



*Il Borro, one of the latest additions to the prestigious Relais & Châteaux.*

# BEING SALVATORE

BY GRACE LAI

Il Borro, a 700-hectare wine and olive oil estate has recently been accepted a new hotel member of the prestigious Relais & Châteaux. Helmed by Salvatore Ferragamo, the visionary entrepreneur shares his reasons for his personal venture.

**T**he grandson of the Italian shoemaker, the first Salvatore Ferragamo, whose dynasty is today internationally renowned in the world of fashion, Salvatore Ferragamo the younger (and namesake) has now guided the family business in a whole new direction. He adds wine-making and running a hotel to the roster, keeping to the same high standards and respect for the heritage handed down to him. Salvatore Ferragamo, General Manager of the family-owned Il Borro estate in Tuscany, also takes the reigns as brand ambassador for Relais & Châteaux for the year 2013.

Set in a mediaeval Tuscan village, Salvatore, together with his father Ferruccio Ferragamo and family restored and created this haven of peace, rebuilding it from a dream.

It is said that “this ‘fate’ was decided whilst out with a hunting party in 1985, when Ferruccio Ferragamo fell in love with the Il Borro Estate”. For years the Ferragamo family rented the Tuscan Estate, up until 1993, when the family decided to purchase the entire estate, including the mediaeval village (at the time in a very bad state of repair) and the Manor house, which had been destroyed by attacks during the Second World War. What is today considered the Il Borro Estate, actually arose as a place from the past which was a meeting-place and a source of work for residents in the area. The heart of the Estate is really the small mediaeval village which, going back to 1039, is built on the craggy rocks of the “borro”, a term used to indicate a ravine formed by the bed of a stream. Today the Estate, thanks to the care lavished on it and the lengthy restoration work by the new owners, has returned to a new splendour.



The breathtaking mediaeval Tuscan village of Il Borro.



The property covers an impressive 700-hectare with wine and olive oil cultivated on the land.

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**How does it feel to be the 2013 ambassador for Relais & Châteaux?**

I still do not really know why, after Paulo Coelho, their ambassador in 2012, they chose me, but I am honoured to have received this appointment and I feel full of enthusiasm for this fantastic experience. Not only do I want to fly the Relais & Châteaux flag, I would also like to explain and illustrate my world and how I perceive and live my life, both my working life and that within my family. I hope to be equal to the task.

I consider myself very fortunate to be able to work in such an active, dynamic sector (hospitality and wine production), more especially because it enables you to spend most of your working time surrounded by the countryside and in contact with nature. I grew up with Il Borro and now, on a daily basis, I attend to its growth, in accordance with the fundamental philosophical principles of my father, with whom, every day, I share a dream which becomes ever more real.

**The family underpins all your activities. What have you inherited from your family?**

Clearly the idea that strength lies in numbers. Our family is very tightly knit. My grandmother, Salvatore Ferragamo's widow, who turned 91 in December continues to come to the office every day. However, even more importantly, she carries the heritage of my grandfather, the son of a family of simple farmers, and one of eleven children. He developed a real passion for the trade of shoemaking and this guided him throughout his life, taking him to the peak of his profession.

We want to hand down his values, the belief in listening to what your heart is telling you, and living your dream. Therein lies the road to success.

**Tell us about your personal, perhaps your fondest memory of restoring Il Borro.**

I must say that it would be my very first harvest. That was the 1999 vintage. That moment when I could see the richness and darkness of the colour of the wine was an epic moment for me. The juice, the intensity, the fantastic moment was really quite indescribable. It took ten years to plant and grow the harvest. We studied the different soils on the property and invested heavily in different machinery. That first sip of the wine, our end result, was very much fulfilling.

**Did you always know what you wanted to do in life? The direction of your life?**

No, I did not. I only knew that I have always wanted to be doing business, which I was interested in and fascinated by. I could have joined the family's fashion business but I wanted to build something of my own and try my hands at something else. I wanted to start something from ground zero, very much like my grandfather when he built the Ferragamo brand I think.

**Were you ever prompted to go into shoemaking or the family business?**

I have always had a lot of support from my family. They knew I wanted new projects instead of maintaining an existing role. I was always on the lookout for the prospect of adding on to the family.

**How do you feel about the Ferragamo name and legacy?**

It is really a big responsibility, carrying the name and the expectations are there. It is also a huge privilege that I carry my grandfather's name. I am the first boy of the first son and in Italy, it is a tradition where the grandfather's name goes to

the first boy of the first son. My family are all level-headed people with strong principles. We were brought up to be hardworking and we learnt a lot from my grandmother. She is a fantastic example of good, strong leadership and she communicates that to the family.

**Tell us about you and your twin brother, James Ferragamo.**

The differences are there, but there are also strong similarities. He works in the family business and is in charge of ladies' shoes and dresses. We are identical twins and tend to be competitive with each other in sports. But ultimately, we carry the same family principles. We are both driven to achieve what we set out to do and we enjoy a good challenge.

**What prompted you to take on Il Borro?**

It was a challenge to restore a property that was in such a state of shambles. I was excited by the opportunity to do something totally new. I guess I followed my grandfather's example in doing so, as he too started from nothing. I brought back Il Borro, a mediaeval hamlet that we acquired in 1993, on our land in Tuscany and restored it to all its glory.

Since the hotel opened, I have watched the site recover its original beauty under my very eyes, seen the vineyards produce quality wines once more and hospitality return to its heart. Witnessing this rebirth has been an extremely rewarding and satisfying experience. It's a very special estate. Imagine spending a holiday in a beautiful mediaeval hamlet perched on top of a hill. The only way to access it is a narrow and tall stone bridge.

Even though the market is full of various prestigious hotels and fantastic wine, I knew that this was the right thing to do. The

property now is self-sustaining especially in the area of energy. Europe is in the forefront of green energy and the production of our wine is entirely organic.

**Are you very involved in the winemaking?**

Yes. I am involved in many aspect. I talk to the winemakers on strategies but I do not interfere in the process itself. I leave that to the professionals because they know the best. I travel the world as ambassador of Il Borro and Relais & Châteaux now and am involved in the administrative and managerial areas of the business.

**Tell us more about the wines.**

From the very beginning my father and I knew that we should produce wine at Il Borro because of the fertility and variety of the soil. We cultivate Sangiovese, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Syrah, Petit Verdot and Chardonnay on our lands. This is our first winery as a family although my uncle Massimo does have another beautiful winery in Montalcino, also in Tuscany in the province of Siena. Generally we try to keep the fashion side and wines quite separate. You will not find the name Ferragamo on the bottle of Il Borro. Our wines are treated with great respect in order to deliver the best quality produced.

**What are your guiding principles in life?**

Perseverance. Never give up. I market and sell my wines without putting the Ferragamo name on it yet it carries the seal of approval from the family. The Ferragamo name will generate a lot of interest but I wanted to build something from scratch. It was not easy because it took me 10 years and a lot of hard work to build the name Il Borro but I am glad I never gave up. 🍷



*Enjoy authentic, historical Italy at Il Borro.*