

Where Finicky Found Fulfillment

A picky columnist's favorites, from Parisian chic to Vegas cheek

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By LAURA LANDRO

That *la dolce vita* feeling sipping Champagne at the Italian lakeside hotel. The vine-covered cottage by the creek with the scent of California eucalyptus. Small children's laughter in the pool at the grand Florida resort.


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Toni Anzenberger/Redux

Villa Feltrinelli

In more than a decade as The Wall Street Journal's Finicky Traveler, I've done my share of complaining about substandard rooms, slipshod service and suspicious smells. But I've also had happy and memorable stays at hotels and resorts over the years, with my ever-patient husband reading the paper in the lobby while I inspected rooms and finagled upgrades.

As I wrap up my stint on this column and move on to other assignments, this seems like a good time to answer the question: Do

you have any favorites? Yes, and here are some of them:

MOST ROMANTIC, EUROPE

Villa Feltrinelli, Gargnano, Italy

This luxury villa can go over the top—rose petals floating in the toilet—but deserves its platinum-plated reputation, with food to match. The Nazis virtually imprisoned Italian dictator Benito Mussolini at this 1892-built hotel until shortly before his death in 1945. Ask for one of the 13 rooms in the main hotel with at least a partial view of Lake Garda. Be sure to check out the limonaia, the tiered, walled garden built to protect citrus trees from the elements, and take time to pet Winston, the cat. Close runner up: **Palazzo Sasso**, in Ravello, on the Amalfi Coast.



MOST ROMANTIC, U.S.

The San Ysidro Ranch

Where JFK and Jackie honeymooned, this intimate 41-room hotel on a former citrus ranch is in pristine condition, after Ty Warner of Beanie Baby fame spent \$150 million to buy and renovate it. The vine-covered cottages (some with creekside patio and hot tub) scattered around the property are great perch from which to explore Santa Barbara, fittingly called the American Riviera, with its historic Spanish roots and architecture, spectacular beaches, trails and wine country nearby. Runner-up: Carmel's **Post Ranch Inn** (small rooms, grand views).