



STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN: Derek has retained period features at Grand Ocean

The age of glamour

FROM PAGE 80

of sophisticated Art Deco, Derek's favourite period is Regency, as found in his London and Newcastle houses.

"I've carried out 70 per cent of the renovation on my London Regency townhouse, near the Oval Tube station. The predominant look is white and black, which frames period fireplaces and looks great next to my Tracy Emin artwork and other contemporary pieces in an 18th-century building."

He has trouble explaining his Emin hand-stitched blanket, The Rothko Blind Kids, to friends, however, when they ask why a dishcloth is hanging on his wall.

Derek also has a collection of elegant tea boxes from the period and last year,

bought two £1,000 Regency hall chairs. "They cost a fortune, but they're lovely. My partner, who's a plumber, thought the pair cost £100 and he'd have a fit if he knew how much I spent."

Derek's Grade I listed Newcastle home in Leazes Terrace, where he stays a couple of times a month when he goes to visit family, was restored from scratch nine years ago. "I was driving by and saw a flat was for sale. I paid £62,000 for the wreck and stripped it right back, discovering Regency wallpaper behind later versions. It's now light and airy and a fantastic place to hang out."

● **INFORMATION:**
exploreliving.co.uk/0845 873 9054
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DEREK'S TIPS

- **A collection of items**
 (I have white balls in a bowl with one coral one popped in for effect in my hallway) can look striking
- **Buy the best you can afford** it's better to get one good piece rather than a bunch of tat
- **Get a good pop art poster** that picks out key colours in a room

MODERN: Despite the apartment block's heritage, the flats have a modern design



Heady Tuscan Renaissance

In the Italian region best known for sublime scenery, great art and rich food, **PETER SWAIN** discovers an old hilltop village being brought back to life, where you don't need to be a millionaire to buy a piece of paradise

WHEN WE think of Tuscany, scenic farmhouses only millionaires can afford immediately spring to mind. Yet at Castelfalfi, in the heart of the Pisa-Florence-Siena "Chianti" triangle, you can now buy a slice of period paradise for less than £200,000.

The medieval borgo, or village, is straight out of a Puccini opera. Dating back to the 12th century, 476 inhabitants once lived in the quaint cluster of houses around the picturesque castello.

If its outline looks vaguely familiar, it's because you've seen something similar in the background of great Renaissance masterpieces by Michelangelo, Raphael and Leonardo da Vinci, Vinci being a village less than 20 miles away.

By the Fifties, though, Castelfalfi had been all but abandoned. Then, in 2007, Europe's largest travel company, TUI, bought it with a view to transforming its fortunes.

In the first phase of the £210million project, the castello is being turned into a gourmet restaurant and cookery school, while the original main street of the borgo is being converted into shops, bars and 35 freehold apartments, priced from £190,000 through agents Knight Frank.

Over fresh pasta with wild boar sauce at the village's exquisite Il Rosmarino restaurant, the scheme's manager, Martin Schlüter, explained: "Because we already have these atmospheric old buildings, this will soon be reborn as a typically vibrant Tuscan community."

This is the key to Castelfalfi: it's got a heart. Rather than creating one of those slightly artificial communities found on the Costas, the developer is building on centuries of tradition.

On the street where you live, there'll soon be a butcher, a baker and a fresh spinach pasta-maker.

"Behind stylish Italian exteriors there'll be efficient German interiors," says Schlüter, which sounds like a winning combination to me. I especially like the idea of drinking a cappuccino in the piazza and consuming wine and olive oil produced on "my" estate, not to mention partaking in a spot of truffle hunting.

Sporting types will also appreciate the 27 holes of championship-class golf that have already been built in the valley below the village. I found the Mountain course to be in great shape, and the stylish if occasionally noisy enthusiasm of Italian club golfers all made for a good day out.

For those who want to be closer to the action, 11 fairway-side golf villas of a design familiar to buyers in the Algarve are being created,



TRANSFORMED: Castelfalfi holiday homes are set around a pool



COMMUNITY: The streets have traditional shops and restaurants

costing from about £1million each. The chic 32-room Tabaccaia boutique hotel, back up in the borgo, is also being refurbished and is due to reopen later this year.

Two more hotels will be built, together with a spa and wellness centre. The renovation of the large public swimming pool, La Piscina, will be complete by this time next year.

For anyone dreaming of the classic Tuscan idyll, the 2,700-acre estate contains 18 old casali, authentic farmhouses, ripe for conversion as they say, starting at £588,000.

The developer will do all the structural work and install mains services, leaving buyers to create their very own Renaissance masterpieces.

The 2008 recession and Italy's current financial woes have killed off a few similar projects, but with the clout of TUI behind it, this one looks to have a bright future.

The "hidden village" of Castelfalfi is once again a living, breathing community.

● **INFORMATION:**
Pisa airport is 40 minutes by car
Florence is 50 minutes away
Apartments priced from £190,000, ready in 2013: knightfrank.it



More Tuscan 'hidden villages'

TENUTA LA BAGNAIA

- Eight miles from Siena
- Apartments starting at £498,000
- Robert Trent Jones II golf course
- Five-star hotel already on site
- knightfrank.it

BORGIO DI VAGLI

- Near Cortona
- 21 stone farmhouses
- Fractional ownership from £63,000
- Ready to move into today
- clubborgodivagli.com