


Agritourism

The food industry expands and connects diverse lands, going beyond the basic role of offering mere sustenance to eat. One of these combinations is agritourism, which centers a travel experience around a place and the process of food ingredient-growing. At agritourism destinations focusing on olives, *F* keenly feels the vivid impact of the ingredient and all the adjacent cultures.

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A photograph of a wall with a lantern and a stone pillar. The wall is light-colored and textured. A small, square lantern with a glass front and a metal frame is mounted on the wall. To the right of the lantern is a vertical pillar made of rough-hewn, light-colored stone blocks. The lighting is warm, casting a shadow of the lantern onto the wall.

Agritourism is a portmanteau of "agriculture" and "tourism." The culture of taking a retreat in a countryside to escape hectic urban life existed in the late 19th century, but the systemic development of tours for rural experience began in the 1950s in Europe. In Italy, from the 1950s to the 1970s, small-scale farming gave way to large-scale operations that used agricultural equipment, and following this, many farmers left the industry. In response, the Italian government passed a law in 1985 to encourage so-called farm stays. The policy helped increase farmer income and create jobs, and other European countries introduced similar schemes to usher in an era of agritourism. Following the globally increasing interest in food and food production traceability, agritourism has quickly branched out to include gastronomic experiences like farm-to-table dining, traditional cooking classes, wild ingredient foraging, and local food festivals.



Kapsaliana Village Hotel

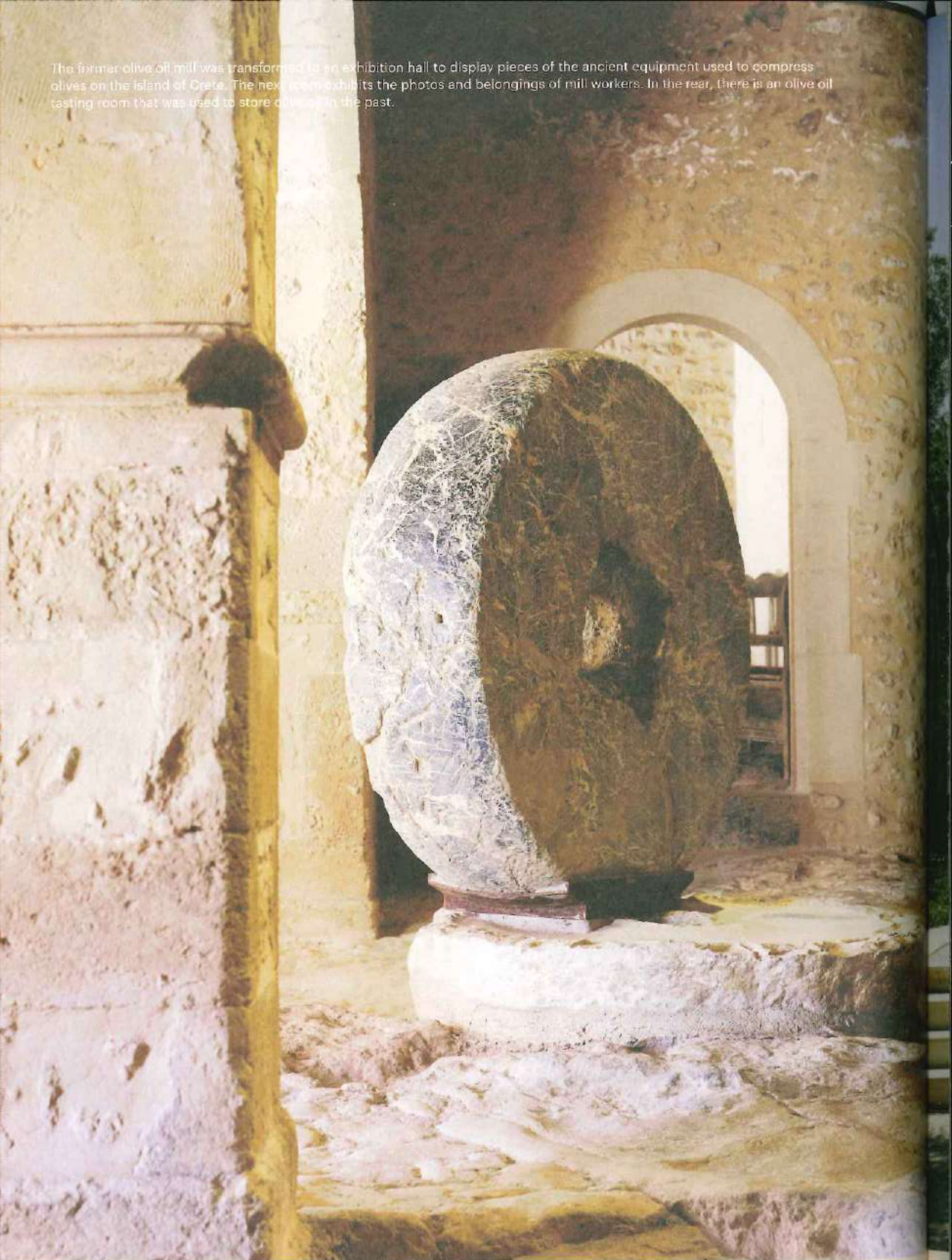
Restored 18th-century stone building in a remote olive village

On the island of Crete, there are traces of the Republic of Venice, which conquered the island after the Crusades in the early 13th century. One of these is a small village called Kapsaliana, which is located in the central part of the island. In 1763, the Abbot of Arkadi Monastery, the most influential entity on the island, decided to build an olive oil mill in the area that, up to that point, only had a small chapel dedicated to the St. Michael and olive groves as major landmarks. The village was the perfect place to build the mill because it had so many olives and the topography is such that it is really only vulnerable to an attack from the south. Back then, olive oil was a quality source of energy and an expensive commodity used for religious ceremonies, soap making, and lamp fuel. Therefore, the monastery constructed a fortress-like defense and guarded the olive oil. As the heyday of olive oil production passed and the Second World War broke out, residents slowly left the village, and the mill closed in the mid-1950s.

Olives brought life back to the nearly defunct village. In 1976, Greek architect Myron Toupoyannis bought abandoned houses, the mill, and the laborer lodgings to embark on a restoration project after convincing the local government and residents to get on board. The initial goal was to restore historically valuable buildings and preserve the olive traditions deeply connected to the identity of Crete. After 30 years of renovation, Kapsaliana Village Hotel opened in 2008. The mountaintop stone building overlooks olive groves on all sides and offers another level of serenity. It has become quite a popular holiday getaway. Simply put, the dying hamlet transformed into a thriving tourist destination all thanks to olives—the mainstay of the village.

The olive oil tasting session is a signature activity here. In a warehouse, participants taste an array of extra virgin olive oils and learn about the complex and subtle nuances from an expert. The farm-to-table cooking class makes Cretan traditional dishes with organic herbs and vegetables grown in the hotel, too, and the baking class teaches traditional bread making, which also attract foodies.

The former olive oil mill was transformed to an exhibition hall to display pieces of the ancient equipment used to compress olives on the island of Crete. The next room exhibits the photos and belongings of mill workers. In the rear, there is an olive oil tasting room that was used to store olive oil in the past.



The elements from the past—the original design of the olive oil-producing buildings and the centuries-old irrigation system—have been preserved as much as possible with simple aesthetic improvements, creating a spiritual and solemn mood like in ancient Greek temples. Homages to olives that make up the foundation of the village are everywhere in the hotel. Some guest rooms have artifacts from the old days, such as a large wood plate used to extract olive oil, making guests feel like they are spending a night at a museum. The hotel amenities include extra virgin olive oil. Another charm is the serenity. The calming sound of rustling olive leaves in the wind soothes the mind and soul.



Myron Toupoyannis
Owner,
Kapsaliana Village Hotel

Alkis Kranas
General manager,
Kapsaliana Village Hotel





"I think 'luxury' is more closely associated with visual aesthetics. I didn't intend to create luxurious vibes. The architecture of Crete comes down to minimal and geometric beauty. The structures don't have curves and use simple materials like wood and stone, similar to a monastery's minimal design. I just emphasized the elements that highlight the identity of this place."

"In the hotel garden, we have olive trees named after our regular guests. Although they're still young, they'll become special memories when they mature into adult trees. Mediterranean people often say life 'begins with olives and ends with olives.' These trees will still stand long after we're gone."

"When I first found this place, the population had dwindled so much. It was like an old tree barely staying alive. Despite the other buildings falling apart or gone, I could see the once vibrant village filled with olive trees. I wanted to bring new energy here, with olive oil as its foundation that encapsulates its identity. Our commitment to recreate a contemporary version of the village led to the creation of what you see it today."

