

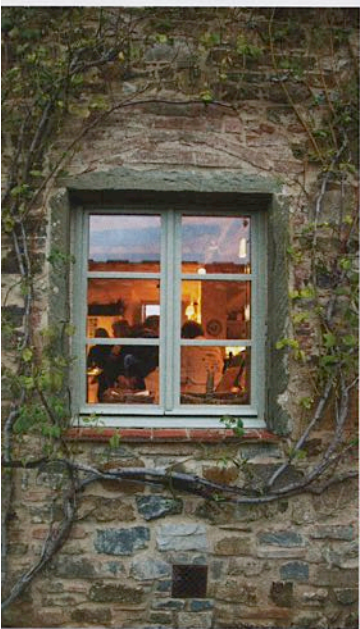
Italia: A Movable Feast

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO SEPARATE ITALY FROM ITS RICH CULINARY TRADITIONS. FOR MOZZARELLA COMPANY FOUNDER PAULA LAMBERT, THERE IS NO BETTER WAY TO EXPERIENCE THE COUNTRY'S CULTURE AND HISTORY THAN BY COMBINING SIGHTSEEING WITH COOKING LESSONS.

TEXT KAREN CALLAWAY PHOTOGRAPHY COLLEEN DUFFLEY

During their weeklong sojourn, tour participants stay at Podere Le Radicchie—a villa in the Chianti Classico district of Italy. From its hilltop perch, the authentically restored Tuscan farmhouse offers breathtaking views of acres of vineyards and the countryside below.





This page: Cooking classes are conducted at the villa, which boasts an outdoor dining area overlooking the rolling hills of Tuscany. Inset photo: Entrepreneur Paula Lambert pours a glass of local wine. Opposite: A brick walkway leads to the entrance of the magnificent structure.



From the moment their plane touches down in Florence, Italy, the fun begins for the small band of adventurers who have signed on for a weeklong excursion through Tuscany with famed cheese maker Paula Lambert. This energetic Dallas businesswoman knows Italy like the back of her hand, and there is nothing she likes more than sharing her love for all things Italian.

After college, Paula lived in the city of Perugia for five years, immersing herself in the culture and cuisine. When she came home to Texas, she searched in vain for the creamy orbs of fresh mozzarella she had enjoyed daily. Undeterred, Paula learned the art of cheese making back in Perugia, then returned to the States to start her own business, Mozzarella Company.

After penning two popular cookbooks, the entrepreneur was invited to teach at a cooking school in France and parlayed that position into a similar one in Italy. She now takes six small groups a year to Tuscany, giving participants an insider's perspective on the sights and flavors of this enchanting country. "I don't run it like a business," Paula explains cheerfully. "I run it like a house party of friends."



Podere Le Radicchie, a beautifully rustic villa, is home base for Paula and her entourage. Although most Italian cooking schools present lessons in the morning, the agenda is different here. Each day after breakfast, the group sets off for nearby towns to sightsee, shop, and sample regional cuisine before convening at the villa for the evening's instruction. Under Paula's capable guidance, the eager pupils learn to make pasta, minestrone, and *osso buco*—dishes they can re-create at home. But no matter what else is on the menu, it always includes fun. A recent attendee says, "There is Italy—and then there is Italy with Paula. With Paula, it is truly *la dolce vita!*"

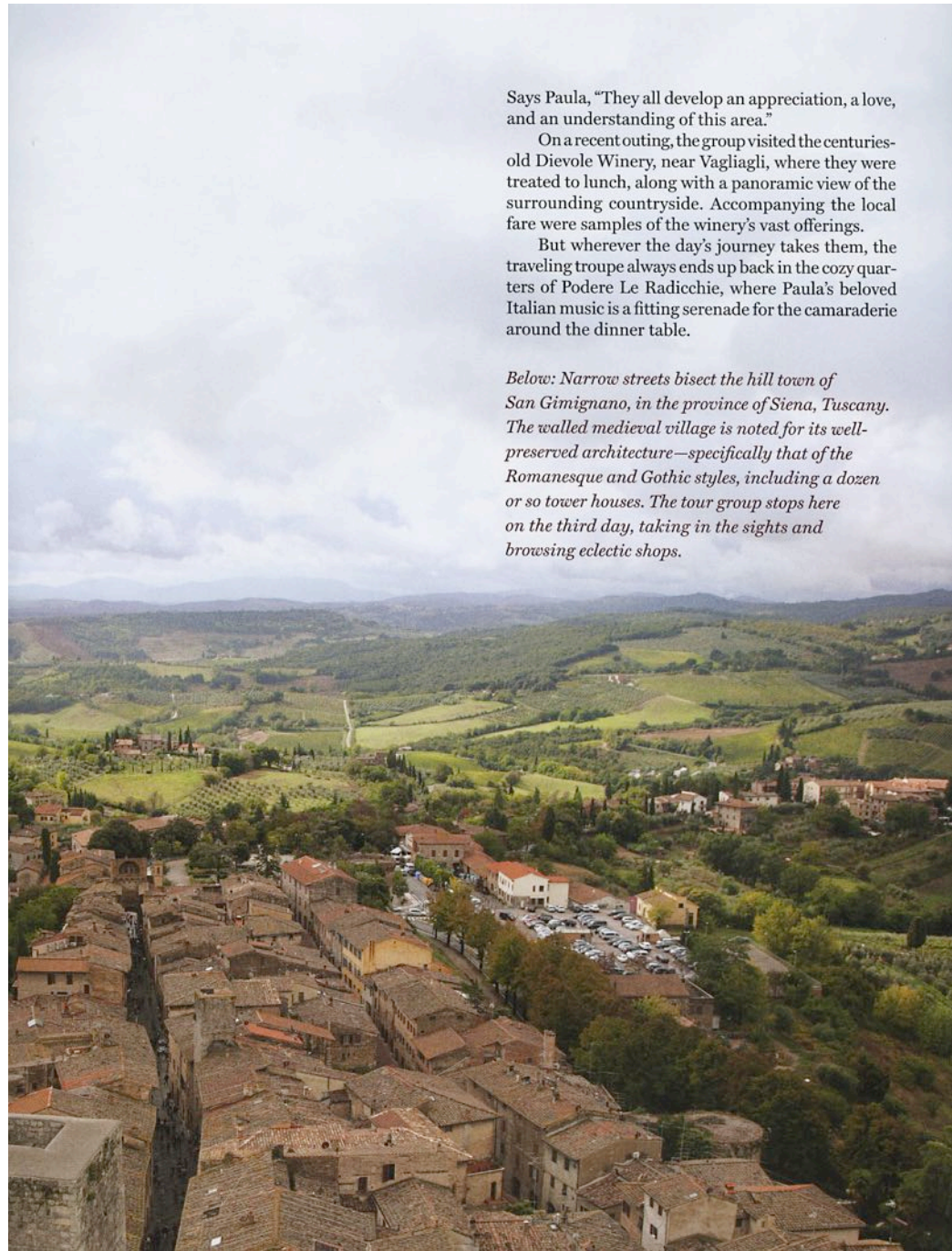
Opposite: The villa's master bedroom features rough-hewn wood beams and terra-cotta-tile floors typical of homes in this part of Italy. This page, clockwise from top left: Sunlight spills through the shuttered windows of the anteroom at Podere Le Radicchie. The traditional Tuscan house pictured here is located in the village of Lamole. An elegant arched doorway leads to the dining room of the host villa. Inset photo: Students prepare meals during class.





An Outing AT DIEVOLE

Every day of the Tuscany trip brings a new adventure, whether it is exploring the ancient Castello di Brolio, perusing the Sunday market in Panzano, or discovering Siena—a town where it seems time has not passed since the Middle Ages. The tour also encompasses Montefioralle, where Leonardo da Vinci once lived, and includes lunch at Casamonti, a farming estate that produces wine, olive oil, and Cinta Senese pigs. The intimate groups—just eight people, plus Paula and her assistant—are a mix of old and young, first-time visitors and those who have come back to the Chianti Classico region.



Says Paula, “They all develop an appreciation, a love, and an understanding of this area.”

On a recent outing, the group visited the centuries-old Dievole Winery, near Vagliagli, where they were treated to lunch, along with a panoramic view of the surrounding countryside. Accompanying the local fare were samples of the winery’s vast offerings.

But wherever the day’s journey takes them, the traveling troupe always ends up back in the cozy quarters of Podere Le Radicchie, where Paula’s beloved Italian music is a fitting serenade for the camaraderie around the dinner table.

Below: Narrow streets bisect the hill town of San Gimignano, in the province of Siena, Tuscany. The walled medieval village is noted for its well-preserved architecture—specifically that of the Romanesque and Gothic styles, including a dozen or so tower houses. The tour group stops here on the third day, taking in the sights and browsing eclectic shops.



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This page, clockwise from above left: The cavernous interiors of the Basilica of San Domenico in Siena are truly awe-inspiring. Also in Siena, an open door beckons customers to enter a small bookstore. The imposing Castello di Brolio rises above the Chianti Classico landscape. Near the village of Radda, Rampini Ceramics produces handmade, hand-painted Italian pottery. Flowering vines climb the walls and the balustrade of its workshop, located in a historic villa.

