

spotlight on tuscany



1 AFTER



2 BEFORE

Perfect Restoration

Extensive renovations transformed an abandoned family granary into an Italian masterpiece. by Lauren Hoffman

In the late 1700s, the prominent Medici family owned 5,000 acres known as the Casadorna Estate in the Tuscan Triangle of Italy. Now, about 230 years later, Greg and Sue Evans

are the proud owners of part of this estate and their own villa that marries traditional Tuscan charm with modern elegance.

Nestled in the lush landscape between the Italian cities of Florence, Sienna and >



3 AFTER

1 & 2. Dine and Recline A large brick arch leads from the kitchen to the family-sized dining room with an antique wooden table.

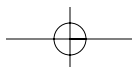
3,4 & 5. Room for a View The original barn was overgrown with unsightly plant life, but flower beds now flourish outside of the barn and newly constructed well.



4



5 BEFORE



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Pisa, Il Granaio (meaning granary) sat abandoned for almost 75 years. When the Evans' were vacationing in Italy late in the summer of 2002, they were shown this property on a whim. "We loved it," says Greg Evans, "but we weren't really in the market to buy in Italy."

The Evans began singing a different tune after returning home to Princeton, N.J., and by November were the proud owners of their own Tuscan retreat. Looking at the piles of debris, the cracked plaster and the plant life that had been calling Il Granaio home for some time, one might think that a daunting task loomed ahead. Restoration began in May 2002 and took two years to complete, which is longer than usual explains Greg, but the Evans have their reasons.

From Grain Room to Game Room Logs used to dry grain and wheat have been removed to make room for entertaining. In addition to a billiards table, an authentic bee-hive oven (not shown) is still in working order and Greg is mastering his homemade pizza recipes.

After deciding to purchase Il Granaio, which is an old farmhouse and barn, they made another life-changing decision. Greg left his job as a management consultant and Sue cut back her hours to part time as a managing director for a New York investment firm, and the two began their own company, Tuscan Hills LLC, a business designed to help other families rent, purchase and/or remodel their own Italian villas from the comforts of home. "We were very involved in the



process [of our remodel]," says Greg. "We wanted to make it as a showroom for our clients." The Evans even rent out their villa, which can house up to 16 people at a time.

With the majority of the planning completed by phone and Internet, the Evans connected with Michael Vigni, an Italian geometre (a person that specializes in architecture, surveying and title searching), who helped them through this process. In Italy, there are very strict rules about remodeling homes and Vigni knew all the local codes. Most importantly, the building codes instruct remodels to reflect the exact dimensions of the structure as it was first built—meaning no additions, only subtractions. However, the remodel inside the structures can take on any shape or size—walls can come down or up, and in this case several bedrooms and bathrooms were added, being that Il Granaio was built in the late 1700s. "Which by Italian standards is not very old," jokes Greg.

Prior to the restoration, the main house only had six rooms and one bathroom. The Evans wanted to use as much of the original structure as possible, and were even able to turn feeding troughs for cattle into contemporary and functional bench seating. After the restoration, the main house has five bedrooms and bathrooms, and the barn has been divided into three bedrooms and bathrooms.

Preserving the elements of Tuscan architecture during the remodel was very important to the Evans. Large arched doorways led from one room to another, exposed wooden beams heightened the 12-foot ceilings and the authentic Venetian plaster walls and terra cotta tile were re-integrated into the design. As often as possible, original materials were taken out and restored to their former beauty. While scraping down the walls, a pleasant surprise peaked out from behind the plaster. "They exposed the entire interior and it was all brick and stone," says Greg. The stone and brick were left



exposed in many parts of the house after the remodel was completed.

Because the Tuscan region is prone to earthquakes, one of the stipulations of any remodel in this area is to infuse the house with protective steel poles. These poles were integrated into the villas redesign, and are now unnoticeable. The second floor of the house had to be completely reconstructed to incorporate these poles, and the result is a carefully crafted and beautifully designed Tuscan hideaway.

Walking into the villa, guests are greeted with a hand-painted mural, made to look just like the natural landscape that surrounds Il Granaio. American decorative artist Lisa Hickey was recruited especially for this task, and took careful steps to ensure the true beauty of the property was mirrored on the walls. "She went out around the property and took photos of the landscape and replicated it on the wall," says Greg. Also in the foyer are two wrought iron pieces—a bench and a coat tree—made by the Italian artisans, Caporali, who specialize in hand-forged iron works. While the style of the bench is rather traditional, the medusa-like coat tree adds a touch of whimsy to the entryway.

Many modern touches were added to the villa during the remodel and now it is the picture of refined luxury. Several bathrooms were created to give potential renters adequate privacy. Each bathroom is unique in its design, and they are even equipped with a bidet. "This is pretty standard in rentals," says Greg. Floor-to-ceiling Italian marble and a console sink gives a very modern look to one of the bathrooms, similar to what one would find in any upscale hotel.

Perhaps the most modern element in the house is the kitchen, with stainless steel appliances and countertops, a Carrera marble sink and cherry wood cabinets. By keeping a spacious kitchen but adding modern appliances (all Italian), including a six-burner stove, the Evans and their guests can gather

around the room and cook meals large enough to feed 16 people. "It is also large enough for people to gather while the meal is being prepared and also walk out to the patio [a pergola] off the kitchen to watch the sunset," says Greg. In the center of the kitchen sits an antique kneading table (a madia) used as an island and doubles as storage space.

In the adjacent dining room, a bright red emanates from the walls, complementing the yellow earth tone of the kitchen walls. "The idea was to pull in color from the stone and the brick in the wall," explains Greg. "We wanted to make it a darker setting because light streams in there." The dining room is Sue's favorite in the remodel for several reasons. In addition to the exposed brick wall and the vibrant red paint, the centerpiece of the room is an antique dining table. Large enough to seat 16 people, this table is about 150 years old and once belonged to the Japanese Embassy in Italy. The dining chairs are wrought iron, also made by Caporali. While they are not antiques, the quality craftsmanship stands out and they

blend harmoniously with the design of the room.

One room that is very unique to the remodel of Il Granaio is what is now the game room, located in the old barn. Originally, this room was used to dry out food and wheat, had dirt floors and a bee hive oven. Now with a billiards table as its focal point, the game room has kept the exposed stone walls, but added a four-inch granite stone floor in order to maintain the barn-like feeling. The new game room is one of Greg's favorite in the remodel—but he prefers to call it the "pizza oven room." "I like the pizza oven room because it is the original oven for the family that lived in the house more than 200 years ago and is where they would cook their meals," says Greg. "The 'bee hive' design is classic and it operates exactly as it did when it was first built. It makes excellent pizza today either on your own or with the help of a local pizzaiola." Now that the Evans have an authentic Tuscan villa to call home, they will have plenty of time to perfect their own pizza recipes. ■

Designing Under the Tuscan Sun

In addition to the Evans' Tuscan realty company, they also have a showroom designed like a Tuscan villa where they sell authentic Italian accessories and furniture. In their Princeton, N.J., showroom, the Evans feature Caporali wrought iron furniture, Venini blown art glass, hand-painted ceramics by U. Grazia, crystal and stemware by Arnolfo di Cambio, and other items like linens, photography and spa products. Using a combination of furniture and accessories can lend a Tuscan feel to any home, and Sue Evans knows the importance of using unique elements to accomplish this look.

FURNITURE In the living room in their Tuscan villa, Sue chose a sofa that was close to the ground with simple lines, and accented it with bright fabric. She chose to play off the older aesthetic with modern design—creating a design scheme that can only be described as rustic elegance. Adding to this are the numerous wrought iron pieces (benches, beds and chairs) scattered throughout the villa. Sue likes it because it uses old materials like iron but in a modernized design. "To me, it combines it all," says Sue.

ACCESSORIES Some of her favorite Italian pieces are wooden candlesticks. Sue has found that these candlesticks used to be painted or gilded, but only on the fronts. These candlesticks were sometimes found in regal homes or on altars, and she has even used them as a base for a lamp. Also, using earthy materials like terracotta, marble and stone add a genuine Italian flavor to any home.