

LUXURY WITHOUT COMPROMISE

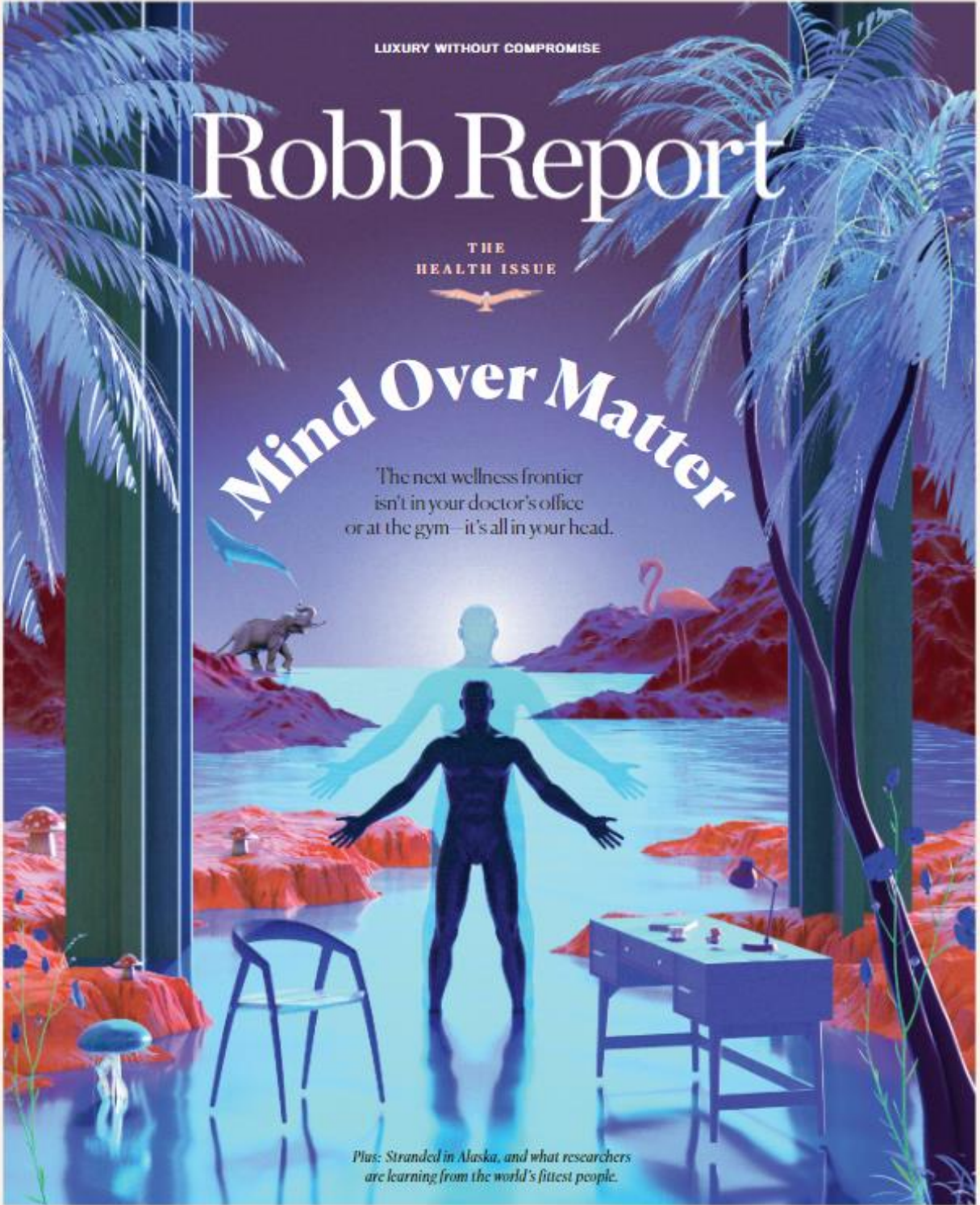
# Robb Report

THE  
HEALTH ISSUE



## Mind Over Matter

The next wellness frontier  
isn't in your doctor's office  
or at the gym—it's all in your head.



*Plus: Stranded in Alaska, and what researchers  
are learning from the world's fittest people.*

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## Andrew McCarthy



**Y**ou'd think that after many years of traveling the globe as both a successful actor (*Pretty in Pink*, *St. Elmo's Fire*) and editor at large for *National Geographic Traveler* and contributor to *Men's Journal*, *The New York Times* and others, McCarthy might be hard to impress. But he found himself pushed to the limit during his stay at the Ranch's new outpost in Italy, which he wrote about for this issue ("Malibu Meets Italia," p. 94). "I never thought I'd get used to being a little (and sometimes very) hungry all the time," he says. "But I eventually found it a positive state, adding to mental sharpness and creativity." ■

## MALIBU MEETS ITALIA

The trail gains elevation over exposed roots between moss-covered limestone. Sun dapples the way through oak and beech trees. In a high meadow, a small blue butterfly flutters between yellow and white and purple wildflowers. A faint breeze cools my hot skin. All is well, very well. Except I'm hungry.

I've come to Italy to hike, eat good food, perhaps engage in some reflection while being pampered, and—incongruously enough for an Italian vacation—maybe lose a few pounds.

For more than a decade, the Ranch in Malibu, Calif., has been dedicated to reconnecting its guests to themselves and nature in equal measure. With a regime of four-hour daily hikes, exercise classes, massage, yoga and a plant-based diet, folks leave tuned up and slimmed down. And now the Ranch is branching out. To Italy. (A third Ranch is set to open in New York's Hudson Valley next year.) While the mothership exists in a world of its own on an expansive, self-contained campus perched above the Pacific, the Italian version embeds itself in the 102-room Palazzo Fiuggi, a 50-minute drive from Rome in this eponymous hill town known for its restorative springs.

I'm met by Eduardo, Quick with a knowing nod, he embodies the hotel's conspicuous mix of opulence and silently understood need for discretion. "We at the hotel cater largely to a Russian trade," he purrs. "At least we did, until the war." My well-resourced room faces the old quarter of Fiuggi—houses tumble down the hill outside my window. "Enjoy the Ranch experience, and if there's *anything* we at the hotel can do ..." Eduardo almost bows.



*The Ranch's signature activity is a four-hour morning hike. Here, a picturesque stop in the Apennine Mountains. (TYSON SADLO)*



Down in the Ranch's corner of the palazzo, I find Americans, Europeans, a few Canadians and a contingent of Saudis gathered. Several are Ranch Malibu veterans (the spa boasts a more than 50 percent return rate). Over the next week, the 23 of us will eat three meals a day, hike and take classes together. My dread of such enforced intimacy is quickly diffused as those seeking their own space are left to drift, while the more sociable gravitate—each posture equally welcome. An avid hiker and lover of Italy, but neither a “spa junkie” nor a vegetarian, I enter the week with cautious optimism.

The focal point of the day is the morning hike. After a 6 am stretch class, followed by a petite bowl of homemade granola and almond milk, we're on the trail. It helps that the Ranch has the Apennine Mountains over which to tramp. Each morning a different route takes us through beech forests to high lookouts with names such as Porta del Paradiso, or over Roman bridges and along the banks of the Fiume Aniene, or down the ancient Cammino di San Benedetto pilgrimage path, before we're handed cool, lavender-infused towels to whisk away that Italian perspiration.

While the cross-cultural experience occasionally strains to fit, as when New Age phrases perhaps better suited to the Southern California DNA are imposed on an Italian sensibility, the program works best when room is made for both the Ranch's trademark mindful, health-conscious precision and the Italian dedication to la dolce vita. The green minestrone soup tastes as satisfying as it does clean, and the beetroot-filled buckwheat ravioli are as flavorful as light.

It takes me all week to make it through the palazzo's three swimming pools, salt room (when I ask, I'm told it's for treating inflammation), infrared sauna (for yet more inflammation), steam room and dry sauna, multiple plunge pools, hydrotherapy and Thalasso pools, without time to even consider the scores of personal services on offer at the spa apart from my daily afternoon massage.

After dinner on my final evening, I slip out the gates of the palazzo, down the hill and into town. The Italians are chatting on the street and sipping digestifs at outdoor cafés under cypress trees while children orbit. An accordion plays somewhere. At a belle époque restaurant, its doors thrown open to the night, I yield to temptation and indulge in the best gelato of my life before climbing back up the hill, feeling only marginally like a tipsy teen sneaking in after curfew.

The sensation of cultural whiplash brought on by the peculiar hybrid of Southern California mindful-health-chic set amid laissez-faire Italian hill-town culture, while being swaddled in Russian-flavored indulgence, never quite sub-sides, but the Ranch Italy delivers on its promise. Most guests lose between 3 and 6 percent of their body weight during a week's stay, and I walk away at the end of mine five pounds lighter. Try saying that about any other trip to Italy. *From \$9,100 per person for one week* **Andrew McCarthy**