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Post revival The imposing exterior of Casa Serafini, with its lovingly restored interiors



An artful Italian renaissance

The rebirth of an estate is creating classic holiday homes, says **Cheryl Markosky**

Fancy becoming lord or lady of your own Italian manor - without the responsibility of its upkeep? Then one of the 42 renovated or new homes on an ancient estate in the Le Marche region offers a tantalising taste of history.

The Serafini estate is said to date back to the 15th century, when Ettore Serafini fled here after his plot against the Duke of Urbino was foiled. The tyrannical Duke was immortalised in a famous painting by Piero della Francesca, and by coincidence the buildings at Casa

Serafini are named after Renaissance artists including della Francesca.

The main villa, built in 1803, and three outbuildings, are being converted into apartments and three three-storey town houses. Alongside them, there will be three new apartment buildings.

Buyers won't own the entire four-hectare site, of course, but possessing a fragment of Serafini history has its advantages, such as a warden and a gardener - and even free olive oil from the olive grove.

Tim Marsh from Colliers CRE, who is

selling homes on the estate, believes the fusion of historic and modern will appeal to British buyers and at manageable values compared to the costs of renovating something of their own. Prices start at £102,000 for a one-bedroom apartment, rising to just under £400,000 for a large town house.

"The builder, Edoardo Tagliavento, best known for restoring Italian churches, is a real craftsman," Marsh says. "It has taken two years to restore the first 24 apartments that will be completed by the middle of next year."

David Ferri, a lawyer from south-west London, is looking to buy a two-bedroom apartment at Casa Serafini from £186,000 to £182,500. The price will depend on whether he takes an apartment with its own tavernetta - an old brickwork wine cellar that can be used as a dining room or extra bedroom. He plans to spend several weeks a year on the estate with its communal pool and tennis courts.

"Friends are going up old Italian wrecks, which sounds fantastic if you

can be out there to supervise the building work," he says. "But I could not be there to sort out the phenomenal red tape that is inevitable in Italy."

David has been attracted by the workmanship of Casa Serafini. "Things are handmade and doors have been restored. It would have been easy to plaster over old walls, but they have been sandblasted and remain pretty much as they were."

Tuscany has been the favoured spot for Britons looking for country houses and *rustici* (farmhouses), but it is an

expensive choice. Tim Marsh says a typical Tuscan, two-bedroom home starts at around £350,000, while a similar place in Le Marche is around £150,000. Two-bedroom homes in need of restoration can still be found for as little as £40,000, but prices are rising.

People who buy at Serafini will have the angels on their side: the emblem above the main door, representing the family name, is three seraphs.

Casa Serafini: Colliers CRE, 020 7487 1978, www.collierscre.com