

# Tiny, mellow Monteverdi makes a grand break

by CAROLINE PHILLIPS

**A** SKINNY fellow with a 'man bob' and his attractive female companion are sipping prosecco and gazing at an extinct volcano in a valley that has scarcely changed in a century.

Nearby, a woman from Cincinnati surveys a medieval building that is being turned into a tiny spa, while an impecunious musician eats a meal made by a chef who worked at one of Giorgio Locatelli's restaurants.

This is the scene at Monteverdi, an 11th-century fortified Tuscan hilltop village, and the fellow with the man bob is the film director Wes Anderson, who made *The Royal Tenenbaums* and, more recently, *The Grand Budapest Hotel*.

He is here because Michael Cioffi, a successful U.S. lawyer, is transforming the village into a luxury holiday venue and hopes Wes will hold a film festival here. Naturally.

Monteverdi's real name is Castiglioncello di Trinoro. It's near Pienza and Siena. The village has just 30 homes and only ten year-round residents.

There are houses available to rent and a ten-bed boutique hotel. On the hilltop is an infinity pool, plus a cafe (serving crostini and wonderful views) and a Tuscan restaurant.

The 13th-century chapel has been transformed into a low-key concert venue and a nearby 12th-century farm building is now a gallery.

Early one evening we follow the dirt track out of the village, past vines, the occasional farmhouse and a new-born fawn that gazes at us in awe.

In the hills, we hear the frightening roar of a wild boar, which sounds like a dog crossed with a lion. Mount Amiata — that extinct

volcano — sits on the horizon and sometimes electrical storms light up the sky. Otherwise the hills are almost silent.

After four miles we reach La Foce — a Renaissance villa restored in the Twenties by

Marchesa Iris Origo, the Anglo-Irish author. During World War II she sheltered refugee children and fugitive prisoners of war.

The current owner is Benedetta, a glamorous Italian aristo. We creep around the villa, sneaking a

peek at the frescoed, galleried dining room and avoiding some badly dressed, noisy Americans who are renting it for a week.

Benedetta organises an annual music festival — with events held locally, including at La Foce —



Picture: 4CORNERS IMAGES



Timeless: A Tuscan valley and (above) the view from the cafe in Monteverdi

# TRANQUILLITY IN TUSCANY

that is directed by her Grammy award-winning son, the cellist Antonio Lysy. Some concerts take place in her garden.

Back at Monteverdi, we sit under a walnut tree (there's no air-conditioning here, and it's the coolest place), admiring the view that seems to stretch for ever, bathed in that mellow light of Renaissance pictures — then retire to our house with its plasma screen, underfloor heating and cellar full of vintage wines.

A bat flies in through our small window, then leaves.

Outside the sound of live jazz fills the air. We're all in favour of Renaissance revivals.

## TRAVEL FACTS

BRITISH Airways flies to Pisa from London Gatwick, from £78 return (0844 493 0787, [ba.com](http://ba.com)). Rates at Monteverdi start at £308 per night, per room on a bed & breakfast basis (0039 0578 268 146, [monteverdituscany.com](http://monteverdituscany.com)).

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