

Italy in Depth  
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## Sicilian Citrus Dreams

by Hannah Gutteridge

A few paces from the coast, between Catania and Siracusa lies the estate of San Giuliano which has belonged to the Marchesi di San Giuliano for 800 years. The handsome Baroque building lies amongst acres of cacti, plants and palms, more reminiscent of a tropical reserve than a Sicilian country retreat. Amidst the haven of beauty, Giulia San Giuliano has her organic business. Originally set up by her mother, Fiamma di San Giuliano 10 years ago, the business is an undiscovered gourmet's treasure.

It was Giulia's principle desire to continue her mother's fruit passion when she passed away five years ago. This fruit devotion is organic marmalade with a range in excess of ten. These comprise every type of Sicilian citrus fruit transposed into a jar, be it a grapefruit, red or yellow, a lemon or a delicate clementine. These fruit nectars are a far cry from any conserve previously touched. As well as being encouraged to indulge on toast or over ice-cream they are exceptional by the spoon full.

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The fruits are grown solely on the estate and the fertility of the volcanic soil together with the climate and ample water allows for optimum harvests. The region, although reputed for blood oranges is renowned for delectable lemons, tangerines and grapefruit. To this end Giulia's expanded her range to include delicately sliced oranges and lemons in syrup to be enjoyed naked from the jar.

The original spot where production was overseen, wholly by hand, was principally for the enjoyment of family and friends but this has now given way to contemporary methods but remains on the estate in production kitchens adjacent to the house. Although business is international, Giulia prides all production upon the original recipes of her mother – fruit picked by hand, only in season and wholly organic with none of the nasty additions so often experienced in fruit conserves.

The most recent accession to the citrus delights has been the research and development of delicate biscuits, again handmade of course. With the help of a friend, Giulia has transformed the customary biscuit for tea into a mouth-watering butter soaked lemon or orange indulgence. As with all of Giulia's creations packaging maintains the trait of impeccable style which runs throughout the family; beautiful, elegant and justifiably exquisite for the contents.

During the production season; October – May, Giulia can be found at the estate, guiding her colleagues. Passion is the key to her production and one can witness this love of her product through everyone present. The exactness with which they add the final touches to the 400 jars a day is memorable.

Unceasingly she clutches her two mobile phones, which she informs are a necessity for liaison with Florence. Communications are limited in this remote region and each phone works in a different corner of the estate.

Pleasure for Giulia is her animals, 12 dogs in Sicily and a Labrador to keep her company in Florence. When the time permits she heads for the sea on her boat.

An ancient rounded chapel lies within the estate and the resounding bell that strikes the hour is unquestionably the prelude to 'oranges and lemons'.