

FANFAIR



Under the Tuscan Sun

RETREATING TO LA BANDITA

A year ago, sheep were still living in the 1930s farmhouse in the southern Tuscan Val D'Orcia that **John Voigtmann**, a former Sony BMG record executive, recently transformed into a minimum-chic hotel. **La Bandita** (the Preserve) is a hilltop outpost with bright white interiors, travertine floors, and some streaks of terra-cotta accents. The eight-room hotel—really more of a private villa with guest rooms—is located near the famous wine town of Montepulciano, and overlooks a humble farming region of great natural beauty. The day I visited, a flock of sheep greeted me at the gate; very appropriate, since one of Italy's Pecorino-cheese capitals, Pienza—a Renaissance jewel designed by Pope Pius II—is minutes away.

Voigtmann and his wife, **Ondine Cohane**, a travel writer, are gracious on-premises hosts, both ebullient Italophiles willing to direct you to the best trattoria, arrange a special winery visit, or tell you the right time to show up at the local monastery to hear the monks perform their Gregorian chants. Voigtmann worked with a team of architects (the London firm of Ab Rogers, Ernesto Bartolini of D.A. Studio, in Florence, and, locally, Fabrizio Bardelli) to achieve the reserved luxury of the hotel. The design team used materials made only in Italy (terra-cotta from Impruneta, in Tuscany, marble from Bagno Vignoni, in southern Tuscany, linens from Busatti, in Umbria). "The goal was to always have a Tuscan feeling, but not a dark tradi-

tional Tuscan farmhouse interior. I wanted the star to be the view, to draw your eye outside, and emphasize the landscape," says Voigtmann. Mount Amiata, a sacred Etruscan site, looms in the distance. From the terrace, you can see the weather moving in and the sheep moving, en masse, around the hills. "I fought Italian bureaucracy, international finance laws, and my own periodic panics to get it done," says Voigtmann. A particular challenge on the town-council lobbying front: the swimming pool, which, he says, will be the last one permitted in this part of Tuscany. The ability to swim with a view of a country almost unchanged since the time of Leonardo made it all worth the effort, *senza dubbio*. —MATT TYRNAUER

Clockwise from far left: La Bandita sits on a hilltop in Tuscany, with an infinity pool, inviting guest rooms, and sumptuous food; owners Ondine Cohane and John Voigtmann; view of the Val D'Orcia's rolling countryside.

