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Political scandal goes hand in hand with monumental clean-ups and a papal charm offensive.

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Rome Today

Recent events have left Rome shaken and angry. In late 2014 the city was shocked to the core as details emerged of deep-rooted corruption in city hall and links to organised crime. This, coming after a year of spending cuts and economic uncertainty, was a bitter pill for the city's already weary residents to swallow. On the plus side, restoration work concluded on several high-profile monuments, and Pope Francis continues to win over fans in the Vatican.

Best on Film

La grande bellezza (The Great Beauty; 2013) Paolo Sorrentino's Fellini-esque homage to the Eternal City.

Roma Città Aperta (Rome Open City; 1945) A neo-realist study of desperation in Nazi-occupied Rome.

Dear Diary (1994) Cult director Nanni Moretti scoots around a semideserted Rome.

The Talented Mr Ripley (1999) Murderous intrigue on Piazza di Spagna and in other Italian locations.

Best in Print

The Secrets of Rome: Love & Death in the Eternal City (Corrado Augias; 2007) Journalist Augias muses on little-known historical episodes.

Roman Tales (Alberto Moravia; 1954) Short stories set in Rome's poorest neighbourhoods.

Rome (Robert Hughes; 2012) A personal portrait of the city by the straight-talking Australian art critic.

Michelangelo & the Pope's Ceiling (Ross King; 2003) Fascinating account of the painting of the Sistine Chapel.

Scandal Rocks the City

Rome is no stranger to controversy but even hardened observers were shocked by the Mafia Capitale scandal that rocked the city in late 2014.

The controversy centred on a criminal gang that had infiltrated city hall and was making millions by milking off funds earmarked for immigration centres and camps for the city's Roma population. Thirty-seven people were arrested and up to 100 politicians and public officials, including former mayor Gianni Alemanno, were placed under police investigation. The Romans, not unused to the colourful behaviour of their elected officials, were appalled and a feeling of genuine outrage swept the city.

The man charged with cleaning up the mess – quite literally in some places as the gang had also muscled in on waste disposal contracts – was mayor Ignazio Marino. A former surgeon who likes to cycle around town, Marino has not had an easy ride since taking over from Alemanno in mid-2013. He has had to deal with the city's parlous finances – Rome narrowly avoided bankruptcy in early 2014 – while also managing local exasperation at the state of degradation and neglect in the city.

He has come under enormous pressure to resign but so far he has resisted, and, in a defiant move to promote the city, he recently backed a bid for Rome to host the 2024 Olympics.

Restoration & Urban Art

Rome's recent economic straits have put an enormous strain on the city's capacity to maintain its historical monuments. But walk around town today and you'll see several high-profile monuments gleaming in the wake of recent makeovers.

Despite the very public nature of these restoration projects, most of them were actually financed by pri-