



A Sanctuary



An Interview with Bianca Sharma,
Owner, Monastero Santa Rosa Hotel & Spa

Monastero Santa Rosa Hotel & Spa (above); outdoor area of
the Sea View Premium Terrace Suite (left); Ristorante Il Refettorio (below)

EDITORS' NOTE Bianca Sharma is a U.S. entrepreneur and owner of Monastero Santa Rosa Hotel & Spa. A former Montessori nursery teacher, Sharma had no prior experience as a hotelier. She first caught sight of the abandoned monastery in 2000 while on holiday with her sons. Enchanted by what she saw and knowing that the building would make a fabulous hotel, she embarked on a decade long journey to revive the forgotten building, turning it into the charming boutique hotel and spa it is today. Sharma currently splits her year equally between living in the U.S. (South Carolina and Colorado) and Italy (Amalfi Coast) and is very much involved in all aspects of the hotel operation. The hotel is a family enterprise and Sharma's son, Nathán, is involved in the day-to-day running of the hotel in his role as Managing Partner.



Bianca Sharma

Will you discuss the history and heritage of Monastero Santa Rosa Hotel & Spa and how the property has evolved?

Monastero Santa Rosa dates back to 1680 when the Pandolfi family provided for the construction of the monastery attached to the existing church, Chiesa Santa Maria di Grado. This monastery housed nuns of the Dominican order until the late 1800s when the monastery was deconsecrated by the Catholic church and the structure was turned

over to the municipality. The remaining nuns were allowed to live out their lives in the building, the last surviving there until 1912. Not long after that, a hotelier from Sicily, Massimiliano Marcucci, spotted the structure from the mountains above, falling in love with the design of the structure. He purchased the building and, ultimately, the former monastery became a hotel, occupied and run by the family. The last remaining member of the family died in 1998, leaving the property to a distant relative in the north of Italy, and was basically abandoned. In 2000, I was visiting the Amalfi coast with my sons and family friends, and I spotted the monas-



tery from the sea and was intrigued by the stone structure that seemed to grow directly from the cliff. When I asked the boat captain about the structure, he told me it was a monastery and that it was for sale. Something strongly pulled me to want to learn more, and I returned to the U.S. with a dream of bringing this abandoned building to glory by creating a luxury hotel. Naturally, my family financial consultant was not in agreement, but he started the process to learn more, even taking time to return to the Amalfi coast with

me to have a serious look at the entire property. That is when he really encouraged me to forget this, as it was going to be a daunting task. There was no true infrastructure, no real evidence of a former hotel, with only three bathrooms for many more rooms, and the fright of working in Southern Italy as Americans. His assessments were completely correct, but I was still determined. The final result of what we offer today took 11 years to create, partly because of mistakes on our side, partly because of the difficulty of working with Italian bureaucracy. In the end, I have no regrets.

We are now proud that, in a relatively short period of operation, the hotel has won many awards, most recently *Conde Nast Traveler's* Top Hotel in Italy and Second Top Hotel in Europe, and our kitchen has been reconfirmed for a third year with a Michelin star.

Will you highlight the accommodations at Monastero Santa Rosa Hotel & Spa and the strength of its suite offering?

Monastero Santa Rosa offers 20 rooms in total, 12 rooms of varying categories and eight unique suites. Having this variety of rooms and suites allows us to accommodate a wide range of guest preferences. It was very important to me to maintain the integrity of the original architecture, so all rooms reflect the nuns' quarters and common spaces. Rooms, and some suites, were created by linking two or three nuns' rooms. In most rooms, the bathrooms occupy an entire former nun's room, allowing space for a very generous and well-appointed bathroom. The largest suites were areas that the nuns used for congregating, praying, cooking and laundry. In spite of all rooms and suites having their unique touches, there is a continuity from room to room, creating a sense of harmony.

I would say that our largest suites give guests, especially for longer stays, a sense of being in a home within a home.

How important is it to keep a family feel at the property?

My staff has my heart, and they know it. Many of our original team are still with us because of this strong bond we have with each other. So many guests have commented that they feel they have entered a home and have been embraced by a family. That warms my heart. ●

PROPERTY BRIEF Situated between Amalfi and Positano, Monastero Santa Rosa Hotel & Spa (monasterosantarosa.com) is a spectacular former 17th century monastery which has been lovingly restored into 20 beautiful sea-view guest rooms and suites. The hotel opened in 2012 and is now regarded as one of the finest luxury boutique hotels on the Amalfi coast. The hotel retains the unique features of the original monastery and the original vaulted ceilings and arched windows of the nuns' rooms and refectory have been preserved and linked together to create individually decorated rooms and suites. The family run, adults only, hotel is nestled into the side of a cliff. Each room is decorated with historical photographs of the area and the monastery itself, adding to the sense of history. A true refuge from city life, the hotel has a beautifully manicured, five-tiered Italian garden, spectacular heated infinity pool and award-winning spa. Monastero Santa Rosa is renowned for its incredible infinity pool that literally falls off from the cliff edge, an award-winning Spa with unique treatments created exclusively for the hotel by Santa Maria Novella (the oldest pharmacy in Florence) and Michelin starred restaurant, Il Refettorio, serving locally sourced, fresh and seasonal produce including hand-picked herbs from Monastero Santa Rosa's own gardens.