

■ BY MOTHER MARTHA

If, after a performance of the spectacular new show *The Last Judgment: Michelangelo and the Secrets of the Sistine Chapel* — a new, fully-immersive “live show” by Marco Balich which opened on Monday, March 12, 2018 at the Auditorium Conciliazione in Rome — you want respite and refreshment in surroundings that date to Michelangelo’s time, from the Auditorium cross the *Via della Conciliazione* and head up the street toward St. Peter’s Square. In less than five minutes you will come to the entrance of *Hotel Columbus* at no. 33, open to guests since 1950. It’s a few doors before the *Palazzo Cardinal Cesi* at No. 51 that I reviewed in *ITV*, June/July 2014.

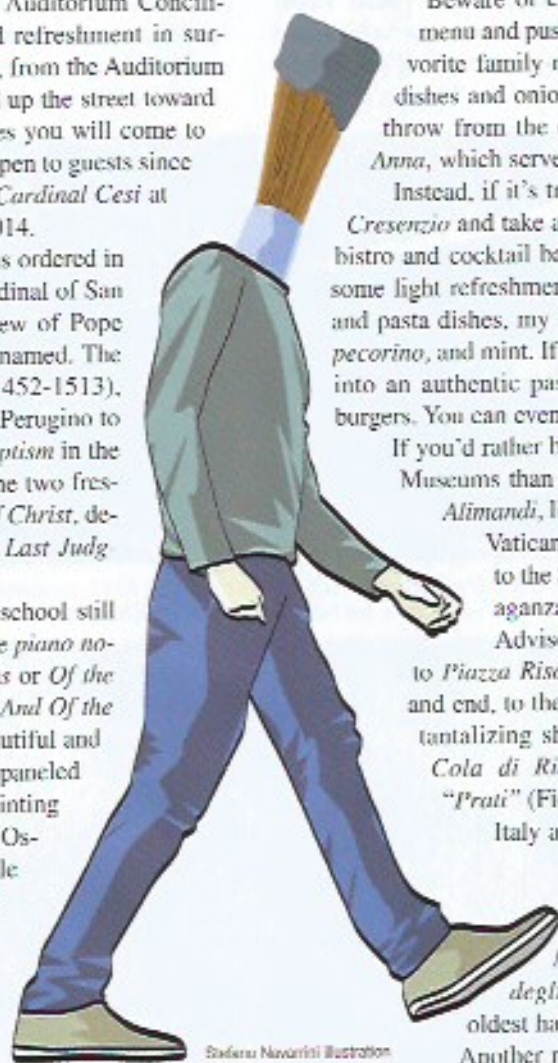
The building of the *Hotel Columbus* was ordered in the 1400s by Domenico Della Rovere, Cardinal of San Clemente and the exceedingly rich nephew of Pope Sixtus IV, for whom the Sistine Chapel is named. The palazzo was frescoed by Pinturicchio (1452-1513), who may have helped his fellow-Umbrian Perugino to paint the *Voyage of Moses* and *Christ’s Baptism* in the Sistine Chapel, and who himself painted the two frescoes *The Finding of Moses* and the *Birth of Christ*, destroyed to make room for Michelangelo’s *Last Judgment*.

Pinturicchio’s frescoes or those of his school still decorate several of the hotel’s rooms on the *piano nobile*: *Of The Grand Master*, *Of the Seasons* or *Of the Zodiac*, *Of the Prophets and the Apostles*, *And Of the Demigods*, which is probably the most beautiful and best preserved one. Its gold-painted, wood-paneled ceiling is covered with a mock-mosaic painting dating to 1490. Scenes from Sorrentini’s Oscar-winning film about the decadent lifestyle of contemporary Rome, *The Great Beauty*, were filmed in the *Hotel Columbus’* elegant, beautifully decorated restaurant, *La Veranda*.

It’s possible to eat outside in its torch-lit courtyard during good weather. Highly recommended are the pumpkin *gnocchi* with thyme, baby lamb stew, and artichokes however cooked.

La Repubblica’s guide *Roma Maxima* rates its brunch one of the ten best in Rome; however, TripAdvisor reviewers com-

ON AND NEAR VIA DELLA CONCILIAZIONE



plained about the hotel’s poor air conditioning, small rooms, worn-out bedding, and “arrogant” staff.

The *Borghi*, or narrow streets behind the auditorium, are full of small *trattorie*.

Beware of cheap tourist traps with a fixed-price menu and pushy hawkers, so head straight to my favorite family run *Arlù* in *Borgo Pio* for its Roman dishes and onion soup. Oh the desserts! It’s a stone-throw from the cozy, reasonably-priced *Hotel Sant’Anna*, which serves breakfast only.

Instead, if it’s trendy you’re after, continue on to *Via Crescenzo* and take a table at the romantic New York-style bistro and cocktail bar *Zanzara* (meaning “mosquito”) for some light refreshment. There’s an ample menu of starters and pasta dishes, my favorite being *tagliolino* with shrimp, *pecorino*, and mint. If you’re feeling homesick, you can bite into an authentic pastrami sandwich and many types of burgers. You can even invent your own cocktail.

If you’d rather be closer to the entrance to the Vatican Museums than to St. Peter’s Basilica, book at *Hotel Alimandi*, literally across *Viale Vaticano* from the Vatican Museums’ entrance and thus nearer to the Sistine Chapel than to Balich’s extravaganza. Enthusiastically reviewed by TripAdvisor, another advantage is that it’s near to *Piazza Risorgimento* where many bus lines start and end, to the Metro-stop of *Via Ottaviano* and the tantalizing shopping streets, *Via Candia* and *Via Cola di Rienzo*. This neighborhood is called “Prati” (Fields) because before the Unification of Italy and Rome becoming the national capital in 1870 it was outside the city. Other neighborhood tips: If you are a hat enthusiast, you’ll enjoy *Antica Manifattura Cappelli*, at the top of *Via degli Scipioni*. Founded in 1936, it’s the oldest hat shop in Rome.

Another neighborhood institution on *Via Leone IV* is the *Sartoria Carbone*, for made-to-order men’s suits. If you feel hurt or you simply want a short break between purchases, the artisanal ice cream, especially the fruit flavors, at the *Gelateria dei Gracchi* on the homonymous street is heavenly. ☺

From the left: *Hotel Columbus*, Pinturicchio’s fresco of the *Demigods*, a scene from *The Great Beauty* at “*La Veranda*” and hamburgers at “*La Zanzara*”

