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**PODERE NUCCIOLE**

This home adds a splash of yellow to the green canvas of hills leading down to Florence. It started out as a wreck, but has been restored by its owners, with a Gaggenau kitchen, Portuguese sandstone flooring, a gym and a steam room. It sleeps 12 people and the pool is heated, just in case the temperature drops. Although there's space to snack or work by the pool, a second dining area is being created closer to the gueshouse – and the fridg. The British owners let the property when they're not using it, contributing to its upkeep. It's available to rent from £5,050 to £8,417 a week

Alessandra has opened a stately boutique hotel in the family palazzo in Florence ([palazzodicamugliano.com](http://palazzodicamugliano.com)), and one of the former farmhouses on the 1,500-acre estate has been converted into a more modest *locanda*, or restaurant with rooms. This is open all year round, serves organic food grown on the Camugliano farms and has become a hub for the rural community. Other estate houses have been restored and let to local people, so that, as Lorenzo says, when overseas visitors come to rent one of his holiday homes, "they can find local life".

It is one of these holiday rentals that Ball has been advising on. The Poggio ai Grilli farmhouse had already been done up for rental in 1999, with some ancestral furniture, but, says the *marchesa*: "Simon pointed out the important things – he knows what people look for, especially the ways the rooms are organised. We didn't think of having one bathroom for every bedroom. So we're going to add a few doors and create two suites for privacy. Instead of a six-bedroom house, it will be advertised as four bedrooms, each ensuite, and two of the suites will have an extra bedroom – useful for children. We're upgrading the concept, and there will be more privacy, but we retain the rustic sensibility."

They'll also replace twin beds with doubles, and "a bit of redecorating" will make sure there's none of that best room/worst room scenario, which

can sour the holiday vibe between sharing families or friends.

So that's inside, but outside is just as important, Ball says, not least for making it look good in the all-important website photo gallery. The worn-out and unlovely gravel at the front and back of the house will be replaced with lawn turf, and half of the high oleander hedge will be taken down so the pool is visible from the house (but will remain protected from the gaze of anyone passing on one of the estate tracks). There will be much more emphasis on outdoor living, with a secluded nook for relaxing and reading in the alcove that still holds the original oven.

Smart new outdoor furniture, including sofas and armchairs – one of Ball's must-do improvements – will be installed in pergolas, creating new shaded dining and lounging areas. His go-to brands include Paola Lenti, Dedon and Royal Botania. One of the pergolas

will be on the raised oblong concrete slab known as the *concinaia* – formerly the site of the farm's dung heap. The ping-pong table will be moved to a space near the gueshouse, which contains another bedroom suite.

Poggio ai Grilli was already comfortable, stylish and a bit grand: there's an imposing portrait of a 14th-century Niccolini – Lapo, a Florentine political grandee – in the vaulted living area. The farmhouse will have other high-end essentials: wi-fi, of course; a cook, who will also shop for food; and a maid to prepare breakfast and clean. The changes Ball has advised will, he says, "ensure a higher price, as the new layout and added comforts appeal to a segment of the market that expects ever higher standards".

Less than 10 miles from Florence, at Podere Nuccioli, manager Udesh Virasringhe, who used to be in the hotel business, and his wife look after guests on the 28-acre estate near the town of Fiesole. In 2006, when it was bought by the fashion retail consultants Jeremy and Jane Blanchard, it was a wreck. They hadn't wanted a project, but, says Jeremy: "Everything we saw was restored and we would have been paying a lot for a rustic Italian style we didn't like."

They transformed the estate into a chic house fit for the pages of a magazine: Blanchard calls it "a modern, international approach to

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