



Where Old Meets New

Sam and Jeremy Harris's dream of a home in the Umbrian hills came true with the help of two expatriate property experts

FEATURE **RUTH CORBETT** PHOTOGRAPHS **DARREN CHUNG**

The town of Gubbio, in the far north eastern part of the Italian province of Perugia, is a historical gem. Studded with medieval palaces, churches and cathedrals, it's a small town that provides a tantalising glimpse of the rich Roman heritage of the region, and is one that Sam and Jeremy Harris were instinctively drawn to. 'My husband's family had inherited an apartment in Marbella some years ago, but it's a place that has lost a lot of its charm and authenticity, so we started to look into the possibility of a home in Italy, which had always been a bit of a dream,' explains Sam.

That the Harrises found themselves in this Umbrian idyll is testament to an exhaustive internet search by Sam. 'I found plenty of wonderful looking properties >



TOP LEFT The rustic exterior of Sam and Jeremy's home
THIS PAGE Salvaged materials in the sitting room include chestnut beams and a stone fireplace. For a similar stove try woodburners.co.uk. The armchair is an eBay buy reupholstered with tartan William Yeoward fabric



READERS' HOMES



KEY FACTS

Location Umbria, Italy

Period Built in 2011 using original materials from the ruins of a traditional Umbrian farmhouse and outbuildings

Size Open plan kitchen-dining room, living room, three bedrooms and three bathrooms

Owners Sam Harris who is a practice nurse and her husband Jeremy Harris, a general practitioner



'The kitchen is modern, specifically chosen because we like the contrast of new and old'

ABOVE In the kitchen a mix of natural stone and rendered walls complements the contemporary units

LEFT There is plenty of fresh local produce to enjoy

OPPOSITE In the dining area, a pendant light from Mufti (mufti.co.uk) hangs over a Chunky Plank table and Breton chairs from Indigo Furniture (indigofurniture.co.uk). The traditional glass dresser is from Lombok (lombok.co.uk)

during my search, but the prospect of buying in an unknown country and marketplace was daunting.'

Sam's concerns all but vanished, however, when she came across Fervidus White (ferviduswhite.com), a specialist company founded by two Britons, Karen and Steve White, that helps people who wish to buy in Italy. 'After a flurry of emails we flew out to Umbria to meet Karen and Steve and were immediately impressed by their expertise and their intimate knowledge of the area. They showed us around all sorts of intriguing properties and stunning locations, and by the time we left we'd fallen in love with the place,' says Sam.

An antiquated, rundown farmhouse and two derelict outbuildings were eventually to become the Harris's new home, in a beautiful rural location, just 10 minutes drive from Gubbio. The buildings were beyond restoration, but using as many of the original materials as possible, including beams, stone and roof tiles, a new house has risen from the rubble. Unpretentious and very easy on the eye, it is a single storey dwelling that nestles seamlessly into the >





THIS PAGE The handcrafted copper bath in the en-suite bathroom is from William Holland (williamholland.com). Finishes such as nickel, enamel and tin are also available. The walls are painted in Brassica by Farrow & Ball (farrow-ball.com)





‘The brickwork and chestnut beams create a connection to what was here before’

verdant, undulating landscape, as if it has always been there. ‘In many ways we’ve got the best of both worlds: a house made using authentic materials but with all the conveniences of a modern home,’ says Sam.

Karen and Steve White managed the entire process using a tried and trusted team of lawyers and bankers, architects and artisans, to ensure the project came in on time and on budget. Without the stresses of dealing with planning permissions, local bureaucracy and language barriers, the Harrises could relax and focus on the style and layout of the house.

To get the look she wanted, Sam created mood boards, tearing images that she liked from magazines and adding paint and fabric swatches. The finished result is one of understated luxury played out against an earthy colour scheme of browns, beiges, taupes and grey: shades that reflect and enhance the natural surroundings. A spacious L-shaped kitchen-dining room with windows overlooking the valley leads through to a comfortable and very chic sitting room, with exposed ceiling beams and a wood burner, ▶

ABOVE AND TOP RIGHT

The luxurious bedroom suite features pieces from indigofurniture.co.uk.

Sam found the Arco lamp during a trip to Venice

ABOVE RIGHT A local carpenter made the dressing table using a piece of carved wood; it’s teamed with a chair from Achica (achica.com)

KAREN WHITE’S TIPS ON BUYING A PROPERTY IN ITALY

- Whether you’re searching for a home or restoring a property, it is advisable that you access a team of professionals that can guide you through the process.
- Be realistic about how long the planning and restoration might take and allow enough time to appreciate the process. Renovating a home in Italy can be a pleasant experience – try to relax and enjoy it.
- Set yourself a list of criteria that you want to achieve from your new home. Many people purchase a property following a holiday; it is a good idea to spend a bit more time in your chosen location just to make sure that it lives up to expectations.
- It is possible to obtain fixed priced contracts for building works and this is a great way to ensure that you are in full control of your project.
- Remember: location, location, location – this applies in Italy as well.



'We have a house made using authentic materials but with modern conveniences'

TOP LEFT AND LEFT A chair covered in a mix of plain and patterned fabrics adds an individual touch in one of the guest rooms; a simple display of flowers provides colour
ABOVE This bedroom is known as the London room because of the pictures and cushions featuring illustrations of the capital. The brass bed is from feather & Black (featherandblack.com)

while a domed corridor takes you to the bedrooms and bathrooms. 'The period features, like the stone brickwork, the huge chestnut beams and brick arches create an emotional connection to what was here before,' says Sam. 'But we haven't been slaves to tradition. The kitchen is modern, specifically chosen because we like the contrast of new and old.'

In the master bedroom suite Sam has created a luxurious sanctuary, incorporating a stylish seating area and, through a high stone arch, an en-suite bathroom. 'We are so pleased with the bathroom. Jeremy insisted the free-standing bath was positioned in precisely the right spot in which to appreciate the views,' says Sam.

With a swimming pool about to be dug and an olive grove soon to be planted, the Harrises are busy planning their future in Umbria, despite only having had the property for barely a year. 'We're thrilled with how the house has turned out and plan to retire here eventually,' says Sam. 'There isn't a day goes by that I don't pinch myself and think how lucky we are to have had this wonderful dream of a home come true.' ❧