

T & C

TRAVEL

FROM THE BEACHES OF BODRUM TO MEDIAEVAL MONTENEGRO

PUREBRED
ANDALUSIANS
ON THE
RESCHIO
ESTATE

EDITED by LUCY HALFHEAD

FIELDS OF DREAMS

*Discover a rustic Umbrian hamlet reborn as a luxurious retreat,
where horses run free and you can drift away on a private lake.*

Plus, our pick of Europe's most opulent hotels



TRAVEL

VILLA PARADISO

On a verdant Umbrian estate, Frances Hedges discovers a romantic idyll brought lovingly back to life by the aristocratic Bolza family



ABOVE: THE MASTER BEDROOM IN THE CASA DELLE SUORE AT RESCHIO. RIGHT: AN INFINITY POOL



Looking out of my window as the sun begins to rise, I can see nothing but green. Cypress-trees stand sentinel on the slopes beneath me, lining the long footpaths that wind down to the olive groves and wild-flower meadows dotted around the estate. The lush Umbrian hills, planted thickly with ancient oaks and conifers, form a cinematic backdrop, enveloped in a light, silvery mist that will soon give way to gentle sunshine.

I have awoken this morning to blissful silence, broken only by the quiet hum of the cicadas. Here in Reschio – a rambling, 3,700-acre estate in the fertile heart of Italy – there is little to disturb my deep sense of tranquillity. Safely ensconced in our three-bedroom farmhouse, Piantaverna, my partner and I are at least a Land Rover drive away from any other human life, our closest companions the wild boar, deer and porcupine that roam the countryside surrounding us.

Piantaverna is one of 26 privately owned villas – nine of which are available to rent – that have been built on historic foundations by the aristocratic Bolza family, who have run the estate with care and devotion since Count Antonio and his wife Angelika bought it in 1994. Then mostly derelict, it has been transformed under their stewardship into a thriving concern that encompasses a working farm, a hunting reserve and stables housing almost 50 Andalusian pure-breds, recognised as among the finest dressage horses in the world. The couple still live on

the estate, but it is their son Benedikt – a trained architect – who now takes the entrepreneurial lead, supported by his wife Nencia, a Princess from the Florentine Corsini family with a talent for mural painting (her fresco-inspired artworks decorate the walls of one of the villas).

I meet Benedikt and Nencia for an espresso on my first day at Reschio and find them exactly as charming as I had hoped. Nencia is quietly courteous, a little anxious about her English, while the Count enthuses eloquently about his passion project: breathing new life into the remains of centuries-old houses. ‘What fascinated me as a child – and still fascinate me – were the ruins,’ he says, recalling his earliest visits to Reschio. ‘We’d go running around the abandoned estate, hunting for fortifications and wondering who had lived there.’

Today, Benedikt works with private clients to build homes on those original footprints, balancing respect for history with sensitivity towards buyers’ individual tastes. Signature architectural details recur across the collection, but the decor of each residence is unique. Palazzo, for instance, is a classically Italianate villa whose vaulted ceilings, hand-painted wall-papers and cantilevered staircase radiate grandeur. By contrast, our home for the weekend has a simpler, more rustic feel, with period features sitting comfortably alongside modern furniture, including bespoke light fittings designed by Benedikt’s own interiors brand.

Homeowners benefit from the services of landscape gardeners and housekeeping staff, while those who are simply renting a property for a few days have access to yet more domestic comforts. Every morning, our fridge is refilled with delicacies from nearby producers – salumi, ripe tomatoes and pecorino cheese – and our bathrooms are stocked with a fresh supply of Ortigia products. One evening, we welcome Rosa, a local chef, into our kitchen for a private cookery masterclass; she arrives laden with ingredients and patiently guides us as we fumble to operate the pasta machine. Under her expert tutelage, we assemble row upon row of ravioli and agnolotti, fill courgette flowers with creamy ricotta, slice up hand-picked funghi and macerate pears in what looks like a cauldron full of red wine. ‘*Buon appetito*,’ says Rosa with a smile, magicking away our mess from the worktops as we sit down to dine.

With a chef on call, a pile of novels to hand and plenty of sunloungers on which to read them – not

WE ASSEMBLE ROW UPON ROW OF RAVIOLI AND AGNOLOTTI, FILL COURGETTE FLOWERS WITH CREAMY RICOTTA



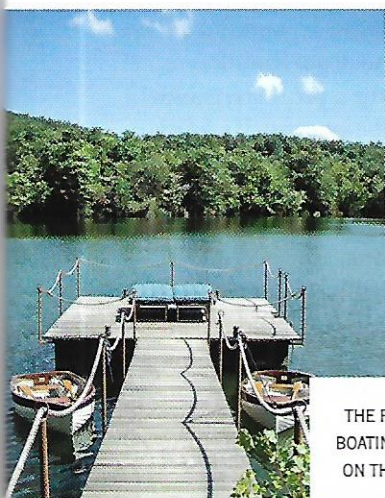
LAVENDER BEDS OUTSIDE
CASTELLO DI RESCHIO

to mention an enormous infinity pool in the garden – there’s no need to stray far from home to be entertained. For the more adventurous traveller, however, Reschio is a paradise waiting to be explored: guests can take a boat out on the lake, try clay-pigeon shooting,

play tennis or, like us, venture beyond the estate to discover a region of Italy that is extraordinarily rich in culture. On our last day, we enlist the help of a chauffeur to visit the nearby Tuscan town of Cortona, with its steep, cobbled streets, Etruscan masonry and panoramic views over Lake Trasimeno.

Before leaving Reschio, we stop by Benedikt’s office in the Tabacchiaia – a former tobacco factory that now serves as the family’s creative headquarters – to say our farewells, and find him poring over architectural blueprints, eager to tell us about his latest initiative. Following the launch of a new equestrian centre, restaurant, bar and wine shop earlier this year, he is focusing on converting the estate’s majestic 13th-century castle into a 36-room hotel, Castello di Reschio, due to open next spring. ‘We’re turning the old wine cellars into an indoor spa and putting a pool in the ancient tower,’ he says, gesturing excitedly at his plans. It’s a vision that perfectly encapsulates the spirit of Reschio, where history and modernity co-exist in harmony and nature provides a dazzling canvas for ambitious human designs. □

Reschio (www.reschio.com), from about £8,480 a week for four people staying in a farmhouse.



THE PRIVATE
BOATING DOCK
ON THE LAKE