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From dilapidated castle lookout to luxury Tuscan villa

Heritage property near Sienna has been transformed, retaining many original features



It is little wonder Vittorio Gerri's country retreat has such commanding views of Tuscany's rolling hills: it was used as the western observation tower of the Castello di Ripa d'Orcia, a 13th century castle that was under the protection of the Republic of Siena.

The building was a ruin when Gerri first saw it in 2008; he estimates that it had been uninhabited since the early 1900s, when it was a farm. But after viewing more than 200 potential properties to make his holiday home, he knew this was the one he wanted. "It was love at first sight," he says. Its location in the middle of woods and fields in Val d'Orcia, and the absence of artificial light at night, were a particular draw.

He had a big task on his hands. “There were no windows, no bathrooms and the roof was collapsing,” he says. “The room where the pool table is used to be a stall for animals.”



The arches and wooden beams are among the original features that were retained during the renovation

But following a three-year renovation, the impressive property, which combines traditional Tuscan architecture with sleek modern interiors, offers the next owner seven bedrooms and six bathrooms spread over three floors. It is on the market for €2.6m.

The house comes with around 3ha of land and sits on its own on the side of a small hill. It is accessed by a 6km dirt road, which is on the Via Francigena, an ancient pilgrimage route that goes from Canterbury, Kent to the Vatican, Rome via France and Switzerland. An olive grove lines the hillside below the property and Gerri makes olive oil for his friends at Christmas from the 400 trees, which are a mix of varieties including Leccino and Olivastra. “It tastes very Tuscan and delicious,” he says.

The Castello di Ripa d’Orcia is on the opposite side of the Orcia river. It was originally home to Sienese nobility — the Salimbeni and Piccolomini families. In 1990, the property was renovated and turned into a hotel.



The house is just off the Via Francigena, an ancient pilgrimage route that winds through Tuscany

Before Gerri, who has his own construction company as well as a packaging business, could start work on his own restoration, he had to seek approval from the local authorities in Castiglione d' Orcia, the closest town at 6km away, and Siena, which is 55km from the property. The process took three years. The Val d'Orcia is a Unesco World Heritage Site, one of seven in Tuscany, which added to the local requirements to restore the property to its former glory rather than make any bold changes.

The biggest surprise during construction was the unearthing of some beautiful marble water troughs, thought to be around 300 years old. Gerri had them installed as sinks in the kitchen and ground floor bathrooms. In the living areas, the arches and wooden beams are believed to be original features. There is a separate kitchenette in the basement, which has two bedrooms and a bathroom, making it suitable to use as a separate apartment.



The pool table room had last been used as a stall for animals when current owner Vittorio Gerri acquired the property in 2008

For summer, there is an outdoor barbecue area, plus a 60 sq m swimming pool. The coast is about 90 minutes' drive away, with good beaches to be found at Alberese, in the Maremma national park, around 100km away.

In winter, underfloor heating helps to keep the large rooms cosy.

Gerri, who lives in Bologna, has used the property for weekends and long vacations with his three sons. A decade after completing the renovation, he intends to look for another historic property to restore. "I love this kind of journey, buying a ruin and giving it a new life," he says.

Photography: Italy Sotheby's International Realty; Dreamstime.com

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