

VOGUE

August 28, 2024

This New Umbrian Resort in a Hilltop Castle Is a Celebration of Italian Craftsmanship

By Liam Hess



Over the past few years, even the most ardent Tuscany fanatic may have felt their enthusiasm dim a little. Sure, the Italian region best known as the birthplace of the Renaissance still boasts the same wonders it always has—treasures of art history, hearty pasta dinners, glorious summer weather, and those iconic streets lined with cypress trees—but post-pandemic, not only has “revenge travel” seen the area near-overwhelmed with tourists, but hotel prices have skyrocketed to eyewatering figures. Slowly but surely, the more savvy traveler has begun to turn their gaze elsewhere.

For many, that gaze has settled on Tuscany’s neighbor, Umbria. Sure, the region isn’t exactly an unknown quantity—many will be familiar with the winding streets and architectural marvels of Perugia, or the bountiful black truffle harvests that arrive every fall—but where Tuscany has more than its fair share of dazzling five-star retreats, Umbria has taken a little longer to catch up. The latest arrival to the Umbrian luxury hotel offering? Borgo dei Conti Resort, which opened just a few weeks ago near the charming village of Montepetriolo, and looks (and feels) like a medieval Italian village preserved in aspic.

A few weeks back, on a baking hot summer afternoon (albeit, mercifully, in the air-conditioned hotel shuttle car), I pulled up to the gates of the estate, where the drama begins—courtesy of an imposing gatehouse, complete with portcullis, that could have been plucked straight out of one of the early Renaissance landscape paintings you might find in Perugia’s Palazzo dei Priori. A winding road then leads you up to a pair of monumental Lebanese cedar trees that shade the facade of the main building: an equally striking edifice that may initially appear to be a remarkably well-maintained medieval palace, but was in fact largely built in the early 20th century for the noble Rossi-Scotti family, who wanted the feel of a historic castle but with all the latest mod-cons. First converted to a hotel in the early 2000s—hence the fully grown-in landscaping—the hotel has lain dormant for the past two years while its owners, the group behind the Londra Palace in Venice and The Place in Florence, have given it a head-to-toe refurb, halving the room count to just 40 generously proportioned rooms and suites.

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VOGUE

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Stepping through the doorway, the bright, airy lobby reveals the fruits of that labor immediately: the skeleton of the building, with frescoes trimming the ceilings and monumental fireplaces, is still present and correct, but given a modish update with sleek brass accents and mid-century-inspired light fixtures. Up here, the heat also seems to calm a little, with a welcome breeze rustling through the olive trees and winding its way through the building; the doors are flung open so you can wander in and out of the building's rabbit-warren corridors, or take a late afternoon aperitivo in the courtyard. Arriving on a late afternoon, I was led to the hotel's flagship Cedri restaurant—named after those century-old cedar trees—where executive chef Emanuele Mazzella had whipped up a tasting menu spotlighting local ingredients, with many herbs and vegetables coming from within the estate itself. (Highlights included a dish of plump ravioli parcels stuffed with suckling pig and lemon, as well as a decadent—and in its earthiness, very Umbrian—plate of veal with black truffle.)



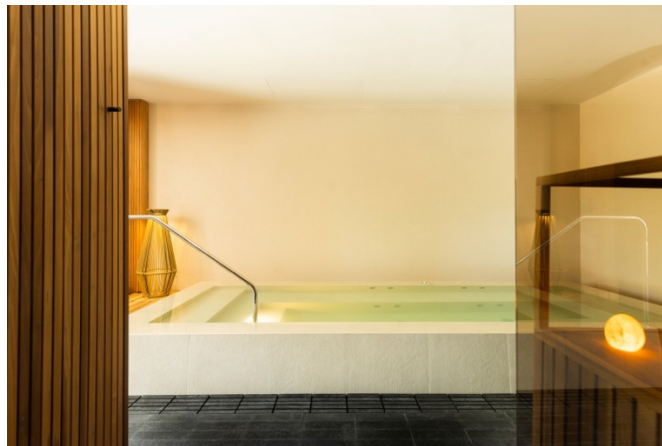
The following morning, I was led on a tour of the property by the hotel's charming general manager, Antonello. He was keen to point out every design detail—and for good reason, as the various elements that make up the interiors, which were overseen by the Milanese firm Spagnulo and Partners, boast impressive provenances. Many of the textiles you'll find on headboards and cushions are sourced from Giuditta Brozzetti, a local textile atelier situated in the heart of Perugia, and the patterns of terracotta that detail the hotel's floors came from nearby Montone; the delicate color palettes of each room, meanwhile, take their cues from the works of Renaissance masters like Perugino and Raphael. My room, one of the two main suites in the central villa, came complete with original stone fireplaces and frescoed ceilings. If the building does not *actually* date back to Umbria's boom period in the 14th and 15th centuries, once you're tucked away in your room it certainly feels like it does.

VOGUE

August 28, 2024



Equally impressive is the deceptively large spa, which features a range of bells and whistles: sure, there's a hydromassage tub, a Turkish-style steam room, and a sauna with views across the hotel's 40-acre grounds, but you'll also find a Himalayan salt room in one corner, as well as a space-age room along one corridor containing a sensory deprivation tank. There are also small indoor and outdoor heated swimming pools, which make a convincing case for the hotel as a year-round resort getaway—the mental image of holing up on a crisp autumn evening with a plate of truffle pasta and a fire roaring nearby sounds incredibly appealing.



Of course, if you're visiting Umbria for the first time, there's plenty in the area you'll want to do, whether that's breezing through the museums in Perugia—the team at Borgo dei Conti will be delighted to set you up with a visit to the Giuditta Brozzetti textile workshop—or stopping by Lake Trasimeno. (If you fancy the ultimate *la dolce vita* experience Umbria has to offer—and are also something of a thrill-seeker—look into renting a vintage Alfa Romeo Spider and taking it for a drive around the scenic hilltops surrounding the lake.)

VOGUE

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On the weekend I visited, however, I had zero urge to leave the delightful world of Borgo dei Conti, which lived up to its name—at least in the sense that I felt like the resort was my own little village to wander around. After a hearty breakfast of eggs royale, I went for a walk through both the English- and Italian-style gardens and spent a lazy morning in a cabana by the pool. Then, I pulled up a chair at the laid-back Osteria del Borgo, where I wolfed down a plate of beef carpaccio followed by an outrageously delicious pizza with a perfectly blistered, blackened crust. To cap off my incredibly busy and stressful day of wandering and lounging, I decided it was time to head to the spa, where a sauna and soak followed by a deep tissue massage left me practically floating. (After my dinner, there was the option to watch a classic Italian movie at the resort’s outdoor cinema—but the crisp linen sheets of my bed were already calling my name.)



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Borgo dei Conti's secret sauce is that it offers a little bit of everything: it can be a base to explore the historical and cultural wonders of one of Italy's lesser-explored regions; a romantic getaway for couples looking to wine, dine, and lounge by the pool; or allow design lovers seeking to immerse themselves in Italian craftsmanship to shop their way around the textile mills of Perugia or the boutiques of Orvieto. It's the kind of place that feels likely to become a word-of-mouth hit—so if you're tempted to look further afield than Tuscany, get there before the crowds do.