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“The views – and solitude – are virtually unparalleled”

A rustic family estate gets an elegant makeover in the green heart of Italy



Santa Croce, one of the houses on Umbria's Tenuta di Murlo estate restored by Carlotta Carabba Tettamanti Radziwill

MARCH 10 2019 / MARIA SHOLLENBARGER



They call **Umbria** ‘the green heart of **Italy**’, and in its northern reaches it is green indeed, not to mention rugged. The hills north of Perugia, dense with woods of oak and elm, are in some places nearly as impenetrable today as they were in Renaissance times – which is when the Carabba Tettamanti family began to acquire vast tracts of unspoiled forest land here, collectively an estate known today as Tenuta di Murlo.



Supper on the terrace at Santa Croce: the estate’s management offers chefs on request

I’d heard about Murlo through the photographer Charlotte Bland, whose Instagram feed ([@charlottebland](#)) would occasionally surface an achingly perfect Italian-idyll scene that invariably made me stop and sigh – warm-stone farmhouses surrounded by wildflower beds; wide vistas of rolling countryside; generous lunches on handmade maiolica plates set under perfect covered terraces. The dream, basically, except a notably simplified-yet-elevated version of it. It was clear this place had something. So last September, while visiting friends in **Tuscany**, I struck out to discover Murlo for myself.

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Santa Croce's hilltop location affords spectacular views of the surrounding countryside



One of the rooms at Le Fonti, Tenuta di Murlo's three-room inn

The estate covers several thousand hectares of remarkably unsullied land – it's crisscrossed by only a handful of *strade bianche* – and, I was told by the young estate manager who met me, is home to some 75 or 80 ruins of various sizes, a handful of which Carlotta Carabba Tettamanti Radziwill, Murlo's current chatelaine, has restored. These sleep anywhere from six to 18, and can be taken as self-catered holiday houses or provisioned and partially staffed by Murlo's management to offer chefs, **spa** treatments, **yoga** – the works. They range from La Torre, a medieval tower with a wide emerald lawn, killer infinity pool and prime sunset positioning, to Subtilia, a small compound with its own olive grove and a separate cottage for a couple seeking a bit of remove. Santa Croce, which sleeps eight, sits atop one of the highest points for miles around; while it's not a place you'd want to forget to buy milk while staying there (the closest shop is several miles away, and at least half the route is steep and unpaved), the payoff of its views – and solitude – are virtually unparalleled in the area. Throughout all the houses, the design and palette recall a bit of Flamant here, a bit of Kit Kemp there; easy, chic, ideal.

I had the privilege of being one of the first to sleep at Le Fonti, the three-room inn that Carlotta had opened just days before my arrival, next to the estate's Il Caldaro **restaurant**. Housed in a single-storey building set back from the (quiet) road, Le Fonti has its own lovely 18m pool and easy access to Il Caldaro's terrace and **garden**, ringed gorgeously in pinkish-white hydrangeas, for breakfasting and lounging. Headboards are upholstered in vibrant patchwork linens and weaves, and chic sisal pouffes are scattered across pale oak-plank floors. A minibar stuffed with estate-produced goodies – cured meats, olives, white and red **wine**, house-made crisps – and a vast marble-clad bathroom upped the ante on the usual restaurant-with-rooms offering. If you're en route across central Italy, this is the perfect one-night stopover (not least for the fantastic, if rib-sticking, food at Il Caldaro). If you've got a week in July, and want a truly rustic escape, go for Santa Croce – if I haven't got there first.