

TRAVEL

A first-hand look at the art capital

BY **CHRISSANDRA NEUSTAEDTER**

For an artist, there are few dreams more exciting than a trip to the capital of art – Italy.

I left for Rome at the end of September but began studying Italian in my studio from CDs while I was painting.

The first sojourn on my *viaggio grande* (big trip) was be the Cinque Terre ("five lands").

It was during the train ride north to Liguria that I decided to put down roots in one of the five car-less villages – Riomaggiore, Manarola, Corniglia, Vernazza and Monterosso. I chose Vernazza.

I arrived in the warm, sunny and colourfully flowered village clunking and bouncing my wheeled suitcase down the stairs from the train station and on to the cobbled main street.

I stopped at The Blue Marlin coffee bar to take a break and think of where I might stay.

I couldn't help but think about all the stairs everywhere, especially with my

suitcase.

Sonja came out of the coffee bar, took my order and told me she had a room to rent. An apartment as a matter of fact. Perfetto! It was straight ahead, only a few stairs.

I settled in, unpacked and headed to the Five-Terre co-op grocery store to select produce for my first authentic Italian meal in Vernazza.

What caught my eye was Luciano's Cantina del Molo Vineria – and what goes better with Italian cuisine than fine wine made by the owner?

I spent the first week exploring the village – the nooks and crannies, taking photos of all the interesting and diverse doors that decorate the narrow vias. There are many tapered stone-staired passages that lead up to flowering cactus terraces with dramatic panoramas of the Mediterranean Sea.

Part of the intrigue of the Cinque Terre is the many hikes that link village to village and beyond.

My first hike to neigh-



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Nanosee artist Chrissandra Neustaedter absorbs the culture of the Italian countryside.

bouring Monterosso fascinated me – a look down on compact, colourful Vernazza, the boats and the trail itself that had been constructed long ago by the local merchant traders.

Vernazza brims with friendly people proud of their heritage and unique past. I met and made a great connection with Susie, a local artist, while she was hosting her art show on *il molo* (the wharf). It's hard to imagine a more striking backdrop

for a show.

Then there was Ivo who shared his knowledge on the history of the village's architecture and the rhythms of *il mare* (the sea).

I returned from Vernazza with a more complete view of the culture and an invigorated inspiration for painting new works of the Cinque Terre.

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