

A passion for Italy became their life



What began as their Tuscan retreat grew into a luxury estate hotel filled with herb and flower gardens, delicious food and inspired interiors, discovers **Cathy Hawker**

Passionate: owners Claus and Jeanette Thottrup have transformed a derelict former pilgrims' inn, right

TUSCANY has no shortage of dreamy borgos where honey-hued stone blends in so simpatico with the multi-layered green backdrop of hills and olive trees. Yet for sheer ambition and elegance, few rival the heart-skipping beauty of Borgo Santo Pietro, the culmination of close to two decades work by its Danish owners Claus and Jeanette Thottrup.

Borgo Santo Pietro is 45 minutes south-west of Siena in a rural and untouched part of Tuscany. Originally a coaching inn on the medieval pilgrim path, the 13th-century Borgo had lain empty for 27 years when Claus and Jeanette first saw it while hunting for a summer home.

They bought it in 2001 and set about the Herculean task of transforming the house and gardens, planting 250,000 shrubs and lining the drive with cypress trees, lavender and rosemary. Over the years the project seemed to take on a life of its own and just grew with ever more splendour until, in the end, the couple decided to turn the Borgo — universally referred to simply as “Borgo” — into an hotel.

The couple welcomed their first guests in 2008 and rapidly gained a stellar reputation for high-quality service, enchanting beauty and privacy. Borgo is unashamedly expensive — the top rooms are £2,500 a night — but as Jeanette points out: “I am a purist. It is more important for us to do it right, than to cut the price. This is what it costs to do what we do.”

The Thottrups have stratospheric energy levels and bags of talent. Jeanette was a successful fashion designer while Claus is a mechanical engineer turned master builder. Their construction company PN Homes has completed more than 50 high-value projects in London alone over the past 20 years. Claus excels at design and space planning while Jeanette has a designer's skill, a collector's eye and an A-list address book.

Luxury for Jeanette is about “being cared for, being loved” and with Claus she has lavished love on Borgo. Today there are 20 rooms and suites in a 220-acre estate alongside a charming low-key cookery school, a farm with brown and white alpacas and 300 sheep, 25 acres of vines and exquisite gardens with antique roses, medicinal herbs and a large lake. The couple's formidable attention to detail extends right down to hand-embroidered leather seats on the Borgo Bikes dotted around the grounds.

“I am not interested in style, I am

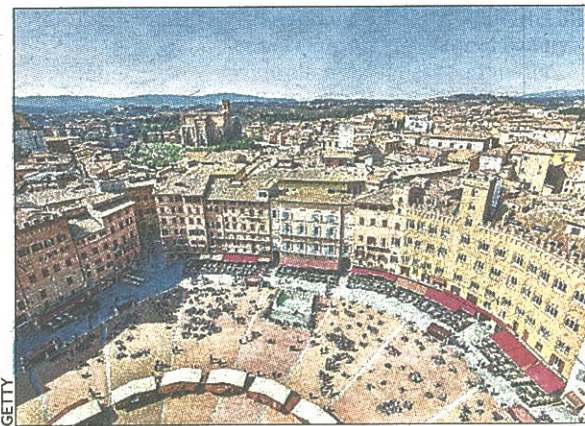
interested in atmosphere, in creating a holistic environment,” says Jeanette. Her eclectic design matches wicker chairs from Bali, chandeliers restored by an artist in Paris and beds handmade in Tuscany while antique Rubelli fabrics mix with Fortuny prints. Favourite hunting grounds include markets in Arezzo, L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue in Provence and Les Puces in Paris.

With two restaurants at the Borgo and another Michelin-starred one in Florence, their farm and homemade cheeses shop in the village, a laboratory and new skincare range (see box) and their exquisite 41.5 metre charter yacht Satori that sleeps 10 guests in total luxury, life is busy. Yet despite the undoubted hard work, it remains great fun. “Everything we do is with a glass of wine in one hand while sketching on a napkin with the other,” says Jeanette.

And it's clear their passion remains as strong as ever. Claus and Jeanette live an hour away in Florence close to their 12-year-old son Vincent's school but are building their own home in the grounds of the Borgo — of course.

Jeanette only has to look out of the window of their garden trattoria and she has an idea — for adding rooms, a champagne bar, a gourmet restaurant

ANDREA JONES/BORG SANTO PIETRO



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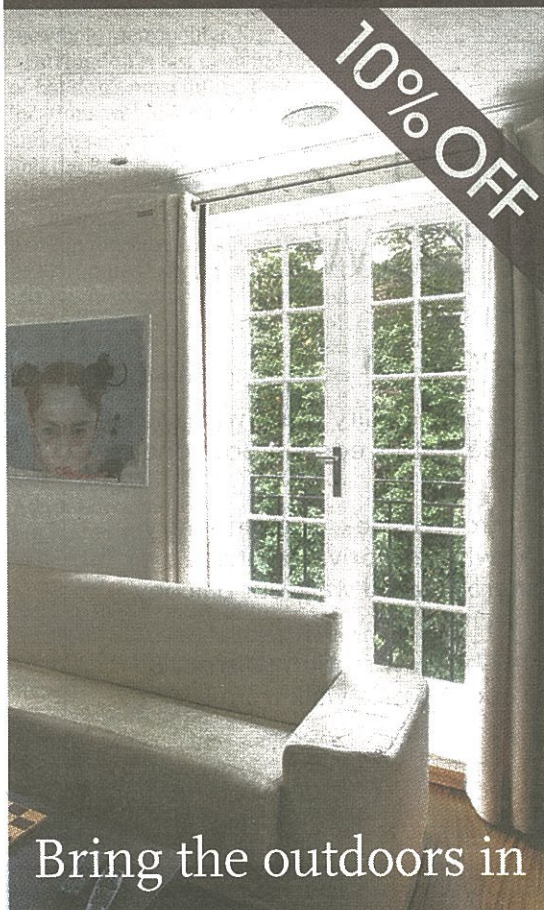
and an upgraded spa with indoor pool. The couple are extending the farm and adding more organic chickens to those already housed in what they jokingly call Portofino, after the famous luxury hotel, as the chicken hutches are painted in Farrow & Ball pastel. “Borgo is a home from home with no stiffness,” says Jeanette. “Fountains flow, peacocks and ducks wander and the herb, flower and fruit and veg gardens offer peace. It is nature at its purest.” You can even take a pastel-painted bike and cycle the acres of gorgeousness.

● Borgo Santo Pietro
borgosantopietro.com
● PN Homes
pnhomes.eu

Borgo Santo Pietro is open from April 1 to October 31. Double rooms start from €535 (£470) including breakfast.

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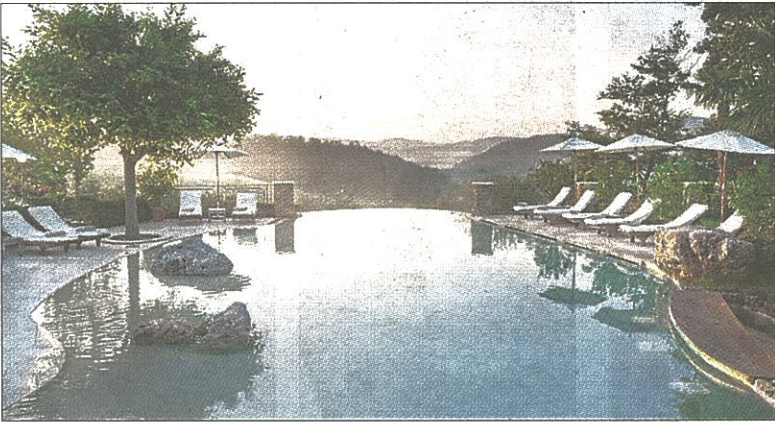
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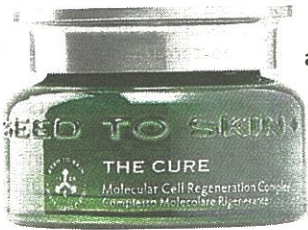
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Homes abroad **Homes & Property**



Stunning: at Borgo Santo Pietro the rooms have beds handmade in Tuscany, with chandeliers restored by an artist in Paris. Outside, the pool has unmatched views, while glorious Siena, far left, is just 45 minutes away

NATURALLY SENSORY SKINCARE
JEANETTE Thottrup's passion for a natural, holistic lifestyle extends to her latest business, Seed to Skin, a skincare range launched this summer and available exclusively at Liberty. The 16 products have been developed along with cosmetologist Anna Buonocore in the sleek, dazzlingly white laboratory and shop in Palazzetto, a short walk from Borgo Santo Pietro. "I have always searched out herbal remedies and had a spa at the hotel for 10 years so we know what works," says Jeanette who has overseen



every detail of the hand-crafted range. Fully natural raw ingredients include raw honey from the Borgo's bees, sheep's milk and rose oil. Seed to Skin aims to harness the "potency of plants and science to extract the best possible holistic properties for targeted skin regeneration and health". Rather like Jeanette's hotel, the skincare range is luxurious and expensive but carries an equally long-lingering sensory experience in its wake. ● Seed to Skin, prices from £49 at libertylondon.com



£265,000: a stone farmhouse and separate granary for full restoration in the wooded hills of Grosseto, Tuscany. Through Knight Frank



£500,000: in Sarteano, Siena, a four-bedroom farmhouse to restore with five acres of land and 250 olive trees. Through Knight Frank

Buying a ruin can be charming but watch the budget

THE dream of restoring an historic ruin into a private home or hotel has captured the imagination of many buyers over the years. Bill Thompson of Knight Frank Italy cautions potential buyers to keep a strict eye on their budget but with prices still below pre-recession highs and many available properties, the buying opportunities are interesting. "Recently I've seen a group of friends buy a borgo together to share in retirement, creating their own little community with a pool, a vegetable garden and perhaps a small vineyard."

Thompson points to a 10,000sq ft ruin divided between two houses, for sale at £450,000, that could be restored to create 10-12 flats. A similar-sized ruin in the wooded hills close to Grosseto in two acres of gardens is £256,000. Savills is selling a detached stone house in 17 acres in Castellina in Chianti with full permission for three bedrooms and a pool. The price tag of £700,000 includes full restoration.

- Knight Frank: knightfrank.com
- Savills: savills.com

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