



HOTEL OPENING

Umbria

Rise again

Set in the sweeping hills of Tuscany's wilder neighbour, Castello di Reschio adds a keen eye for historic Italian design to its rustic setting.

By *Laura Rysman*
Photography *Philip Vile*

The pale stone castle that gives Castello di Reschio its name overlooks its estate of grassy slopes, oak forests and vineyards in Umbria, Tuscany's wilder, less-touristy neighbour. Reschio's fortress has surveyed this frontier between the regions for a millennium – its oldest tower dates to 900AD – and after decades as a tobacco plantation and farm, the castle will open its gates to visitors in May 2021 as Italy's most intriguing new hotel.

"It was just crazy as an undertaking but the whole idea behind this hotel is time," says Count Benedikt Bolza, an architect whose family bought the vast Reschio estate in 1994 and who has dedicated the past five years to transforming it into flawless accommodation. The slow process of gutting, converting and furnishing the castle – unlike a typically rushed hotel development – seems to inspire a similarly leisurely pace in the guests.

Castello di Reschio is an antidote for anyone fed up with the dispiriting sterility and inattention of many luxury hotels run by bigger brands. Bolza has worked with Umbrian makers and craft folk to create the furnishings, all inspired by Italian design of the first half of the 20th century, he says, "when crafts were celebrated". The detail can be seen in items such as a brass-plated light with art deco lines and a lampshade corseted in velvet to cast a mellow glow. "Nothing here comes from a catalogue – everything is made by hand; everything is custom," says Bolza, tipping the peak of his brown fedora that holds a porcupine quill in its grosgrain band. "This is a huge project completed

with small artisans, which would only be possible in Italy, where they're still making things with passion."

Each room is unique, an extravagant medley of Bolza's furniture designs and antiques found over the years in markets and auctions. There's also decorating insight from Bolza's wife, Nencia Corsini – "my unconventional advisor, who pushes me to a wackier level," as he puts it. "We hate things that match," says Corsini, whose reputation for eccentricity



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can be traced to the years when she went everywhere with a pet parakeet perched on her head.

The pleasures of castle life go well beyond the furnishing though. There's a spa built into stone wine cellars where a masseuse uses treatment oils infused with Reschio's own herbs. Not to mention the grass-edged 30-metre pool surrounded by umbrella pines, with a poolside bar inside a watchtower – plus a pianist playing a 1909 Steinway in the lofty, beaux arts-style palm tree conservatory that serves as the castle's lobby.

"Everyone used to do everything in their bedrooms and we wanted to bring back that pleasure," says Bolza, showing MONOCLE into a castle suite. The bathroom is stocked with enough



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(1) Courtyard (2) Restaurant and bar (3) Grand boot room (4) View from Reschio's tower suite



"We interfere as little as possible and let nature give us what works well"

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(1) Palm Court bar (2) Castello suite with Bardiglio marble sink (3) Vibrant foliage that gives the bar its name (4) Furnishing is inspired by historic Italian design (5) Coffee and cleanliness

sumptuous furnishings to fill a large apartment. Double brass sinks are set into a thick slab of grey Bardiglio marble; an antique table and bentwood chair sidle up beside a claw-foot tub, with a marble-and-brass cocktail bar against the bathroom wall. “I like to imagine Churchill taking his morning whisky in the bath here, as an aide at the table reads him the day’s schedule,” says Bolza. A “quirky but very practical” dressing table in marble and dark-stained beech flanks the bathroom entrance – a piece that the count created to encourage unhurried grooming and which is present in all of the hotel’s 36 rooms. “The furniture encourages you to spend time here,” says Bolza, running a hand along the needlepoint-embroidered sheets of the four-poster bed he designed. “Don’t come for a day,” he says, half-architect and half-hotelier. “Come for a week.”

In another suite a centuries-old olive press sits at the centre of the room, while a velvet daybed designed by Bolza rests on a former olive-sorting table by a castle window. Throughout the hotel there are age-old painted portraits, soft-toned linen-velvet chairs, logs piled up next to working fireplaces and other eccentric relics: an altar covered in gold leaf; a walnut jeweller’s bench that seats five. “I wanted the rooms to look as though they’d been furnished through the centuries,” he says.

Before the renovation Bolza and Corsini lived in the castle for a decade, home-schooling their five children under a crumbling roof. “It was like a birdcage with the wind blowing through the rooms,” says Bolza. It was Bolza’s father, Antonio, who reclaimed Reschio’s equestrian tradition and who still oversees the stables and dressage. Bolza’s mother, also an architect, revived the first of the estate’s 50 dilapidated cottages as vacation residences to rent or buy. There are now 26 refurbished homes, each with its own pool, dotted around Reschio’s hills, with 10 available for rent. Corsini, a decorative

painter, met Bolza in 1997 when employed by his mother to create frescoes. Today the pair occupy a sprawling house near the stables, with room for their five children.

Corsini, who rides a horse around the estate, also oversees the gardens. As she walks through one with a Swiss Army knife slung from her belt bag, she points out garlic mustard, primrose and radicchio – all destined for Reschio’s two restaurants. “We interfere as little as possible and let nature give us what works well,” she says, the wooded hills behind her stretching out to the horizon. “If you take the time to observe, you understand what works.” Time, it seems, is a key ingredient in Reschio’s recipe for success. — (M) reschio.com



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Riding at Reschio

At Castello di Reschio, there’s mountain biking, tennis (and a surprisingly competitive Reschio cup), cooking and painting lessons on offer – but equestrian activities take pride of place. When Antonio Bolza fell in love with horseback riding in later life, he dedicated himself, and Reschio’s stables, to dressage – the centuries-old sport of training horses to perform intricately controlled steps with their riders. Every Monday, Reschio’s residents gather at the bar beside the stable’s arena to watch the Spanish steeds do their prancing, patrician dance with dapperly attired riders.

Address book

VISIT

Perugia
A lively university city of well-preserved medieval architecture. The Galleria Nazionale dell’Umbria is unmissable, as are the restaurants (try Civico 25), and newsstand and cultural hotspot Edicola 518.

SEE

La Scarzuola
A surrealist cityscape constructed in 1956 on the remnants of a Franciscan monastery to represent the ideal life, dreamed up by esoteric architect Tomaso Buzzì.

Città di Castello

The Fondazione Alberto Burri holds 130 works by the Città di Castello artist, one of Italy’s foremost modern artists, plus the Renaissance-rich Pinacoteca Comunale here was decorated by Giorgio Vasari.

Spello

Renowned for its flower displays, the charming hilltop town boasts a chapel by Pinturicchio at the Santa Maria Maggiore church, and excellent food at La Cantina di Spello.

DRINK

Cantine Paolo Bea

This biodynamic winery gives the native *sagrantino* grape 10 years of ageing to create sophisticated Umbrian wines.