

# Italy



**UNDER THE LE MARCHE SUN** *Duncan Campbell*

The first lesson of Italian farmhouse renovation is to slow down. Time here in Le Marche, central Italy, is an optimistic approximation at best – ‘nine’ means ‘no earlier than ten’, ‘Tuesday’ means ‘not before Wednesday’, and so the estimated three to four months for our renovations will end up taking more than six. However, it’s not because the work was underestimated, it’s simply because it’s taken so long for everyone just to show up. Oh well. At least those brick-and-stone arches were worth the wait.

Rural Italy is also full of tradition, where old habits die hard. Introduce an idea that deviates from the age-old norms, and the builder brushes off your suggestion with a brusque ‘*bruto!*’ (‘ugly!’). Sometimes only persistence gets you what you want. More progressive attitudes are leaking in, but it takes legwork to find practitioners of ‘alternative’ concepts such as non-gas heating and non-tile flooring.

With the influx of English buyers and their powerful pounds, it’s a costlier dream today than a few years ago – €150,000 is not unheard of for a pile of stones, and renovation costs start at €800 per square metre.

But it’s worth it. Bring patience, humour, and five willing senses, and all frustrations give way to simpler, more vital things. Like spinach and tomatoes so fresh they’re dripping with earth... alluring aromas from chalkboard *ristoranti* where you’re greeted like a friend... neighbours who kiss you on the cheek and treat you like family... verdant waves of rolling hills stretching into forever...

Getting back in touch with life’s essential pleasures at a pace that most of us forgot long ago – it’s why Frances Mayes bought *Bramasole*, and why we bought our little taste of *la dolce vita*. And, of course, being able to wake up of a morning and say: ‘I think I’ll go to Florence today.’

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