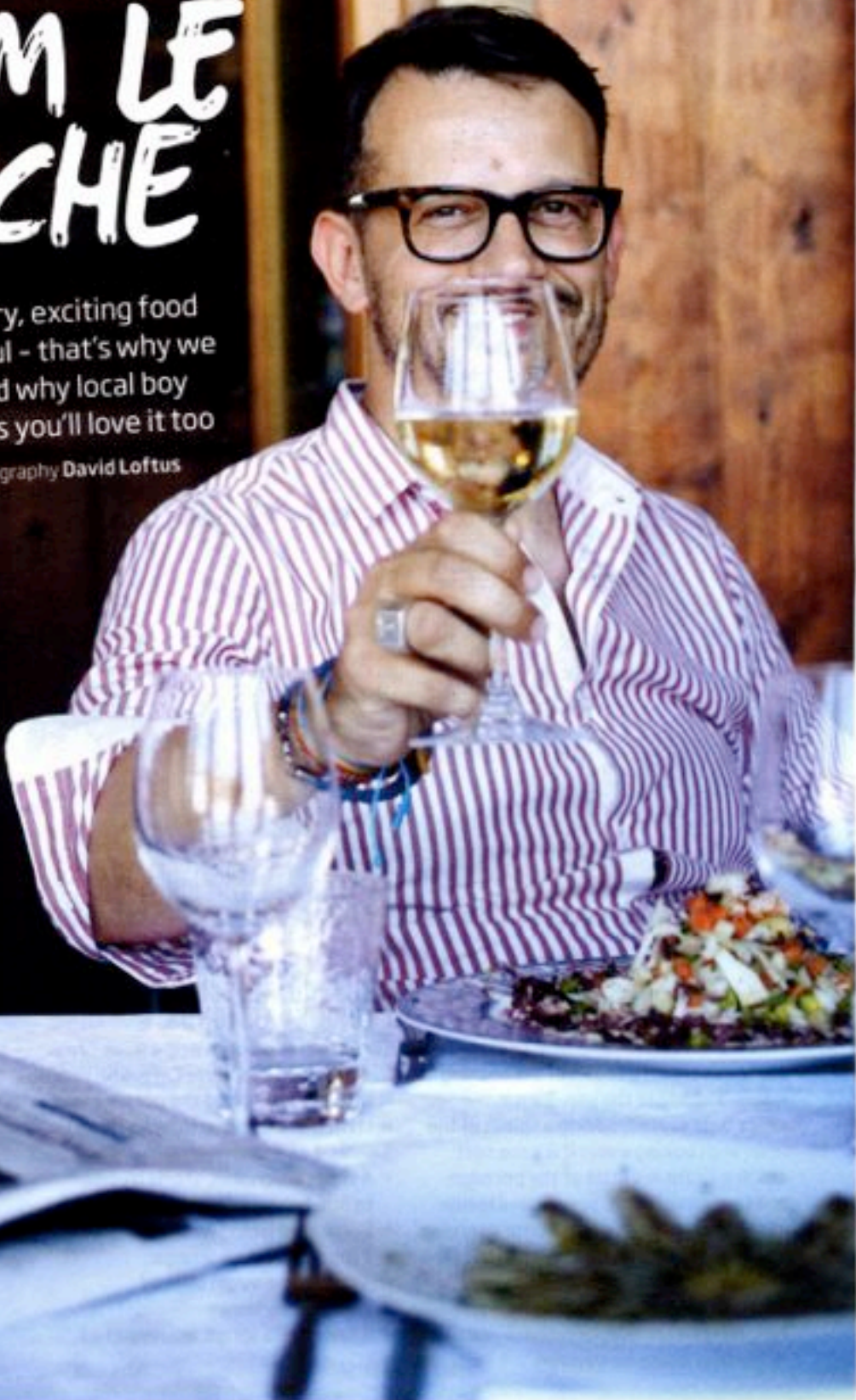


THE MAN FROM LE MARCHE

Breathtaking scenery, exciting food and a whole lot of soul - that's why we love Le Marche, and why local boy Gianluca Giorgi thinks you'll love it too

Words **Andy Harris** Photography **David Loftus**

A man with dark hair and glasses, wearing a red and white vertically striped shirt, is seated at a table in a restaurant. He is smiling and holding a glass of white wine up to his face. On the table in front of him are several dishes, including a plate of salad and a bowl of what appears to be fried fish. A newspaper is spread out on the table. The background shows a wooden wall.

Gianluca at Fondaloro in Senigallia. Opposite, clockwise from left: Moreno Cedroni at his beachside sushi shack, Clandestino; sea truffles; Portonovo beach; bento box from Clandestino; Gianluca and his wife, Michaela; fishermen at the Portonovo fishing cooperative



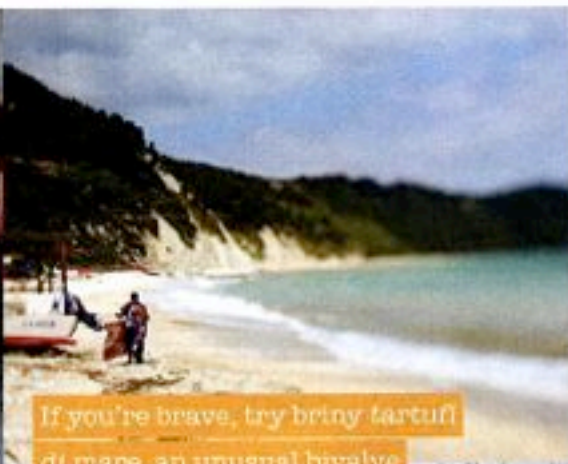
ou can take an Italian out of Italy but you can never take him out of his region. Often the first thing he'll tell you when you meet is whether he is a Toscano, Siciliano or, in the case of Gianluca Giorgi, who hails from Le Marche, a Marchigiano. This enigmatic region, known as The Marches in English, is the beloved homeland of our guide in this story, and slowly being discovered by travellers tired of the tourist hordes in the chattering Chianti-shire regions of Tuscany and Umbria.

Gianluca has been showing people around the hidden hill towns and coastal villages of Le Marche since he began working as a tour guide while still a student. About six years ago he started introducing the region's delicious food products, such as cascotta (said to be Michelangelo's favourite cheese) and salami di fichi (fig and nut log), to Britain via chefs Gennaro Contaldo and Antonio Carluccio. Soon after, he began taking the Fifteen restaurant apprentices on annual pilgrimages to the region, introducing them to his

childhood friends who had become accomplished chefs, and the artisanal food and wine producers of an area he describes as "Italy in one region".

Nestled between the Apennine Mountains and the Adriatic Sea, Le Marche is known for its geographical diversity. The landscape spans the wilderness of the remote Sibillini National Park, a tapestry of valleys and undulating hills topped with fascinating Roman and Renaissance-era settlements, and a coastline punctuated by remote beaches, cliffs and somnolent fishing villages. Because of the hills, farming here has always been limited; instead, an interesting tradition of small-scale industry has taken hold in the isolated hill towns, whether it's paper production in Fabriano, shoemaking in Montegranaro, cloth-weaving in Fermignano or copper-making in Force, and made the region one of Italy's more prosperous.

"My region is a synthesis of classic landscapes, old customs and the Italian soul," says Gianluca. "Apart from the excellent food and drink, we have a strong

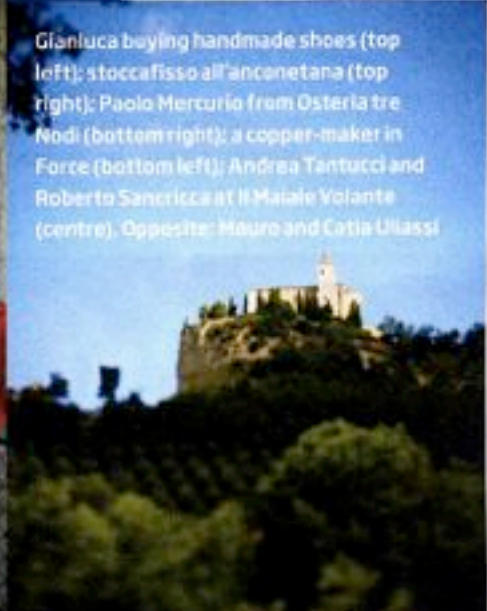
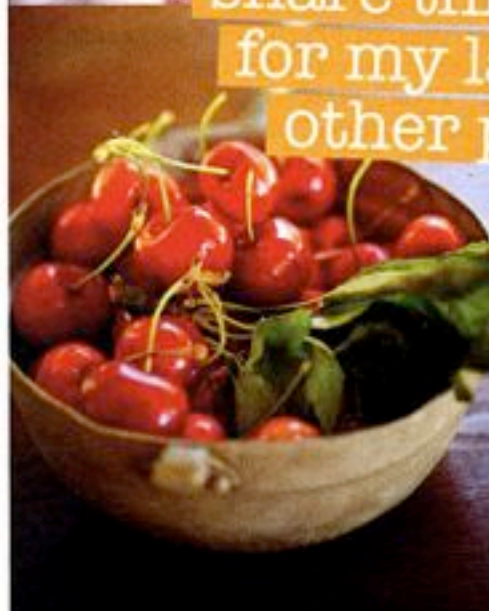


If you're brave, try briny *tartufi di mare*, an unusual bivalve with a scrambled-egg-like interior that everyone should taste at least once in their lifetime





“My project is to share this passion for my land with other people”



Gianluca buying handmade shoes (top left); stoccafisso all'ancanetana (top right); Paolo Mercurio from Osteria tre Nodi (bottom right); a copper-maker in Force (bottom left); Andrea Tantucci and Roberto Sanerizza at Il Malale Volante (centre). Opposite: Mauro and Catia Ullassi





"It's not a job, but more like giving your friends something that you adore, something you're proud of as you share one of the best-kept secrets of Italy"



City Guide

cultural heritage – painters such as Raffaello from Urbino, and Gentile da Fabriano from Fabriano, musicians like Gioachino Rossini from Pesaro and the poet Giacomo Leopardi from Recanati are famous around the world," he says. "Only a few people live here, no more than a million and a half, and they are lucky to be able to enjoy this great mix of culture, cuisine and scenery. My project is to share this passion for my land with other people. I love showing them the workshops where I like to buy handmade shoes, and letting them experience the dishes and drinks, and places I wander round. It's not really a job but more like giving your friends something you adore, something you're proud of as you share one of the best-kept secrets in Italy."

First stop on Gianluca's gastro-tour is Cingoli, an ancient town of crumbling Renaissance palaces and churches in the central highland area. "I was born here and I grew up in the countryside, where my grandfather, who is 88, runs a farm. I still use his eggs and home-cured guanciale to make my favourite, spaghetti carbonara," he says. "But at the moment I'm addicted to a new

recipe, tagliatelle al Varnelli, that is more summery because it uses fresh tomatoes, red onion, guanciale and Varnelli, a local aniseed spirit."

The perfect embodiment of the slow pace of life is Il Maiale Volante (The Flying Pig) near Cingoli. This idyllic restaurant and farm, where animals such as Sofia the donkey and countless ducks and geese wander happily, is run by Gianluca's friends, chef Andrea Tantucci and Annalisa and Roberto Sancricca, who oversee the restaurant's supplies of free-range meat, poultry and produce. Built into a 1920s chicken coop, the restaurant has a funky, modern style. Andrea is obsessed with rock music and has it turned up loud the minute he starts cooking. He's even written a crazy book called *Rockitchen* with music critic Paola De Angelis, and they often co-host music nights with themes such as 'Are You Experienced with Jimi Hendrix?', which feature bourbon-fuelled dancing. Despite the wall of sound in Andrea's kitchen, dishes such as *zuppa di piselli con ricotta infornata* (pea soup with baked ricotta) and *lasagnetta con fave, carciofi and finocchio selvatico* (lasagne with broad beans, artichoke and wild fennel) show lively respect for local ingredients.

Gianluca's other favourites are two perfect *azienda agriturismo* bed-and-breakfast operations. Lo Smeraldo is

EAT & DRINK

La Terrazza Molo Santa Maria, Ancona; +39 071 54215.

Nonnas preside over the tiny kitchen of this rooftop trattoria above the ferry terminus, and dish out generous portions of seafood antipasti and brodetto.

Fondaloro Foro Annonario 20/23, Senigallia; +39 071 793 1037. Situated beside the Foro Annonario open-air market and serving seafood classics.

Uliassi Banchina di Levante 6, Senigallia; +39 071 65463, uliassi.it. Brother-and-sister team Mauro and Catia Uliassi run this chic Michelin-starred seafood restaurant.

Emilia Baia di Portonovo; +39 071 801 109, ristoranteemilia.it. Since 1929, they've been serving perfect grilled seafood and pasta dishes by the sea.

Migliori Piazza Arringo 2, Ascoli Piceno; +39 073 640 3787, miglioriolive.it. This wonderful deli has picnic fare, such as stuffed ascolano olives, all just a stroll from the Piazza del Popolo, one of Italy's most beautiful piazzas.

Il Maiale Volante Loc. Fonte Antica 17, Cingoli; +39 073 360 4687. Prepare for a lazy



perched above tranquil Lake Castreccione. Diego and Claudia Ciciliani bought and restored this former school in a deserted Castreccione village 15 years ago, and now offer local fare and lodgings. Diego bakes impressive *crescia* (flatbreads) in his wood-fired oven and makes a mean tagliatelle with fish caught in the lake.

Down a winding country lane near Force is Paolo Ciccioli's Agriturismo Ramuse. Paolo supplied Gennaro Contaldo and Giorgio Locatelli with truffles for years before restoring this rambling farmhouse and focusing on cooking for a steady troupe of visiting chefs, such as Heston Blumenthal and Germany's Tim Malzer.

On the way to the small city of Jesi is Caseificio Piandelmedico, an artisan dairy run by the Trionfi Honorati family. Founded in 1939 with 30 Friesian cows, today the impressive operation is run by brother-and-sister team Antonio and Giulia. There are more than 300 buffaloes

and cows producing milk for an array of products, from robiola to mozzarella, caciotta and stracchinona, as well as buffalo yoghurt and ice cream.

Giulia once ran a pub in London, before meeting her English husband, Chris. "We decided to get out of the rat race and are now happy making cheese every day, surrounded by family and friends," she says. Not far from the grand family house, their restaurant, Il Casino del Marchese, serves local rustic dishes.

Le Marche's coast is strewn with trattoria serving just-landed fish and shellfish. In Senigallia, Mauro Uliassi takes degustation to new heights at his all-white Michelin-starred boardwalk restaurant, capturing the essence of the Adriatic in a minimal array of exciting dishes. At Portonovo, you can eat the famed *mosciolo* mussels and other classic fare at Emilia, or simply go next door to the fishing cooperative to buy oysters and, if you're brave, briny *tartufi di*

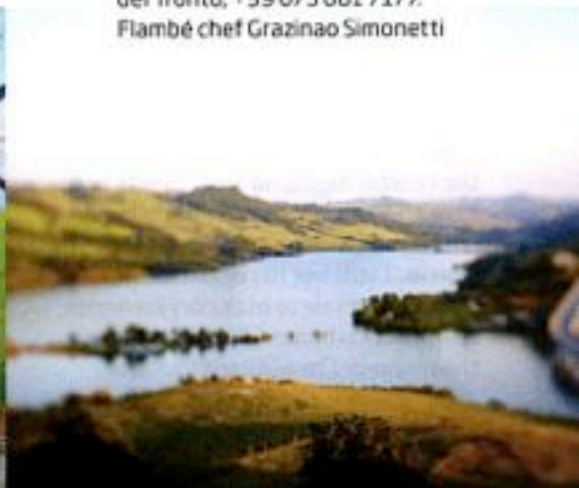
afternoon of rustic dishes and rock music, all washed down with homemade *visciolato* (wild cherry wine).


Clandestino Baia di Portonovo; +39 071 793 1228, morenocedroni.it. Moreno Cedroni weaves a magical spell with Mediterranean sushi after a refreshing dip in the sea at this beachside cantina.

Portonovo Cooperativa Fra Pescatori Via della Pescheria, Baia di Portonovo; +39 071 933 1801. The small fishing boats of this cooperative bring in local seafood specialties such as the famed DOC *mosciolo* mussels and *tartufi di mare* (sea truffle) with a briny scrambled-egg interior that's best eaten raw.

Lo Smeraldo Via Castreccioni 82, Cingoli; +39 073 361 2104, ristorantelosmeraldo.it. Rooms offer views of the lake, and there's excellent wine and rustic food in the restaurant, such as *coniglio in cocchio* (rabbit cooked in spiced milk).

Ristorante Santa Lucia Via Valle Chifenti 192, Appignano del Tronto; +39 073 681 7177. Flambé chef Graziano Simonetti



A man wearing a wide-brimmed straw hat and a dark polo shirt with white horizontal stripes is smiling. He is holding a dark plate with a large, crusty loaf of bread and a round salami. The background is a lush, green vineyard with sunlight filtering through the leaves.

Opposite, clockwise from left: one of Mauro Ulassi's creative seafood dishes; making zabaglione at Ristorante Santa Lucia; seafood salad at Fonda loro; Lake Castreccione; Antonio and Giulia Trionfi Honorati with their mother; making mozzarella by hand

Paolo Ciccioli's been
Gennaro Contaldo and
Giorgio Locatelli's truffle
supplier for years

Scorpion, weever and gurnard fish ready for the brodetto (top left); Lo Smeraldo's Diego and Claudia Ciciliani (top centre); Il Maiale Volante's pea soup and Trilly the hungry bull mastiff (bottom)

likes to finish the pasta tableside with copious gratings of fresh truffle at this old-fashioned trattoria close to Ascoli Piceno.

Caseificio Piandelmedico Via Piandelmedico 101, Jesi; +39 073 120 8397, caseificiopandelmedico.it. With more than 30 cheeses to choose from, as well as freshly made buffalo milk yoghurt and ice cream, it's hard to leave this relaxing farm empty-handed.

Osteria tre Nodi Viale Gramsci 385, Porto San Giorgio; +39 073 467 5457. Chef Paolo Mercuri whips up the best brodetto (seafood soup) in town.

Il Casino del Marchese Via Piandelmedico 109; +39 073 164 140. The daily-changing menu reflects the seasons and utilises all the cheeses from the family farm down the road.

Agriturismo Ramuse Località Casette 3, Force; +39 328 629 1859, ramuse.it. Paolo Ciccioli's farmhouse is the perfect spot to stay and explore the region with wonderful meals to end the day.

VISIT

The Sidecar Museum Via Valcarecci 13, Cingoli; +39 073 360 2651, sidecar.it. If sidecars are your thing, this mad museum is well worth a detour.

Claudio Marini Via Respighi 2, Montegrano; +39 073 422 7671. This accomplished shoemaker works out of his garage and will make you shoes to last a lifetime.

Fabi Factory Store Via Bore Chienti, Monte San Giusto; +39 073 383921, fabishoes.it. Local boy Flaminio Fabi runs his fashion empire, known for its shoes and luxury leather goods, out of this designer warehouse, where sale items are well-priced.



"Now I live by the sea I'm getting mad with the chance to taste all this amazing fresh seafood on a daily basis. Today I embrace everything the coast has to offer"

mare, an unusual bivalve with insides like scrambled eggs. Everyone should taste it at least once in their lifetime.

Close by is Clandestino, a ramshackle beachside shack that is the unlikely setting for two-Michelin-starred chef Moreno Cedroni's Mediterranean sushi creations. The city of Ancona is famed for its brodetto (seafood soup) and the best place to try it is at La Terrazza, on top of the main ferry terminal. It's full of retired sea captains and ferry boat crew who also come to eat hearty *stoccafisso all'anconetana* (stockfish and potato stew) and *mosciolo* mussels. Another place to try brodetto is Osteria tre Nodi in Porto San Giorgio. The opera-addicted, cigar-toting chef, Paolo Mercuri, once cooked for Fidel Castro, but that's not his only claim to fame – his amazing brodetto follows the strict guidelines of the traditional recipe, using 12 types of

seafood, garlic-rubbed toast and a sultry tomato and herb sauce enriched with wine and vinegar. It's a revelation.

"Now I'm living by the sea I'm getting mad with the chance to taste all this amazing fresh seafood on a daily basis," says Gianluca. "Growing up, I loved humble cabbages, potatoes and beans from my village. When I was at university and fell in love with my wife Michaela, I used to bring her our famous *ciascolo* (soft salami) and *salami di fegato* (liver sausage) to remind me of my mountain roots, but today I embrace everything the coast has to offer."

Walking along the sandy beach of Porto San Giorgio, the town Gianluca now calls home, watching him take quirky pictures for his daily posts on Instagram, it's clear this self-styled man of Le Marche is an erudite and passionate guide who will help you get the best out of this laidback and charming region. ●

For more on Le Marche tours or produce, email Gianluca at glc.giorgi@gmail.com.