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Margo Piliero tells Fiona Razi about creating her Tuscan dream home



a grand italian design

'You may have the universe if I may have Italy,' said the composer Giuseppe Verdi. The words struck a chord for Wimbledon based Margo Piliero and her husband Iain when they holidayed for many years in Tuscany before they had their family. When Margo, an ex-banker of Italian descent, came across an ad for a Tuscan farmhouse in the *Financial Times* she flew out to view some properties and started to turn her dream into reality.

'The Tuscan house is very often traditional in décor, but the first property we saw gave me the inspiration for our design. It had been styled in a very modern way, exactly to my taste,' she says. The house she subsequently bought on that trip was a 17th century farmhouse set on a Tuscan hill in the heart of the Chianti region. The nearest village, Gaiole, was voted in as the most idyllic place to live in Europe in *Forbes* and is just 3km away.

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Having bought the farmhouse in 2006, they then took three years to complete its transformation. Margo tells me the house would originally have been part of an estate.



'The animals would have lived on the ground floor and there was the trapdoor that used to separate the living and animal quarters'.

Margo's style is a fusion of modern Italian with rustic, and works in sympathy with the essence of the house. Contemporary certainly doesn't mean minimalist and the house is complemented with both modern art and beautiful Italian antique pieces picked up at auction. 'The whole house is designed around the central courtyard which is the heart of the house. You can see each other across the courtyard from different areas of the house.' She tells me how the central hallway has been re-worked. 'As you enter the house it is configured around a central hallway where we increased the height to give an openness.'

Margo and Iain now have three young children as well as a large extended family. 'We designed the house for the way we live; for family and friends. We wanted a very open plan feel - places for communal dining and entertaining and for the children to play and also