

COUNTRY LIFE INTERNATIONAL

SPRING 2014



Buying under a southern Tuscan sun

Picture-perfect properties in Provence

Arabella Lennox-Boyd's palazzo

PLUS Which are the best international schools?

A perfect palazzo

Acclaimed landscape designer Arabella Lennox-Boyd tells Arabella Youens about her childhood home in Lazio, Italy

ARABELLA LENNOX-BOYD is a landscape designer who has won numerous gold medals at Chelsea. Born in Italy, she's married to the former conservative MP Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd and they live between Lancashire, London and Palazzo Parisi in Italy. At the outbreak of the Second World War, her father bought the *palazzo*, which dates from the 15th century, when it was only accessible by mule. It's a mellow Renaissance building that sits in the Sabine Hills, about an hour and a half from Rome's Fiumicino airport.

The history

The house is in a beautiful area of Italy that's now renowned for its olive oil—regularly recognised as the best in the country. It was my childhood home and I was brought up between there and Rome. My parents were both Italian, but I had an English nanny who was sent to the Vatican for the duration of the war which, being a strict Presbyterian, she loathed. My father was advised to buy the house, but it wasn't a good investment as the land is too hilly to farm, but my mother decided to make it her life and she embraced it and became a farmer.

The changes

When my father died in 2001, I took over the reins and restored the property—refitting the bathrooms, the decorations, putting an infinity swimming pool in and essentially converting it into a comfortable home. It's very big. There's no central heating, so the winters can be a little chilly, but in the summer, it's perfect as the walls are 3ft thick and keep the house wonderfully cool.

My father didn't want me to rent the house as he was a bit old-fashioned, but in 2002, we started to let it for a few weeks. The rental season begins in the last week-end of May and runs until the end of



Arabella Lennox-Boyd on the shady terrace at Palazzo Parisi, which is charmingly planted with roses

October. For a large family or house party made up of different families, it's perfect—it comes with a wonderful cook and two lovely women who help and there's a gardener, too. It sleeps 10.

The garden

There's a formal garden around the base of the house and I've created a new loggia where you can sit with a lovely glass of something and take in the views. There's a walk down to the chapel with roses, irises and olives and, to the right side of the path, I plant perennials every year so, in theory, and if the weather is right, it flowers right up to the end of October. However, I'm a bit puritanical about water, so if it's been a hot summer, we don't water very much. Beyond the chapel, there are more borders and then the pool, which is also planted with olives and lots of roses, lavender and rosemary.

The setting

The village is very old-fashioned and doesn't seem to have been touched by much in years. People do a little bit of this and

a little bit of that; they are very unhurried. I always say to our guests: 'I do hope you understand that this is Italy.' You could be having an afternoon snooze on the terrace and find the lady from the village who sells underwear approaching. And on the first Sunday in September is the village *festa*, with a band, fireworks and processions to the church.

Favourite haunts nearby

There's a wonderful rose nursery in Rieti called Le Rose di Piedimonte (www.rosedipiedimonte.it), which I love to go to. And, of course, there are some wonderful gardens to visit, including Ninfa, Villa Lante (Sir Roy Strong's favourite Italian garden, *Country Life Travel*, December 18, 2013) and Castello Ruspoli at Vignanello. Otherwise, there are plenty of walks and drives to do in the autumn through the beech forest as well as beautiful towns and villages that make good day excursions. *Palazzo Parisi is available to rent from £5,000 a week (020-7931 9995; www.palazzoparisi.com)*