

Downtown Downtown

STORY *by* ANDREA PETRINI
PHOTOGRAPHY *by* CHRISTOPHE URBAIN





“Lyon was the right place to start. We found this Italian snack bar for sale and we opened, counting only on our own strengths.”

Renvoi d'ascenseur. In French this means to return a favour. Credit where credit's due. That's why, before we start on the personal details of this article's subject – Guillaume Monjuré – we need to pay tribute to Georges Dos Santos. Who better than this Portuguese sommelier – free electron of the Lyonnaise world, the star performer of the best wine bar in the world, Georges Five, and now the showman at Only Georges – to introduce this moustached and timid youngster?

While you sneak a peek at his fine profile on these pages it should be said, or rather written black on white, that one winter's night, a traveller lost on Lyon's foggy streets was alerted to him by the hyper-excited tones of Georges Dos Santos on the other end of the phone. “Stop complaining that eating in Lyon is like a kick in the balls. I went to a place last night that opened not two weeks ago. I won't tell you anything, you'll like it. Go straight away if you don't want to get stuck on the waiting list. In its own little way, it will make a splash.”

Place aside all prejudices and reckless inference: yes, it is a small restaurant with a maximum of 50 covers between lunch and dinner, with a lone helmsman in his little kitchen while Chrystel animates the hearth in the dining room. Don't think however that this is just the latest late night neo-bistrot that are everywhere these days. We also have another eyewitness on the stand: Magnus Nilsson, Viking in Järpen, above all suspicion in the extreme north of Sweden, who asked me in August 2012, “Do you

know that tomorrow evening I have a chef who comes from Lyon at dinner? Have you heard of Palégrié?”

There are those who leave for holidays in Capalbo. There are those who still take charter planes for Spain, and arrive a little late. And there are those who consecrate their Sundays with trips that are part of the most romantic formation. If the 33 year-old chef Guillaume Monjuré had stayed in Marrakesh at the La Mamounia hotel under his patron Jean-Pierre Vigato, we perhaps wouldn't have heard any more of him. The Socratic Parisian mentor from Apicius wanted to make him a knight, but Guillaume was interested in teaming up with Don Alfonso Iaccarino (“at La Mamoumia I was in charge of the French restaurant and Iaccarino was in charge of the Italian one. He was a real gentleman, a noble soul who taught me a lot about culinary humanism, even if he hasn't come to see me as he promised”) but life had other ideas.

I found him in Lyon instead, with a yearning for independence, following the call of the forest. Both originally from the *Rhône-Alpine* region, every Sunday Guillaume and Chrystel, the lady of his life, take the mountainous roads of Vercors and Chartreuse. Interior peace just a short distance from the city. “Vigato wanted us to open with him in Paris to give us a head start. But Lyon was the right place to start. We found this Italian snack bar for sale called Niente di più, and without doing much work on it we opened, counting only on our own strengths.”

Attention! *This is a counter-current success story.* When I first went there, around the end of December 2011,

the formula was already a winning one. And now here is Guillaume, a famous nobody, ready to ride, despite the tiger of notoriety. From Fooding to Gault-Millau, it's only a Michelin star that's missing in the accolades for Palégré – the name a contraction of the street address near Palais Grillet that also evokes an image of a Palais Grillé – a grilled and burnt palace – as it thrives in an economy of sufficiency.

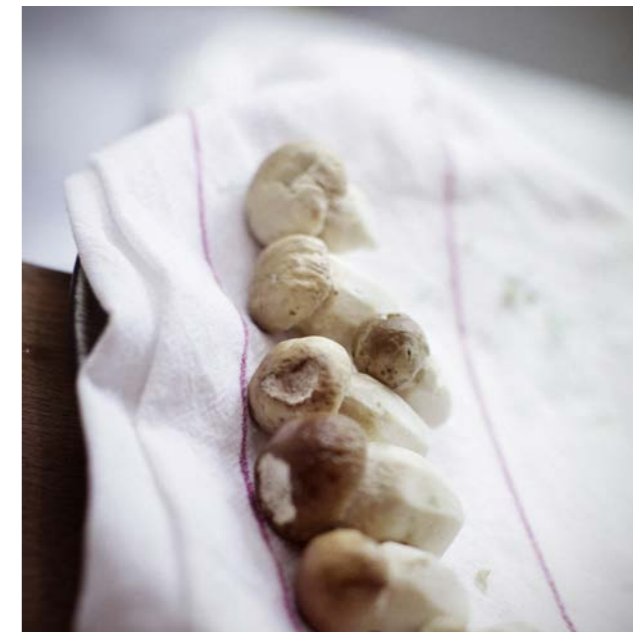
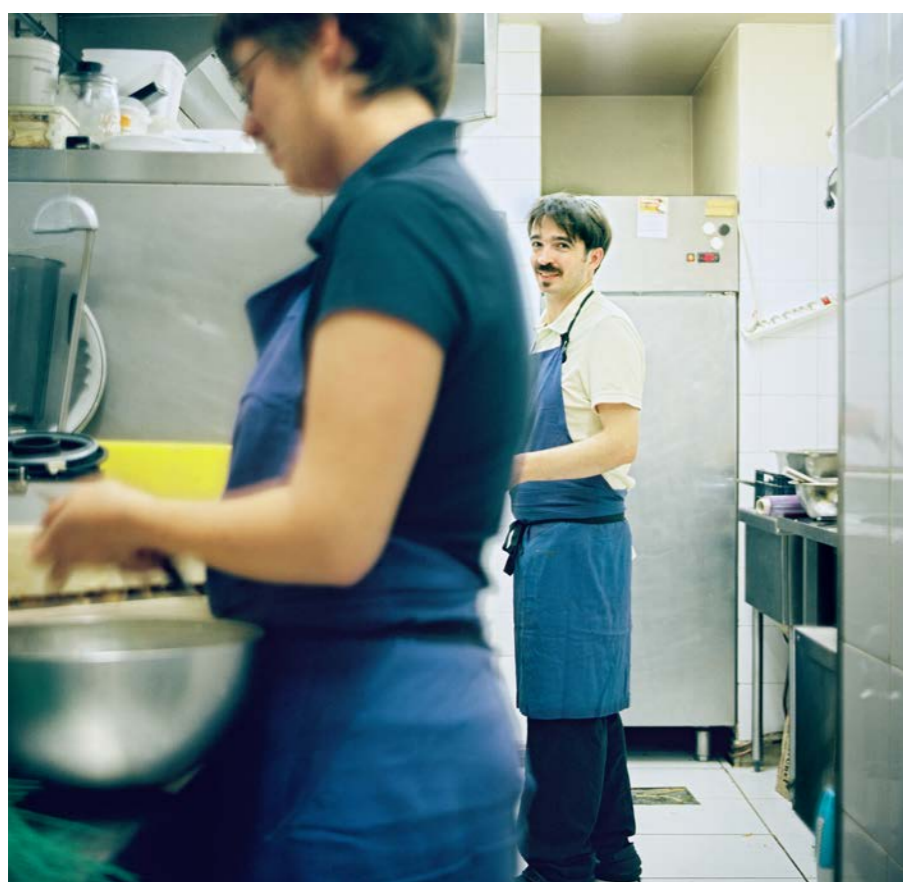
Around 20 covers, the modest pass at the end of the entry hall, a long wooden table that acts as the *maison d'hôtes* with a menu that changes every day like in a home. In the evening, with the blank page formula, it's full throttle for the lone helmsman, a generational stronghold as Lyon suddenly finds a taste for fresh air.

"It's not an easy city, but for us it's gone really well. It's squashed between old institutions and traditional tourism and for years it seemed like there was only space in Lyon for the *bouchon*. But there is actually room for simple spaces where personal research only adds to the pleasure of the client. We are still just a few black sheep, all different, but that's why we help each other." That's also why we see the Joker again, Georges Dos Santos, the Flying Sommelier who detests so-called natural wines, teaming up with Chrystel and Guillaume as they

negotiate carefully with the dealers of hard-to-find wines. Better than a historical contract, the entrepreneurial Portuguese invites them to themed evenings "announced on the Internet and Facebook, open to all but only for around twenty participants. People pay up front 50 to 350 euros depending on which wines the winemaker is coughing up". Dos Santos is keeping the Monjurés close to his chest. It's not as if they are running away however; the routine of improvisation is their daily bread.

When the truck of their faithful forager arrives on Monday morning with the just-picked herbs and mushrooms, Chrystel, with Guillaume looking out from the pass, sits down at the computer to dictate the laconic *intitulés* for a menu made up on the spur of the moment. "We can't do the fricassée of prataioli mushrooms with olives, prawns and pumpkin seeds that you ate with Bob Noto, not even for the photos. It's a dish from last month that has already passed, already forgotten," says Chrystel, who knows well how her companion operates. She promises to ask her virtual assistant Siri to write down all the mycological denominations that will be present in his impromptu dishes today.

The pompous hierarchy of classifications would be sure to place the





Palégnrié couple in the category of those venues that are still only known as neo-bistrot. Let's leave the blindfolds to the blind. The two prove that in Lyon, between Septime and Chateaubriand ("we also love Jérôme Bigot of Les Grès who does those marvellous things at Lindry"), and between the Seine and the Saône, there are a lot of things in common. The same sensation of food without fussiness, reduced to its most intense expression, all the difficulty in simplicity exposed as the horizon to follow. Note well: Guillaume does not complain any more about the forced solitude ("I have recently acquired a girl, an ex-client who has decided to change her life, rolling up her shirt-sleeves with me in the kitchen"). This is the state that lets the imagination run free. Feeling apart but also part of that movement of people, without passwords or rigid socialist



dictates, that seeks a balance between the animal and the vegetable.

Not seen as emerging for nothing, Monjuré seems to be growing exponentially. He immediately grasps intensities that were just intuitions, and revisits previous themes ("I have the whole repertory of menus in the computer") remixing ideas and developing – on the razor and season's edge – a reflection on freshness where the raw and the cooked go hand in hand. Together with the smoked lobster that follows the trout *bigné* with dill, he digs out mushrooms from a basket and dusts them off. The *Sparassis crispa*, that almost seem like morels, are precisely timed, joined by shallots and a drop of cream, then served with an egg yolk and bread chips. There is just time to wipe the plate clean as, with the last mouthful, the not very religious realisation comes upon me that this is a re-visitation of the collective memory of a carbonara.



Everybody says that Lyon is an Italian city, just as between Bologna and Turin there is a more Savoy than Renaissance air. Philip Kaufman chose the Rhône-Alpine city in 1988 as the set for Prague in the *Unbearable Lightness of Being*, based on the book by Milan Kundera with Daniel Day Lewis and Juliette Binoche in the roles of the cursed lovers.

But the best Italophile talent here is Guillaume from the Palégnrié. Take his line-caught hake. It's a well-cooked fish in a spicy tomato sauce. The tomatoes are among the last seasonal fruit of Jean-Luc, the gardener poet and personal supplier for this dish that Monjuré doesn't hesitate to call "8.30: a ray of sunlight". When summer draws to a close and autumn turns leaves golden brown, harmony, as in the *Abandoned Cities* electronic composition of Harold Budd, is torn from melancholy. Irony (consistent if unwitting) is never far. A splendid



sheet of lasagna, almost a work of art you want to frame, pressed through with leaves, herbs and aromatic plants (fennel, tarragon, purple basil, chervil, chives and deer horn) and spread out like a holy shroud, envelops the marbled bulk of the hake. It's a dish that appears effortless, but it was the result of long reflection, from Marchesi to the Cremaster Cycle of Matthew Barney.

Times have changed. There's been a lot of water under the bridge. There are those that still live for stars, and there are those who deal with the real world. "We never expected such a warm welcome. The first day the restaurant was open, it was half-empty, but two days later, on the eve of the first week, there was not a single table left. It has been like that for two years now, packed to the rafters, without a moment to breathe. The only thing missing is the Full House label fixed on the entrance all year to discourage the careless roamer.

Not everyone knows that the Monjurés, while they practice the rational green theory of local produce ("what we don't gather on our days off we get from a host of producers, who are all within a few dozen kilometres of Lyon"), also do so as hunters, from the razor clams and salsify with lemon to the white squid crumbed like a schnitzel with a caper sauce on the side. They adore returning from the forest, when feathered- or furred- hare, venison and partridge (with translucent onion leaves and spelt to recall that country yearning) dialogue with even more decisive flavours. The menu closes as it begins with earthy notes, from the poetic salsify (smoked scorzobianca) cooked in an obviously vegetable broth ("they are the first of the season, still an unusual sweetness") served with raw porcini mushrooms and a cream of tuberous chervil with white borage leaves, an invitation to walk in the forest amongst dead leaves and life returning.

"Without nature nearby we would never have come to Lyon," say the two, who no longer struggle to fill the place ("in a few years we hope to have



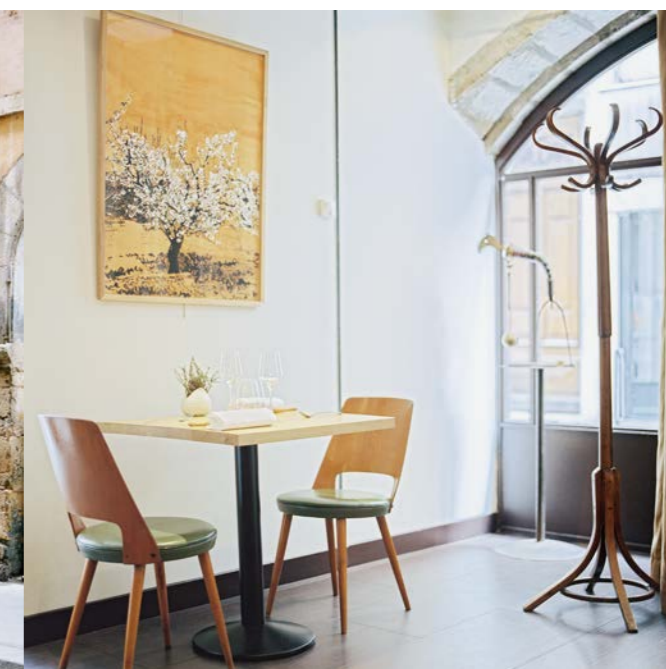
a faithful clientele near a mountain with maybe a few rooms to rent"), if anything their mission is to not delude the already converted. Note to the interested: in the evening the Monjurés always leave a table free for friends or clients who rightly complain if they say they're fully booked. But that's not all. "We closed at the end of October to renovate and we put a table for two next to the pass. There will be no menu there, just Guillaume talking to the two lucky diners. Also for the wine, I'll be pulling out some bottles off the list. It will be a kitchen table in the dining room, for an alternative tasting experience." But do not fear: they will not be placing the table up for auction to the highest bidder.

Eating at Palégré is not an expensive exercise; about forty euros for five or six dishes. If anything, given that the two spend most of their time between home and work ("apart from the weekend when we don hiking boots for the mountains, our only outings are taking the dogs out for a walk between services") the hard thing will be continuing to see friends and family.

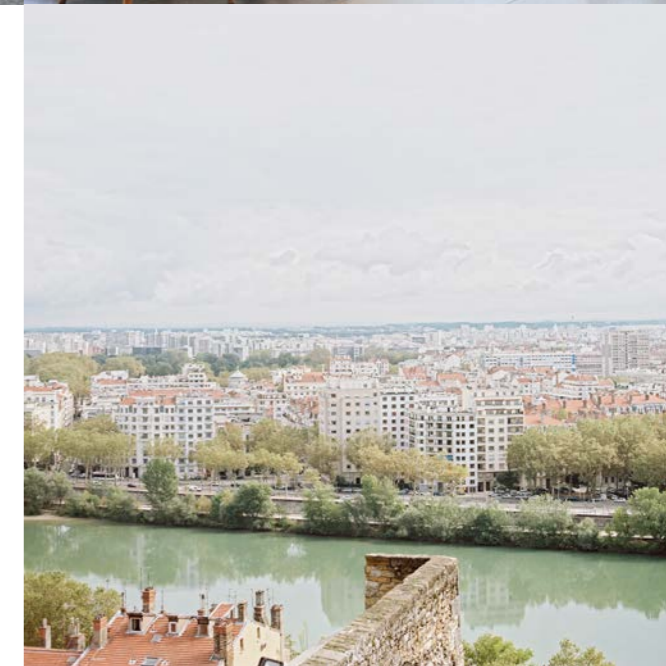
Lyon is not like the never-sleeping New York. For those that go out late,

or come from the opera, the cinema or theatre next door, there is an end-of-evening formula: 25 euros all inclusive. "Every end of the evening, instead of doing a second sitting, we take out everything that's left – eggs, meat, fish and vegetables. We empty the fridge for whoever is here. The dishes are the same, or almost; we put everything on the table and they serve themselves, apart from the wine that is left over. It's without frills." It's a good way for the younger generations to get introduced to the world of gastronomy and it has also earned them an entry (they're not stupid, these two) in the next pharaonic edition of Joe Warwick's opus *Where Chefs Eat*.

Watch out after-hours, however. If those other than Mathieu Rostaing-Tayard, on his return from Canada and after his own place, Georges Dos Santos, semi-unemployed since he closed his wine bar, or chefs like Davide Scabin, coming out of Paul Bocuse's Restaurant, should discover it, the idea of a *vie de famille* for Guillaume and Chrystel will be definitively and irrevocably a pale, far-off and poignant memory.



“Emerging for nothing, Monjuré seems to be growing exponentially. He immediately grasps intensities that were just intuitions. revisits previous themes. Remixing ideas.”



Palégré

8 Rue Palais Grillet
69002 Lyon
Francia
Tel: +33 4 78 92 94 84
www.palegrie.fr

The menu needs to be prepared this morning. It's 6.30 am and outside my window it's raining.

1st antipasto

Smoked scorzobianca mushroom. bulbous chervil, porcini shavings

Out come the porcini. We'll cut them in thin slices, the scorzobianca smoked with country straw and the bulbous chervil cooked in milk to make a cream.

The first leaves fall. We'll make chips from tubers, a few drops of grilled rapeseed oil and borrago flowers complete this first antipasto.



GUILLAUME MONJURÉ

2nd antipasto

Sparassis crispa, Colonnata lard, naturally proofed bread

At 7.45 am it's still raining.

I ordered some Sparassis crispa that will be cleaned carefully and cooked in cream with chopped shallot and garlic, following the idea of a carbonara.

I'll finish the dish with a thin veil of Colonnata lard, an egg yolk and bread chips.





3rd fish

Line-fished hake, passed in a tomato water, the last tomatoes from Jean-Luc, translucent pasta with herbs

8.30 am a ray of sun

The last tomatoes from Jean-Luc will be just seasoned, the hake cooked in a juice of peppered tomatoes and then covered with the fresh pasta rolled to translucency with herbs in it (500g of eggs to 500g of flour, a tablespoon of olive oil and herbs).





4th meat

First grey partridge of the season, grilled onions, spelt

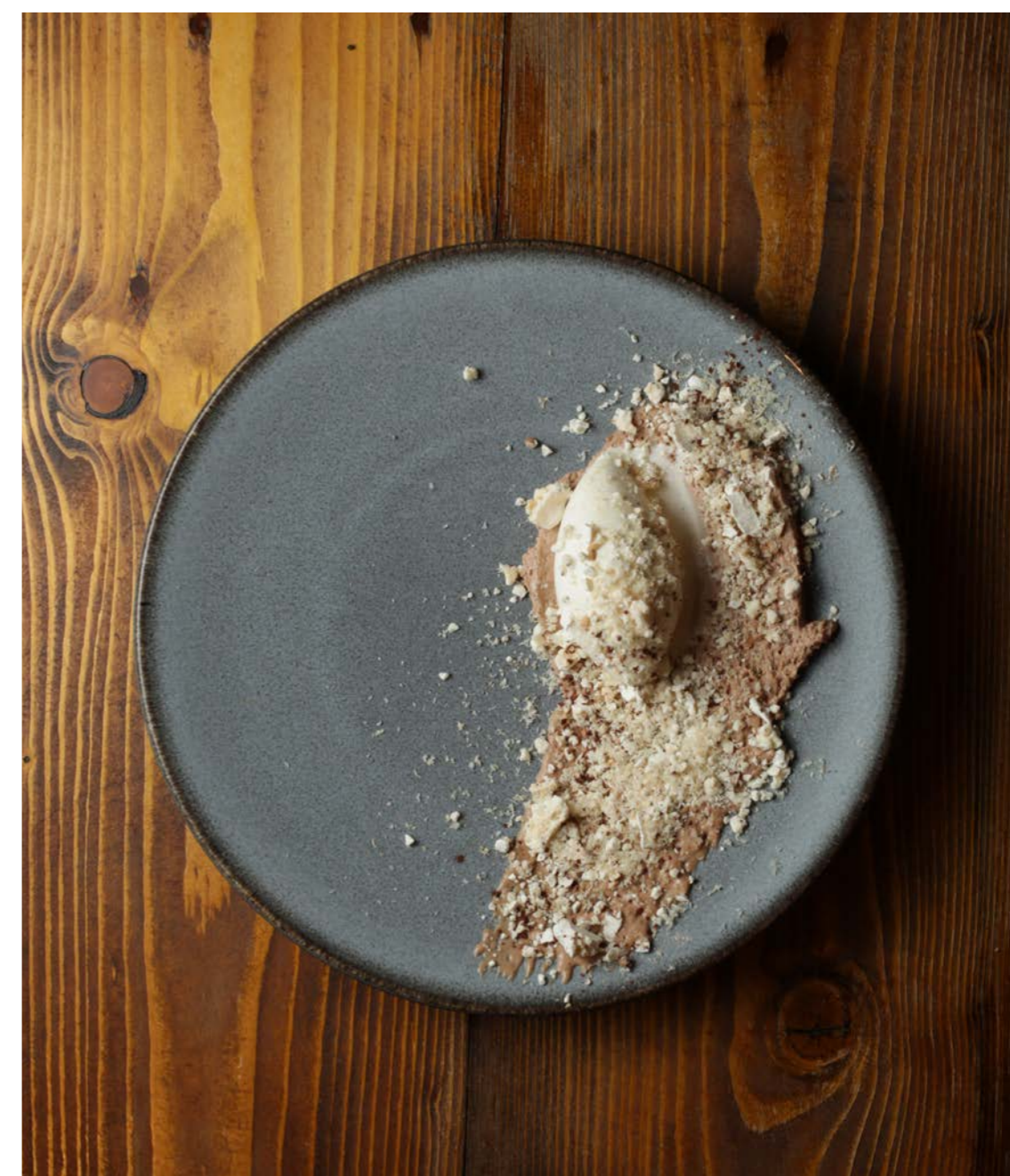
The hunt is open and I've had the first grey partridges in the fridge for 15 days. They'll just be simply grilled with a neck full of grain.

The side dish will be a spelt prepared like a risotto, onions and leeks on the griddle and a sauce to complete the dish.

1st dessert The Milky Way, one September evening

9.30 am and it's raining again. Chrystel will shortly put the menu online.

This evening we'll have the Milky Way: milk chocolate mousse (durum wheat ice cream, 800g milk, 500g cream, 12 egg yolks, 300g sugar, a handful of toasted durum wheat). Linseed meringue, with nut and cocoa crunch.



GUILLAUME MONJURÉ



2nd dessert
Vineyard peaches, candied capers

10 am I drink a coffee looking out the window. I remember an evening last summer at Chateaubriand: cherries and capers to complete an elegant meal. For me, tonight, vineyard peaches and candied capers. It's 10.30 and the menu is online, all the ordered produce has arrived and more will still arrive. From here until tonight, how many things could still change...

34ESIMAEDIZIONE

EMMEDEADV



TIRRENO CT OSPITALITA' ITALIA

Complesso fieristico di Carrara
dal 23 al 27 febbraio 2014

Attrezzature e forniture per
Alberghi, Ristoranti, Bar, Gelaterie, Pasticcerie, Panifici
Pizzerie, Pub, Comunità, Strutture ricettive

orari 23/26 febbraio: 10:00 - 19:00 27 febbraio: 10:00 - 17:00

Tirreno Trade s.r.l.
Organizzazione fiere

Centro Direzionale Olidor
54100 Massa (MS) Via Dorsale, 9
scala 9/c int. 29
Tel. 0585 791770 | Fax 0585.791781
Partita IVA 00652730468
www.tirrenoct.it | info@tirrenotrade.it



Regione Toscana | Comune di Carrara | Comune di Massa
Provincia di MassaCarrara | A.P.T. MassaCarrara
C.C.I.A.A. MassaCarrara | C.N.A. MassaCarrara
Assoturismo | Confesercenti | Ascom | Confcommercio
Assipan | Confturismo | CRC Carrara