

ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

A Guide to the Historic Villas and Stylish Boutiques in Tuscany's Val d'Orcia Region

Home to some of Italy's best wine and food, the idyllic community boasts a new crop of enticing restaurants, smart shops, and country-chic retreats

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Photo: Jaroslaw Pawlak

Tuscany's Val d'Orcia may well be the most perfect slice of the most perfect part of Italy. Lying just south of Siena, this ancient valley of gently rolling hills and scenic villages can feel blissfully timeless, its rich history and natural splendor exquisitely preserved. "You go back to paintings from the Renaissance or the 18th century, and the landscapes you see depicted tell you that the Val d'Orcia is an uncontaminated place," says Gelasio Gaetani d'Aragona Lovatelli, a wine consultant whose family has owned land in the region for centuries. "It has not been destroyed."

The valley has long been an idyllic getaway for Italians and foreign travelers alike. They come for the relaxed sophistication found in and around the towns of Montalcino, Pienza, and Montepulciano, for the renowned cuisine and wine, and for the area's convenience to Florence and Rome (both are less than a two-hour drive away). Autumn always shows the valley at its best: As the tourist season winds down, vineyards turn to russet and gold, and harvest festivals abound. And now visitors have more options than ever, thanks to a new generation of hoteliers and restaurateurs.

"The Val d'Orcia hasn't seen this much action since the 15th century," says John Voigtmann, who left a music-business career in New York several years ago to open a guest villa, [La Bandita](#), outside Pienza. This spring he added [La Bandita Townhouse](#), a 12-room boutique hotel in the center of town. Occupying a former convent that dates from the 1400s, the

Townhouse features honey-color stone walls, beamed terra-cotta ceilings, and gray-washed wood floors, with a mix of antiques and custom-designed furnishings. Book the top floor's room 11, with its vaulted ceiling and enchanting views.

The hotel's casual modern-Tuscan restaurant offers a daily menu of seasonal dishes, served in a lively setting. If you venture out for meals, the friendly staff will secure you a table at one of the area's classic spots, say, Montepulciano's Osteria Acquacheta—*the* place for thick cuts of oven-fired bistecca fiorentina—or the mostly locals' wine shop/restaurant La Botte Piena, on the main square in Montefollonico. They can also arrange visits to vineyards, such as the new eco-friendly winery of Montepulciano producer Salcheto.

Of course, you'll want to stroll Pienza's cobbled streets and its early-Renaissance piazza. Make your first stop just across from the Townhouse, at the petite atelier of veteran leatherworker Valerio Truffelli (011-39-33-8164-0091), who crafts bespoke belts and bound journals. These days, two recently opened shops have picked up Truffelli's artisanal mantle: At the gallery-like Officine 904, stylish hand-stitched bags in Italian leather line the shelves, while Aracne offers bright linens and one-of-a-kind shawls, scarves, and ponchos.

In nearby Rocca d'Orcia, businessman turned winemaker Pasquale Forte has helped reenergize the center of the medieval village, opening an art gallery, a Tuscan housewares boutique, and a gourmet shop. The biggest attraction, however, is his Osteria Perillà, where Tuscan-born Michelin-starred chef Enrico Bartolini turns out seasonal fare both rustic and refined, including a beloved nouvelle spaghetti perillà, featuring a savory sauce with the cured local pig cheek known as *guanciale di cinta senese*.

Nothing announces the Val d'Orcia's high-style arrival more than Castiglion del Bosco, one of the area's rare resort-style properties, just outside Montalcino. Massimo Ferragamo, who runs the U.S. operations of his family's fashion empire, and his wife, Chiara, bought the 12th-century hilltop village and surrounding 4,000 acres a decade ago and opened it to guests in 2010. Today it features a five-room spa, a Tom Weiskopf-designed golf course, a cooking school, a winery, and three restaurants. There are 23 suites, which occupy a former manor house and stables, as well as nine farmhouse villas. All exude discreet elegance, their rooms layered with tailored furniture, antique prints, and works by local artisans.

"I've always felt the Val d'Orcia was a magical and unique place," says Massimo, who enjoys Montalcino's classic Tuscan eateries Ristorante Boccon DiVino and Enoteca Osteria Osticcio when not dining at one of his own restaurants. "And the valley in autumn is a true joy for the spirit."

Another entrepreneurial force in the region is Michael Cioffi, an American lawyer who bought several crumbling buildings in the mostly abandoned cliff-clinging hamlet of Castiglioncello del Trinoro (population: 25) and rehabilitated them as Hotel Monteverdi. The graceful property consists of three villas and ten airy whitewashed suites—three just opened in July—plus a restaurant, a pool, and, as of this fall, an art gallery.

The hotel's rustic-luxe aesthetic was masterminded by Rome-based interior designer Ilaria Miani, who's restored more than 20 homes in the valley (many available for rent at pilgrimsway.it). Inspired by "the image of the peasant building tradition," as she puts it,

Miani outfitted the interiors with rough-hewn wood, terra-cotta, galvanized metal, polished plaster, linen, and burlap. “Every single stone here talks about something,” she says.

Down the hill from Hotel Monteverdi sits the vacation villa Il Cocceto, another Miani project. Here the designer restyled an 18th-century farmhouse for winemaker Andrea Franchetti, who produces the area’s most sought-after Super Tuscan at his adjacent vineyard Tenuta di Trinoro (tastings available by appointment). Opened in 2012, the property has a comfortable, welcoming feel, from the large eat-in kitchen to the six light-filled bedrooms to the glorious pool and manicured grounds.

Another essential stop, especially for garden lovers, is the nearby La Foce estate. Built around a 15th-century villa—which, along with other buildings on the site, is available for rent—the property features olive groves and extensive Renaissance-style gardens laid out by British architect Cecil Pinsent in the 1920s and ’30s, with dramatic views of Monte Amiata. Last year the Origos, the family that has run La Foce for nearly a century, turned a former cantina for the estate’s workers into the charmingly relaxed trattoria Dopolavoro, a great spot for lunch or dinner when visiting La Foce.

Benedetta Origo, the clan’s matriarch, suggests that what makes the Val d’Orcia special is its refreshingly unhurried pace. “It all changes, of course,” she says, noting the rash of new arrivals. “But in this era where everything goes so very fast, things here still manage to go slow.”



A room at Hotel Monteverdi, also designed by Miani, in the hamlet of Castiglioncello del Trinoro.