

RIGHT TIME, RIGHT PLACE

It took the owners years to find this stone farmhouse in Tuscany and even longer to get permission for the renovation they had in mind – but it was certainly worth the wait

TEXT DOMINIC BRADBURY | PHOTOGRAPHS RICHARD POWERS



POOL (*opposite*) The Val d'Orcia is a picturesque region of Tuscany to the south of Siena. The roof terrace offers views of the pool and the hills beyond. The sunloungers are from Roda

DINING AREA (*this page*) Ceilings were raised on the ground floor, which used to be the stables. New Crittall doors and windows fill the house with light. In the dining area, mid-century chairs designed by Giò Ponti surround Piet Hein Eek's 'Waste Table in Scrapwood'





DINING AREA AND FAMILY ROOM An archway connects the kitchen to this open-plan sequence of living spaces, which was partly designed around a vintage French pharmacy cabinet bought at a flea market in Paris. The metal 'Hanging Atomic Lamp' in the dining area was created by Atelier Van Lieshout in Rotterdam. The photograph on the left was taken by Elger Esser. At the far end of the room, sofas by Axel Vervoordt and wooden armchairs from LeStudio Gallery in Paris create an informal seating area



From the garden of this Tuscan farmhouse, the only sounds are the swirling birds and the church bells from the nearby village.

This part of the Val d'Orcia is not only delightfully picturesque but also wonderfully tranquil. No wonder the owner and her family fell in love with such a mesmerising setting.

'My favourite view is of the hillside opposite the house,' she says. 'I call it "my hill" and there is something so beautiful about it. I love the way the clouds float past it and how the grass grows in the meadow so that in spring you see the breeze blowing through it, making green waves across the landscape. It is very poetic.'

The owner is an amateur equestrian who was unfamiliar with this part of Tuscany until she was introduced to it by her husband. They started spending holidays in the Val d'Orcia, then rented a house in the area, eventually deciding that they would love to buy a place of their own as an escape from their main residence in France. But the task of finding somewhere that would suit them and their son was not easy.

'Around 12 years ago we started to look for a farmhouse or a ruin to update and convert and finally we found two houses that we liked in the Val d'Orcia,' she says. 'We settled on this farmhouse but it then took another four years to buy it because the process was so complicated. This did give us plenty of time to think about our plans for the house, though, and to observe how the landscape changes throughout the year. You really appreciate all the seasons

KITCHEN (top left) La Cornue supplied the **units**, the range **cooker** and the central **island**, which provides open storage for ceramic **tableware** from Sophie Conran and Portmeirion. **EXTERIOR (top right)** After four years of renovation, the three-storey farmhouse looks restored but has retained its traditional character. **SITTING ROOM (left and opposite)** An Aboriginal artwork hangs above the chimneypiece. The 'PS16' **chaise longue** was designed by Franco Albini. Equestrian-themed pieces include riding crops bought in South America, a lasso **photograph** by Gonzalo Rivera and an Etruscan figurine on the Jean-Louis Deniot **coffee table**





here and the different ways the farmers work the land in each one.'

The 18th-century farmhouse, known as a *podere*, consisted of a number of smaller stone buildings and stables arranged in a U-shape around a central courtyard. It had begun to crumble and required extensive restoration. The owner assembled a team to work on the project, including the Italian architect Matteo Pamio of Roberto Pamio + Partners, and the French interior designer Elodie Sire of D.Mesure, who has also designed two homes in France for the family.

'It is a Unesco-protected area, so you have to build in the traditional way,' says the owner. 'But it's also an area of seismic activity, so the building codes are strict. We wanted the *podere* to appear the same but in a restored condition, so the exterior walls were retained and, from the outside, the farmhouse looks almost exactly as it did originally. Inside, we had a lot more freedom to do what we liked.'

After she and her husband bought the house in 2011, there were four more years of planning and construction. They were allowed to raise the ceiling height on the ground floor – which used to accommodate the stables – and to add more windows, while creating a fluid arrangement of spaces. This includes an open-plan sequence comprising the kitchen, dining area and family room, which leads out to a sheltered veranda with a view of the hills.

Working closely with Elodie, the family sourced materials and characterful pieces of architectural salvage that suit the modern rustic atmosphere. The semi-open-plan kitchen and dining area was partly designed around a vintage cabinet originally from a French pharmacy. 'We would go to flea markets together to look for lighting, mirrors and furniture, and then work on the arrangement of the rooms, as well as the textiles and fabrics,' says Elodie. 'I also designed custom furniture for the main bathroom, a desk for the owner and the bunk bed in her son's room. I love the quality of the detailing and the fact that there is a coherence to the house, as well as the way it is integrated so well into the surroundings.'

The family added a number of pieces gathered on their travels, including equestrian-themed items from South America. Leather riding crops and gaucho images by the Argentinian photographer Gonzalo Rivera make a striking display in the sitting room, which also features designs by Giò Ponti and Franco Albini.

The owner's son's room and the guest bedrooms are on the first floor, as are the spacious main bathroom and the study, where a secret staircase leads up to one of the owner's favourite parts of the house: the main bedroom on the second floor, which opens onto a hidden roof terrace. It is a restful, secluded space, in keeping with the idea of the farmhouse as a retreat and a place in which to recharge and reconnect with the natural world.

'In the beginning, my dream was to keep my horses here as well, but the heat can be hard for them in summer so, instead, we sometimes rent horses nearby and go for a ride,' she says. 'We had such a good team working together and the *podere* feels very special as a result. Friends and family who come here tend to develop a crush on the house and landscape because they are so captivating. There is a wonderful sense of calm – and always a warm welcome' □

Elodie Sire: dmesure.fr | Matteo Pamio: studiopamio.com

MAIN BEDROOM (*opposite*) Gervasoni made the **bed**, which stands on a raised oak platform above the polished concrete floor. The **curtains** are made from two linen fabrics from Holland & Sherry. A rattan '**Hanging Egg Chair**' by Nanna Ditzel is suspended from a beam next to a **lamp** by Serge Mouille. SPARE BEDROOM (*this page*) Interior designer Elodie Sire created bespoke furniture for several rooms in the house, including the leather-topped metal **desk** and the **daybed** by the window. The table **lamp** is from Philips. Linen fabrics from Designs of the Time were used to make **cushions** for the daybed – an inviting seat offering views of the nearby hills

