

# FIRST

**JONATHAN McLEISH  
INVITES US TO HIS  
HOME IN MQABBA**

**THE SOCIAL SCENE  
IN PICTURES**

**ARTIST LISA  
ZANATTA PISTORIO**

**MAN ABOUT TOWN  
LABOUR MP CHRIS AGIUS**

# THE FLORIANI FAMILY

**A PART OF MALTA'S HISTORY**



# the family floriana

**CARLA FLORIANI COMPAGNONI, a descendant of Pietro Paolo Floriani the military engineer who built the Floriana lines, spoke at length to IRENE CANOVARI about her itinerant life and her illustrious ancestors.**



**T**he Floriani's are a well-travelled family. Tell me something about yourself and your fascinating childhood in Argentina.

On the 29 October 1948 I saw the light of day in Montevideo, Uruguay. I knew I was Uruguayan forever, even if only six days old and flying away by seaplane to Buenos Aires, Argentina. From now onwards I will always travel. Travel is my one constant – I do not stay long in one place until I am in my thirties.

Buenos Aires is a big, vibrant city. There is a feeling of constant freedom and blessed space. I take in an atmosphere of modernism and culture. We live in the centre, close to the Obelisco on the ground floor of a high building. Beyond the tall, exotic trees in the Central Garden, the Théâtre Colon di Margot Fontaine and the modern cinemas open at all hours including

the mornings. I sense the wide avenues leading out to wider spaces and a sweet melanchony embraces me.

My father was extraordinarily well-travelled. He regularly booked sea crossings to Italy. At that time that meant 18 days across the wide ocean criss-crossing the equator. The sea route always the same: Baires, Rio, Tenerife, Lisbona, Barcellona, Marsiglia, Genova. Cavernous wooden chests used to excite our attention. Emotions always overwhelmed me. Hearts were chased by the marching tune of *Made in U.S.A.* as the ship broke away from the pier, tearing apart strips of paper in the process.

**What are your memories of Europe in those times?**

I recall the light of the hotel in Genova, sand dunes, the smell of pine resin and the towering Atlantic waves off Bayonne in France at my aunt's house. I recall my



grandma Giulia; her ephemeral image, stark white hair tied in waves, blue-purple apron, her walking stick with a worked silver handle. Beautiful portraits of a Europe now gone. On returning to Argentina, it's time to go back to school.

At the age of six I could already speak four languages thanks to our travels and this allowed me the indulgence of being *rompiscatole* (a pain). On our European journeys, whether we were travelling by train, by sea or on foot, I craved to communicate with anyone at any time.

**When and why did your family move back to Europe?**

It is 1958. I observe the wrinkles on my father's brow as they deepen. My bed is moved into the bathroom, there are some gun shots here and there, a lot of noise and then a lot more silence. The country is

**Above:** Carla with her two daughters Valeria and Valentina.

shaking: *la revolucion!* My recollections of that historical time are fleeting: my mum fainting in Plaza de Mayo in the middle of a big crowd of Argentinians chin up towards Peron's balcony. The endless eerily silent queue waiting for the auction of Evita's personal belongings, waiting to see her rigid corpse.

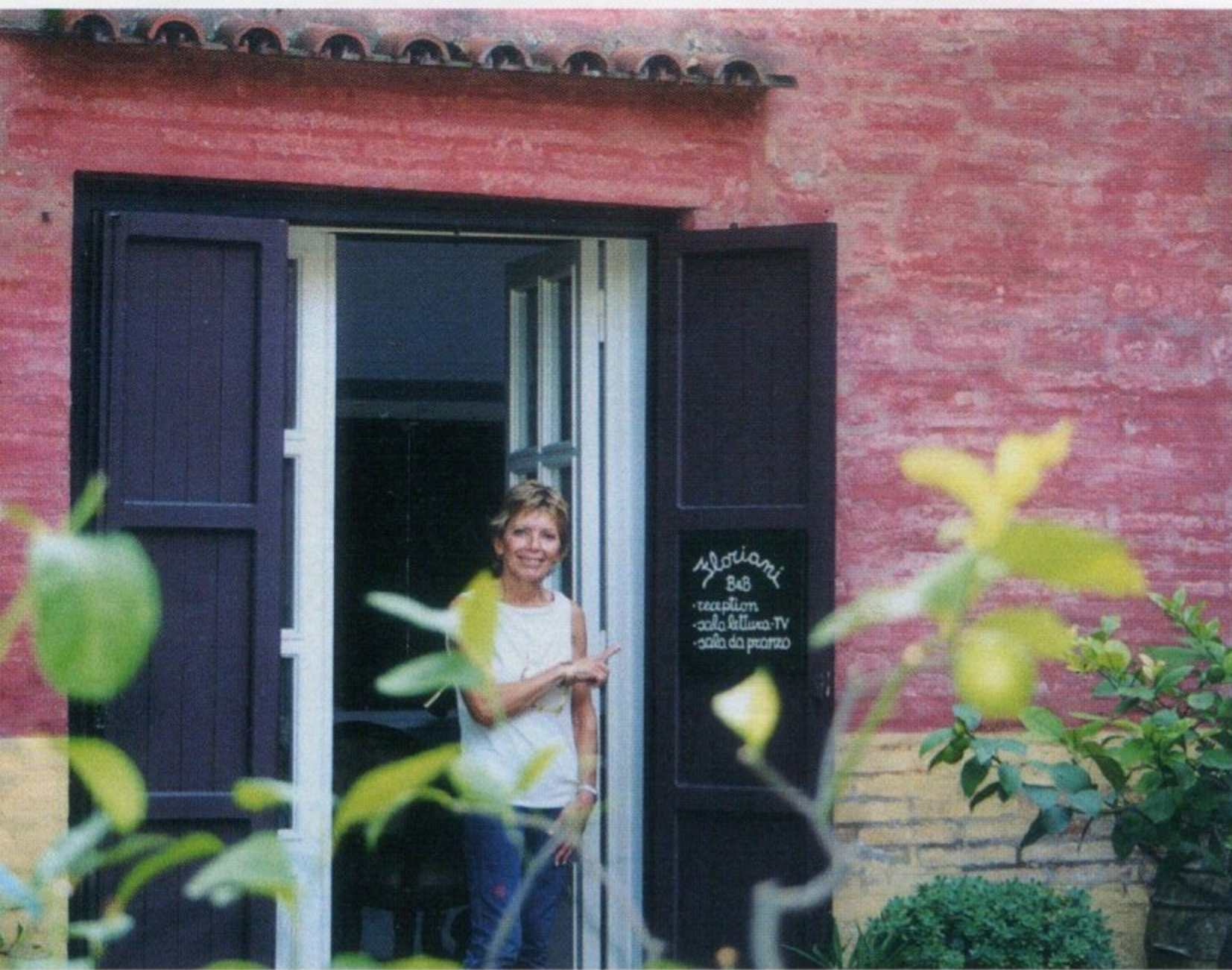
...and then Macerata in the Marche region, central Italy.

Right. Fast forward to spring 1959. My mother and I are in Macerata. Another world. No more space. It feels like a jacket – too tight on the shoulders. From straight lines to countless curves and semicircles, miniscule sea waves and little hills. This is Le Marche. Narrow roads. Ditches following streams. Shade and moss. The changing of the seasons, snow, and the family home at Montanello, a hunting lodge dating back to 1500, covered in wild greenery beckoning me with enchanting looks.

**Is this where you meet your ancestor Pietro Floriani?**

My father tells me about Pietro Paolo Floriani for the first time in Montanello. And not just about him. An encounter with history unfolds in the family house. One which slowly gets inside me, the history of a family the origins of which date back to 1055; a memory which is extremely alive in the family archives and in my own being. Sometimes, I find myself staring, puzzled at my own bone-structure. The lines on my face seem to claim my tight blood-tie with this or that ancestor among the old family portraits. My pleasure in drawing is reflected in the passions of other ancestors. I recognise in my handwriting the hands of other family members through family letters calling from the past.

My father spent his last twenty years here, snowed under archive papers organising Floriani's correspondence.



military engineer and architect. Pompeo resided in Malta around 1570 and observed closely the building of the new fortifications of Valletta by Laparelli in 1566. Pompeo's 1576 publication *Discorso Intorno all'isola di Malta* speaks highly of Laparelli's work. When Pompeo dies in 1600 aged 55 he leaves three very young children. Pietro Paolo is just 15 and he is already heading for a brilliant and adventurous future.

When Pietro Paolo was 19 he got involved in a fight in which an Alessandro Bocalazi died. A few months later, thanks to intervention by the church and relatives, he was pardoned by the man's relatives. Following this episode he had to leave home, his environment.

**But it was another painful episode which led him to Malta. Right?**

Yes, in 1605, Pietro Paolo

married Maria Pellicani who, soon after got pregnant. She died in childbirth leaving Pietro Paolo with a daughter, Camilla. Camilla was raised with love and care by his family. In 1606 Pietro left Macerata heading to a new future, an adventurous life, full of travel, wars, great enterprises – and Malta. Macerata's loss is Malta's gain.

Life's irony can be savoured in another family portrait. Camilla, Pietro's daughter, is depicted here as a great beauty. She wears a wonderful dress with a deep decolletée and a nice red ribbon. She will soon take holy vows as a cloistered, Santa Chiara nun. A gain for everyone!

He painstakingly copies, word for word, an enormous amount of letters that Pietro Paolo exchanged with a number of personalities of his time, with his relatives and good friends. He feels particularly close to Pietro. Their adventurous nature is a bond across time.

During these years my father traces the route of Pietro Floriani while, like Pietro, I fulfill an interest in theatre, concluding my studies in scenography at the *Accademia di Belle Arti* in Roma. I, too find myself on the move but the story of my own travels would lead me to a different story.

For many years now my father has not been with us. When I'm at his desk reading his files through his reading glass, continuing his work, reorganising a mass of papers and trying to understand more, to find hints that can open more doors to understanding the ingenious personality of Pietro Paolo.

My father must have known that sooner or later I would succumb to Pietro Paolo's charm and the impulse to get close to that strange wardrobe overfilled with yellowing papers. He was so sure that he left a letter to be opened only after his departure. It was left there among letters from our many family ancestors from 1500 onwards. His last message of love to me. Touching and smelling words from the past. Emotions. The same emotions which touch the most expert scholar who witnesses centuries of history re-emerging from writings and drawings.

**What can you tell us about Pietro Paolo Floriani?**

In 1997 I met Prof Giuseppe Adami who is passionate about architecture and history of art. This was a turning point in my research.

My father Eros Compagnoni Floriani archived letters from our ancestors who, generation after generation, protected this archive. Their efforts have allowed us to study more deeply this eclectic character, military strategist and great military engineer. A portrait portrays him as authoritative and proud of his Malta Cross which is pinned prominently on his elegant black

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suit. It depicts him in the act of adding his final signature to the Floriana project. His eyes are attentive, piercing. He seems unhurried. You cannot fail to notice in his look a strong creative vein. His determined and impulsive character, his attention to any news strongly emerges from his letters.

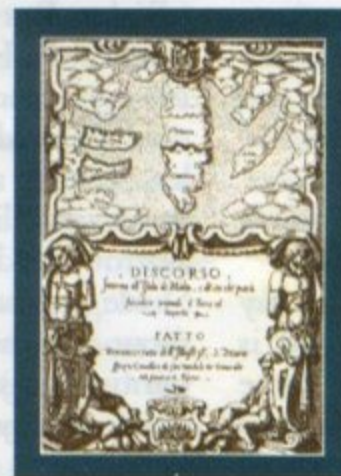
Another portrait. This time it is Pietro Paolo, his brother Felice and Angelina, his sister. Again, intense eyes and austere features.

Pietro was constantly stimulated to study by his father, Pompeo, himself a

**Carla, tell us how Pietro ended up spying in Algiers.**

I quote from a letter Pietro addressed to his mother Claudia, his sister Angelina, his wife Lucrezia written from Madrid on 15 October 1612:

'I happened to be on Maundy Thursday evening in conversation with friends. After a big dinner, jumping and dancing and many other such absurdities, I warmed up a lot and sweated a bit. I didn't bother changing, not to interrupt the conversation. That night I had a burning fever that kept increasing for seven days and doctors were worried for my life.'





## pietro paolo floriani

Professor Quentin Hughes in *Fortress: Architecture & Military History in Malta, 1969*, writes thus:

"In 1632 Pietro Paolo Floriani was invited to Malta to discuss the possibility of strengthening the land front of Valletta by increasing its depth towards Marsa. His name was well known on the island. His father Pompeii Floriani had been a notable writer on the art of fortification, and had published a book in 1576 criticizing Laparelli's defences of Valletta. The father died when young Floriani was 15, but the environment had already had its effect and young Floriani drew profit from his father's cognizance, experience won in fighting at Lepanto, and practical proficiency gained at numerous fortresses. Young Floriani, within the aura created by the fame and success of his father, threw himself into a study of battle tactics and in particular military architecture. He was tutored by men who had built reputations for themselves in the wars in Flanders, Hungary, and the Levant. Soon he was involved in his own practice, building fortifications in Italy. He entered the service of the king of Spain and carried out a secret mission to assess the feasibility of capturing the Turkish cities of Algiers and Tunis. In 1620 he was with the Imperial Army at the siege of Rosenberg and in the following year took part in the assault on Neuhäusel. Leading 200 men he personally stormed the towns of Valcodero, La Cola, and San Giorgio, and built so great a name for bravery that sonnets were written in his praise. By 1627 he was Castellan of Fort St Angelo in Italy and Governor of the armies of Umbria. At this time he began to compile his experience into his great tome on fortification. With this reputation it is little wonder that his work should be heeded by the Knights. In Malta he criticized the Laparelli defences on five scores...Nevertheless, and with some reluctance, Floriani's plan was accepted and work went ahead on the chain of bastions but from the solid rock. The engineer supervised the laying out of the trace and the initial details of the scheme, but he was in a bad temper, holding in contempt those that had opposed his plans. In deep disgust, and feeling that he had been maligned by certain persons who were envious of his renown and reputation, he left Malta. Once more he took up his post as commander of the citadel at Ferrara and shortly afterwards died, perhaps of a broken heart, for he was only 53 years old...."

The engineer Valperga also drew up the plans for the suburb of Floriana, which was named in honour of his compatriot – perhaps some recompense for the abuse Floriani received during his visit to Malta." ❧

Floriani contacts a spy working for the King of Spain. He inspects a hide-away right under the Great Mosque and assesses the risk of Moslem retaliation against the thousands of Christian slaves in Algiers. He also identifies the meticulous military supervision around town. The final report for the King of Spain is detailed and convincing. Pietro Paolo volunteers to lead a siege of Algiers and requests an army of 600 soldiers.

In a letter of recommendation, dated 12 December 1614, signed by the same De Monroy we find that P. P. Floriani arrived in Algiers from Rome, looking for his brother known to be in prison. Not having found him, Pietro Paolo needs to go back home. But it's the middle of winter and there is no means of going to Majorca. Pietro has to wait till 21 December finally getting

an English ship going to Alicante.

Floriani was just 29 at this time. Luckily he doesn't get arrested and there isn't a winter sea storm. The siege of Algiers remains for now only an idea.

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### today...

The Floriani family have turned their ancestral home in Montanello, Italy into an Inn. The home is situated some 300 metres above sea level, 20 km from the Adriatic sea and 20 km from the Sibillini mountains. It is a good starting point for trippers and hikers to reach the main cultural and tourist centres of the Marche.

This is 'agriturismo' at its best where guests are able to taste healthy seasonal cooking, based on old recipes. Since hunting in the surrounding woods has been forbidden for many years, guests will be able to see a great many animals which are either living in the park or simply passing through it.

Tel: 0733-492267/347-1432970 or e-mail [agriturismo@florianicompagnoni.it](mailto:agriturismo@florianicompagnoni.it). There is also a website [www.florianicompagnoni.it](http://www.florianicompagnoni.it)



As a result of this fever he would convalesce in Madrid for a whole year, *amorevolmente* looked after by his host Giovanni De' Medici.

In May 1613, Floriani, still in Madrid and finally better, requests the King of Spain Philip III of Augsburg to despatch him to the Indies as a military architect. Instead, he

is sent to Algiers for a very difficult and dangerous mission. Pietro has to sail to Algiers and report back about the fortifications, military organizations there – and preparations for war.

He has to reach Valencia and from there find a way to get to the island of Majorca from where two frigates are bound for Algiers under the mantle of night.

On 18 September 1614, Pietro duly leaves for Valencia, where he aimlessly waits for two months for a ship going to Majorca. He eventually meets a tradesman going to Algiers who invites him onto his ship.

Pietro departs armed with a vague presentation letter. Though the letter is written by Bernardo De Monroy, redentory monk of the prisoners of the *Ordine della S.S. Trinità della Provincia di Castille* he does not sign or make any direct reference to Pietro as a precaution in case of capture.