

SEPTEMBER 2012 £3.99

AMALFI COAST

...in England, Ireland and Scotland

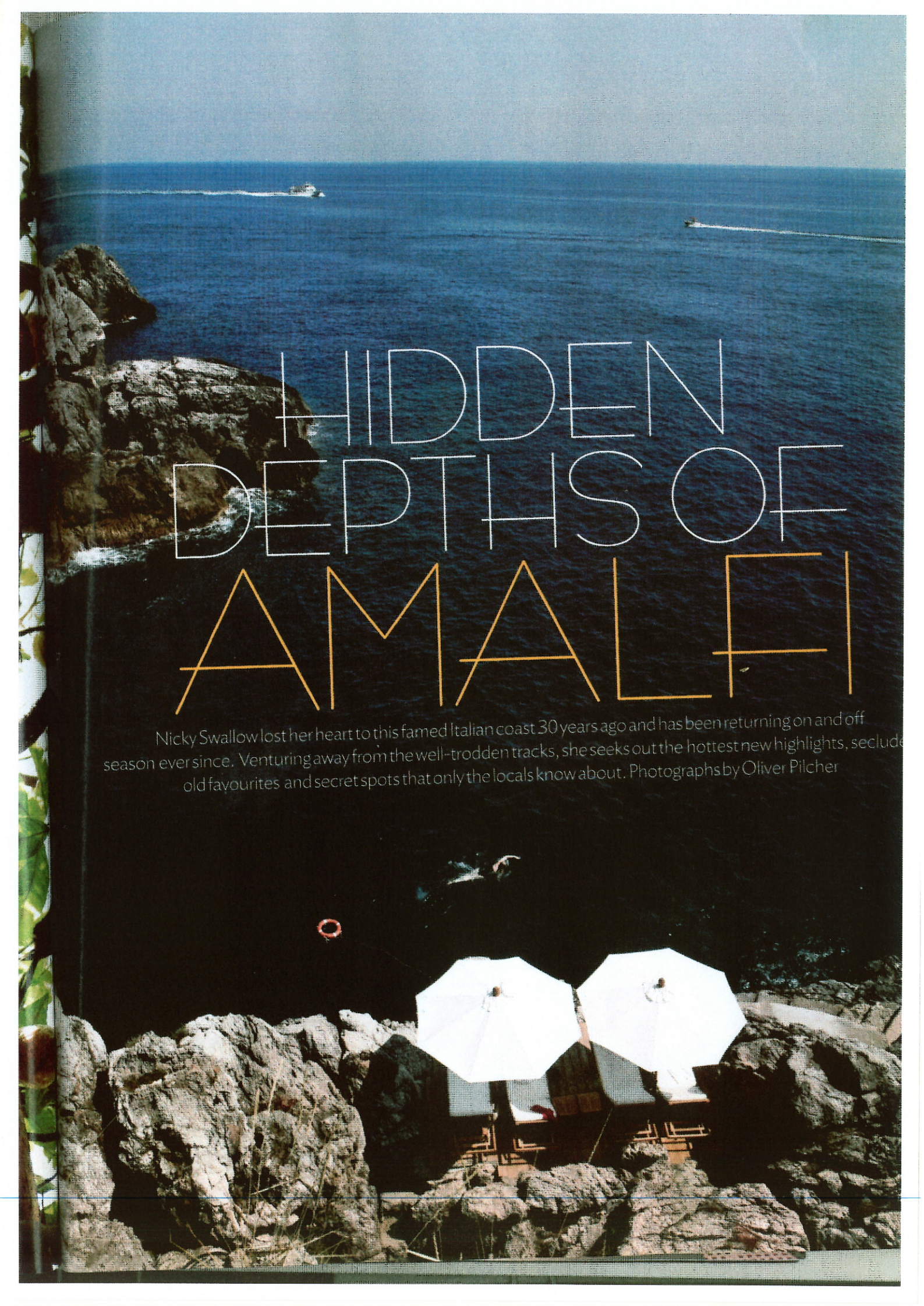
Giles Coren

grapples with
an octopus
in Los Angeles

THE COOLEST DESTINATIONS FROM

ARIZONA TO ZAMBIA





HIDDEN DEPTHS OF AMALFI

Nicky Swallow lost her heart to this famed Italian coast 30 years ago and has been returning on and off season ever since. Venturing away from the well-trodden tracks, she seeks out the hottest new highlights, secluded old favourites and secret spots that only the locals know about. Photographs by Oliver Pilcher





➤ more sophisticated, it is exquisitely managed by Swiss-trained Antonio Sersale and his wife Carla, and filled with the family's gorgeous antiques and pictures. The 59 bedrooms have handmade Vietri-tiled floors and vaulted ceilings, and the pool terrace has the best bay views; the Champagne & Oyster Bar is a prime *aperitivo* spot, and the romantic La Sponda restaurant serves dishes including scallops with artichokes. There is also a spa and a vintage Riva speedboat. *Via Cristoforo Colombo 30 (00 39 089 875066; www.sirenuse.it).* Doubles from €385

Hotel Palazzo Murat

This elegant 18th-century mansion in the centre of town, with a shady garden and dreamy courtyard, was once the summer

residence of Gioacchino Murat, King of Naples. For space and atmosphere, go for one of the Deluxe rooms in the original palazzo with their Bourbon-era antiques and romantic four-posters. The other bedrooms are smaller and plainer, with white walls, tiled floors and private terraces or balconies. The highly regarded Al Palazzo restaurant creates modern takes on local specialities such as herbed rack of lamb with millefeuille of sweet-and-sour aubergine. *Via dei Mulini 23 (00 39 089 875177; www.palazzomurat.it).* Doubles from €250

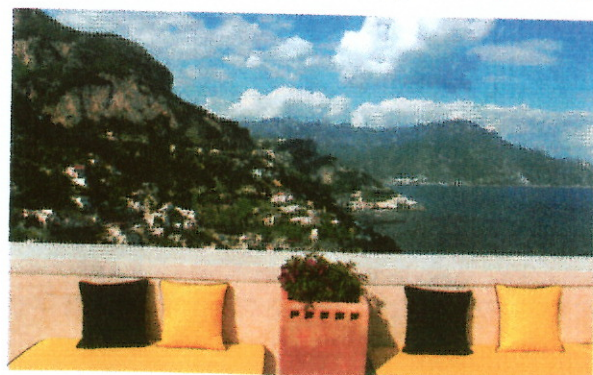
Villa Treville

Franco Zeffirelli's former home is made up of four houses in white, pink and blue. It is very beautiful and very secluded ➤

NEW
THIS
SEASON

MONASTERO SANTA ROSA, NEAR AMALFI

This 17th-century former monastery dominates the shoreline about a kilometre from Amalfi. The latest glamorous hotel to open on this stretch of coast (Prince Albert II of Monaco and Princess Charlene were checking in as we arrived), it has knockout terraced grounds and a swimming pool that seems to hover between sea and sky. After more than 10 years' restoration work, the new-look Monastero has emerged with beautiful, very soft, lovely to walk on Jerusalem-marble floors and 20 cool if austere bedrooms. Some have terraces, but all are furnished with a mix of custom-made pieces and 19th-century antiques collected by the American owner. There are lots of quiet spots in the gardens, but it's the spa that will be the real pull. Perhaps it's a bit grandiose for this area, but it's undeniably fabulous, with natural light, stained glass, an ice cave and gorgeous Santa Maria Novella products. The chef turns out delectable dishes such as potato-and-nettle gnocchi with scampi. *Via Roma 2, Conca dei Marini (00 39 089 832 1199; www.monasterosantarosa.com).* Doubles from €375



From top: a nautical look in Casa Angelina, Praiano; via Laurito in Positano; splashes of colour on the terrace at Monastero Santa Rosa



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with a colourful dome, and a rocky beach, La Gavitella, at the bottom of 350-plus steps, where you can enjoy the last rays of the evening sun – bliss on this convoluted stretch of coast.

To really understand the topography of the *costiera* here, you need to get down to sea level. You can pick up a boat in Positano or Amalfi, but you can also take a detour down to cute Marina di Praia (aka La Praia), a clutch of cottages and a small beach wedged between towering cliffs, where there's a boat concession and a couple of simple restaurants to set you up for your trip.

Heading west, you will eventually reach Punta Campanella, the wild, barren tip of the Sorrentine Peninsula and, beyond it, Capri. But a gentle chug eastwards towards Amalfi takes you past some pretty impressive scenery. It's liberating to be out on the water and there's so much to take in that isn't visible from the road: gorgeous villas suspended over the water; sea caves and grottoes tucked into folds in the cliffs; solid Saracen defence towers that speak of pirate raids and war; slivers of pebble beach begging you to stop for a quick dip; waterside restaurants perfect for lazy lunches.

The jagged coastline to the east of La Praia is broken by the Vallone di Furore gorge, which shelters at its mouth a few ancient fishermen's huts hewn from the rock face and a tiny scrap of beach. Further on is the Grotta dello Smeraldo (you'll know you're there from the tourist boats swarming around it), named after the intense, greenish light that filters into the cave from an underwater arch. Just beyond the Capo di Conca headland lies the pretty fishing village of Marina di Conca,

➤ (truly amazing as it's just outside Positano), and pretty much everyone in the film world has stayed here, from the Taylor-Burtens to Sophia Loren and Steven Spielberg. All the bedrooms are different: the Bernstein is white and blue, and Zeffirelli's own collection of rooms is still furnished with his antiques. The cook makes whatever you want, whenever you want it. Via Arienzo 30 (00 39 089 812 2411; www.villatreve.it). Doubles from €770

PRAIANO

Casa Privata

A former fisherman's house in grounds that descend to a private rocky beach, Casa Privata has six bedrooms with original, rough-stone cupola ceilings and large private terraces with glorious views along the coast to Capri. The look is a stylish mix of custom-made Indonesian furniture and early-20th-century design classics. The only downside is that it's a steep climb up to the main road for lunch and dinner. Via Rezzola 41 (00 39 089 874078; www.casaprivata.it). Doubles from €195

Casa Angelina

This dazzling-white, 1970s cubic structure is in a fabulous location just outside Praiano, with views up the coast to Capri from the pool, bar and excellent rooftop restaurant, Un Piano nel Cielo. The all-white public rooms are warmed up with hardwood floors and wacky Murano glass sculptures; the bedrooms are scented with aromatherapy oils. For proper privacy, book one of the four Eaudesea Experience rooms which are in renovated fishermen's cottages just above La Gavitella Beach, 150 steps down from the hotel.

Via Capriglione 147
(00 39 089 813 1333;
www.casangelina.com).
Doubles from €245

AMALFI

Hotel Santa Caterina

This hotel, which opened in 1904, is the grande dame of smart Amalfi Coast hotels. Charming managed by the Gambardella family for four generations, it combines undertones of immaculate, old-school service with a contemporary kick. There are sea views from the vaulted public rooms, garden terraces and most of the 66 bedrooms. Two lifts whisk guests down the cliff side to a rocky bathing area with a pool, gym, spa and the casual Ristorante Al Mare; the more formal Ristorante Santa Caterina up top serves unpretentious food, including a punchy fish soup with garlic croutons. SS Amalfitana 9 (00 39 089 871012; www.hotelsantacaterina.it). Doubles from €290

RAVELLO

Palazzo Sasso

There are magnificent coastal views from all 43 lavish bedrooms in this pink palazzo with its Moorish, arched windows, although only a few have private terraces. Service is second to none, with more staff than guests and loads of attention to detail (there's a sheet menu, for example). Fancy some sea air? Take the free shuttle bus down to the hotel's private beach club before heading back for an award-winning Martini, followed by a romantic dinner at Rossellinis. Via San Giovanni del Toro 28 (00 39 089 818181; www.palazzosasso.com). Doubles from €280

WHERE TO EAT

This blessed little corner of Campania has long been a magnet for foodies. One of the first Michelin stars awarded to an Italian restaurant was bagged by La Caravella in Amalfi in the 1960s, and today the area has one of the highest concentrations of stars in Italy. But some of the best feasts are to be had in authentic trattorias off the radar. The culinary traditions of the Sorrentine Peninsula are influenced by the dual presence of sea and mountains, and the warm, sunny climate: flavour are bold and colours bright. (The Romans were right when they called it 'Lucky Campania'.)

Prices are for three courses for two people, without wine

POSITANO

Ristorante Next 2

This sleek wine-bar and restaurant may look contemporary, but the food is firmly rooted in local traditions. Stalwarts such as *pizzella frita* (a small, deep-fried pizza) and *totani e patate alla Praianese* (squid-and-potato stew) share the menu with more innovative dishes such as *parmigiana di pesce bandiera*, a fishy variation on the classic aubergine version. Homemade puddings are a treat, and the intelligent wine list covers all of Italy. The terrace, with its cocktail bar and regular live-music sessions, gets buzzy on summer evenings. Via Pasitea 242 (00 39 089 812 3516; www.next2.it). About €75

La Sponda

Its recent Michelin star confirms what many already knew: La Sponda at Le Sirenuse hotel, under chef Matteo Temperini, is one of the top tables on the coast. It is also the ➤

Top, classic elegance at Palazzo Sasso, Ravello. Opposite, the inviting waters below the bridge at Furore