

THE HOME FRONT

PRIVATE PROPERTIES

BY CANDACE JACKSON



Crichton's Hawaii, For Sale

A Hawaiian estate owned by the late author

Michael Crichton is on the market for \$12 million. An adjacent home owned by Mr. Crichton's trust sold in December for \$10.1 million.

The home still listed is a 1926 estate on Kauai's Hanalei Bay, surrounded by mountains and adjacent to the beach. Built for a local doctor, the nearly 1.2-acre estate includes two homes built on three lots. The 3,000-square-foot main house, remodeled in 2002, has two bedrooms, two baths. There's a yoga studio and a detached three-car garage. A guest cottage has two more bedrooms. The grounds include tangerine trees and botanical gardens.

The estate that sold has three beach cottages on two lots, with a total of four bedrooms on 0.75 acre.

The author, who died in 2008 at age 66, wrote "Jurassic Park," "The Andromeda Strain" and "Congo," all made into movies. The "Jurassic Park" films were shot on Kauai. Mr. Crichton also created television's "E.R." Barbara L. Sloan from Coldwell Banker Bali Hai Realty Inc. has the listing and handled the sale.

Patagonia, \$30 Million

A 180,000-acre ranch in the Patagonia region of Argentina has gone on the market for \$30 million. The ranch, known as Estancia Alicura, is owned by **Ward Lay**, the son of **Herman Lay**, the co-founder of Frito-Lay Co. and the former chairman of PepsiCo.

Ward Lay bought the property in 1998 from a company controlled by the Benetton family, which founded the famous retailer. Mr. Lay declined to say how much he paid but says his improvements include converting the site from sheep to cattle ranching. The main house (see interior below), a restored colonial hacienda that Mr. Lay has renovated, has five bedrooms and comes with two large guest houses and a pool. Staff lodging and a stag-hunting and trout-fishing operation are included. **Ted Turner** owns a ranch adjacent to the property.

Mr. Lay says he's selling to focus more on his Argentine wine business. Trent Jones of Hall & Hall in Sun Valley, Idaho, has the listing.



(t-b) eyevine/Zuma Press; Hall and Hall

Beatle's Onetime Lair

An estate once owned by Beatles drummer **Ringo Starr** at the height of Beatlemania has hit the market outside London. The sellers are asking £5.95 million, or about \$8.6 million.

The home is in the gated community of St. George's Hill, in Weybridge. Mr. Starr lived there for several years in the late 1960s; fellow Beatle **John Lennon** lived nearby. The house, formerly known as Sunny Heights, has six bedrooms, six baths and a '60s psychedelic wall mural painted over the fireplace. Simon Ashwell of Savills in Weybridge has the listing.

Email: privateproperties@wsj.com



(clockwise from right) Al Hurley; Sandro Michalichellis; Fotografo for The Wall Street Journal; Steven Rothfield

Best-selling author Frances Mayes renews her love affair with Italy—with another restoration



Under Another Tuscan Sun

BY KATE BOLICK
Cortona, Italy

FRANCES MAYES takes a heart-first approach to real estate—and has done well by it. In 1990, she fell in love with a tumbledown villa just outside this sleepy hill town about 70 miles southeast of Florence, and the questionable purchase and backbreaking restoration resulted in "Under the Tuscan Sun," a best seller in 1996 and later a successful film with Diane Lane.

In 2003, picking wild blackberries on a hill, Ms. Mayes and her husband spied through the brambles a dilapidated stone cottage and fell headlong all over again. Another renovation, another book. "What a lonesome beauty," she writes of the home in the final installment of her Tuscan trilogy, "Every Day in Tuscany," which has sold 83,000 copies since its publication in April.

It's not that the author needed another summer home, a mere 15-minute drive from the first (she lives the rest of the year in Hillsborough, N.C.). That one, called Bramasole ("yearning for the sun"), had proved a reliable muse, inspiring not only the trilogy but two lavishly illustrated coffee-table books and a furniture line for Drexel Heritage. During high tourist season, upwards of 200 on-lookers a week flock to the villa. Ms. Mayes says she enjoys meeting the pilgrims but finds it a bit disconcerting on a Tuesday morning, drinking coffee in her nightgown, to look out the window and see a busload.

What she calls "the mountain house," however, could hardly be more remote. Built in the early 13th century by hermits who followed St. Francis of Assisi, Fonte delle Foglie—The Font of Leaves—is a humble structure set high on a peak overlooking the vast and rolling countryside. When the Mayeses found the house, it had been vacant for half a century; it was dark as a tomb, and nearly as airless. The stone roof was surprisingly intact, save for a few

bald patches and a couple of holes. But one side was collapsed and the doors choked with vines and weeds. The ground floor was divided into four cramped mangers, for animals, and the top floor into four high-ceilinged rooms with two fireplaces but littered with plaster and debris.

This time around, armed with more than a decade's worth of knowledge—of the grim realities of DIY, as well as the complexities of Italian history—Ms. Mayes opted to not take on the renovation herself, but instead hire an expert. This was the man she refers to as her "Italian brother," the preservationist architect Fulvio Di Rosa.

The two met after one of Mr. Di Rosa's restoration projects had delighted Ms. Mayes. Since the 1980s, he's been buying abandoned borghi—tiny medieval villages scattered throughout the Tuscan mountains, built with stone walls so thick they give silence new meaning—and meticulously bringing them back to life. That zeal for authenticity appealed to Ms. Mayes's passion for history. "When we are together we just talk and talk—and talk," she says.

Properties in the area generally sell for about \$7,000 to \$12,000 per square meter (a little less than 11 square feet). The Mayeses paid \$140,000 total for theirs, plus three years and hundreds of untallied receipts for the restoration (high-level projects usually run about \$3,000 to \$3,600 per square meter). That's not counting the old carved stone fireplaces, blacksmith-made stair rails, hand-painted cabinets, 17th-century doors, and the bocce court and bungalow they've added since. Such touches, right down to the Busatti bed linens, make the cottage feel gorgeously rustic—as luxurious as a boutique hotel, yet devoid of artifice, much like the hermit's retreat that it was.

"Of course, owning two houses in the same town is utterly bizarre," says Ms. Mayes. The couple divide their time equally between the two, even though she's con-



Author Frances Mayes, top, with Italian restoration expert Fulvio Di Rosa and her mountain house, Fonte delle Foglie. Above, the living room of the house.

stantly leaving her red cardigan at the wrong one.

To reach the mountain house, one bumps along a long, rocky dirt road, swerving to avoid potholes, parks at roof level, and descends a winding path leading to a wide, sloping lawn carved from the surrounding forest.

The restored main house and an outbuilding contain four bedrooms between them. The new bungalow is built into a slope (something only recently permitted by law) and includes a fifth bedroom suite that doubles as a workplace for this pair of writers. (Husband Edward Kleinschmidt Mayes is a poet who has published widely.)

The grounds skillfully layer wild woods and manicured landscaping, harmonizing with the mix of old and new buildings. The hills fan out below, all the way to a glimpse of Lake Trasimeno shimmering in the far distance. It feels like there's nobody on earth but the Mayeses and whichever friends they invite over for long Sundays of swimming and playing bocce—or, this summer, sampling the recipes for "The Tuscan Sun Cookbook," which Ms.

Mayes will publish next year.

On a recent tour, Mr. Di Rosa stopped to crouch and point to a 500-year-old crack in a floorboard, or to mirror his hand along a plaster wall's contours, its surface intentionally left slightly wavy instead of straightened into the harsh lines of modernity. His design philosophy can be summed up as "simplicity is luxury." He goes to great lengths to locate the same materials used by the original carpenters and masons—chestnut beams, terra cotta tiles—and hews as closely as possible to the original construction methods. "The more you learn of the history," he says, "the more you come to understand why the builders made the decisions they made."

This sentiment rings true for Ms. Mayes. Life at the mountain house lets her slip more completely into the country's rhythms. "In America I usually feel up against time—looking at my watch, booking appointments weeks in advance," she says. "Here time is more of a river to float on, than a current to swim against."

► Read an article about another Di Rosa restoration at WSJ.com/RealEstate.

► See more photos of the homes featured on this page, plus continuing coverage of the real-estate market, at WSJ.com/RealEstate.

RELATIVE VALUES | A Shore Thing

A sampling of oceanfront homes under \$1 million



SANDWICH, Mass. \$895,000

A 1,742-square-foot home with five bedrooms and three baths near the Sagamore Bridge, which connects the Cape to the mainland.

DETAILS: The 1960s shingle-sided home is on a beach that has views of boats coming through the Cape Cod Canal. The three-level house has a vaulted living room with a large stone fireplace. The home has a heated sunroom and an outdoor deck that have views of the ocean. An unfinished space above the garage could be converted into an entertainment room.

SHORE MEAL: Seafood Sam's, along the Cape Cod Canal, serves lobster eight ways, including a casserole and a fried version with buttered gulf shrimp.

FRIDAY'S FORECAST: Sunny, high 66 degrees

SOURCE: Melinda Chapin with Sotheby's International Realty in East Sandwich, Mass., 508-568-1714, melinda.chapin@sothebysrealty.com



PALM BEACH, Fla. \$895,000

A 2,500-square-foot penthouse oceanfront condominium with two bedrooms and 2½ bathrooms.

DETAILS: The penthouse, on the fifth floor, has a wraparound terrace with views of the ocean and the Intercoastal bay. The living room and master bedroom have floor-to-ceiling windows with expansive ocean views. The owners eliminated one bedroom to expand the living room and den. The condo complex has tennis courts, a pool and a fitness center.

SHORE MEAL: The restaurant at the Four Seasons Resort Palm Beach, a short drive or walk along the beach, has a menu that can include yellowfin ahi tuna and crab risotto.

FRIDAY'S FORECAST: Partly sunny, high 90 degrees

SOURCE: Donald Gorbach with Corcoran Palm Beach, 561-707-6210; donald.gorbach@corcoran.com



LONG ISLAND, Bahamas \$985,000

A 2,883-square-foot beachfront home with three bedrooms and 2½ baths on 1½ acres.

DETAILS: This 1970s house sits on a private peninsula on one of the lesser-developed Out Islands. The property comes with a backup generator, and a covered walkway from the house leads to the detached master bedroom, with its own kitchenette and deck. There's snorkeling and bonefishing offshore.

SHORE MEAL: The Cape Santa Maria Beach Resort, a walk of about 15 minutes, has a restaurant that serves Caribbean food with views of the beach. The menu includes conch fritters, grouper and steak.

FRIDAY'S FORECAST: Sunny, high 91 degrees

SOURCE: John Christie with H.G. Christie Ltd. in Nassau, a Christie's Great Estates affiliate, 242-357-7572; John@hgchristie.com

—Candace Jackson