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Homes & Property

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Up, up and away

Buy into a slice of Tuscan life and a new flexible ownership scheme, says **Janice Morley**

BORGO di Vagli is a 14th century hamlet in the Tuscan hills (it's name means "between the valleys"). A stay there is the essence of getting away from it all for a special sort of person, happy to be tucked away among this rolling landscape where rustic Tuscany meets the "demanding" mountains of Umbria.

This is not for those looking for a vine-covered *castello* at the end of an impressive cypress-border drive. Borgo di Vagli sits atop a steeply climbing gravel track full of sharp bends. Anyone tempted to turn back will know that Borgo di Vagli is not for them. The track is the only "road" in and out of the hamlet, a way of leaving behind that other life and relaxing among generous bushes of lavender and rosemary beneath wide even skies where the night-time sport is spotting shooting stars. This is the philosophy of Borgo di Vagli, according to Fulvio di Rose, a civil engineer who discovered the abandoned 14th century

'Beneath these wide even skies the night-time sport is spotting shooting stars'

village 20 minutes from the Etruscan town of Cortona, and two hours from Florence. Di Rose began his quest to buy the 32-acre site 10 years ago by hunting down its former inhabitants (mostly cobblers and carpenters) to discover how they lived — and where



The pool at Borgo di Vagli is set further up the hill to avoid interrupting views from the hamlet

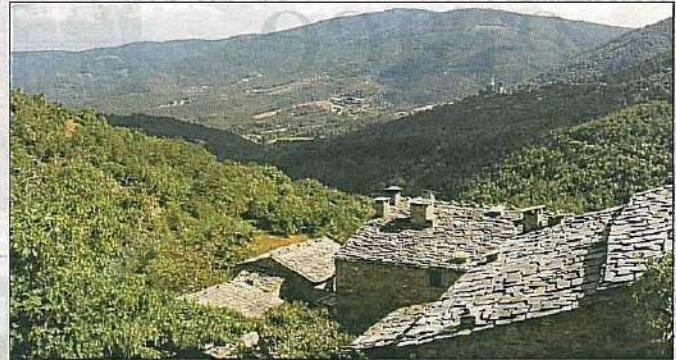
they put the deeds of ownership: one path led to a prison, another to a woman who had grown up in the village.

Dina, now a grandmother, is employed by Di Rose to run the kitchen of the hamlet's candlelit little trattoria. With robust arms she kneads the pasta, preparing supper feasts over an open wood fire. On pizza evenings no one eats lunch — she makes six different toppings for her herb-flavoured pizza dough. If you want to learn how to make them yourself, she loves visitors to her kitchen, which is stocked with local produce.

The cottages have been carefully reconstructed with 18in-thick, vine-covered stone walls. Inside they are dim and cool even on the hottest August afternoon, and furnished and embellished by craftsmen — with wood-beam ceilings, cotto tile and stone floors, rustic furniture, stone sinks, copper pots and neat linen with embroidered edges. But there is also internet access and satellite TV to all 21 properties.

Di Rose is an Italian who loves his comforts. Over 20 years he has enjoyed converting hamlets and farmhouses with award-winning success. But authentic restoration does not mean deprivation. The bathrooms and showers are engineered within an inch of their lives; water and electricity are plentiful and

The dusty track eventually arrives at Borgo di Vagli and its 21 restored homes



Pizza nights can be walked off among the hills that enclose the once abandoned village

fridges are stocked full of local produce and wine. Staff come in to clean. Stephanie, at reception, will bring up hot bread and croissants for your self-prepared breakfasts on

'Cottages have wood beams, cotto tiles, stone sinks — internet and flatscreen TVs'

your terrace, and there is a large store room/shop on site offering local honey and, more importantly, delicious local wines.

SOLD as a private member-owned fractional ownership community of one- and two-bedroom properties, each home at Borgo di Vagli is restricted to 10 ownerships each, allowing 100 owners ample and flexible vacation time. Each November owners plan their holidays for the coming year but short-notice reservations can be booked any time but not necessarily in your own cottage. Owners can invite guests to stay but the hamlet will remain closed to general public use.

Grape picking and olive harvest



The Owens wanted to avoid "spoon-fed" holiday resorts

JOHN Owens is a Westminster University professor of political science. His wife, Maggie, is a former headteacher. Now in their fifties, with grown-up children, they are typical of Borgo di Vagli owners: well-travelled and instinctively curious types and not fans of spoon-fed poolside holidays.

The Owens prefer to search out music festivals, cultural events and open days in ceramic factories, and to join in grape picking or the local olive harvest.

"We have met three or four families here, mostly barristers and lawyers, who we look forward to seeing every year," says John. "I have my 70 words of Italian and it gets us around. The advantage of having a home here is that you get to know the area better every year. We love to explore."

LOWDOWN: on Tuscany. By Cathy Hawker

Borgo di Vagli

Location: the hilltop hamlet of Borgo di Vagli overlooks the Niccone Valley in eastern Tuscany close to the Umbrian border and 12 miles north of the family-friendly hotspots on Lake Trasimeno.

The Etruscan town Cortona is 20 minutes away, with Florence, Montepulciano and Siena all an easy day trip.

To the south, over the Umbrian border, Perugia and Assisi are within an hour's drive.

Access: BA flies from Gatwick to Pisa and Rome, both two hours from Borgo di Vagli. Single fares are from £62. Meridiana flies daily from Gatwick to Florence, one hour 45 minutes away, with single fares from £50.

Ryanair flies from Stansted to Perugia, 45 minutes away. Single fares are from £23.85. (www.ba.com); (www.meridiana.it); (www.ryanair.com).

Climate: Tuscany has a decidedly

Mediterranean climate of hot dry summers and cold winters (you will want a roaring fire in December).

Temperatures veer between summer highs of 39 degrees Celsius and January lows of zero degrees Celsius; rainfall is highest in autumn.

The property: 10 one- and two-bedroom homes are available at Borgo di Vagli, each with private outdoor space. Restoration of the 14th century hamlet took 10 years with original features — thick stone walls with small windows and internal exposed wooden beams — complemented by modern technology such as high-speed internet and satellite television.

The 32-acre grounds have a heated swimming pool, eight circular hiking trails, a trattoria in the medieval guard tower, a small supermarket and a concierge service.

The costs: prices are in euros, with a one-tenth fractional share of a one-bedroom

property set at about £46,800, or £72,000 for two-bedrooms.

Annual maintenance fees covering management, refurbishment and insurance are about £1,750 to £2,200.

Owners must also pay a "checkout fee" up to £46 per stay to cover house-keeping. Daily cleans cost from £3.

Fractional ownership: this is a well-established form of ownership in America. In the UK it is often confused with timeshare but fractional ownership gives owners an outright share in their property.

Each residence at Borgo di Vagli is sold in no more than 10 fractions. Buyers have access to either a one- or two-bedroom property with title held in perpetuity for the owners by an independent trust company.

Ownership of a property can be sold or left in a will.

For more information about Borgo di Vagli, call 00 39 0575 619660



From £234,000: Casali San Regolo, a Tuscan farmhouse converted into four homes. Knight Frank (020 7629 8171)