

Limited Edition
August 2008
C: 15,000

Aug 2008 **Limited Edition**

The magazine for Somerset

£1.50

**The best
local
proms**

Pictures from the
best parties
around the county

**Makeover
magic**

Hot hair, white teeth
and fabulous nails



**Get set
for the
summer**

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smart packing
and stylish
sunglasses

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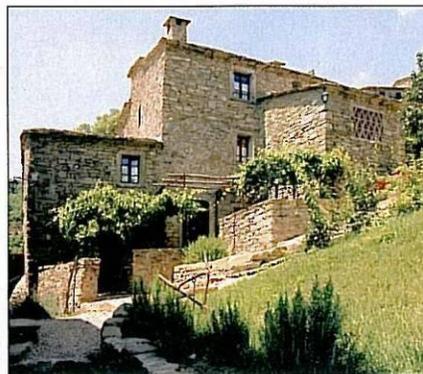
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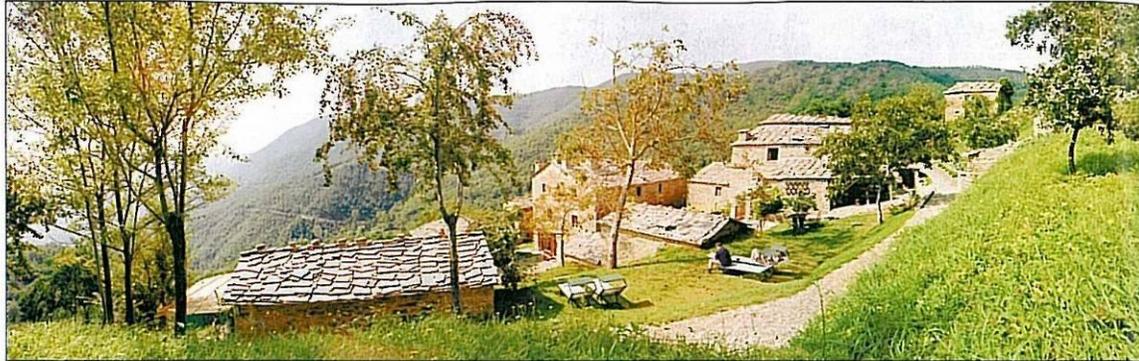
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travel



Restored home just the

Fancy your own place in Tuscany but thought it was beyond your how you could make the dream come true

Tuscany has long been regarded as one of Europe's most desirable holiday destinations. Encompassing Florence and Pisa, it stretches from Italy's Tyrrhenian Sea to the Appennines.

It conjures up images of vineyards, olive groves, rolling countryside dotted with the occasional splash of terracotta and long, lazy days with plentiful supplies of the local red to hand.

Such desirability combined with limited availability has meant Tuscan property prices make central London look reasonable and the dream of owning a holiday home in this part of Italy way beyond most people's reach.

However, the vision of Italian civil engineer and restoration expert, Fulvio di Rosa (*inset*), has meant living the dream just might be possible.

Di Rosa is known for his exquisite restorations. He masterminded the Casa Fonte della Foglie project, the former 13th Century abandoned ruin which has become the home of friend and author of *Under the Tuscan Sun*, Frances Mayes.

His most recent project was the painstaking restoration of a 14th Century hamlet, Borgo di Vagli, 20 minutes away from the medieval town of Cortona.

Realising there was a huge demand from people who loved the thought of owning property in this part of the world but without the necessary spare million plus Euros, he devised a fractional ownership scheme.

Essentially a more upmarket and desirable version of timeshare, and already well established in the States, it is possible to buy a tenth share of a specific

property. He explains: "You get the benefits of a holiday home without the responsibilities and sums associated with year-round maintenance and upkeep." And, as the name suggests, at a fraction of the price.

It is possible to make an advance reservation for up to 21 days but short notice bookings can also be made depending on available space.

Borgo di Vagli, or 'Village of the Valleys', nestles in 32 acres of olive groves and gardens and is a wonderful escape from the modern world.



Di Rosa is passionate about Tuscany and its beauty, culture and lifestyle. This is evident in the way he has restored Borgo.

Using an artist's eye he has used local and original materials, keeping wooden beamed ceilings and stone floors and sourcing local

antiques to furnish the properties. Mind you, our planning laws look relaxed by comparison.

Di Rosa says: "New builds are strictly forbidden. Planning permission is so strict and maybe 99% of applications are rejected."

I flew from Bristol to Pisa with Easyjet for an amazingly reasonable £60 – closer to £100 during peak periods – and took a train and taxi via Florence to my destination.

I could have saved myself the train journey by flying from Stansted to Perugia with Ryanair but liked the convenience of a local airport.

The trains, while unglamorous, ran to time in a way that should make South-West trains weep, and in spite of



my lack of Italian (actually I found speaking my schoolgirl French with an Italian accent remarkably effective – you can't say I didn't make an effort), the journey was easy and stress free.

Arriving at Borgo it was immediately apparent just why Tuscany is so sought after. The views over the unspoilt Niccone Valley were stunning and the air was heavy with the scent of wisteria.

Any tension just disappears and I wished I had brought my paintbrushes and easel.

The whole place couldn't be more inspiring if you have even the slightest artistic streak – definitely a place I would go to write my novel.

While restoring the hamlet di Rosa tracked down families who had previously lived at Borgo, and previous resident Dina now prepares authentic Tuscan dishes in the on-site Trattoria in the medieval guard tower.

Using a traditional wood-burning oven, Dina creates mouthwatering local favourites including a melt in the mouth herby lamb, an unlikely sounding but delicious bread and vegetable concoction and the best pizza I have ever had.

You couldn't go to Tuscany and not sample the local excellent wines, which we did with great enthusiasm.

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Italian job?

means? Kate Finlayson explains



Borgo produces unusual but delicious fennel, laurel and citrus liquors as well as the best olive oil I have ever tasted.

There are numerous suggested local trips that do not usually feature in the guide books and the staff are on hand to help you plan your holiday. There are wonderful walks if you feel like some gentle exploring, a swimming pool set on the hamlet's highest terrace with breathtaking views and the town of Assesi is only a short drive away.

Set on the side of a hill and a lovely place to potter for a morning, it was here St Francis preached chastity and poverty (hmm, think he should have sacked his PR) and many Catholics flock to his Chapel.

So did anything about my trip disappoint? Sadly, I have to say yes – I spent two days in Italy, couture capital of the world, and failed to buy a single pair of shoes.

It might just be my imagination but my husband seemed all the more pleased to see me at the airport without the expected number of shopping bags.

For more details about the fractional ownership scheme in Borgo di Vagli, visit www.borgodivagli.com

