

# An Italian Job

Undertaking a restoration project in another country can be a daunting prospect. However, by seeking professional advice and support, Jill Keene finds you can end up with the home of your dreams at a good price

Renovating property in Italy can be a minefield of red tape and bureaucracy and this has encouraged many investors to look elsewhere. But those in search of a second or investment home are being enticed back. The Apennine region of Northern Italy, for example, where cheap flights to the region are ever more plentiful, is becoming increasingly popular for this type of buyer.

Eddy Crompton, director of La Casa Emilia, specialists in this area, says, "Initially it may be difficult for investors to fully grasp the possibilities a property in need of renovation can offer. We make them aware of what can be realistically achieved in terms of scope of project and time needed with the funds available."

With all work having to be authorised 20 days before any alterations can take place a local geometra (architect/engineer) has to submit plans and project details to the council. If renovation work is internal then permission is a formality, whereas extensions or structural work will require detailed planning permission (concessione edilizia). On average this takes two months to be approved and incurs a tax of around five per cent.

Mr Crompton continues, "Many of the properties we market have been built in stone, which need tradesmen who are experienced in working with this material. Our geometras will also approach only those firms and tradesmen who have a proven track record in this type of renovation work. The geometras,

knowing the likely cost of any restoration, will be able to independently verify the estimates of the work provided by the building contractors.

"Where people have run into trouble before is that they have independently taken on local contractors and expected building work to be completed on schedule. However, with the aid of a local geometra, a contract can be drawn up outlining the work to be carried out along with regular payments at agreed stages and also adding penalty clauses so that if the work is not finished on schedule there would be some refund available, dependent upon weather conditions at the time of build."

With the aid of the Internet it is even possible to undertake such restoration

work without necessarily being on site. However, it is still essential that when appointing a local geometra a site visit is undertaken so there is some personal contact from the start.

It may be that, having weighed up all the pros and cons, renovation is not for you and you decide to opt for a ready-renovated property. If that's the case, you'll find that prices vary greatly from province to province and renovation to renovation. In general terms, they could start from as little as £1,021 (€1,500) per square metre for a project in a less popular location to £3,405 (€5,000) and more for an ancient, renovated villa, castle or monastery with features such as frescoes, large gardens and superb views.

Italian property renovator, Renato Tagliaferro, advises, "If you buy a restored property, always check that there is a proper foreman in charge, that work on the heating, water, doors and windows has been carefully completed and that the stone walls have been reinforced with armed cement. You can always judge a renovation project by the recuperation of original materials - always a very expensive process. Too often developers use low-quality materials, which look slightly similar to local, traditional ones, but over the years they tend to deteriorate."

Our Top 10 properties over the next couple of pages are in need of everything from minor to major restoration - there's even one totally restored but attractively priced option - take your pick! ▶

## To restore or not to restore?

Linda Travella of Casa Travella offers the following advice to those contemplating buying a property in need of attention.

- Restoration is not necessarily cheaper. How much you have to pay for the property and what kind of work needs doing must be taken into consideration.
- Renovating a property is very time consuming and can be difficult if you do not have an experienced architect/surveyor overseeing the project.
- It's always a good idea to inform the local 'comune' of any work to be carried out, no matter how small.
- For any major work, such as adding balconies, permission will always be required.
- If you are buying property with land make sure you check on any pre-exemption rights that neighbours may have.