

International

A home in the hills, the Italian way

Carol Lewis takes a tour of rural retreats — without too much peace and quiet

While a remote villa under the Tuscan sun or a farmhouse in the rolling Umbrian hills might appeal,

most of us would miss the neighbours and the convenience of local shops and restaurants. Buyers have realised that remote is not remotely enticing. Instead people are opting for a home where there are neighbours to befriend, handymen on call and a local trattoria within stumbling distance.

Managed estates are becoming increasingly popular with Britons looking for homes in Tuscany and Umbria, according to Gemma Bruce, Italy consultant for estate agents Aylesford International. "Many buyers want a really stress-free property. They don't want to do restoration or maintenance. They want to be able to lock up and leave."

The most affordable way to do this is fractional ownership: buy a share of a property in return for a predetermined number of days' holiday. Borgo di Vaglie, tucked away on a wooded slope close to the Umbrian border, 14 miles from Cortona, is one of the first places in Tuscany to offer fractional ownership.

Fulvio di Rosa took four and a half years to restore the medieval hamlet and create 21 holiday homes; he has been rewarded with a mention by author Frances Mayes in her book *Bringing Tuscany Home*.

The hamlet's social hubs are the swimming pool and, naturally, the trattoria. The sensitively restored cottages have



Above, Castello di Reschio in Umbria; right, Borgo di Vaglie in Tuscany; and below right, a CGI of a proposed villa design at Borgo Le Vaglie, Tuscany; below, Colin Firth and his Italian wife, Livia Giuggioli, divide their time between London and Umbria



private terraces that look out over the valley. Purchasers can buy between a twentieth and a tenth of a property for between €31,000 (£25,800) and €98,500, plus annual charges of €1,211 to €3,061, in return for at least two to four weeks' vacation time. The fees include all

maintenance, redecoration, utility costs, insurance and local taxes.

The renovated Castello di Casole, in the Chianti region, also offers fractional ownership as well as outright ownership of the 15 homes on the estate. There are two farmhouses for sale, costing €498,000 for a twelfth and €699,000 for a tenth. For those seeking outright ownership, the master apartment in Strozzi Castle at the heart of the estate is on sale, via Aylesford, for €2.2 million.

Property on the estate has grown in popularity since a boutique hotel opened. Bruce says: "Buyers really like the idea of a hub with a hotel. People like the facilities and want a stress-free package but don't want to feel too part of a club, they don't want it to be too cliquey, they prefer to be spread out."

The ultimate in estates is Castello di Reschio. Not far from Umbertide, this is one of the most exclusive places to live in Umbria. The bespoke villas are so far apart you would hardly know you had neighbours; although there is a central restaurant. Knight Frank has a property for sale here for €3.9 million.

While restaurants often provide the social hub for estates, golf courses are popular too. Near to Reschio, for

example, there are plans at Antognolla golf course to renovate the castle and borge to create holiday homes complemented by a Four Seasons hotel. In the Maremma area of Tuscany, Savills is selling ten homes in Borgo Santa Chiara on the Toscana golf course, with hotel facilities, priced from €680,000.

For those who prefer not to have a clubhouse near by, developer Pagus has created clusters of homes at La Leopoldina and Il Pino, not far from Castiglion Fiorentino. Pagus is now creating a new borgo: Borgo Le Vaglie. It will consist of six bespoke villas set in large plots overlooking the valley to Arezzo. There is no obvious hub but the historic Badia di Campoleone hotel is a ten-minute drive away. The properties can be bought off plan, via Beauchamp Estates, from €1.8 million.

Alternatively, the San Vittorino estate, a ten-minute drive from the medieval town of Gubbio in Umbria, has eight beautifully restored properties with communal pool overlooking the Apennine Mountains. Three-bedroom homes cost from €353,000 through Fervidus White.

Creating an Italian home-from-home, with neighbours, has never been easier.

The Chelsea footballer John Terry has reportedly sold his newly completed home in Oxshott — not far from the club's Cobham training ground — for a £10 million profit. So, where now for the former England captain?

Terry's gain on the house, which cost him £6 million to build, is well above that secured by other sellers in this upmarket area of Surrey. House prices here have risen by just over 7 per cent in the past year. The family may decide they want somewhere closer to his club's Stamford Bridge ground, although homes in Chelsea and other prime areas of London have risen by 75 per cent.

However, now is the time when transfer talk is rife, Terry's contract runs out this summer unless the manager

Is Terry looking for new home grounds?

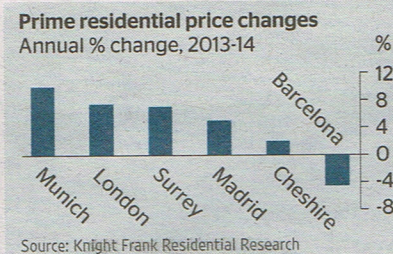
For sale: above right, a villa in Supermaresme, Barcelona €8 million; far right, one in Grünwald, Munich €7.8 million



José Mourinho renews it. Perhaps it is time to check out property farther afield.

A move to Manchester United, the club Terry supported as a boy, could be worthwhile. Prices in Wilmslow, Cheshire, are stable, with a 2 per cent rise since this time last year, according to research by Knight Frank.

A move to Bayern Munich could prove



costly, though. Kate Everett-Allen, from Knight Frank, says: "The 10 per cent uplift in Munich's prime prices is indicative of the surge in pricing being seen in prime German city markets. Wealthy investors are looking to luxury bricks and mortar as a means of safeguarding their capital."

The footballer might be better hoping



for a spot at Mourinho's old clubs, Real Madrid or Barcelona. Alex Vaughan, from Spanish agent Lucas Fox, says: "The 4.5 per cent fall [in prices] in Barcelona is not demand-supply related. It is more sentiment-based." Expect more sentiment from Chelsea fans if Mourinho doesn't renew John Terry's contract. Carol Lewis