

# Marche MAKEOVER

When two families decided to buy a holiday home abroad, they rose to the challenge of restoring a ruin in the heart of Le Marche

**C**ASTEL CLEMENTINO, in the undulating hills about 30 Km inland from the Adriatic coast, has its roots in a 16th-century watchtower, as is evidenced by five arrow-shooting windows in what is today the living room. Much altered over the centuries, its walls were still standing but the roof and floors had long since collapsed. Friends Mike and Gill Hore and Tim and Jan Way, who had been holidaying together for over 20 years, looked at another ten properties before settling on this one, their confidence in it boosted by the rapport they had developed with local project manager, Marco Consolati of Thea Homes ([www.theahomes.com](http://www.theahomes.com)). Stories like this have been known to start out hopefully but end in delays, cost overruns

and retribution, but clearly their instinct about Consolati was right. Under his guidance, the building was reinforced, damp-proofed, one crumbling side wall entirely rebuilt and all the services completed ready for occupation within six months – six winter months at that.

The restoration came in within the budget of about €1,000 per square metre (the house is some 220 square metres) before kitchen, bathrooms, furniture, pool and garden were considered. Unusually, rather than making a series of stage payments, the families gave Consolati access to their local bank account, which they kept topped-up with funds. In return, Consolati emailed photographs of progress every day (around a thousand in all) and asked for no contract of any

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sort. Not a route that would be recommended by any books, but one in which mutual trust invested by both parties yielded a lasting friendship.

#### ANCIENT AND MODERN

Stringent planning laws have protected much of Italy's countryside from the ravages of development suffered by other Mediterranean countries and the final restoration involved no extra building at all. Even the option of a tiled portico was ruled out as being an unacceptable addition because it would have compromised the traditional appearance of the house. Instead, a shaded al-fresco dining area was provided by the installation of a lightweight wrought iron and canvas pergola. Conformity with earthquake-proofing regulations was achieved without the option of anchoring the roof to a reinforced concrete ring – a technique that Consolati disapproves of, saying that it can lead to the rigid concrete acting like a hammer-drill to demolish the more fragile walls under the impact of seismic vibrations.

Whilst the mish-mash of honey-coloured brick and stonework remain faithful to the building's original appearance, the interiors combine modern finishes and traditional beamed-ceilings infilled with terracotta tiles. With a wealth of ancient buildings around them every day, the Italians are often less obsessed than the British with



Realisation of the vision

creating replicas of old-world style in their interiors and unashamed to let stainless steel and halogen lighting dwell alongside exposed stone and twisted beams. As a result, the interiors feel light, spacious and modern; very much spaces for living, rather than a museum.

#### HOLIDAY HEAVEN

With an eye to the holiday rental market as well as their own families, four bedrooms, two with en-suite bathrooms, were provided on the first floor, with an open-plan living room, dining room, kitchen and

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The extent of the challenge...



a study/bedroom on the ground floor. A wide terrace leads to an infinity-edge pool overlooking a valley, beyond which the medieval town of San Martino cascades down a vertiginous hillside. A full-size tennis court has been shoe-horned into the hillside, out of sight of the main house. The tapestry of cultivated fields, olive groves and vineyards seen from the house is backed by the imposing Sibillini mountains, some 35 Km away, topped with snow for much of the year.

Whilst Le Marche may not have the glitzy art-treasures of Tuscany or saints and sepulchres of Umbria, its villages and landscape are every bit as seductive, much less discovered by tourists and it has the added advantage of being close to the sea. Low cost flights to Ancona's new Stansted-look-alike airport have given the area a boost, both in terms of tourist trade and permanent homes.




The owners with their *geometra*.

#### COVERING COSTS

The cost of furnishing, landscaping and equipping the house added significantly to that of the structural work, but the first-time visitor notices right away that this is not just a flat-pack-furnished rental home but a treasured family asset. Rentals in the first year have yielded about 10 weeks at around £1,800 per week: not a huge return yet, in

investment terms, but one which is certain to increase as repeat-business cuts in.

Almost immune to the vicissitudes of destinations which bill themselves as 'the next big thing' the enduring appeal of Italy's climate, landscape, culture and food will secure the investment made in this home. In addition, there's the prospect of blissful holidays and the satisfaction of knowing that a small piece of history has been rescued from neglect and lovingly brought back to life. 

[www.castelclementino.com](http://www.castelclementino.com)

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