

at HOME in TUSCANY

Quaint guesthouses in the Tuscan countryside take their cue from the comforts of home

BY PAUL SEMKULEY

If you crave design and decor inspiration, travel is one of the best ways you can feed your creativity. From the architecture and culture, to indulging in the local food and wine while taking in the sights, one of the key design influences while abroad is the hotel you choose and its surroundings. When in search of accommodations, for some there is always some apprehension. Nagging questions like, "Is there a place to sit other than my bed? Will the bed and pillows be comfortable? Is the furniture new or is it like being in a corporate office setting? What kind of view will I have?" These considerations are key when booking a place to stay.



Porcellino Gallery Art Boutique



Porcellino Gallery Art Boutique

RENAISSANCE RULES

On a recent trip to Italy this past summer, I found accommodations that not only quieted my reservations but surpassed my expectations. Our first stop was Florence for a four-day stay to tour the city. As far as lodging, I wanted a place that felt like home and not a hotel. The Porcellino Gallery Art Boutique is a mere two cobblestone blocks away from the Piazza della Signoria, with the Medici Palace and Uffizi Gallery just beyond. You couldn't have asked for a better location, but what made it even more special were the furnishings and surroundings within the 16th century Palazzo Cavalcanti that has been in this Florentine family for many generations.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDREA VIERUCCI (LOCANDA)

The front door of the palazzo is tucked behind the vendors of the Piazza Mercato Nuovo, and is very unassuming (except for the Egyptian sarcophagus). Yet beyond the glass door, the aroma of sandalwood and cedar fill your senses and the surrounding decor starts to delight your eyes. The iron-and-stone staircase leads you up to the main common area of this gorgeous guesthouse.

ROOM WITH A VIEW

With only five guest rooms, there wasn't anything that said, "Look at me, I am a hotel." It was more like, "Look, I have my own palazzo for the next four days!" Our room was one of the larger ones overlooking the square where the famous bronze Boar statue sits. With high ceilings and a double-door window, the room screamed old-world charm. But there was something more. It was the combination of the brass-bed frame with a '70s-style globe chandelier, zebra rug and low-fringed tub chairs that gave this room so much style and appeal. It could have been a chic bedroom in the home of a design-savvy person anywhere in the world. This was not your standard-style hotel room. It truly made you feel like you are a guest in someone else's home...and a palazzo at that...



Porcellino Gallery Art Boutique



Locanda al Colle

SECOND STOP

After four glorious days at the Porcellino Gallery Art Boutique, we headed to our next destination, further into the Tuscan countryside, to the beautiful Locanda al Colle. Located in the green foothills of the Apuan Alps and the township of Camaiore, we settled in for nine nights of perfection.

The original house dates back to 1760 and became a five-bedroom guesthouse in 2000, then expanding to 12 bedrooms in 2010. The grounds are meticulously maintained, with olive groves surrounding the property and the panoramic views of the Tyrrhenian sea are breathtaking; rolling hills, clay-topped roofs, olive and cypress trees are bountiful and the air is so fresh and clean.

IT'S ALL IN THE DETAILS

As we walked up to one of the doors leading into the guesthouse, I once again felt that this is not going to be your ordinary stay. The entrance doors lead you into a seating area that is decorated and appointed with the best mid-century furniture, art and accessories. There is no front desk or check-in area, just beautiful surroundings that you would find in a home. The owner has curated a refined collection of art and furniture from around the globe and it shows how much he cares about his guests as the attention to detail is literally everywhere.

We were lucky enough to have a small suite for the next nine nights, with a bonus outside terrace to lounge about after being out at the pool or touring nearby Lucca and Cinque Terre. Once again, our room did not fail in wowing us. Filled with a modern and refined point of view, retro and antique furnishings were mixed to combine a magnificent setting. Why would I ever want to leave and go home?... I am home!

BEDDING'S BEST

Besides the sumptuous setting, there is still one more important detail in your home away from home and that is the bedding. We yearn for comfortable bedding and pillows and we know taking a pillow from home takes up way too much valuable suitcase space. Most places that I have stayed at, even the five-star hotels, the sheets are barely tolerable; crispy and course due to the commercial washing and detergents, not the thread count. At both of these outstanding establishments, it was just like *nonna* had washed the sheets, hung them out to dry and put them back on the bed. They were both sublime, the pillows full and plump, making every sweet dream possible while being away.

HOME... BUT BETTER

Some of us have taken influences from our travels, mostly seen in the "hotel style bedding." But it seems like these splendid establishments have taken their cue from the comforts of home, and reversed the chain of ideas. By knowing what a beautiful, comfortable home is and bringing those comforts to a paying guest, the chain of influence has gone full circle. These magical guesthouses confirm that there is comfort away from home while you travel abroad. I say continue to take your influences from travel and make your home, your home. This will maintain the cycle of creativity between you as a homeowner and the establishment of the hotels and guesthouses around the world.

Now get out there and live. I think I need to call my brother now and ask him for my brass bed back. A little Tuscany in Toronto is in order. ♦



Paul Semkuley, A Toronto-based interior stylist and principal of re:source lifestyles, successfully incorporates the client's existing collection of furniture and family treasures in unique and unpredictable ways. resourcelifestyles.com

SOURCES
**PORCELLINO GALLERY
ART BOUTIQUE**
Piazza del Mercato nuovo, 4
50123 Firenze, Italy
+39 055 288464
info@porcellinogallery.com

LOCANDA AL COLLE
Via la Stretta, 231
loc. Capeziano Pianore
55041 Camaione, (LU) Italy
+39 0584 915 195
info@locandaalcolle.it