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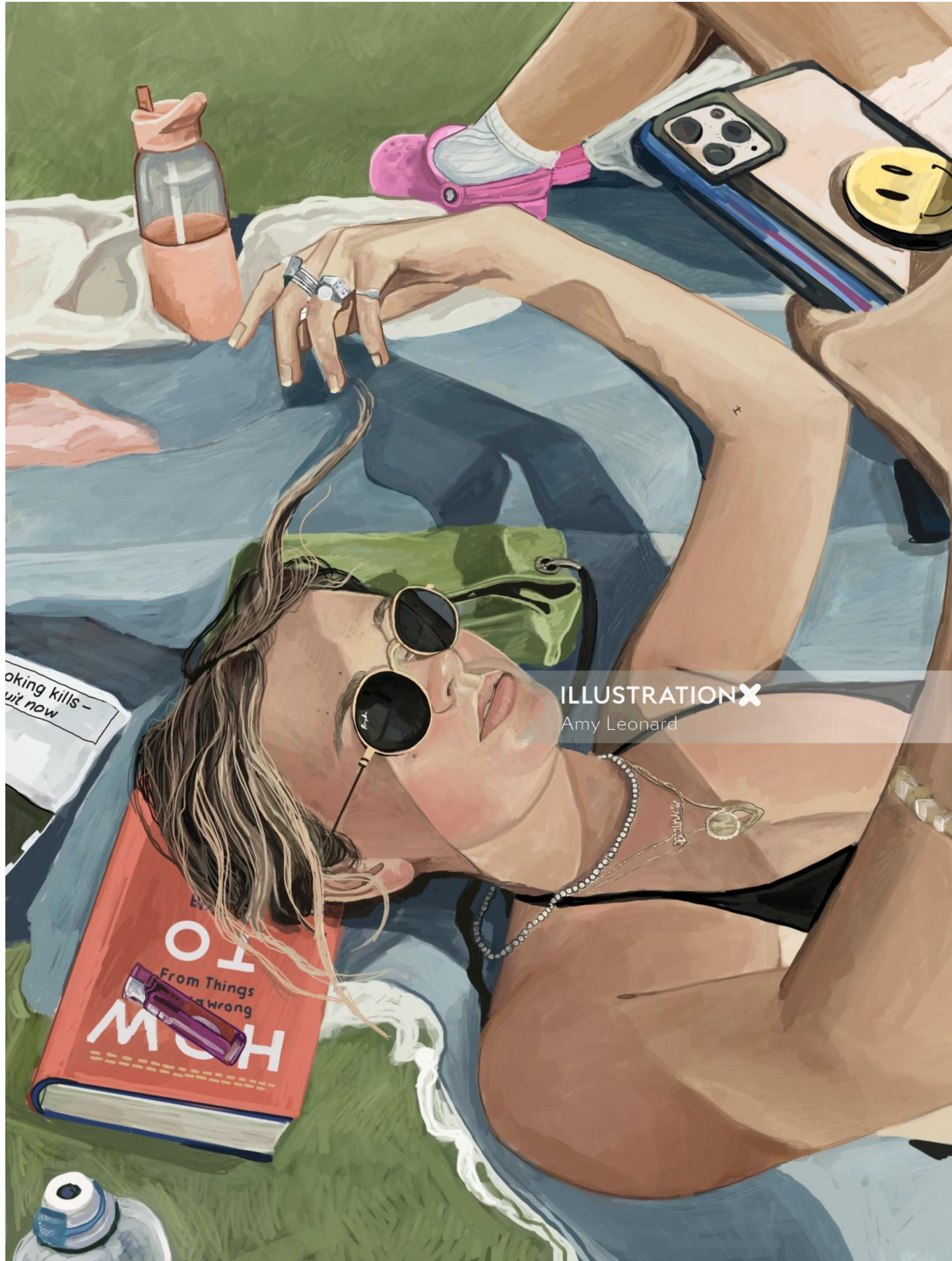

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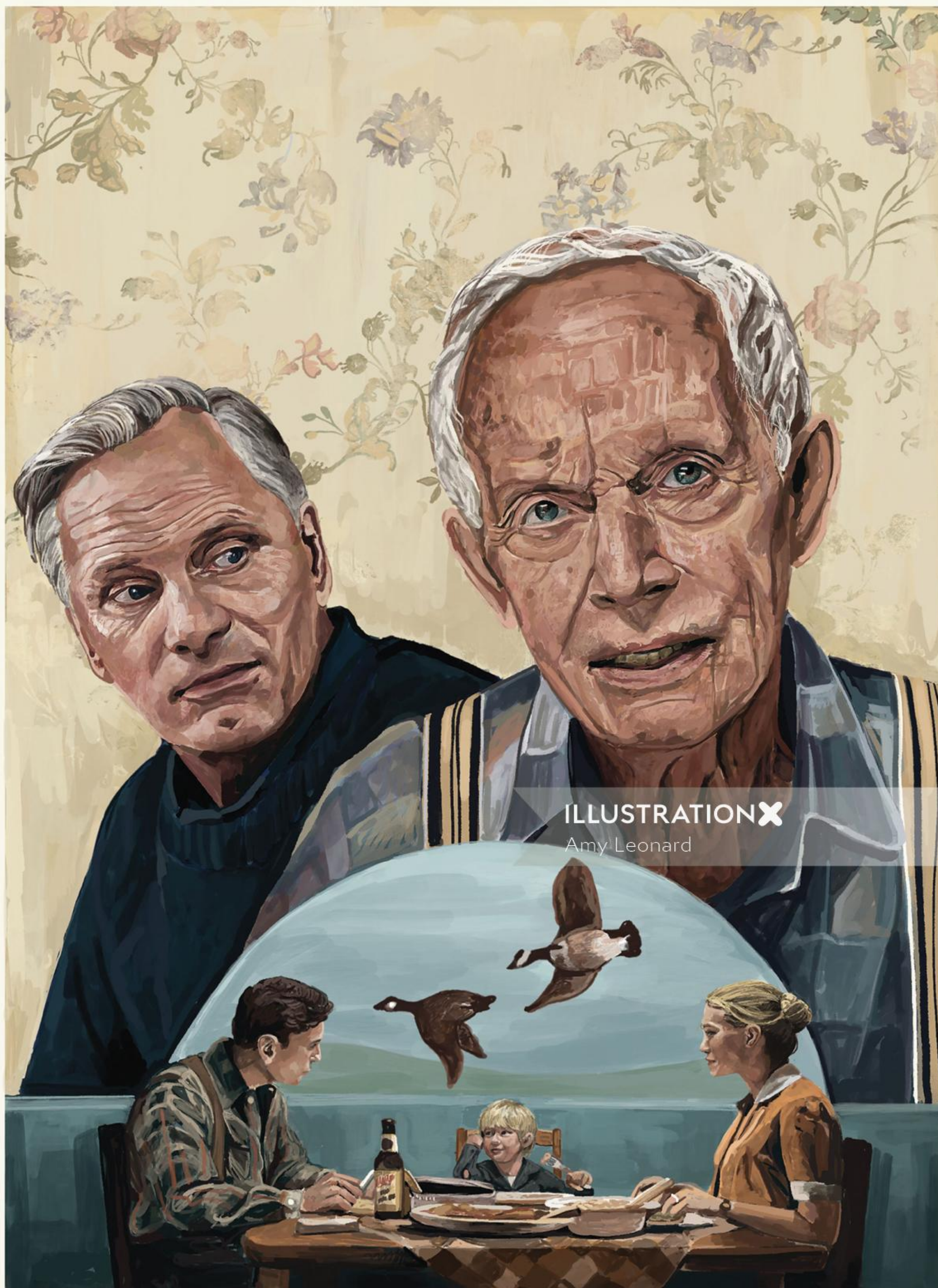

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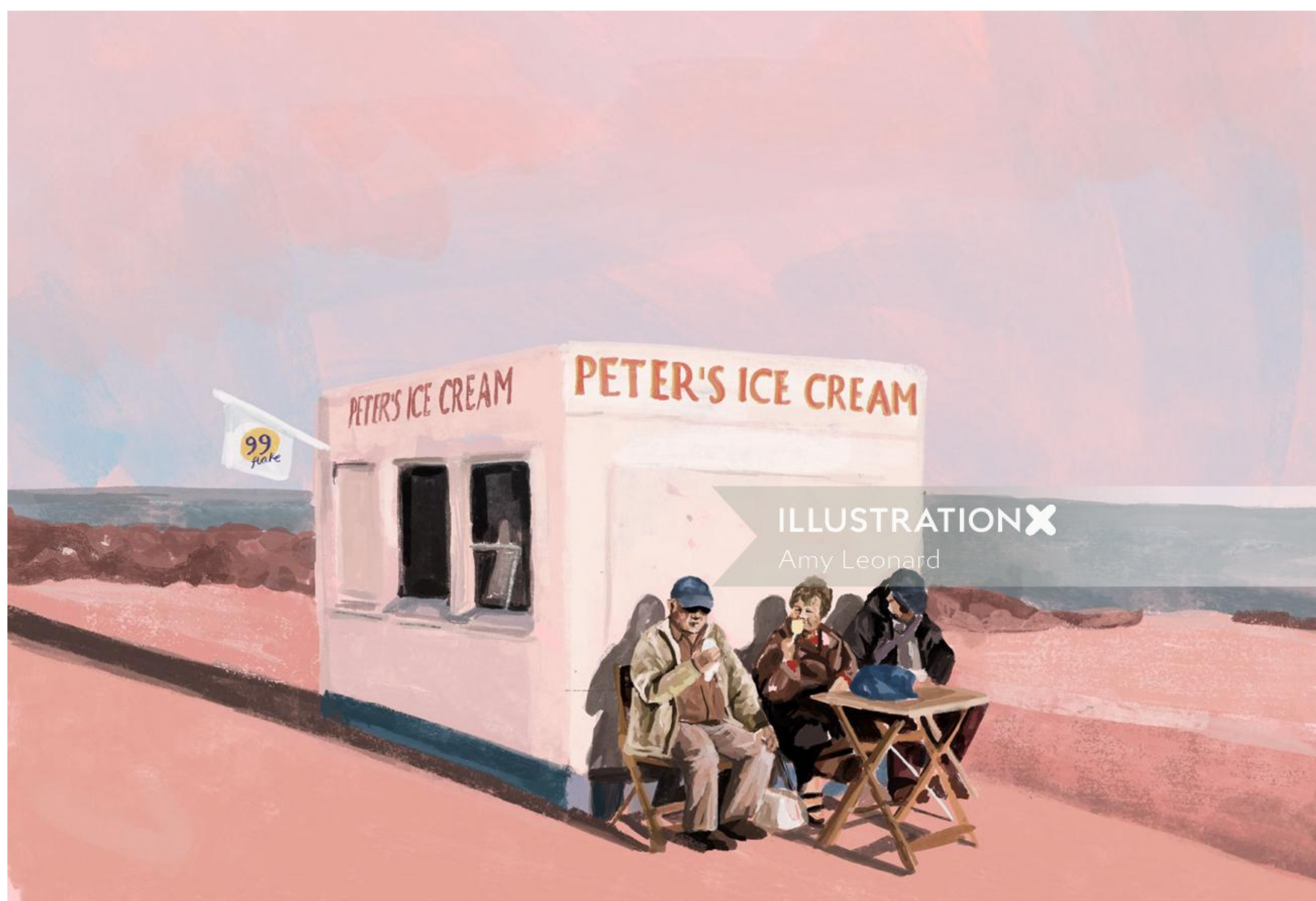

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The breakfast cappuccino
A cappuccino at breakfast time, often enjoyed with a cornetto (the Italian version of the croissant) or biscotti (a hard biscuit), is still popular all across Italy. The idea is that the drink's dairy- or plant-milk content will fill you up until lunchtime. However, it seems that indulging in a mid-morning pastry as well is no bad thing. According to custom, a cappuccino should only be drunk before lunch, after which time espresso takes over.

The post-lunch espresso
In Naples, espresso is often served with a small glass of water. This is not, as is commonly thought, to wash away the bitter taste of the coffee after drinking it. Quite the opposite: according to Neapolitan tradition the flavour of coffee should be savoured, and the water is meant to cleanse your palate so you can appreciate it to the full. After lunch, espressos can be drunk quickly at the bar, or more leisurely in a piazza. Espresso macchiato topped with a little frothed milk is another favourite. Illy's Moreno, meanwhile, is partial to a capo – an espresso in a glass with a few drops of milk.

The moka pot
Italy's love affair with coffee started with the moka pot – a cooker-top or electric coffee maker that brews by passing boiled water pressurised by steam through ground coffee. The moka pot was first invented for a world trade show in Milan in 1906, and went through various designs until an engineer called Alfonso Bialetti came up with a sleek version in 1933. It has hardly changed since, though it didn't become a household item until the 1950s, when Bialetti's sons decided to devote his shop to the sale of one item: the Bialetti Moka Express. It's estimated 90 per cent of the coffee in Italy is still drunk at home, and there's something beautiful about the ritual of filling a moka pot with freshly ground coffee and letting it simmer over the hob while you potter around the kitchen.

Sicilian coffee granita
In the searing heat of Sicilian summers, iced coffee is taken one step further with granita – essentially shaved ice infused with bittersweet espresso, sometimes topped with cream. Recipes vary even between the different cities in Sicily, but granita is traditionally made with espresso, sugar and water, then frozen to a desired consistency. Traditionalists enjoy it for breakfast scooped on to a sweet brioche bun. It is also served on its own in a glass, with a dollop of whipped cream or your favourite liqueur drizzled on top.

The bicerin
Turin, in northern Italy, serves a delightfully decadent mix of chocolate, coffee and cream known as bicerin, which has long been warding off the chill of the city's cold winters and mountainous climes. Named after the bar where it was invented in 1763, these little mugs of bittersweet cosiness have become a symbol of the city. In the nearby city of Alessandria in Piedmont, a coffee-and-cocoa combination served in a glass is known as a marocchino.
In Alba, home of Ferrero's chocolate industry, Nutella is used instead of cocoa powder.

Third-wave coffee
The movement known as 'third-wave coffee' takes the drink to an artisan level. The 'speciality coffee' scene might have been championed in the US and Canada, but it has a rightful place in Italy. Coffee expert Helena Kyriakides runs private tastings and barista workshops in Bologna through her company Yummy Italy. She often introduces visitors to Bologna's third-wave coffee shops, such as Caffè Terzi, where beans are hand selected from all over the world. In Florence, hip baristas at Simbiosi Café serve up single-origin coffee to locals and ex-pats, while Australian-owned bistro and bakery Melaleuca overlooking the River Arno takes pride in its speciality coffee.

Words: Phoebe Hunt

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Special perks

Italy is synonymous with delicious coffee, from creamy cappuccinos to gorgeous granitas. But what do rituals and timing have to do with its role as a coffee-culture world leader?

Spend any length of time in Italy and you can't help but notice how different the coffee-drinking rituals can be there. This is not to say all Italians are dependent on their morning cappuccino, or that you won't see oat milk or even the occasional pumpkin-spiced latte being drunk with gusto. It's more that the joy of drinking coffee is deep-rooted in Italian society. In cafés and homes and crumbling piazzas, these traditions are a fascinating part of daily life, from Florence to Naples, Turin to Sardinia.

According to the Italian coffee company Illy, almost 97 per cent of Italians drink coffee in some form. 'In Italy, we are characterised by our love of espresso, but now we're open to many other ways of drinking coffee,' says Moreno Faina, the director of Illy's Università del Caffè in Trieste, which was set up in 1999 to promote 'the culture of high-quality coffee'. 'Drinking a coffee is a moment of relaxation and joy and happiness,' he says. 'I could talk about it for hours.'

Here, we look at some of the country's coffee rituals (see xxxxx), and discover that when it comes to enjoying the world-famous beverage, the Italians really do know a thing or two. But remember that drinking coffee like an Italian isn't about puritanical rules. The sheer variety is proof that coffee doesn't have to be traditional to capture the country's ethos. But however you drink your coffee, taking a moment to savour the process can add a little calm to daily life.

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From the rooftops

Viewed from above, towns and villages present a fresh perspective on everyday life and a heightened sense of the interconnectedness of humanity and the natural world

Many have jaunty facades, others pitched roofs. Some have clay tiles, others winding stairwells offering routes to the summit. What is universal to all rooftops is the power of a clandestine space where everyday burdens are left on the ground and freedom and mischief are reclaimed.

Rooftops are an intriguing in-between space, unrestrained by purpose and unobserved by the world below. It demands no single activity yet nothing is strictly forbidden either. Whether it's peeking out between railings, dancing a slow waltz with a partner or snapping photos by the dozen, this space is captivating because of its private liberation. No longer is there a requirement to perform for other people, garner attention or submit to other powers. 'Solitude is essential for processing and any form of psychic growth,' says clinical and forensic psychologist and Breathe contributor Ahona Guha when considering why people may crave seclusion. 'People process things differently. Some like and need company as they process difficult things, while others are drawn to solitude.'

Away from the surveillance of the street and embracing the silence up high, rooftops offer a place to retreat during times of stress and unease, which reinforces the appeal of their perceived privacy and anonymity. At the very least distance from the world, something many crave when times get tough. Leaving behind any worries on the ground floor and escaping to the roof can be a short-term respite and way to seek perspective on any situation. 'Those who are more introverted and process internally are more likely to seek solitude,' adds Ahona. 'Solitary pursuits remove us from the stimulation the world provides and give us the opportunity to disconnect and reflect, and allow our internal processes and needs to loom large.'

The real and the metaphorical

Perspective found on the rooftop is distinctive in both its visual and metaphorical potential. The crowded streets, functioning as normal below, are reduced in their power because of the distance. This can help to create space and allow for previously undiscovered solutions to emerge. Whether ounging on a rooftop deckchair or peeping out from the balustrade, it's difficult not to embrace the metaphorical resonance of looking down on a world suddenly rendered so much smaller in size. Ahona emphasises how occupying these spaces often encourages 'the capacity to listen to finely tuned inner experiences and build an understanding of ourselves and what we need'.

When enjoying rooftop views, it's helpful to pay close attention to the surroundings and how different they may seem from those times when viewed from other spaces. No longer is it necessary to crane a neck or squint to observe architectural features, instead facades confront the viewer face on. The air might feel cleaner and crisper, and a breeze might brush against the hair. Geese in V-shaped flying formations might almost feel touchable, and pigeons and gulls perched on balustrades and chimneys could feel like neighbours. Nature can also be found in the moss growing in clusters around railings and vents, the feisty grasses and weeds emerging from the guttering, the lichen clinging to concrete and tiles. Stretch out a hand, shut one eye and pinch landmarks or buildings between thumb and first finger. Philip Roth captures the heady wilderness of rooftops in his 1958 book The Conversion of the Jews through the words of young protagonist Ozzie Freedman: 'Being on the roof, it turned out, was a serious thing... [he] wished he could rip open the sky, plunge his hands through, and pull out the sun...'

Climbing a stairwell and making it to the summit reveals

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HIGH ART

With significant metaphorical weight and even greater visual appeal, it's unsurprising that rooftops have inspired artists for decades. Here are just three of many loftily inspired artworks

1. Set in Victorian London and Paris, Katherine Rundell's young adult novel Rooftoppers follows a plucky teenager as she flees to the rooftops, challenging traditional spatial boundaries within cities as she also tests the power of authorities looking to limit her freedom. The prose is simple, lyrical and draws the reader into the immersive world of above-ground escapades. Feel bare toes clenching rooftop tiles, experience stomach-flips as the protagonists leap across buildings, and anticipate a full Moon to light up Paris, where new friends are found in unexpected places. The characters are vibrant and eccentric with their decisions emphasising the importance of courage and persistence.

2. Edward Hopper's early-20th century paintings of New York rooftops are a celebration of the urban liberation experienced on a city roof. In City Roofs 1932 and Roofs of Washington Square 1926, the chimneys, skylights and plumbing units aren't obstacles or blemishes but more elements of the skyline to be embraced and loved. The silhouettes of chimneys are striking, representing turrets of the sky, commanding authority and grandeur. It's possible to imagine darting upstairs to sunbathe on these roofs or to confess secrets to friends as the sky turns dark. In works such as From Williamsburg Bridge 1928 and Rooftops 1926, Hopper positions the viewer opposite the crest of rooftop facades and lets them enjoy the irregular city rooftops. The dark cream, orange and peachy hues are evocative of golden hour, a post-Impressionist rendition of the Instagram lighting obsession. Here the shadows are long, the contrast is high, and the mix of rooftops eclectic

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3. The 2012 movie Wadjda, directed by Haifaa al-Mansour, uses rooftops as a recurring motif to explore a coming-of-age storyline as the central character, Wadjda, learns to ride a bike on the roofs of Riyadh. The story includes a navigation of family dynamics and the challenges facing women in Saudi Arabian society. Wadjda's continuous attempts at buying a green bike, with the key interactions occurring on the top floor of a villa, and her ultimate victory ride in the concluding scene, demonstrate al-Mansour's clever use of rooftops to frame pivotal scenes.

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Bright lights, big harvest

The rising popularity of urban foraging is bringing the joy of wild food to the inner city

Foraging is usually associated with rambling countryside hedgerows or wild woodlands bursting with edible fungi and herbs – not the frenetic streets of New York City. But US photographer William Mullan spends his free time foraging in the Big Apple itself, on the hunt, appropriately enough, for apples.

He approaches his apple-picking sprees as if they were an adventure sport: teetering on a narrow ledge of grass above a six-lane highway or climbing a tree in an isolated lorry-park near his home in Brooklyn to bag his fruity loot. It's a hobby that tests him to the core. 'I don't necessarily have a strategy, but if I do it's just to explore new areas of New York City on foot,' he says. 'I walk a lot and keep my eyes peeled for blossoms in the springtime and orbs of fruit, big and small, from June to October. Some of the best apples are in the places where you think: you may die here.'

The drive to use local produce and reduce food waste has seen urban foraging become popular all over the world, including the UK, where more than 80 per cent of the population live in towns and cities. For beginners it's a good idea to find a qualified guide. Forage London, for example, offers guided wild-food walks in London every month of the year, led by experts like wild food consultant Ken Greenway. Ken describes nettles, dandelions and daisies as good 'gateway plants' because they're familiar to most people and easy to recognise. But he warns that mushrooms should always be treated with caution. 'One of my favourite authors, Terry Pratchett said: "All fungi are edible. Some fungi are only edible once". Don't walk around with the attitude that if it's wild, it's good for you.'

Ken suggests using the free app iNaturalist, which allows you take photos and get ID suggestions. The Association of Foragers also has an online directory of foraging teachers, along with a list of principles to promote 'safe, considerate, sustainable' foraging practices.

William's methods follow a similar ethos. On seeing an apple tree he'd like to pick from, he takes a photo, logs the location, and if it's on private property he leaves a note with his number asking if he can harvest a few apples. When the fruit is ripe, he will return to the spot with a picker and buckets. Last year he made 38 litres of cider from apple hauls along the waterfront in Brooklyn. 'Often I'll leave a box of apples near the location or at the front of a building with a sign encouraging people to take some,' he adds.

William's passion for apples began when his family moved from America to Esher, England. In a Surrey supermarket he discovered an Egremont russet apple. 'It looked like a gold-sprayed potato, kind of ugly. In an American supermarket all the fruit is uniform,' he says. Ever since this life-changing encounter as a teen he's been an apple enthusiast. His escapades have accrued him 20,000 followers on Instagram and inspired him to produce a photography book in 2018 titled Odd Apples, featuring beautiful still-life portraits of 90 of the world's most unusual apple varieties.

Is there anything William finds surprising about foraging in a city like New York? 'How good the fruit is and how afraid people are to eat it,' he says. 'I understand the latter, people are right to be cautious of chemicals in the fruit. But I'm surprised how pervasive pop cultural narratives about apples being poisonous are. There are no poisonous fruits in the entire Malus genus (apple family). I can't even count how often I've been told to be careful about getting poisoned. Blame Disney, I guess.'

William says there isn't much truth in stories of chemical contamination either. 'It's not the reality. Research reveals the trees filter out toxins and that fruit is okay to eat. There are some incredibly delicious apples in truck parking lots, under highways, and off neighbourhood streets. I'm always in awe of how healthy the trees seem. Plants can be so resilient.'

As well as New York, William has picked apples in Maine, Vermont, and Massachusetts. A return trip to the UK is next on his list. He says it's important to take care of both yourself and the environment if you're considering giving it a go: 'Don't climb anything that you're not confident you can come down from,' he says. 'Just be safe and make sure it's totally public before taking a fruit and don't strip a tree clean. Birds and other small animals might depend on that fruit to live.'

Those interested in trying it out for themselves might also benefit from doing some background reading. Professional forager Wross Lawrence, author of The Urban Forager: How to Find and Cook Wild Food in the City, has sourced wild ingredients for breweries, supermarkets and Michelin-starred restaurants. His book includes 32 easy-to-find plants and wild edibles in any urban environment across the seasons. These include blackberries, sloe berries, rosehips, nettles, pineapple

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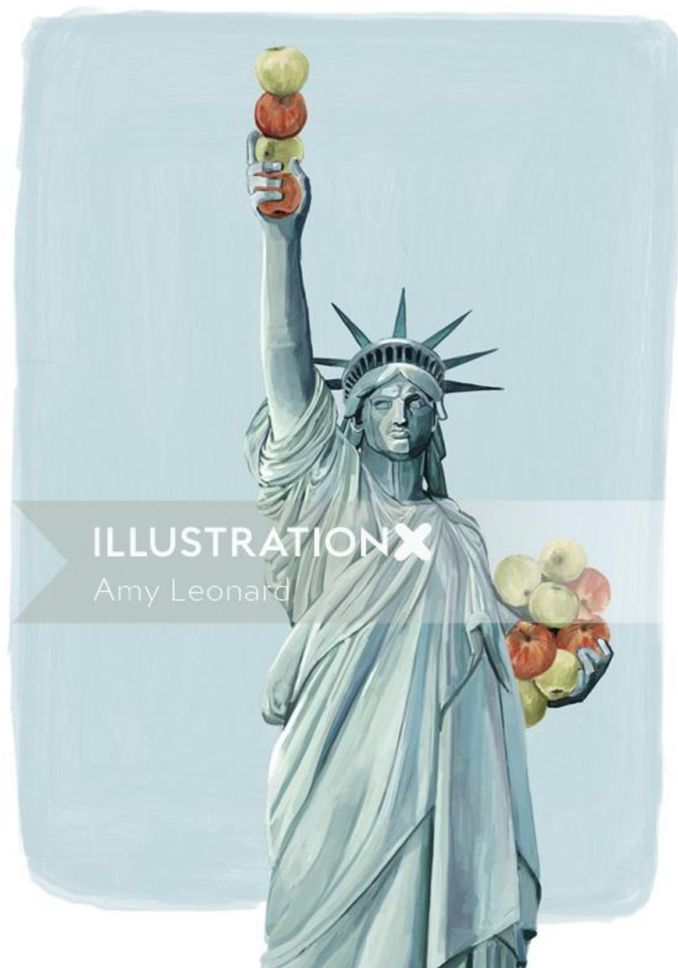

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