

# moving the earth for us case study

Anne Coombes describes how an English couple fell in love with Italy.

**D**REAMING OF escape to the quiet beauty of the Italian countryside?

This is just what Martin and Elizabeth Alpren, owners of *Autour du Vin*, (a shop specialising in wine accessories) have done, although the story starts in Switzerland. They were visiting friends in their holiday chalet when mutual friends who were also guests suggested that the Alprens should buy in Italy. They felt sufficiently interested to take up the offer of a free weekend there.

Their intention was to look for a modest condominium but they were bitterly disappointed by the developments they saw: little English enclaves with no real Italian flavour. However, they had arranged to meet with Karen and Steve, from *Historic Italian Homes*, who stood out among their contacts. This company did not just send out reams of paper but offered to spend a day with the Alprens, showing them a selection of properties to meet their needs.

## ITALIAN HOSPITALITY

It was a day that changed their lives. They viewed five properties in all and the one that most closely suited their brief was just north of Perugia, a lovely house just off the main village square, meticulously restored and redolent with the scent of burning chestnut logs. Unfortunately this beautiful house was not the one for them, but that did not affect the owner, Matteo's, hospitality. He insisted that everybody join him for lunch. It was



money was available not only in wine but also in the properties the Alprens were being shown. They saw one completed house that *Historic Italian Homes* had recently renovated for clients and were amazed by the quality and the reasonable costs involved.

The last viewing of the day was of a ruin: only two ivy-clad walls and a pile of rubble remained. The view, however, was glorious as the site was on a deserted hilltop overlooking sleepy green fields. And yes, they bought the ruin, convinced that they could end up with a far superior property, with all the benefits of a peaceful location and within their original budget.

*It was a day that changed their lives...*

better to entertain five comparative strangers, three of whom he couldn't easily converse with, than eat on his own. Any doubts Martin and Elizabeth may have had about investing in Italy were now firmly dispelled by the warmth of this unselfish welcome. An impromptu feast of bread, *prosciutto*, homemade salami and wine followed on the terrace.

When their host discovered the Alprens interest in wine he proudly opened another bottle for them to enjoy – a wine they had not heard of before. It was the colour of blue-black ink and smelt of berries and cherries and fruitcake. It wasn't cloying for it had a degree of acidity that made it refreshing. It was the Sicilian *Donna Fugata 'Mille e Una Notte'*. For years Sicilian wine has been produced for quantity, but a recent trend has been to work with small yields of traditional values in order to obtain quality. So now it is possible to find Sicilian treasures costing a fraction of other world-class wines.

It became increasingly evident as the day progressed that the same quality for sensible

Against all expectations they decided that renovation was the way forward for them. This was largely due to the inspiration offered by Karen and Steve. Their advice was clearly professional and independent, unlike the commission-based service offered by other contacts. Most importantly, the Alprens felt that they could trust Karen and Steve.

## THROUGH THE BUREAUCRATIC MAZE

They have not been disappointed. The planning and design stages were handled efficiently so that within five months of signing the contract the building work began. Believe me, negotiating legal and financial permission as a foreigner in Italy is no mean feat! On a subsequent visit they met Gaudio the local *geometra* (architect/surveyor) whose work on the finished house they had so admired. The plans he drew up for them needed no changes at all. With a deep affection for the local area and its history, his use of reclaimed materials for an authentic appearance and his unerring eye for design, he proved invaluable. With him came a dedicated team of artisans who work to his exacting standards.







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He even negotiated that the existing road to the Alprens house be moved, along with tons of soil, so that a patio could be built overlooking the view.

#### **PROUD NEW OWNERS**

The Alprens are now looking forward to enjoying their new home where the air is clear, the colours bright, the location peaceful and the amazing view subtly different each time they visit. Their friends are understandably delighted and, perhaps, a little jealous!

Throughout this whole experience Karen and Steve of Historic Italian Homes have impressed the Alprens with their dedication to detail and the service they offer. They have helped them at every stage of the project, overseeing the work in Italy and keeping them fully informed of each

development. As Martin and Elizabeth testify: 'They have made the unthinkable come true for us and without them we would certainly never have contemplated taking on such an ambitious project. In the process they have become firm friends. We are also secure in the knowledge that we have made a wise investment. For 50 percent less than the cost of buying a refurbished property, we now have a place which we can truly call our own. We set out to buy a holiday house but have ended up with another home.' They are so happy with the outcome that they are currently embarking on a second restoration for rental purposes!  

**Information:** [www.historicity.co.uk](http://www.historicity.co.uk)  
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