

# MY OTHER HOUSE IS A VILLAGE

Every rich man must have his village—preferably an Italian one. Conveniently, much of Italy is up for sale, says CAROLINE PHILLIPS

There are thought to be some 15,000 abandoned villages across Italy. Alberta Ferretti has bagged one; the Ferragamo family have snapped up two; Daniele “the Saviour of Santo Stefano” Kihlgren nine. A really des village res is one that’s fortified with ancient city walls.

Now Michael Cioffi, an American lawyer, has upped the ante by forking out on Monteverdi, a dilapidated 13th-century Tuscan hilltop village that has its very own Etruscan archaeological

with hills that are posing for a (Sienese) *Journey of the Magi* painting; enjoy Monteverdi’s only air-conditioning—in the lavender garden.

So far Cioffi has only bought part of this village of 30 houses—with a permanent population of 10—as he wants to retain its authenticity. Its architectural character stays; and so too the raisin-faced grannies doing crochet. Coming soon are more house refurbishments, a spa, a farm, artists’ studios and a 32-seat restaurant.

Interior decorator Ilaria Miani, patron saint of cultural heritage and contessa of country chic, has managed that balance between peasant scenes and plasma screens: there are reclaimed 18th-century beams and underfloor heating. She goes for the “shocking simple”, reinventing Arte Povera and putting it alongside state-of-the-art kitchens.

When heaven palls, wander down the dirt road to the 15th-century villa La Foce, former home of Anglo-

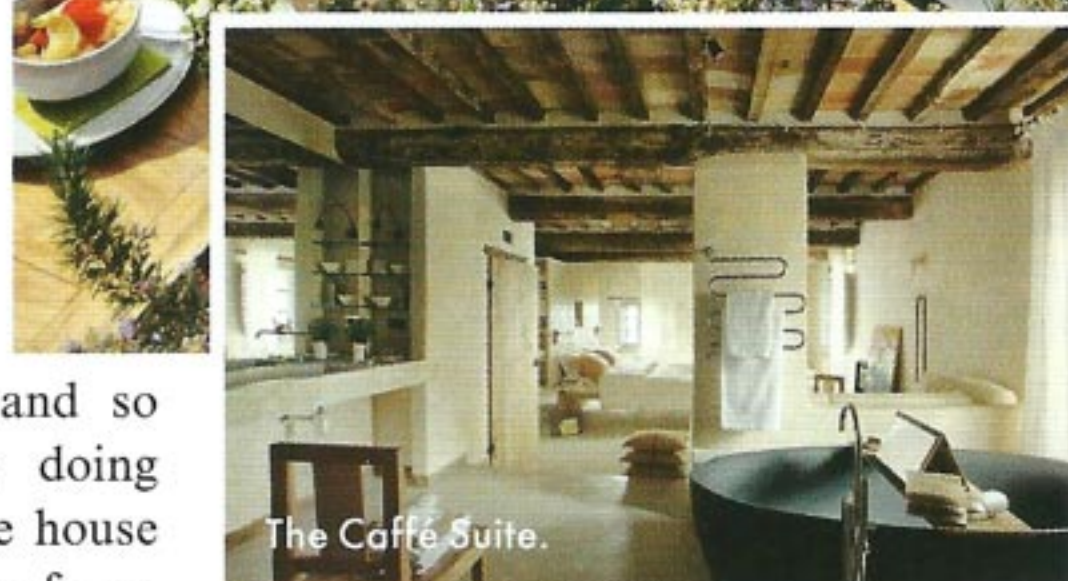
dig. He has also gone for village-upmanship by creating in his a stylish boutique hotel, three rental villas and a Renaissance retreat: a place where artists/writers/composers-in-residence mingle with A-listers and vacationing guests in search of their inner Leonardos.

Cioffi has been granted usage rights of the village’s Romanesque chapel (you cannot buy God here), kitting it out with \$250,000 of acoustic soundboards for concerts. The hills are already alive with the sound of jazz; a film festival is being planned with a big Hollywood director; and a curator (ex-Frieze) is scouting for emerging talent for its soon-to-come gallery.

Sip Brunello overlooking the Val d’Orcia, a UNESCO-designated valley



Caffé Monteverdi, overlooking the Val d’Orcia.



The Caffé Suite.

American author Iris Origo, with its parterres and box hedges overlooking that postcard-famous, cypress-edged, zig-zag road.

Nearby is the Dopolavoro (“after work”) restaurant, built as a 1930s workers’ community centre. Sit in the shade of lime trees and eat local bico flatbread stuffed with sausage, and vegetables that walk across the road in farm-to-plate on fast-forward. But don’t forget that this is slow-food country; and a place of truffles, wild boar and biodynamic wineries. Then back to Monteverdi where life in the slow lane is too fast. (monteverdituscany.com)



A view of the village.



The Garden Suite.

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