

H&G SMART TRAVEL

Once an abandoned watchtower in the heart of Italy's Umbrian countryside, Catherine Zachariou discovers Torre di Moravola, an ultra-chic hotel that has been lovingly brought back to the future

LA DOLCE VITA REVISITED

THANKS TO THE OVER-THE-top trend of faux-Tuscan architecture, many people are turned off at the idea of spending time away at the real thing. Yet an ancient watchtower in Umbria, Italy is paving the way for stylish stays in this ancient European Mecca.

Torre di Moravola is a 12th-century lookout tower that has seen many a tenant, and if it could talk, would tell many a story. So, when owners Christopher Chong and Seonaid Mackenzie stumbled upon its ivy-covered ruins they knew they had to have it. Both architects and designers by profession, the couple saw the potential in the property and, after a lengthy buying process of more than a year, the property was finally theirs. 'The property had a quiet presence and power that testifies to its origins. The premises hovers between reality and paradise,' says Mackenzie. Taking the task of transforming the building upon ▶



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP A stylish covered alfresco dining area is perfect for lazy lunches; a talking point in itself, the property's 25-metre swimming pool reflects the scenic skyline; busy at work in the kitchen, owner and architect Christopher Chong prepares fresh produce from the gardens OPPOSITE PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT The magnificent view of the undulating Umbrian hillside; a modern steel staircase leads from the contemporary en-suite bathroom



PHOTOGRAPHS: TORRE DI MORAVOLA, NICOLAS MATHÉUS;
PRODUCTION: LAURENCE DOUGIER

TRAVEL DESTINATION

themselves was their next challenge. 'The tower was without water or electricity, but pulsed with a beauty that demanded to be made proud once again,' says Mackenzie. The idea? To pay homage to its original structure whilst updating it with a more modern design. Sleek glass and steel have replaced the once heavy features to let in light and warmth.

The couple's determinism paid off, the result is a rustic stone building injected with a chic modernity. With a design reminiscent of the great architect Richard Rogers, whom Chong studied under, the ancient exterior belies the pared-back newness of the interiors with the architectural aesthetic addressed in the floating staircases and jutting angles at irregular intervals. The accommodation is made up of seven ultra-private tower suites, each boasting en-suite bathrooms and top-of-the-line accessories.

Situated high on the ridge of the Madonna di Confine, the grounds have not changed since medieval times, making the area very isolated and quite possibly one of the most magical spots on the planet. So it is no wonder that many couples have decided to wed here. One can see why, at night the olive groves are illuminated by moonlight and the stars enforce star-gazer envy. There is a 25-metre heated pool, shaded gazebo, private yoga sessions on offer, and an Ayurvedic massage pavilion. All meals are made from organic ingredients produced on site and creatively prepared by chef Lachlan Archibald whose seasonal ingredients are given an Umbrian twist. The views are delightful from the property's four terraces and for those with an adventurous spirit, filter through the forest by foot, bicycle or horse toward the village of Montone for some living, local style. ■ *Torre di Moravola* www.moravola.com

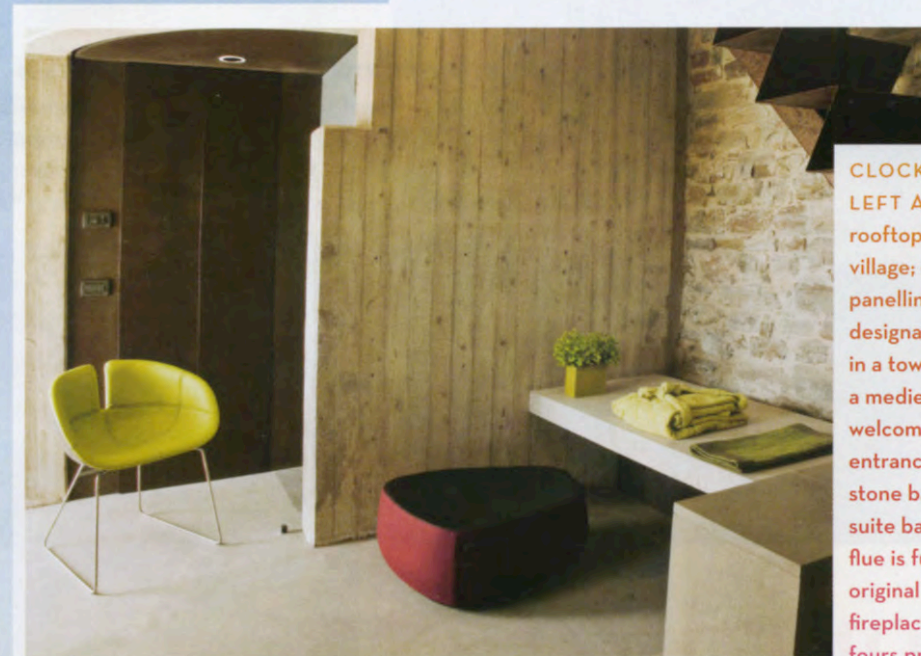
PLACES TO GO, THINGS TO SEE

SYRAH WINEBAR THIS SUPER CHIC WATERING HOLE, SITUATED IN THE TOWN OF **CASA DI CASTELLO**, IS WHERE THE FASHIONABLE FOLK ORDER BY GLASS TO DISCUSS AND COMPARE VINTAGES. WWW.SYRAHWINEBAR.IT

UMBRIA FILM FESTIVAL MINGLE WITH MOVIE STARS AT THIS WORLD-CLASS EVENT, WHERE THE TOWN OF MONTONE IS TRANSFORMED INTO A FELLINI-ESQUE OPEN-AIR CINEMA. WWW.UMBRIAFILMFESTIVAL.COM

THE PERSEID METEOR SHOWER WISH UPON A STAR WHEN VIEWING THE MAGICAL METEOR SHOWERS FROM TORRE DI MORAVOLA'S EAST TOWER. NAMED AFTER SAN LORENZO, THIS IS ONE SIGHT NOT TO BE MISSED.

THE TRATTORIA LA LEA A TRADITIONAL UMBRIAN RESTAURANT WHERE 'MAMA' AND 'PAPA' CALL THE SHOTS TO CREATE THE MOST DIVINE MENU AROUND FOR MILES. ■ 38 VIA SAN FLORIDO, **CITTA DI CASTELLO**



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT A view of the rooftops in a nearby village; concrete panelling artfully designates spaces in a tower bedroom; a medieval archway welcomes visitors in the entrance hall; a sunken stone bath in an en-suite bathroom; a steel flue is fused with an original medieval stone fireplace; delicious petit fours prepared by Chef Lachlan Archibald



WHO, WHY AND HOW?

WHO GOES THERE? DESIGN AFICIONADO SYBARITES AND FASHIONISTAS. SA ARCHITECT STEFAN ANTONI AND FAMILY STAYED FOR A WEEK. WHILE CHARLOTTE SINCLAIR OF VOGUE HELD HER WEDDING HERE.

WHAT FOR? REAL ITALIAN LIVING IN COMPLETE ISOLATION, 360-DEGREE VIEWS, MICHELIN-STYLE FOOD AND ALFRESCO LIVING. ALL BROUGHT TOGETHER FOR AN EXPERIENCE STEEPED IN HISTORY.

GETTING THERE BRITISH AIRWAYS FLIES TO ROME FIUMICINO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT VIA MADRID FROM OR TAMBO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, FROM R5 279 PER PERSON RETURN INCLUDING TAX. FROM THERE, IT IS A TWO-HOUR DRIVE TO TORRE DI MORAVOLA OR THE NEARBY VILLAGE OF MONTONE WHERE HOTEL STAFF CAN COLLECT GUESTS. ■ **BRITISH AIRWAYS** WWW.BRITISHAIRWAYS.COM