

#### 5. How did you get to Italy and how did you become a custom bicycle builder?

A. That's a question deserving of a book-length answer, but I'll try to condense it for you. My journey to Italy was quite unconventional, driven by a mix of coercion and curiosity. It all began when my best friend, who happened to be my roommate, and his advanced- architecture classmates embarked on a study program in Italy. At that point, I certainly didn't consider myself advanced in any architectural sense, and convincing my parents to let me join the trip was a daunting prospect.

However, a fortunate opportunity presented itself, and I managed to tag along, partly because it seemed legitimate, and partly because I'd be surrounded by these brilliant architecture students. During the trip, I often found myself in the background, as they were already fluent in Italian due to their prior courses at A&M, and they took charge of travel and meal plans. Suffice it to say that I was rather inconspicuous on that journey. Nonetheless, I fell in love with the culture, and the complete shift in my surroundings acted as a catalyst for a paradigm shift in my thinking. Subconsciously, I began questioning the routine of my life up to that point. I was captivated by the idea of people traveling by bicycle, and my sketchbooks filled with drawings of novel materials and architectural concepts that I had never encountered in the United States. After the study-abroad program concluded, my friend and I hatched a plan to return to Italy and work at the school, which we did. To sum it up briefly, he pursued a career as an architect, working in Italy, Germany, and eventually earning a master's degree at Columbia. On the other hand, I delved into commercial construction in Italy, specializing in building Italian fashion stores worldwide. This path persisted for nearly a decade until personal reasons led me to make a significant change. In 2004, I established my custom titanium bicycle business in my garage, and by 2012, I had built my shop on my property, where I continue to work to this day.

#### 6. What are some common misconceptions about building custom bicycle frames that you'd like to clarify?

A: There is a famous phrase that was attributed to Oscar Wilde, "The cynic knows the price of everything and the value of nothing"; I had a version of this quote on my landing page of my website for years. It defines a process which I see frequently in my bike-centric world. People are spending stupid amounts of money on marketing and "high-tech", when they give very little attention to what value proposition they are paying for. Most custom bicycles cost way less (even titanium) than typical high- end bikes. The value and attention custom bicycle builders deliver to their clients is something that is overlooked by most cyclists.

#### 7. Are there any role models or mentors who have played a crucial role in your journey?

A: Yes, there have been many. Probably the most important was Dario Pegoretti. He was quite a character and built custom bicycles for most of the professional peloton and world champions. We became friends in the 90's when I was just building as a hobby and he let me into his world of custom bicycles. He was an innovator, an artist and a dear friend. He's no longer with us, but I'm still learning his lessons from over my shoulder as I encounter situations in my shop that are unfamiliar or hard to resolve. I hear his voice at some point on almost every frame that leaves my shop.

#### 8. If you were stranded on a deserted island and could only have one book, one movie, and one food item, what would they be and why?

A: **Book:** The Divided Mind, John Sarno. This book changed my life and brought me back from a point of no return. I believe it is proving to be a foundational change to the way we approach chronic pain and emotional health.

**Movie:** Eraserhead - Peter Lynch is a genius. It is a difficult movie to wrap your brain around. On a superficial level it just seems strange, but when you dig deeper, it reveals a level of artistic expression that I relate to and appreciate as it defines the "feeling" of being insecure in a world that is difficult to understand.

**Food: American based island:** peanut butter. So simple, so good, so different from peanuts. **Italian based island:** tagliata con pepe verde e rosmarino (cut of beef with green peppercorns and rosemary). Simplicity at its best.

**9. Moving from Texas to Tuscany was not easy. How do/did you stay motivated and passionate about your work over the long term?**

*A: To be brutally honest, I didn't find a way to sustain the grind of being an international construction project manager. The relentless cycle of tearing down and rebuilding structures that I had poured my heart and soul into just a few years earlier had left me burned out. Those days of working grueling 17-hour shifts with no breaks for months were a young and, well, somewhat foolish person's game, driven solely by boundless energy and adrenaline.*

*However, as life unfolded with experiences like marriage and the joys of parenthood, my priorities began to shift. Being away from home for extended periods took a toll, and even when I was home, I realized I hadn't seen my own apartment in daylight for months on end. At a certain point, I had an epiphany: nothing would change unless I took the initiative to change it.*

*Making that change wasn't easy. It hinged on my wife's unwavering support for my decision to veer onto a different path and pursue my dream of turning my passion and hobby into a thriving business. It was a challenging endeavor, but my family stood by me, and to this day, they bear with the daily challenges of me running a successful business from our home. When you're deeply passionate about your work, the line between your professional life and your family life can blur, especially when your office is on your own property.*

*My family provides me with the space I need and makes significant sacrifices to ensure the smooth operation of my business. Without their support, I wouldn't have come this far. As I approach the 20th anniversary of my professional framebuilding business in Italy next year, I'm grateful for their unwavering backing throughout this incredible journey.*

**10. If you had to create a signature cocktail or dish that represents your personality, what would it be, and what would you call it?**

*A: LOL...probably something like a Margarita-Gump Surprise. I am known in the area for my margarita's. I have honed my skills over the years and am frequently asked to make them for dinner parties and also club events. Add my vast yet varied life experiences in living in different places and working internationally, I frequently look back on it all with a little disbelief. I was an introverted student with just a backpack and a sketchbook. Sometimes I feel like Forest..did I really do all that?*

**11. If you were a professional wrestler, what would your wrestling persona and catchphrase be?**

*A: I would probably be the worst wrestler in pro wrestling history, so my goal would not to get my arse kicked in the ring. I'd probably emphasize my non-wrestling physique and wear some tight Borat-type spandex in the ring and spend most of the match running away in fear, just trying to escape my adversary and avert certain death from a folding chair. I'm sure the public, after seeing such a horrific spectacle, would come up with an accurate name and slogan for me.*

**12. Take Sides – choose your preference between the following dichotomies. The Bold and **maroon** colored are Darren's selections:**

- **Aggie Football** or European Soccer?
- Pizza Margherita or **Pepperoni Pizza**?
- Road Cycling or **Mountain Biking**?
- **Boardwalk** or Amusement Park?
- The Flash or **The Hulk**?
- Texas or **Tuscany**?
- **Swimming in the Ocean** or Swimming in a Pool?
- **Hot Chocolate** or Hot Tea on a Cold Day?
- **Zip Lining** or Rock Climbing?
- Marvel or **DC Comics**?
- **Dolly Parton** or Shania Twain?
- Start assignments immediately or **wait until the last minute**?
- **Art History** or Music Appreciation?
- Bottle of Wine or **Pitcher of Margaritas**?
- **Tennis** or Pickleball?
- Espresso or **Cappuccino**?
- **Italian Alps** or Italian Lakes?
- Gnocchi or **Risotto**?
- Italian Food or **Tex-Mex**?
- **1960 – 1970's music** or 1980 – 1990's music?



Darren on an Italian Vespa – Looking very Texan with his cowboy hat.





# KOMOREBI

{ko-mo-re-be} | Japanese

(n.) sunlight that filters through the leaves of trees, casting dancing shadows on the forest floor

# AGGIE SPORTS UPDATE



## Sister Sister: Soccer Edition

Most siblings play together at the YMCA, and then in middle school, maybe even high school. But siblings playing together in college? Macy and Margo Matula know a little bit about that.

[Click for more information](#)



## A&M Sports Management student helps Rangers prepare for World Series

Paige Zizka is an intern in the promotions department at Arlington's Globe Life Field, and is one of a handful of Aggies helping to manage the World Series-bound team.

[Click for more information](#)



## Texas A&M's defense has made a big leap forward, but the secondary is a step behind

Texas A&M's 9th-ranked defense is built in the trenches, leading the county in sacks with 33, just 26 away from breaking their single-season record.

[Click for more information](#)



## HEADLINES

**FOOTBALL:** [McKinnley Jackson Named to Lombardi Award Midseason Watch List](#)

**SOFTBALL:** [Get to Know - Kramer Eschete](#)

**WOMEN'S BASKETBALL:** [Aggie Alum Colson Wins Second Straight WNBA Title](#)

**WOMEN'S SWIMMING:** [Maxvill Stanek Promoted to Associate Head Coach](#)

**WOMEN'S BASKETBALL:** [Coulibaly Named to Preseason All-SEC Second Team](#)

**CROSS COUNTRY:** [Aggies Notch Pair of Top-10 Finishes at Barrios Invite](#)





# THE ITALY A&M CLUB NEEDS YOUR ASSISTANCE



## The Italy A&M Club Needs Your Help!

### • BREAKING NEWS

**UPDATE** – The Association of Former Students is assisting us with building out our clubs website! I can't thank them enough for the help. We also will have a *Facebook* page to accompany our *Instagram* postings. These mediums will allow us to post news articles, our monthly newsletters, *Instagram* postings and other social media. So everyone is aware our newsletter reaches out to almost 1,000 readers each month. Thank you all for your contributions to its success.

### • Italy A&M Club Scholarship

The club is exploring the possibility of establishing a scholarship program. The scholarship would be available to club members who live in Italy but are attending Texas A&M, their family members who are attending Texas A&M or possibly students who are studying abroad from Texas A&M in Italy (semester abroad program).

We are considering hosting a silent auction to help raise funds for the scholarship. If you are interested in donating to the auction or in the establishment of the scholarship please reach out to me directly.



### • News – Extra, Extra Read All About it!

Please feel free to share any photos, news articles, announcements, births, graduations, Silver Taps, career changes or any other news you would like to share with the club. We will find ways to include them in the regular updates.

### • Logo

We are looking to create our clubs logo and will be asking for assistance from The Association of Former Students Marketing Department. We need to generate a few ideas for our logo. If you have any ideas or thoughts please let me know.

### • Recipes

Feel free to submit your favorite recipe(s) to be include with the monthly/periodic updates. We would love to share them with the group.

### • Feedback

Please provide feedback on this format, the content and any ideas you may have on ways we can generate additional engagement. Please encourage other people to join the club and to follow us on *Instagram*.

## Contact Information:

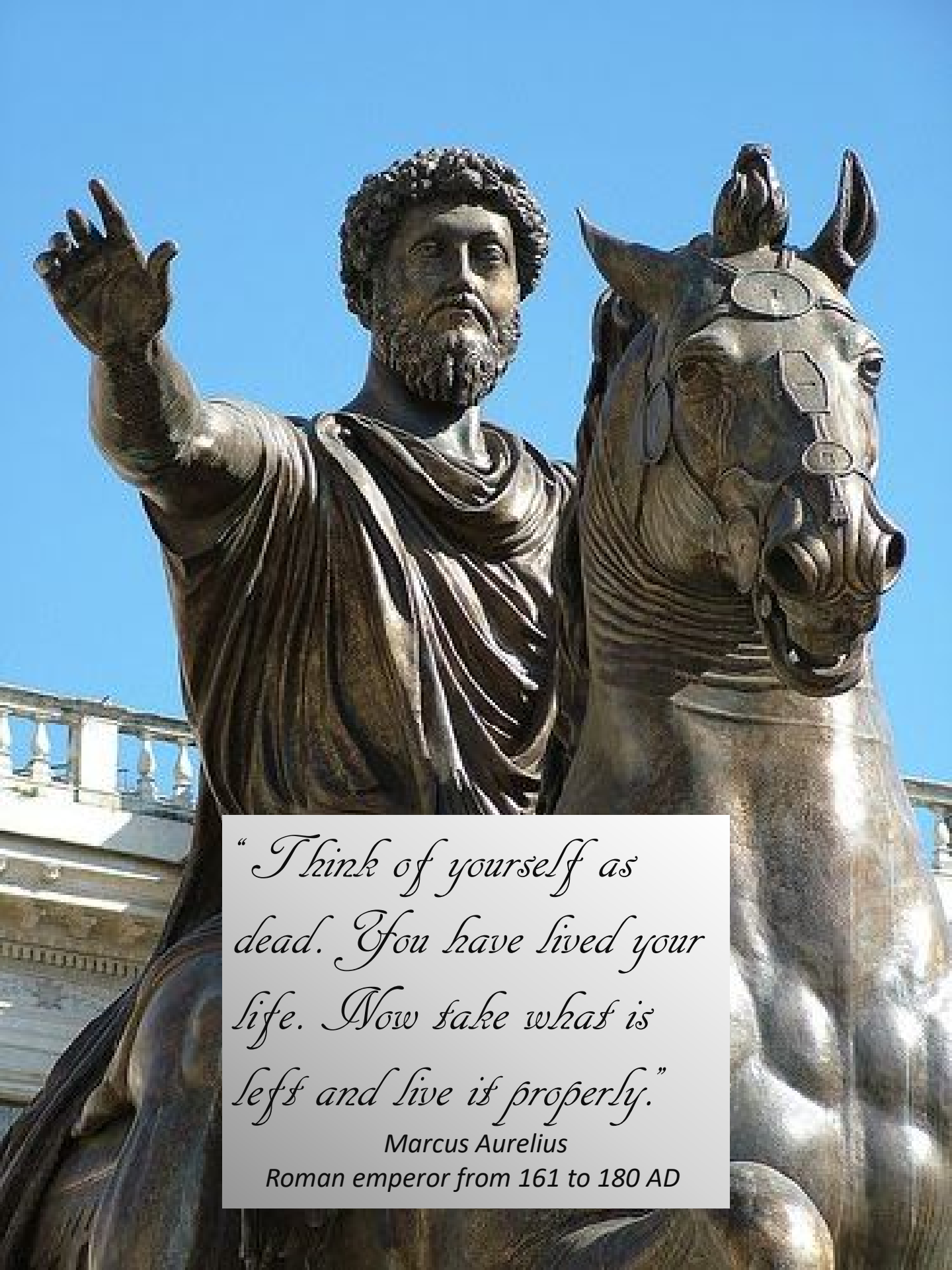
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WhatsApp: +1(713) 962-5775

Instagram: [italy\\_am\\_club](https://www.instagram.com/italy_am_club)



*"Think of yourself as  
dead. You have lived your  
life. Now take what is  
left and live it properly."*

Marcus Aurelius  
Roman emperor from 161 to 180 AD



# PAROLE FINALI

*T*hanksgiving and November welcome the holiday season, we want to express our heartfelt gratitude for your continued support and enthusiasm for the *Italy A&M Club*. This month is always filled with exciting events, enriching experiences, and the warmth of our growing community.

In November's e-magazine, we explored the enchanting landscapes of Tuscany, dived into the artistry of Italian cuisine and the traditions around Thanksgiving, a rich interview of one of our members and delved into the rich history and customs of our beloved Italy. We hope you found these features as captivating and informative as we did.

But our journey together is far from over! As December approaches, we have even more in store for you. Get ready for enchanting holiday-themed content, a look at holiday events in Italy, suggestions for Italian gift ideas and how the Italians celebrate the New year.

Thank you for being a part of our remarkable community, and we look forward to sharing many more incredible moments with you in the coming month and throughout the year.

Wishing you a joyful and festive November and looking forward to a December, filled with love, laughter, and the spirit of Italy.

Ciao for now!

Ryan '91

P.S. Be sure to follow us on **Instagram** at: [italy\\_am\\_club](https://www.instagram.com/italy_am_club)

