

Portrait of a
Village

Montecarotto
Marche
Italy



John Doogan Photographer



In January 2018 we embarked on a project photographing and interviewing a cross-section of residents of Montecarotto, a small village in the Marche region of Italy. Montecarotto is typical of hundreds of small villages across Italy, with a long history and strong traditions.

We were curious to know how the residents felt about the past, the present, and the future of their village.

This book is the result of the generosity and openness of the people of Montecarotto.

*John and Jacqui Doogan
Christchurch, New Zealand*



Montecarotto, Marche, Italy

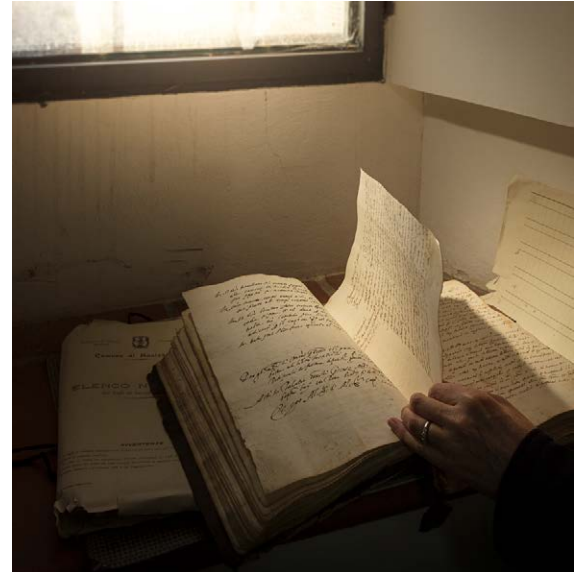
Population: < 2000

Height above sea level: 388 m

Distance from Rome: 250 km; Florence: 250 km; Milan: 420 km







Mirco Brega

I have been the mayor of Montecarotto since 2009. I was born in 1973 and currently live in Senigallia, as my partner's family is there.

Living in Montecarotto is a choice of life. A peaceful place, where everyone knows each other, and in which human relationships are valued. It is an ideal place to raise children or to grow old. The presence of all essential services, including schools for children aged 3-14 years right through to the home for the elderly; as well as the central position in the country (20 minutes from the highway, the airport, the port and the regional capital, 250 km from Rome and 250 km from Bologna) ensures a high quality of life; far from the worries of personal security and the chaos that affects those who live in the city.

There is no lack of job opportunities. There are five important industrial companies: the largest wine production co-operative in the region; an important co-operative producing shoe soles for the big fashion brands; a company of agricultural machinery and equipment; a manufacturer of springs for industrial plants; and a branch of the world's largest producer of oil-extracting machines, specifically for olive oil and sunflower oil.

There is also the possibility of working from home via the internet; and there are new jobs being created in tourism, organic agriculture, and culture. The numerous churches with fine works of art, civic tower, mail art museum (with an installation of the history of tower clocks under construction), one of the most beautiful theatres in the area, the quaint historical centre, craft shops, agro-food production, as well as the wonderful valleys of Misa and Esino, all afford economic opportunities.

We must see new opportunities for life in this small village of about 2,000 souls. There are values to rediscover: people here can come out to meet neighbours, play cards, talk, or enjoy the various public parks and sports facilities (two football fields, a municipal gym, a public park with gymnastic equipment, and a nature park for longer walks). All these facilities occur without stress, without traffic, without smog and pollution, in complete safety: rediscovering human values that western society seems to have lost.

At times in our history, Montecarotto was a land of emigration. From the end of the nineteenth century until 1920, one third of the population emigrated to Argentina. There are historical documents concerning this phase of our history. After World War II there was another period of migration; however, many of those who went in search of greater fortune (among them my parents who emigrated to Milan for some years) came back with the idea of creating economic opportunity in their land of origin. They used the money earned elsewhere to buy houses and build the first local industries.

This beautiful place, Montecarotto, is rich in history and has a strong future ahead.



Luigi Gagliardini

I was born in nearby Cupramontana and still live there. My father worked with wine. I worked in other wineries in the area, and studied business in Finland.

I am the Export Sales Director of the wine co-operative Moncaro, whose wines are exported to more than 50 countries. The co-operative sets standards for cultivation, guarantees to pay the best price for the grapes, takes the entire crop, produces the wine, markets and sells it.

Moncaro was founded in 1964, with the first harvest in 1971. There were nine founding members. In those days it was a revolutionary idea to have a co-operative, and the group was looking for farmers as partners. Nowadays, with about 850 members, joining the co-operative is a source of pride.

Moncaro owns another co-operative, La Moderna, whose employees work the vineyards. If a farmer chooses not to manage his vineyard, he can pay La Moderna to do it. In this case the farmer is paid for the grapes, less the cost of harvesting and processing.

In this way Moncaro can guarantee that agricultural workers are not exploited and receive a fair wage. Being socially responsible is a selling point for the wines, as well as a moral principle to be followed.

We produce Verdicchio DOC, Rosso Conero and Rosso Piceno. We also produce Sparkling Verdicchio. In fact, the verdicchio grapes are excellent for the sparkling wine, as they have the flavour longevity needed for the years of maturation. Although it is said that sparkling wine was invented in France around 1670, there is a book written in the early 1600s by Francesco Scacchi, a Fabriano physician, in which the sparkling wine produced in the Marche is mentioned: 50 years before Dom Perignon.

Marche is a hidden gem, that is still authentic.



Carlo Carotti, founding member of Moncaro, with Luigi Gagliardini





Carlo and Anna Carotti

I was born in Montecarotto in 1933 and Anna was born in Ravenna in 1941.

I studied agriculture in the Agricultural Technical Institute of Fabriano and then at the University of Perugia. I worked first as a teacher at the State Professional Institute of Agriculture in Avezzano (Aquila) and then at the Istituto Professionale Agrario di Monteroberto (Jesi). I have always had a passion for agriculture and in particular for the wine sector.

In 1960 I returned to the Marche to be closer to my parents. In 1962 I got married; and since 1983 I live permanently in Montecarotto, together with my family, in the house inherited from my maternal grandfather.

From the past I remember the clear separation that existed in Montecarotto between the rich landowners, and the majority of the predominantly peasant population. In the Marche, as in other regions of central Italy, the most widespread form of land management was sharecropping. This contract stipulated that owners and sharecroppers would join together for the cultivation of land, initially dividing the profits in half. The size of the shareholdings, and type of cultivation, did not always guarantee the sustenance of the large peasant families of the time. Moreover, the owners often resided elsewhere and the croppers referred to administrators appointed by the landowners. Many farmhouses were without toilets, with water drawn from wells, often far from the houses.

For all these reasons many sharecroppers emigrated to the industrial cities in Italy and abroad, with a mass exodus in the 1950s and 1960s.

This exodus from the countryside was large enough to reduce labour in agriculture and lower the value of land. Many owners sold their land to former sharecroppers who became direct farmers. Today, with incentives, we believe that parts of the land that still lie abandoned can be reused. Young people who are attracted to agriculture must be able to afford to buy a piece of land. There is demand for high quality olive oil, wines, organic products, wheat. If young people could be helped with the purchase of land, there would be people ready and motivated to work in the fields.

In our area the precious culture was, and still is, the vine although, with many small holdings, it was difficult to guarantee prices and develop marketing. Price and marketing were two main objectives proposed by the founders of the Moncaro co-operative: a co-operative winery of verdicchio producers. The beginnings were difficult, as the large wine cellars did not want to lose their monopoly over the price of grapes. They were obstructive. However, the founding members were determined and, little by little, promoted the new mentality of a collective approach. From 1964 to today, Moncaro has promoted social and economic values. Today, Verdicchio is the most famous white wine of Marche, exported and appreciated in many countries of the world. As it leaves our regional borders, the spirit of sacrifice of the early peasant population goes with it.





This photograph from 1945 shows how many worked together on the shareholdings. The children have shaved heads because of lice and they are not wearing shoes. Hygiene as we know it today did not exist; and water in the wells was not always clean and safe to drink.





Roberto Solfanelli

I was born in 1955 and have lived in Montecarotto almost my whole life. My father and his father were also from here. I am married with two daughters; and my wife and I help care for my grandson who is 12 years old.

As a volunteer, I show visitors the civic tower, the museum of mail art and, since 2010, I have been the custodian of the municipal theatre. One of the best shows I saw in this theatre was in 2010, when a French director, Juliette Dechamps, starred in *La Servante Maitresse* for the Pergolesi Festival.

The biggest changes I have noticed in my lifetime are family and work. In the last two or three years the population of Montecarotto has fallen below 2000, since the younger ones prefer to live closer to Jesi and in the valleys. I would like the young to return, but there isn't really work for them here.

In order to improve and be able to use existing structures for the purpose of tourism, renovations are planned such as those carried out on the civic tower. However, projects are often limited due to lack of funds. Tourism is important for a small place like ours and that is why I am proud to work as a volunteer.





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Sabrina Sartarelli

I was born in Montecarotto and have lived here all my life. My grandfather was the baker, then my father, mother, and uncle; now my brother, his wife, and me. My father, Tullio, did this work for 65 years and, for him, being a baker was his life.

Everything here is made from scratch. It gives us satisfaction that something is well made from real ingredients and tastes homemade. We prefer to make fewer products. For example, we have only four types of brioche. We prepare the pastry the day before and the fillings are added the next morning. With the crostata we use really good jam with 80% fruit.

Unrefined flour is the flour of long ago, but bread made with it is more digestible and better for you. Producing refined white flour has a negative impact on the environment. The older people recall eating darker, less refined bread as children when many were poor, so they prefer to eat white bread now. We make unrefined products, but not too much as we wouldn't sell it all.

Nowadays, it is necessary to go further afield to sell the bread. There are many elderly people in Montecarotto and many of the younger ones go away to get work.

People buy their bread at supermarkets, so it makes it more difficult for smaller businesses like ours. There is less of a tradition to eat bread, which used to be a staple food. In my father's day he would deliver loaves weighing up to a kilo. Now people want loaves of 200 or even 100 grams.

This work is a great sacrifice. I arrive at 4.30 am, while my brother arrives at 2.30 am. We finish at 1.00 pm. Then, around 4.15 pm, there is the shop in the afternoon. Six days a week. As a child, I was often with my grandmother because both my parents were always working. They had to do everything by hand, without the help of machinery. My mother used to say neither my brother nor I would become bakers, however, this is where we have both ended up. I have two daughters, aged 15 and 10. I am not sure they have the disposition for this type of work, but I would like them to go abroad, to experience and understand other cultures. My hope is that my daughters will go away, then come back here when they want to start a family.

Although our bakery is a little hard to find, our friends tell new people where we are; and visitors follow the smell of fresh bread wafting into the main piazza.



Sandro Merli

I was born in Montecarotto and have lived here all of my life. I am now 64 years old.

Technology, especially the growth of services offered by the media and television, has had a big impact on Montecarotto and on other places similar to ours. Although it has contributed to social and economic development, it has led to a decrease in interpersonal relationships, interrupting the habit of meeting with families and with neighbours to be together, to talk, to exchange experiences and stories.

For many years, Montecarotto has experienced a demographic decline that continues today: in the historic centre over half of the houses are empty, while in nearby Moie and in other places with greater public transport and proximity to the main communication routes, the population is increasing progressively.

There is a strong commitment to volunteering here: Red Cross, Civil Protection, Regional Tourist Office, and other associations that operate in the territory for the common good.

I am a volunteer in the Pro Loco (Regional Tourist Office) and I also help with the management of the mail art museum. I like being useful to our community because I love Montecarotto, with its merits and its faults, and I am convinced that it is worthwhile keeping this country way of life interesting and alive.

I have a 37-year-old son with a daughter, Stella, aged five. They live in Tuscany, where my son and his partner work. They are far from me which is a bit sad, but knowing that they are happy and serene make up for the pain of separation.



Elena Barducci and Alessandro Chiatti

I come from the Emilia Romagna region and my husband, Alessandro Chiatti, was born in Montecarotto. We met through our love of music. He played guitar, I sang in a band, and I came to Montecarotto for a music festival.

We opened Osteria Sotto Le Mura four years ago. The building was abandoned and had been donated to the church, so we rent it from the church of Jesi. We have done all the renovations ourselves. We try to create an experience with local, seasonal food and local wine; and once a week we have a live music show, or poetry, or theatre. It is more like a little brasserie than a restaurant. We offer a limited selection of food and each dish is complete, with lots of little things. I try to source everything from here or close by: lentils, polenta, pecorino, prosciutto, vegetables.

It is really hard to convince people to come to our osteria. Some come from Montecarotto, but most come from other villages. In the first two years we were ready to close. In the last months we are increasing little by little. The winter is more difficult because customers drive here from other places, and some people think Montecarotto is on top of a mountain, not a hill.

We don't earn much because we do everything with passion and love and not only for money. We are also passionate about cultural experiences. Alessandro is the founding member of 13 Degrees East, a cultural association promoting Montecarotto as a stage for music, theatre and cinema.





A performance of the movie Metropolis
organised by the cultural association
13 Degrees East

Father Crayssac Venish

I was born in 1982 in Ooty in Tamil Nadu state, south of India. After high school I entered the seminary for philosophical studies; then came to Italy to deepen my theological studies. I followed the theology courses at the Pontifical Theological Faculty of Southern Italy in Naples then a specialisation in Dogmatic Theology at the Gregorian University of Rome. I was ordained priest in India in 2011. After three years as vice parish priest, in October 2015, I became the parish administrator of St Annunziata, Montecarotto.

The parish church of Montecarotto, rich in art and history, has for centuries been the centre of religious life in the region. The strategic hill position of Montecarotto, between the Esino and Misa rivers, was a religious and civil reference point for all the other small nearby communities. Montecarotto had a baptismal font, so all the families had to come here for their children to be baptised. The first historical notes of the church of Montecarotto, which has always been dedicated to the Madonna, date back to the 13th century.

The vocational crisis that struck the church inevitably also spread to the country. Currently only one priest is called to provide for parish life. I try to integrate into the social fabric with the mastery of the language; and, with the power of faith, I try to help strengthen the lively religious life flourishing around the parish church.









Paolo Febo

I have lived in Montecarotto all my life, and teach secondary school physics in a city nearby.

Montecarotto is a place of artisans. In the 1800s it established a tradition of artisan clocks, particularly clocks in city towers. Those working the land relied on the clock's chimes to tell the time. Work hours, religious events, and civil matters, were all transmitted via the bells.

At Montecarotto a school for clock makers was founded in 1830, led by Pietro Mei. The Montecarotto tower clock was made by him in 1849 and has operated continuously since then. It has Montecarotto written on the wheel, with the number 22, indicating this was Mei's 22nd clock. It is wound by hand once every 24 hours and is the only Pietro Mei tower clock that is not automated.





Giordano Febi

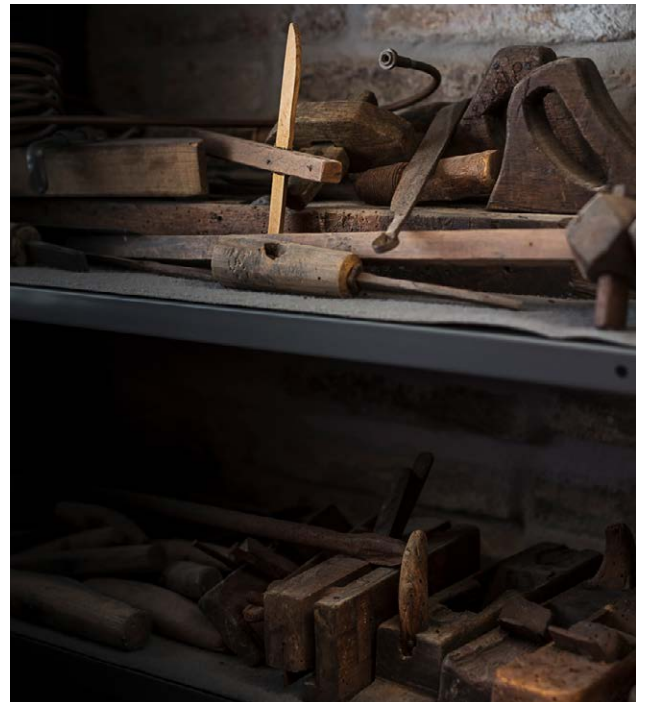
I was born in Montecarotto in 1954 and, except for one year as a young child, I have lived here all my life. Before retiring I was the undertaker.

Although my daughter, her husband and my granddaughter live here now, my son-in-law works in Padua: a journey of three and a half hours, and so, for parts of the week, he lives in Padua. My daughter works in Fabriano which is 40 minutes' drive away. When both her parents are away at work, my wife and I enjoy looking after our granddaughter Amelia.

I like to collect objects and tools from the past that were used by artisans working with wood, or oil, or wine.

Montecarotto is a tiny place; and the young go away to study and to work. Many prefer to live close to where they work and where there is more for them to do.

I hope that my granddaughter will continue to live here in the future.





Marta Giovannetti

I am a PhD marketing student, currently working on a thesis about consumer behaviour. Although I am interested in classics and the arts, I decided to study economics because I like being able to use mathematics as a tool to describe phenomena.

I am a member of the cultural association 13 Degrees East and organise events for the community. There are just a few of us here in Montecarotto; so it is important that people come out from their homes and connect with others. People like to stop and chat in Montecarotto, but it is always the same people who do it. It is important to continue these relationships and create a sense of team. It is also important to work together at the regional level and regain a sense of community; as by caring about our region, we care about each other.

My roots are fundamental to me. My family has lived in Montecarotto for 2-3 generations and I have always lived here. I feel a strong connection with my hometown. Being curious and adventurous, I think the perfect description of me is a woman with her feet on the ground and her head in the clouds. Montecarotto is a wonderful place to live, and I hope the younger generations will realise and appreciate its magic; and continue living here, fulfilling their dreams and contributing to the community. I believe in the potential of this place and, although I can't be sure I will always live here, I am sure that I will come back.



Like hundreds of other small towns in Italy, Montecarotto is at a crossroads between the past and the future: between traditions worth keeping and the lure of the big cities that drain the small places of inhabitants.

Photographing and interviewing we found many positive aspects: in particular, all spoke with conviction of the many advantages of living in a small town and their determination to endure.

Our hope is that small towns like Montecarotto will adapt for the future, while retaining their unique characteristics, their traditions and their connection to history.

This project bears witness to our love for this beautiful place, Montecarotto, and our affection for its inhabitants.

John and Jacqui Doogan, February 2018



JOHN DOOGAN
photographer

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