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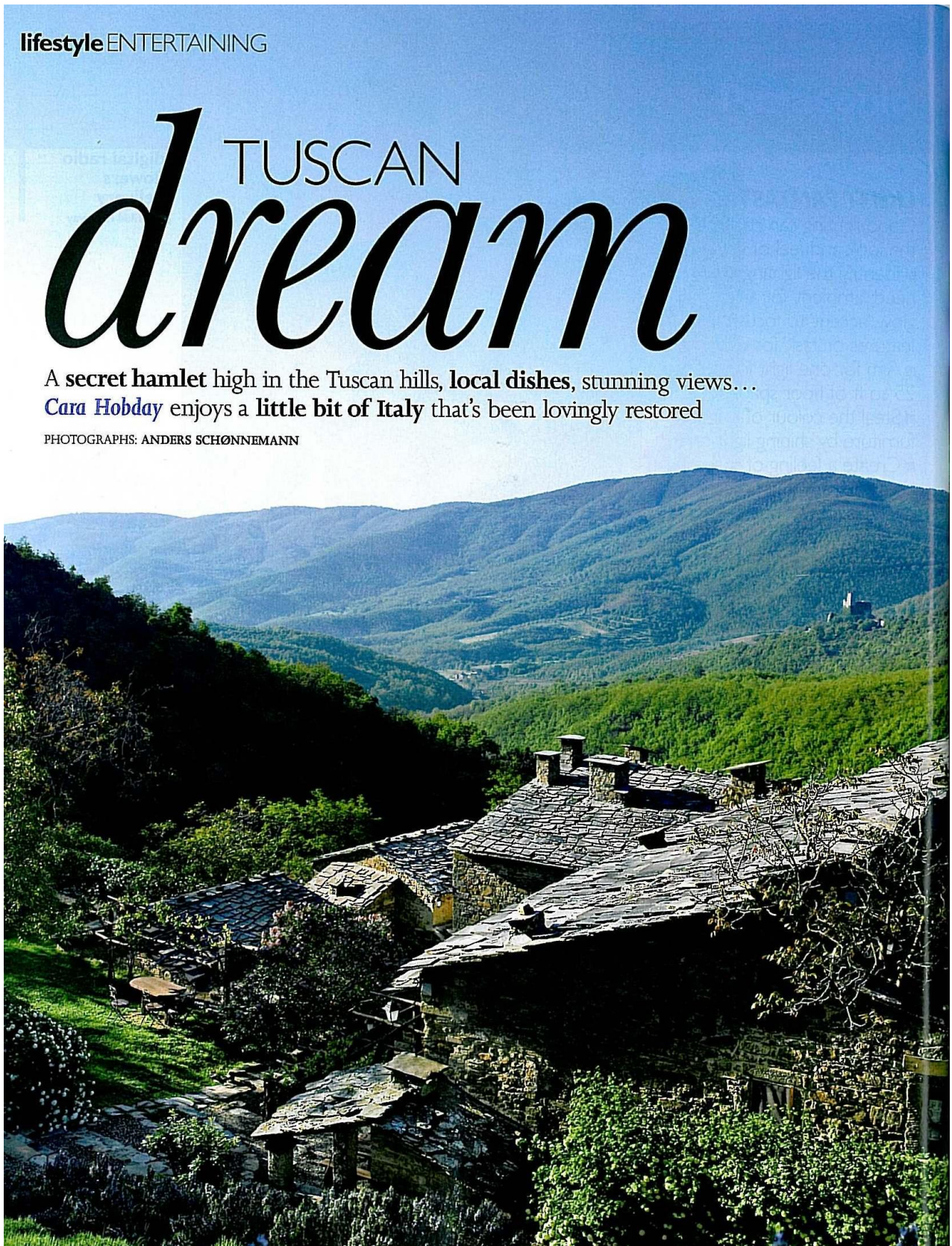
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TUSCAN *dream*

A **secret hamlet** high in the Tuscan hills, **local dishes**, stunning views...
Cara Hobday enjoys a **little bit of Italy** that's been lovingly restored

PHOTOGRAPHS: ANDERS SCHÖNNEMANN

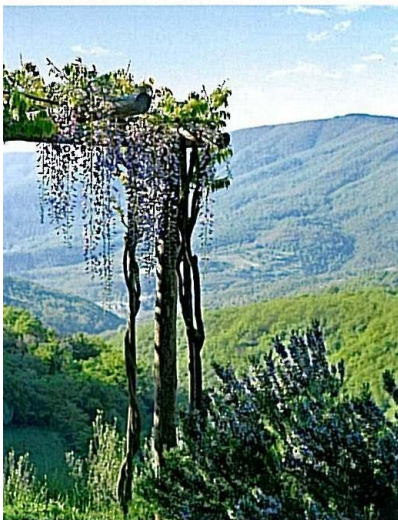


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THE GOOD LIFE: (left) The stunning Borgo di Vagli, near Cortona, has been sensitively renovated to its full glory. It was the project of architect Fulvio (pictured above) centre, talking to assistant chef Tiziana and management consultant Scott)

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Nestled in the hills near medieval Cortona in Tuscany is the wisteria-clad vision of an architect named Fulvio Di Rosa. In 1991, he discovered the tiny hamlet of Borgo di Vagli, untouched by the modern world. The original inhabitants had left for an easier life down the valley, and it was very run down. Fulvio could see the soul of the place instantly, though, and took it on as a project. Over the next 12 years, he resurrected the hamlet, with a passion for the original rarely found in architects. Now, Borgo di Vagli has a growing group of shared owners who visit the pretty hamlet for holidays, looking for peace, quiet and fine dining.

‘Just as there is no gap between knife and fork – one follows another – there should be no gap between the landscape, buildings and lifestyle,’ says Fulvio. The hamlet has been restored with a deep empathy for history. Coming through the doorway of the trattoria, you duck the low beam just as everyone else has for the past 400 years. To look out on to the hills beyond is to feel the same sense of awe that the original inhabitants would have felt.

This empathy does not stop at the buildings – it includes the environment and way of life of the village. This is evident in the kitchens of the village trattoria, where Fulvio insisted on a rustic, wood-fired oven and range.

Today’s lunch is the work of Dina Parati, 65, chef at the trattoria. She grew up in Borgo di Vagli when it was a thriving community, with residents living and eating with the seasons, using whatever the land provided. She can tell you which trees were planted when, and which bushes provide the sweetest rosemary to marinate the *rosticciana*.

‘They like a different shape of pasta on the other side of the valley, but we prefer this one – it holds the sauce better,’ Dina tells me as she expertly rolls out the *cavatelli* pasta with quick hands. The deliciously rich tomato sauce is surprisingly simple, as are all the dishes on her menu, but the essential ingredient is time – to simmer the sauce, roll the pasta, and grill the meats for 1½ hours over oak wood embers. Dina writes nothing down, everything is done by instinct – she stokes the fire at exactly the right time, sets the meat over the embers at the right height to get the succulence required, and knows how much cocoa to sift over the tiramisu to get the right balance of flavours. She does all this with a calm and unhurried demeanour, and attention to every detail.

As the delectably rich tiramisu appears on the table, a stack of empty plates is the only compliment required. Coffee is served and by the time the last of the Villa Antinori Toscana 2004 is savoured, it’s late afternoon and we’re enjoying the dreamlike feeling that a leisurely lunch in the warm sunshine brings. ■

For more information, visit www.borgodivagli.com. Turn the page to recreate Dina’s delicious menu.

MENU

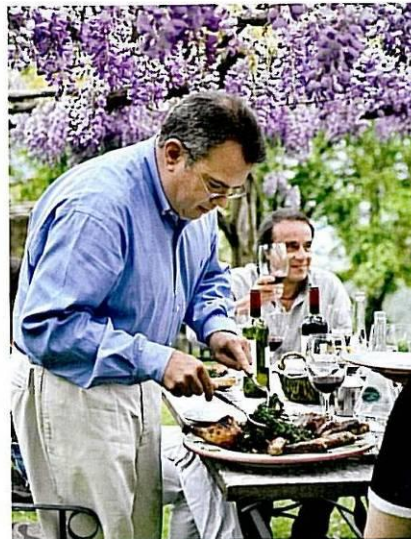
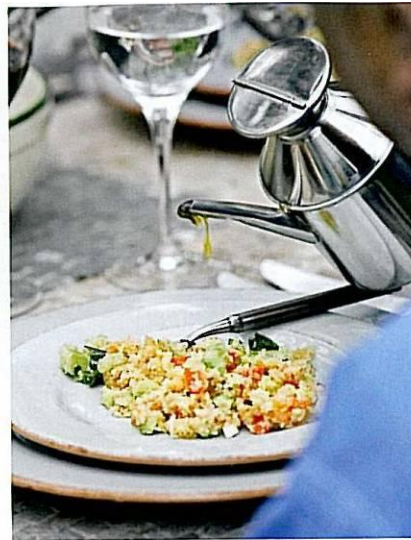
Panzanella

*Cavatelli with
passata sauce*

Rosticciana con spinaci

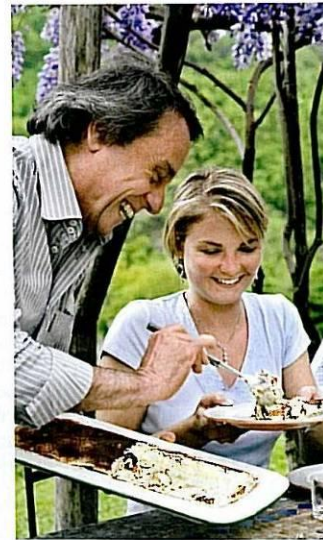
Tiramisu

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WISTERIA AND WINE: (left, from top) Receptionist **Stefania** enjoys the Tuscan wine; a fox roams in the sunshine; the wondrous views of the hills around Borgo di Vagli

(This page, from top row, left to right) The area is in bloom in the summer; the refreshing **panzanella**; trattoria chef **Dina** serves Fulvio at the table; the fresh **cavatelli** pasta with **passata** sauce makes a delicious **primi piatti**; management consultant **Kevin** helps himself to the wonderful main course; the **roscicliana con spinaci** is gorgeously succulent, cooked slowly over hot embers from the wood oven; **Stefania** chats happily over her dessert; a spoonful of **tiramisu** for sales executive **Bianca**



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Panzanella

Serves 6
Prep time: 40 mins

450g loaf Waitrose Classic Tuscan sliced Pagnotta, or similar
1 onion, diced
4 fresh tomatoes, diced
1 cucumber, peeled and diced
3 tbsp fresh basil
4 tbsp olive oil
2 tbsp balsamic vinegar

- Break the bread into a bowl and cover with cold water. Soak for approx 30 mins.
- After 30 mins, squeeze the bread, removing excess water, and break up into the serving bowl. Add all of the other ingredients and season generously with salt and freshly ground black pepper.
- Mix together and check the seasoning before serving.

Cavatelli

Serves 6
Prep time: 40 mins
Cook time: 10 mins

1kg white pasta flour, plus extra for sprinkling
1 egg, beaten

- Pour the flour on to a clean, flat surface and make a deep well in the middle.
- Pour in 500ml water, then add a pinch of sea salt and the egg.
- Mix the flour gradually into the liquid with your hands. When you have a dough, begin kneading. Add a little more water to make the dough 'softer', if required.
- When the dough is soft, divide it into 4 pieces. Take one piece and, on a well-floured surface, roll out to a thickness of 2 to 3mm using a floured rolling pin. Cut into strips of 2cm in width.



- To make the cavatelli shape, pick up a strip and lightly roll between your palms, working along the strip to create a long spiral shape. Lay out the spirals next to each other and sprinkle with flour. Cut into 10cm lengths and set aside. Repeat with the rest of the dough.
- Cook the pasta in a pan of boiling salted water until al dente (around 5-7 mins). Drain and toss with the passata, below.

Passata sauce

Serves 6-8
Prep time: 5 mins
Cook time: 60 mins

4 tbsp olive oil
1 litre passata
2 cloves garlic, chopped
Grated parmesan, to serve

- Heat the oil in a saucepan over a gentle heat, and fry the chopped garlic to soften.
- Stir in the passata, season well with salt and black pepper, and cook for one hour over a low heat, stirring occasionally.
- To serve, add the pasta to some of the sauce and toss together to mix. Serve immediately with grated parmesan.

Rosticciana con spinaci

(Mixed roast grill served with spinach)

Serves 6
Prep time: 20 mins
Cook time: 1 hour 30 mins

6 cloves garlic, finely chopped
Large handful of fresh rosemary, finely chopped
3 tbsp white wine vinegar
4 tbsp olive oil
6 pork spare ribs
6 chicken thighs
6 lamb chops
6 lean pork sausages



- To make the marinade, place the finely chopped garlic and rosemary in a large bowl. Add the vinegar and oil, plus some salt and freshly ground black pepper, and mix together.
- Add the meat to the bowl, taking each piece and rubbing the rosemary mixture on to both sides. Once all the pieces of meat are in the bowl, season well, cover and refrigerate for up to 2 hours.
- Preheat the grill or barbecue to a medium heat. Dina cooks this dish over hot embers from the wood oven.
- When ready to cook, place the pork and chicken on the grill first, then 45 mins later, the lamb and the sausages. Turn the meat often, and change around the position of the meat on the rack to ensure even cooking.
- Serve hot with the spinach, below.

Spinaci

Serves 6
Prep time: 5 mins
Cook time: 10 mins

500g fresh spinach
50g unsalted butter
1 tsp oil
50g sultanas
30g Waitrose Italian pine kernels

- Boil the spinach in a little water for about 4 mins.
- Rinse under cold water, then squeeze out excess water.
- When ready to serve, melt the butter and oil in a pan, and add the spinach. Season well with salt and freshly ground black pepper. Stir, using two forks to mix and separate out.
- Rinse the sultanas in warm water, and add to the pan with the pine kernels.
- Warm over a low heat for 5 mins before serving with the meat.



Tiramisu

Serves 6
Prep time: 15 mins

Pavesini sponge fingers are widely available at good Italian delis. If unavailable, use ordinary savoiardi sponge fingers and slice them lengthways in half.

50g pavesini (thin sponge fingers)
2 large eggs*
250g mascarpone
2 tbsp caster sugar
100ml espresso coffee, cooled
25g bitter chocolate, grated,
or 1 tbsp cocoa powder

- Separate the egg yolks from the whites, and whisk the whites to a soft peak.
- In a bowl, mix together the mascarpone, the egg yolks and sugar, then fold in the egg whites.
- Cover the base of a serving dish with a thin layer of mascarpone mix (thin enough for the dish to still be seen in places). Dip the sponge fingers into the coffee, then lay over the mascarpone layer.
- Add a sprinkling of the grated chocolate/cocoa powder, followed by a layer of coffee-soaked sponge fingers, more mascarpone mixture and then, finally, * more grated chocolate/cocoa powder.
- Leave to chill in the fridge for an hour prior to serving. Eat within one day.

The ingredients used in these recipes are subject to availability and may only be available in selected Waitrose branches.

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