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Gisele!

Shows Off The Season's Heat- Seeking Fashion

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Castel Gardena, built in 1616 by the counts Wolkenstein of Austria, was rescued by the Franchetti family after World War

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or two and a half centuries, the Franchetti clan has been a hopelessly impractical lot, frittering away the family fortune on one treasure after another. During the previous half millennium, however, things were

different. Beginning in the 1300s, this Jewish Italian dynasty virtually minted money through trade and banking and then by cornering the transportation market in much of northern Italy. In Reggio Emilia, where the family lived for centuries, one can still hear the phrase *ricco come Franchetti*, the local equivalent of "rich as Rockefeller."

The family fortunes reached their apogee in 1858, when Baron Raimondo Franchetti—who could ride from Venice to Tuscany without leaving his property—married Sara Louise Rothschild, heiress to the Frankfurt branch of the famous banking family, thereby becoming off-the-charts rich.

Almost inevitably, subsequent generations lost all interest in making money. "After marrying the Rothschild, we only knew how to spend," says Baron Andrea Franchetti, Raimondo's great-great-grandson. But such spendthrift ways should not necessarily be criticized: Some of the great works of art and architecture upon which the Franchettis lavished their wealth, such as Venice's Ca' d'Oro, were subsequently bequeathed to the state.

The Baron is recounting the family history in order to explain the gem at hand, Castel Gardena, an Alpine retreat that his grandfather, Carlo, bought and restored and that Andrea continues to work on today. The producer of one of Italy's most lauded cult wines, he lives otherwise in Rome and on his vineyard in Tuscany.

Seated in a frescoed courtyard on a gloriously sunny day, Franchetti expounds on his family's particular rough brand of beauty, which has nothing to do with comfort.

"Things have to be a bit run-down for us. The more dilapidated, the better," he says. "The Franchettis are the most romantic family in the world—that's what it's all about." Strains of a Mendelssohn concerto waft through

ALPINE WAY

An austere 17th-century castle among the peaks of the Dolomites is the summer refuge of one of Italy's most aesthetically obsessed aristocratic dynasties.

By James Reginato

Photographed by SIMON WATSON





Andrea Franchetti, left, the third generation of his family to live in Castel Gardena. Below: Detail of a light fixture. Bottom: An interior courtyard with delicately painted frescoes.



the courtyard, emanating from an unseen room where his teenage son Giordano is practicing the violin with his tutor.

A boyish-looking man of 55, Franchetti has a mop of wavy brown hair and dreamy gaze. Part preppy, too, he is dressed in a Brooks Brothers oxford-cloth shirt and khakis, and speaks English in a peculiar drawl—the product of summers in Maine and South Carolina, headquarters of his mother's billionaire textile family, the Millikens. (The family tradition of marrying well has continued.)

A walk through the castle's 50-some rambling rooms bears out Franchetti's description. Many are virtually empty, the better to see the exquisitely carved boiserie and paneling or the ghostly remnants of delicately painted frescoes. A typical bedroom offers a rare, 16th-century Gothic bed (and a mattress seemingly dating from the same period), with a stern iron lamp and one elegant cabinet. Nearly every room, however, features a brightly colored, antique tiled stove, a traditional Alpine feature. Just don't look for many comfortable chairs.

The castle, which occupies a commanding position in Valgardena, an emerald valley in the south of the Tyrolean Alps among the astonishing granite peaks of the Dolomites, almost literally fell into the hands of the family. Just after World War I, Carlo Franchetti, an expert mountain climber, was leading a commission charge with tracing the new borders between Italy and Austria. (Long a part of the Habsburg empire, the region is still largely German-speaking.) Crossing a high peak, Carlo lost his footing. Downhill he rolled and rolled until he came to a miraculous halt before Castel Gardena, then abandoned.

Erected in 1616 as the summer fishing and shooting lodge of the count Wolkenstein of Austria, it had been inhabited by the family until the mid-19th century. Deserted, it was looted and eventually used as a poorhouse. Franchetti, enchanted by its romanticism, bought the castle immediately and proceeded to remake it into a summer retreat of his own. In time, his three children would all fall under its spell. Tatiana, now 83, is a painter unmarried to artist Cy Twombly, and Giorgio, 84, is widely regarded as one of Italy's great art connoisseurs and collectors.

By various accounts, the other sibling, Mario—Andrea's father—was a workaholic and of himself. Often described as one of the great beauties of his generation, he had innumerable women vying for his hand, which was won in the end by a determined American heiress, Aune Milliken, who had come to Italy just after the war to work in the Office of Strategic Services. (According to Andrea, "They used to recruit rich girls because they couldn't be bribed.")

The marriage had its ups and downs, owing in part to vast cultural differences. Having emigrated from Scotland, the Millikens, according to Andrea, have a decidedly puritanical streak. "They have a concept of life that could not be more miserable," he says. "Their idea is, you make money, and more money, and you never enjoy it, let alone know what you have, including your kids. One of my cousins was working at a Starbucks."

The prevailing family value, he adds, is respect. "It's so private, and it has to be even more private, so lawyers keep working all the time ensure that." Yet Franchetti has great fondness



Heraldic crests, baroque plaster reliefs and religious icons decorate the chapel.

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Strains of a Mendelssohn concerto waft through the courtyard, emanating from some unseen room where Giordano is practicing the violin with his tutor.



Andrea Franchetti's bedroom is pine-paneled in Alpine Renaissance style. Opposite: Giordano, 15, relaxes in a sitting room.

for his mother's side of the family. "I love them," he says. "It's probably the best family in America. They have an integrity that is unbelievable, coupled with an incredible intelligence."

Though Mario was killed in a car crash in the mid-Seventies, Andrea's mother, Anne, 85, continues to live half the year in Italy. "She spends the freezing winters in Maine and the scorching summers in Sardinia," Andrea says with a smile. (She is said to have a share in the Milliken family fortune equal to that of her brother Roger, 88, who is reportedly worth as much as \$1 billion.)

For a long time, Andrea was a classic confused rich kid. After dropping out of school, he biked through Afghanistan, then, as he puts it, got lost in "the longest dope story in history." Along the way, during an eight-year relationship with an actress, the daughter of one of Italy's leading playwrights,

he fathered his first son, Cody, now 30. Viewers of the controversial 2003 documentary *Born Rich* will remember him as the handsome fellow who expounded on Schopenhauer and bespoke tailoring, not necessarily in that order. Andrea can't comment on the film because Cody, who lives in New York, has never sent him a tape: "He's afraid I won't approve."

The Millikens have not seen it either, he adds. But their reaction is known. "They are outraged! They've only heard about it, but they hate the very idea," Franchetti explains. (They're about to be further incensed: Cody Franchetti is developing his own reality TV show, which he describes as "Straight European Aristocratic Eye for the Regular Guy.")

In the Eighties, Franchetti's life finally began to stabilize. He married the beautiful Sicilian princess—and former terrorist—Fiora Pirri. Descended



Left: Giordano playing his violin. Above: One of the many unused rooms, piled with centuries-worth of family belongings; Mario Franchetti of the present owner, in 1948—he was regarded as one of the most handsome men of his generation.



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from one of Sicily's oldest families, the Monroys (who have a tomb in Notre Dame), Pirri, like many of the youth of her class, became a radical in the Seventies and joined a group that violently advocated independence for southern Italy. Sort of the Italian Party Hearst, she went to prison but has long since rehabilitated herself and is now a leading expert on artificial intelligence. The couple has two sons, Benjamin, 16, and Giordano, 15, and what might be called a classic European marriage: Five years ago, Franchetti fathered a daughter with an American art gallerist with whom he had a brief relationship.

Somewhere along the way, about a decade ago, Franchetti found a profession—and success. After spending a few years in New York, where he brokered Italian wines with a cousin, he decided to use his knowledge and love of wine to make it himself. Before returning to Italy to do so, he stopped in Bordeaux, however. "No one in Italy knows about making wine," he explains. He dismisses most Tuscan wines as "hard and provincial." In Bordeaux family friends at the great châteaux shared some of their secrets. "Contrary to what people think about the French, they are incredibly generous with their knowledge of wine."

Back in Italy he bought an estate in 1992 in a remote corner of southeast Tuscany and planted primarily Cabernet Franc vines, unheard of in the region. "People made fun of me," he recalls, and several lonely years went by as he stuck to his guns. When the first vintage was ready, his 1997 Tenuta di Trinoro, he took another unique route, selling it in the Bordeaux wine market along with the great French premiers crus—a first for an Italian wine.

From the beginning, the reviews have been ecstatic. "Astonishing," wrote the dean of wine critics, Robert Parker, about the 2000 vintage. Of the 1999: "This profound, dark purple-colored offering reveals...astounding richness, gorgeous purity, definition and elegance."

With only 600 cases produced annually, the wine's sales are necessarily limited, and it is expensive (about \$185 a bottle). But Franchetti is now turning out 7,000 cases of a second wine, Le Cupole di Trinoro, which has also been enthusiastically received. Recently he began producing a red Nercello Mascialese from a vineyard he purchased on the slopes of Mount Etna in Sicily, Passopisciaro.

Unlike a lot of other rich people who decide to go into the wine business, Franchetti has done it without the usual panoply of consultants and expensive hired help. "I did it all by myself," he says proudly. "I'm a different person because of it." Waxing lyrical about the beauty of wine, however, he concludes that his vintages would never have excelled had not the vineyards been lovely. "The most beautiful places make the most beautiful wines," he says, speaking like a true Franchetti.

"That's the point," he adds. "As long as there's beauty, the hell with everything else." ●

Far left: A view from the castle's tower; Cody in New York. Left: A traditional Alpine tiled stove decorates a bedroom. Right: The kitchen.

