

CASADONNA/REALE: an overview

The Casadonna complex is located in Castel di Sangro (in Southern Abruzzo) on the original site of a 16th Century monastery, surrounded by the peaks and valleys of Parco Nazionale d’Abruzzo. The property sits on an estate of more than six hectares, located approximately 800 meters above sea level, and includes a vineyard (with the highest planted Pecorino grapes in the region), an orchard, and a garden of herbs. The massive renovation of the monastery, which at the time of purchase was in ruins, was decided in 2009 by Niko Romito, who was looking for a new venue for the restaurant Reale (then located in Rivisondoli) and to headquarter his expanding operations. Casadonna inaugurated officially in 2011. It hosts the 3 Michelin star restaurant Reale and the professional cooking school “Niko Romito Formazione”.

The architecture is essential and at the same time powerful, with natural materials reflecting the light and conjuring the feeling of being away from all. On the first and second floors there are 9 bedrooms, all of which soundproofed, decorated with soft colors and natural fabrics, and with Hammam showers. One level down there are a light-flooded breakfast room with a magnificent view over the valley and a beautiful fireplace room where guests like to sit for tea, cocktails, reading and relaxing. On the same floor is located the stone-encased wine cellar, with an extensive selection of wines (focused strongly but not exclusively on Italy) - a flashback to the past, as the cave was once a stable.

In Casadonna even stones exude history, as they are reclaimed from churches and old Abruzzesi buildings (a section of the floor is made of white limestone from the nearby Maiella National Park); the wood planks in the fireplace room are locally sourced and antique doors are mounted on original iron frames, treated to a “rusty” finish. The décor and restructuring were conceived and supervised by the Chef and his sister Cristiana Romito (who is also Reale’s Maitre D’ and Executive Manager) with architect/interior designer Leonardo De Carlo (Studio Leonardo Project, Pescara).

One floor down from the fireplace room is restaurant Reale. It only took the restaurant 7 years (2007-2014: Michelin Guide’s editions) to be awarded 3 Michelin stars, together with many other important recognitions: a remarkable

accomplishment for such a young chef (Romito was born in 1974) and team. The kitchen's philosophy is to emphasize flavors while respecting the nature of each ingredient: this is only possible through an incessant research on producers, techniques and nutrition. Romito's dishes are precise, balanced and "simple": the incredible work that goes into their development is so seamless it doesn't translate into unnecessary complication on the plate. The result is a menu where each course is a synthesis of comfort and elegance. The restaurant's foundation is the kitchen as much as the front of house: here and impeccable service, elegant and fluid, is overseen by Cristiana Romito, with sommelier Gianni Sinesi. Casadonna and the Reale reflect Chef Romito's philosophy of the essential, and his passionate dedication to taste, art and a "culture of the place". A place truly worth a journey.

<http://www.casadonna.it>

<http://www.ristorantereale.com>