

Three small Tuscan hotels

La Bandita (right) is not for everyone – although the location on a high hillside with views across the Val d'Orcia would leave few unimpressed. The reason for my caveat is La Bandita's particular aesthetic: a super-mod, pared-back interior of six rooms concealed within a traditional Tuscan farmhouse. But for the right type – youngish, style-conscious people who will enjoy the spirited "communal" dining and the owner John Voightman's music collection (he's a former Sony executive) – La Bandita strikes an original, memorable beat. The experience is greatly enriched by Voightman's charm and attentiveness. *Doubles from €250; www.la-bandita.com.*

Villa Bordoni (below) is a 10-room hotel in the Chianti hills belonging to David and Catherine Gardner, who cut their teeth as successful restaurateurs in Florence. Villa Bordoni, converted from a 15th-century Renaissance villa, is perched on a hillside with a walled limonaia for al fresco dining flanked by a lawned garden and olive grove with a pool. Rooms are a mix of English country house and Tuscan colours, with beamed ceilings and painted beds. The kitchen is overseen by Pugliese chef Francesco Fineo. The focus is foodie – a simple breakfast, lunch of salads and antipasti, and flavourful, multi-course modern Italian dinners.

Doubles from €170; www.villahordoni.com.



Castello di Vicarello is a little-known hotel (I haven't stayed) that's receiving some good recommendations from authoritative agents such as Emily Fitzroy at Bellini Travel (tel: +44 020-7602 7602). It's expensive, at about €320 for the cheapest suite, located in Maremma, which is Tuscany's deep south. This is not somewhere to come for sightseeing, more for a spiritual retreat. The 12th-century castle is surrounded by woods.

The owner, Aurora Baccheschi Berti, is Italian but spent 18 years living in Indonesia. This is reflected in the aesthetic (high Javanese beds), the outstanding Ayurvedic spa (with an Indian therapist) and, according to Fitzroy, good service standards. There are two pools and gardens packed with mulberry trees.

Doubles from €320; www.vicarelo.it.