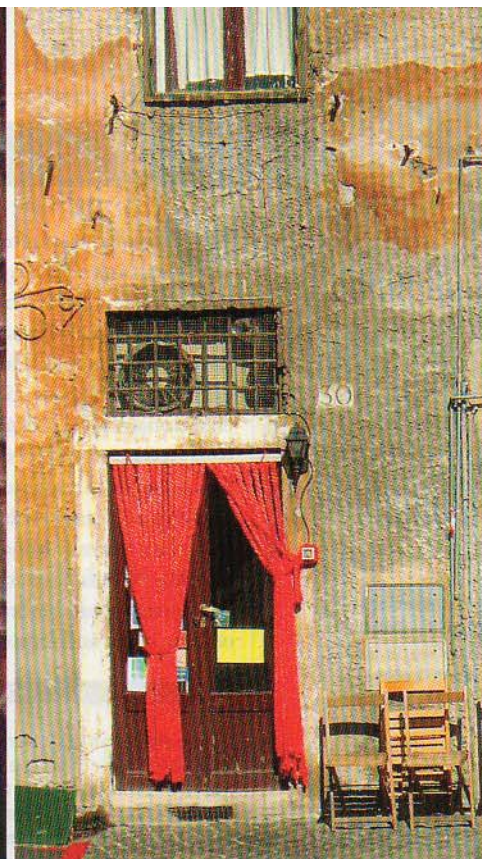


ROME



(FROM LEFT): BERNINI'S FOUNTAIN OF THE FOUR RIVERS IN PIAZZA NAVONA; SORA MARGHERITA HAS NO SIGN ON THE DOOR; OWNER EMILIO VOLPETTI OF GASTRONOMIA VOLPETTI; ROMAN-STYLE PIZZA FROM PIZZERIA DA BAFETTO, TOPPED WITH A POACHED EGG.

The Roman Empire may have fallen, but the city itself remains a beguiling siren beckoning travelers through the ages. (They don't call it the Eternal City for nothing—after all, where do you think the word *romance* comes from?) And nowhere is that designation more evident than in its food: meat, cheese, wine, olives, vegetables and fruit fresh from the Italian countryside, handled—some would say worshipped—with the care other cultures reserve for, say, infants. If you don't hear about hot chefs flocking to Rome or food trends taking hold there, it's because Rome is a place you go *back* to—even if you've never been there before. Ottimista owner Melissa Gisler recommends you do as the Romans do: frequent the family-run trattorias and osterias.

GILLIAN BALLANCE, SOMMELIER FOR PLUMPTRE GROUP

"The best pizza ever is the spicy *pizza del diavolo* with salami and sausage at **Pizzeria da Baffetto** [Via del Governo Vecchio 114, 011-39-06-686-1617]. I also recently feasted on a four-cheese pizza with a poached egg on top, and an arugula-and-bresaola pizza."

"**Gastronomia Volpetti** [Via Marmorata 47, 011-39-06-574-2352] is a butcher in the Testaccio district where I'll spend a full two hours sampling cheeses and cured meats."

MELISSA GISLER, OWNER OF OTTIMISTA ENOTECA-CAFÉ

"The seasonal menu at **Ditirambo** [Piazza della Cancelleria 74, 011-39-06-687-1626, ristoranteditirambo.com] is constantly rotating. Memorable dishes include the pumpkin *sformato* (a savory flan) and radicchio ravioli. All the pastas, breads and sweets are house-made—two ladies stand in the open kitchen, rolling and kneading all day. It's loud, lively and packed with locals."

"**Sora Margherita** [Piazza delle Cinque Scole 30, 011-39-06-687-4216] is a



"I LOVE THE BUCATINI CACIO E PEPE at Sora Margherita—fat house-made noodles with ricotta and coarse pepper. Heaven!"

—Melissa Gisler, owner of Ottimista Enoteca-Café

small trattoria with no sign, packed elbow-to-elbow with workers on their lunch break, drinking wine from juice tumblers and eating off of paper placemats. I love the *bucatini cacio e pepe* [fat house-made noodles with ricotta and coarse pepper], and *carciofi alla giudia* [fried artichokes]. Heaven!"

"**Enoteca Cul de Sac** [Piazza Pasquino 73, 011-39-06-6880-1094] has a great outside terrace, huge wine list and selection of wine-friendly food, including interesting cheese and pâté choices."

"**Enoteca Il Gocchetto** [Via dei Bianchi Vecchi 14, 011-39-06-686-4268] is a cozy and completely local wine bar. I love to grab one of the four bar stools, fill up a plate with cheese, bruschetta and other snacks displayed on the bar, and wash it all down with a glass or two of vino."

"**L' Angelo Divino** [Via dei Balestrari 12, 011-39-06-686-4413], just off the Campo di Fiori market, is another true and tiny, wine bar, that has legs of pork hanging from meat hooks and walls lined floor to ceiling with wine bottles."

WHERE TO SLEEP

Hotels in Rome are notoriously expensive. If that makes you want to throw caution (and your wallet) to the wind, stay at **Splendide Royal** (Via di Porta Pinciana, 011-39-06-421-689, splendideroyal.com) overlooking the Borghese Gardens. If you'd rather save a bit, try one of the Daphne inns, a pair of design-minded B&Bs in the center of town (**Daphne Trevi** at Via degli Avignonesi 20, or **Daphne Veneto** at Via di San Basilio 55; 011-39-06-8745-0086; daphne-rome.com).

WHAT TO DO BETWEEN MEALS

With St. Peter's, the Vatican and the ruins of ancient Rome, there's enough history, culture and art here to keep you busy for a month. But since you know all about them, check out the **Keats-Shelley House** (Piazza di Spagna 26, 011-39-06-678-4235, keats-shelley-house.org), a house at the foot of the Spanish Steps where John Keats died at age 25, and which still holds relics such as locks of hair and correspondence with Wordsworth, Browning, Shelley and others. *Molto romantico.*