

## CASANTICA

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## TROVARE L'INTROVABILE

Centinaia di indirizzi per recuperare subito il pezzo che cerchi

Cortona (AR)  
BENTORNATI  
A VAGLIBuggiano (PT)  
VALDINIEVOLE  
A STELLE  
E STRISCEFaenza (RA)  
LA TAVERNA  
DEGLI ARTISTIStrinato (LU)  
LE STANZE  
DI DORALICE

## Bentornati A Vagli - Interview with Fulvio Di Rosa

Fulvio Di Rosa, a civil engineer by profession, recalls the birth of his jewel, Borgo di Vagli, a small restored medieval hamlet. The restoration is restrained, carried out with attention to detail which enchanted Frances Mayes, author of *Under the Tuscan Sun*.

“The idea sprang from a wish to satisfy a particular desire: a traditional Tuscan country house, at an affordable price, for anyone in the world who had ever dreamed of owning one. The problem lay in reconciling the idea of a “traditional country house” with that of “at an affordable price”.

There were many difficulties: technical, economic, environmental and, not least, cultural in the broadest sense of the word. For more than 30 years Tuscany had been an object of desire for the English, Germans, Swiss, Dutch and, more recently, Americans.

Quite simply, there isn't a “traditional country house” available for everyone. Often masquerading under the guise of traditional houses are tatty dwellings on the fringes of large towns or farm outbuildings from the 1950s or '60s (often built illegally) which with a little imaginative “retouching” are sold as genuine examples of the Tuscan rural heritage. To find true country house, saved at the moment from the grasp of estate agents, is a rare thing which is certain to prove costly. Anyone who still owns such a property knows full well that he is sitting on a treasure chest.

To achieve a high standard of finish in country house, it is necessary to go back in time to the old traditions, to get into the mind and hands of the farmer, the builder, the craftsman who, centuries ago, created these miracles of homogeneity and practicality. There is no need to invent anything new, only to “copy”. Of course, to copy, it is necessary to understand how things were done or, as often happens, how the original would have looked. To achieve this, you need a master builder who has in his blood this culture which cannot be learned, this innate art. He is just as necessary as the wooden beams, stone, lime, terracotta and wrought iron which he handles with such natural skill. This is not some snobbish desire for “purity”; just as the essential conditions for carrying out work with language start with the alphabet and the grammar, so these are the basic tools of the farmer-builder-craftsman.

At Vagli, once the problem of dividing the properties up into living units had been solved, trying to find an acceptable compromise between modern requirements and safeguarding the important architectural features, my constant concern was to clearly convey to the purchaser both a perception of the “cultural environment” linked to this distinctive type of architecture and a strong “sense of the house”. Thus, on the one hand this almost maniacal search for “how it was” and on the other the use of elements (furniture and so on) as distinctive and unique as possible, avoiding repetitive choices. To give a few examples: the heights of the interiors have not been altered so it was necessary to excavate, often into the rock, in order to provide sufficient air space under the floors to ensure the rooms were properly aired. This choice presented big technical and economic challenges, but was absolutely essential to ensure a perception of the “cultural environment”. The sizes of the doors and windows remain unaltered, meaning that the amount of light entering the rooms is the same. Tuscany would not be Tuscany without these façades. This decision preserves the fascination of the “Tuscan light” which filters through these small apertures, spreading softly across the walls washed in traditional pastel shades which absorb it and reflect it back. There are never deep shadows but always a suffused brightness which changes during the day, following the movement of the sun. Then in the evening the many separate points of light – table lamps, standard lamps, oil lamps and so on – dotted around apparently at random create a new kind of light.

These decisions, which seem so obvious, often go against the ideas and requirements of the casual tourist who would like a domesticated Middle Ages (a sort of Las Vegas Tuscany). Unfortunately, often the end user is not ready, not prepared for this true concept of restoration. Other defining elements are the floor: handmade terracotta tiles, irregular and rough but incredibly “warm”, or stone which we have managed to salvage, such as in some floors of the former animal stalls, thus keeping them in the same environment where they had been for hundreds of years. And so we go on, to the massive supporting walls. They are of an annoying thickness, taking up a large amount of space in the rooms but they compensate for this by their imposing presence, softened only by the lime washes which cover the plaster. The plaster itself is irregular, following the rough

surface of the walls. For me, this is the “skin” of the house; a sensual skin covered with oil paintings, dried flowers, pieces of antique doorframes from noble dwellings, *object d’art* and copper pans. Sometimes it is simply the light which plays like clothing or jewellery on a brazed body. Then there is the furniture, found piece in markets or antique shops; fabrics, “beehives” of towels, curtains, all from Busatti looms in Anghiari, the kitchen sinks, no two alike, carved from blocks of sandstone and “patinated” with use; the rustic plates, glasses which seem to come from a painting by Caravaggio, the cutlery forged by hand.....

Everything at Vagli has been made or selected because it represents the cultural environment to which it belongs and transmits a “sense of the house” which every aware guest should seek out. Here, then is the “conflict” with the school of thought (predominantly American) which believes that the standard, service and activities provided by an establishment are the elements upon which its success is founded. Here there is that conviction (mostly European) that transmitting emotions, creating the conditions for broadening the outlook and “selling” the consciousness, and thus the culture, are the elements which, more and more in the future, will define the tourism market. This is a truly visceral conflict, rooted in years of habit and upbringing and difficult to resolve.