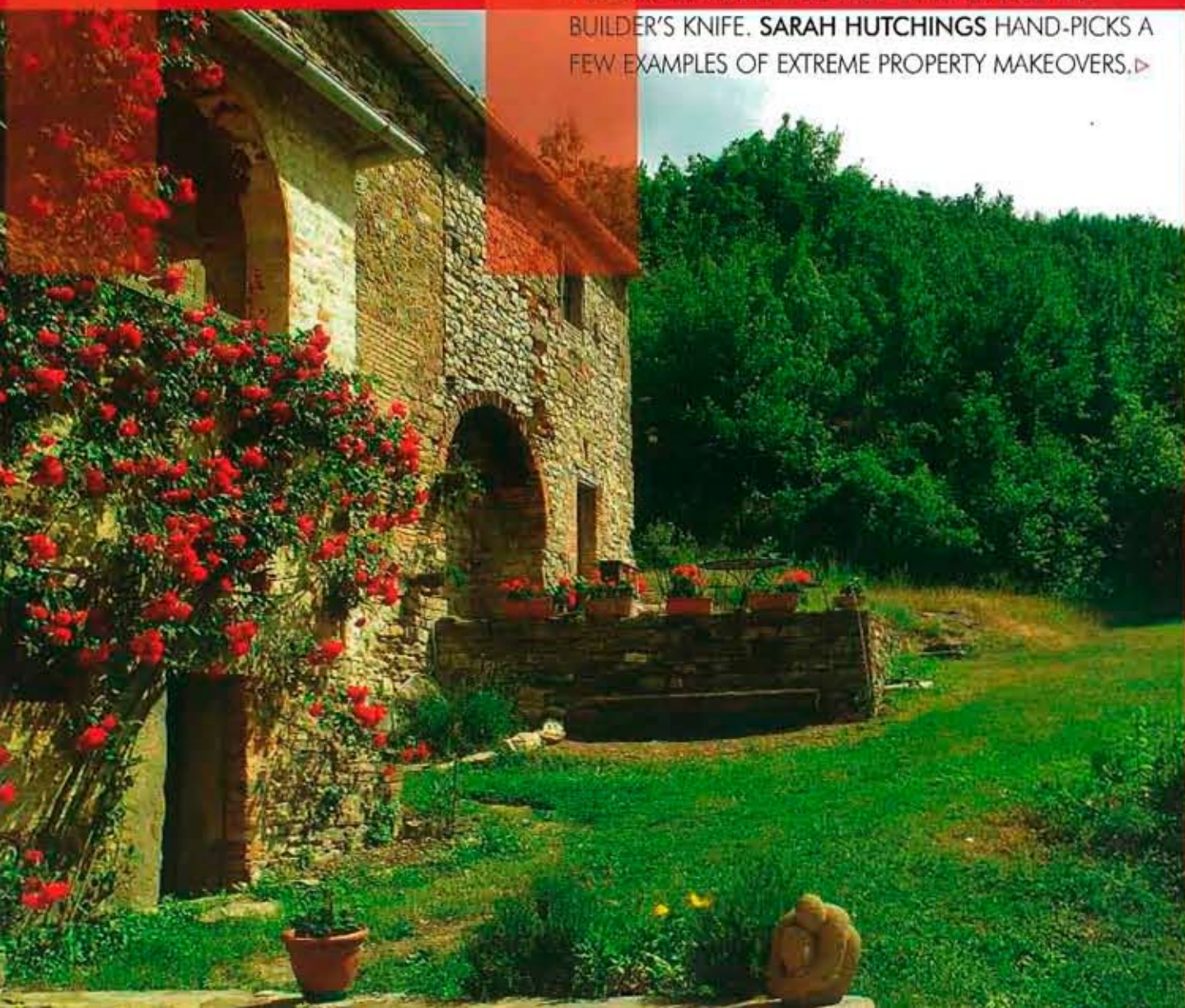


40<sup>th</sup>  
Anniversary Year  
1968-2008

# is for Historic renovations

THEY WERE STEEPED IN HISTORY BUT IN DESPERATE NEED OF A FACELIFT AS THEY WENT UNDER THE BUILDER'S KNIFE. **SARAH HUTCHINGS** HAND-PICKS A FEW EXAMPLES OF EXTREME PROPERTY MAKEOVERS. ▶



There's something about the idea of renovating a property that rouses the dormant Handy Andy in most of us. We see a ruin, fall in love with it and overlook minor details – like the fact that we don't know a screwdriver from a train driver – as we envisage creating our dream home. Some pursue the dream, others leave it to the professionals, but one thing is clear: restoration is not for the faint-hearted.

The results are perhaps even more breathtaking than when they involve ancient properties, and few historic properties could claim to have such a fascinating story as that of Casa Serafini. Beautifully situated on the top of an unspoilt hilly landscape in Borgni de Serrungone, the property is infused with the history of the Serafini family – which would make for a perfect soap opera storyline: one of the earliest excons conspired to kill a Duke who was trying to seduce his wife, while another plotted against a different Duke and was forced to flee to Borgni. This polemic family's emblem – three terrapins – is still clearly visible over the main entrance door to the villa.

The nucleus of Casa Serafini, which lies in the province of Pesaro and Urbino in the northern part of Italy's Marche region, dates from the 16th century and was bought for €1.5 million (£1 million) in 2003 by Edmondo Lupatini. With over 30 years' experience in renovating properties, he immediately saw the potential in the real estate.

Finding a team of suitable professionals proved problematic, as son Renzo explains: "It's very difficult to find top quality renovators, many fake the important details."

"Five years after renovating, you can tell if the right materials haven't been used. Beams don't age in the same way as with newer materials," he adds.

Consequently, the same trusted team of ten men have been working on Casa Serafini since renovations began.

Set in four hectares of lush parkland, the property comprises six main buildings, which are divided into 21, one-

properties, almost all of which have a private garden, patio or balcony.

Tremendous care has been taken to retain the authentic features, with beautiful oak beams, terracotta floors and vaulted ceilings; but the mod cons are all there, too, with Jacuzzis, air conditioning, cable television and thermal and acoustic insulation. There is also a 24-hour portage and caretaker service.

Between €5.5 million and €6 million (£3.8 and \$4.1 million) has gone into the renovations, to create the ultimate fusion of rustic authenticity and ultra-modern comfort.

All properties will be fully ready to move into by January 2006, and the renovation of the extensive gardens, tennis court and large swimming pool is scheduled for completion at the end of 2006, as is the underground car park.

Despite its tranquility, the property is very well connected. There is a village 1.5 kilometres away and a beach just 18 kilometres away. The nearest airports are Ancona, Forlì and Rimini. Casa Serafini is on site through Villa Serafini, with



*"I had to be inspected by two mother superiors and a bishop. The plans had to be drawn up for what I intended to do and I was personally vetted – it was tough"*

prices starting at €160,000 (£110,000).

La Badia di San Faustino is a beautiful old abbey, which dates back to the 9th century when it was used by Benedictine monks. It lies in Italy's upper Tiber valley, just 15 minutes from Umbertide. Jonathan Anderson bought the 35-room property from three separate owners between 1997 and 1999.

The property had fallen into disrepair and needed a lot of elbow grease, as Jonathan explains: "It hadn't been lived in for over ten years and the owners had abandoned hope of doing anything with it. It was an emergency sale on their part and I made them offers – low ones."

Jonathan wouldn't let on how much for

amount spent on renovations, although as the properties were partially renovated when he purchased them, he saved the costly task of having to redo the masonry and floors. Most of the renovations – except the plumbing and electrics – were carried out by Jonathan and his wife, along with some helpful friends.

San Faustino is entirely stone built, and is a veritable 800 square-metre labyrinth of wings, cellars, rooms, annexes and tunnels – there's even a chapel.

The main L-shaped block still has the original 9th-century tower in the corner, and is divided into two two-floor apartments – Casa Forno and Casa Loggia – with a further cellar apartment below and the annex complex next to

the chapel and society.

Casa Forno has a floor area of 120 square metres and comprises three bedrooms (one en suite), bathroom, living room with original fireplace, dining room, kitchen with original bread oven, stone stairs and terrace.

Casa Loggia is the same size, and has a living/dining room with fireplace, kitchen, two bedrooms, two bathrooms and wooden stairs leading to a monk's cell. Both the apartments have original restored beams and ceilings, terracotta floors and double-glazed, traditional-style windows. The cellar apartment comprises three bedrooms and one bathroom and has a vaulted entrance to a vestibule, but requires further work to make it habitable.

The master complex in the west wing consists of an old abbot's room (still with original fireplace and food), five bedrooms (two en suite), living room with original fireplace, kitchen, cloakroom/dressing room, south-facing



stone patio and side terrace. Again, all beams and ceilings are restored originals, windows are in the traditional style and the floors are terracotta. Central heating has been installed in most, but not all areas of the property.

There is also a chapel complex and a 130-square-metre farmhouse, which is currently restored to a builder's finish but would make another apartment. San Faustino is fully habitable. However there is still wide scope for modification for those who fancy making their own mark. The total land covers around four hectares, and includes woodland, well-kept gardens, a vegetable garden and private pool garden, with a 12-metre by six-metre pool.

San Faustino is available through Precious Villas, priced at €1.6 million (£1.1 million).

Whatever the X factor is, La Monasterie development in the Vendée region of France's Pays de la Loire has it in spades. Situated in the fortified village of

1) The original bell tower at San Faustino is a beautiful feature

2) Above them, the renovators of Casa Serafini are viewing their final stages

3) The hill offers the ultimate escape to the country

4) Starting from scratch, renovating an old property often involves completely gutting the interior

5) Original beams and masonry work are a hard joint in the heart

6) Kitchen in San Faustino

Vauvray – France's second prettiest village – the monastery dates back to the 10th century and was bought in 2000 by Maria Kluczyk, who needs divine approval in order to obtain the property. "I had to be inspected by two mother superiors and a bishop," he explains. "The plans had to be drawn up for what I intended to do and I was personally vetted – it was tough."

Maria's plans were given the thumbs up and he got to work on totally restoring the property. While the conditions of the sale mean that he is unable to reveal how much he paid for La Monasterie, he estimates that £5 million has since gone into the renovations.

Every aspect of the monastery, from roofing and tiling to sewage systems and electrics, has been totally restored to a very high quality. All walls have been fully insulated and there is central heating throughout, providing necessary creature comforts.

However, the ancient character of the

building has not been lost, as extreme care has been taken to retain as many of the original features as possible. All the original stonework has been exposed and the old wooden beams remain, as do the original fireplaces and beautiful stained glass windows.

Le Monastere is now a stunning development of 36 properties, comprising one-, two-, three- and four-bedroom apartments and two- and three-bedroom townhouses.

"What makes this development truly unique is the fact that each property is custom-designed by the client.

"I sell a shell," explains Mario. "The client sits with me and my designers for two weeks, and tells us how they want their home to be. When they're happy with it we go ahead and build, sending the owner images every month so they can see the progress. No two homes are ever the same."

Four hectares of beautiful riverside gardens surround the development, overlooked by a luxury swimming pool.

Vouvant has all the necessary amenities and local shops and there is also a colourful street market. The airports at Nantes, La Rochelle and Poitiers are all a 90-minute drive away. Le Monastere is available through agents VEF. Prices range from €143,000 to €610,000 (£98,000 to £418,000).

Looking at the Mill in France's Limousin region, with its picture-perfect surroundings, it is impossible to believe that in 1987 this property cost Trisha Mason just £45,000.

"I had no idea what I was going to do with it," she explains. "I thought that if the worst came to the worst and I could never afford to do anything with it, I could just put a caravan on the site and use it for happy holidays."

After standing empty for 40 years, the property was in total disrepair, and the renovation challenge that faced Trisha was enormous. This would be normally be the cue for architects, builders and a plethora of other professionals – not to mention a sizeable bank loan or two – to enter the arena.

But, as a young widow with two small



children and no job, there was no money to contract workers. Instead, every school holiday around 20 friends joined her in France, camping on the grounds. "We had library books explaining how to do things like wire a house or plaster a ceiling," explains Trisha. "None of us had experience, just lots of enthusiasm."

The Mill is divided into two very separate wings. At first, Trisha and her army of zealous renovators focused on the main building, the east wing, although the amount of work done was sporadic until 1994, when she moved there permanently.

Original features form a significant part of the character of the property, perhaps none more so than the spectacular water wheel that greets you on arrival. The east wing now comprises three en suite bedrooms (two double, one twin), a fully fitted kitchen, utility room, dining room and a living room, which leads onto an open terrace offering views across the meadows and woods.

The west wing has lost little of the essence of its former life as a working mill, and many features have been thoughtfully incorporated into its design. The ground-floor consists of a fully fitted kitchen with a dining area and a lounge. Two spiral staircases lead to the first floor, which comprises three further double en suite bedrooms, a single room and another large living room.

There is half a hectare of carefully maintained gardens, 3.6 hectares of woods and meadows and a kilometre of river frontage, all belonging to the property, creating the ultimate get-away-from-it-all.


The local village is just five kilometres away, the historic city of Poitiers can be



6) Despite its building site status, ten people just couldn't wait to move into Le Monastere and are now permanent residents.

7) Original features like the water wheel add much to the charm of The Mill.

reached in an hour and Limoges airport is a 45-minute drive. The Mill is on the market through VEF, priced at €1.5 million (£1 million).

So, while for some of you all this renovation talk will have propelled your inner Handy Andy into overdrive, the rest of you can take comfort in the fact that there are plenty of people out there ready to do all the hard work for you – all you have to do is enjoy the magnificent fruits of their labour. 

## contacts

**Villa Serafini**  
Tel: +33 140 460 356  
Website: [www.casoserafini.it](http://www.casoserafini.it)

**VEF**  
Tel: +44 (0)20 7515 8660  
Website: [www.vefuk.com](http://www.vefuk.com)

**Precious Villas**  
Tel: +44 (0)870 446 3086  
Website: [www.preciousvillas.com](http://www.preciousvillas.com)