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# HOLIDAY *Villas* magazine

**WINTER SUN  
DOWN SOUTH**

**A TASTE OF  
TUSCANY**

**TIME TO  
BUY?**

# WIN

**A HOLIDAY FOR 4 IN  
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**CHRIS TARRANT'S FAMILY FRANCE**

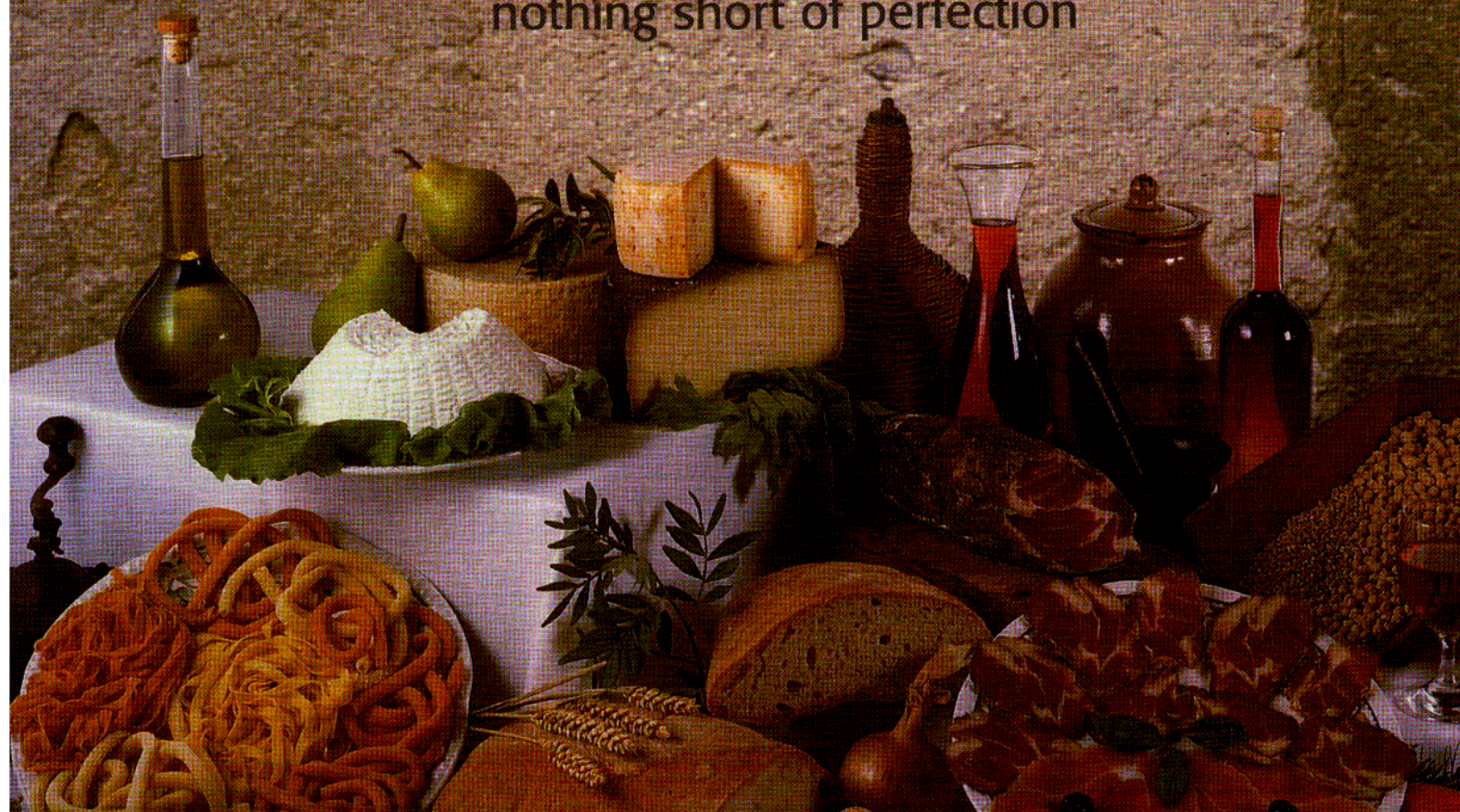
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# A taste of Tuscany

For somebody as keen on the culinary arts as Lola Dali-Kemmery, a villa holiday combined with a cookery course in Tuscany was nothing short of perfection



**P**oppi is a village deep in the heart of Tuscany on a hill dominating the Arno river. Our rented villa, Canova, was five minutes outside the village. It was laid out in typical tasteful Tuscan style with a fabulous pool and terrific views from its perch in the hills.

But, just as importantly, it was only ten minutes from the cookery course I had booked myself into at Casa Ombuto, a beautifully restored Tuscan farmhouse. Most people who attend the course stay at Casa Ombuto itself which has five star accommodation in a superb setting.

The cookery lessons start at 3 o'clock in the afternoon – there is plenty of time to relax, walk in the hills or visit the many olive plantations and vineyards before getting started on the daily task of preparing a four course dinner – always a wonderful and delicious meal.

Once the menu is explained, everybody gets busy, either chopping vegetables, getting their hands floury to make a dough or stirring something on the stove.

Paola Baccotti, our teacher, a former chef and restaurant owner, encouraged a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. Her catchphrase was: 'Don't stress the food.' Paola taught us to watch, smell, listen and feel the food being prepared and cooked. Food must feel free and relaxed, she said, in order to release the flavours and aroma.

Each night we dined al fresco at a long candlelit table, laden with carafes of organic wine. A team of waitresses brought out the food we'd all worked hard to create. Meat dishes, pastas, vegetarian tarts: the selection was always varied, balanced and delicious.

At the end of the course, as a complete contrast to the peaceful routine at Canova

and Casa Ombuto, we took a trip to lively, beautiful Florence. The city is packed with archaeological and art treasures. In a day we could only scratch the surface. The Ponte Vecchio was a must but the weather was so hot we spent quite some time just enjoying the atmosphere of the Piazza del Duomo eating ice creams.

We stayed in Galuzzo, five minutes from the city centre, in a 13th century palace meticulously restored and converted into apartments. The palace, with its high ceilinged rooms and abundant oil paintings, was the perfect retreat from the bustle of the city. Other facilities include a cellar bar and restaurant (also used as a gallery for local artists), private parking and an outdoor swimming pool, gardens and stunning view. ■



## Torta di verdure (Vegetable tart)

### Ingredients

Puff pastry  
1 aubergine  
2 courgettes  
1 red pepper  
1tsp garlic oil and olive oil  
Salt, pepper  
Cheese (pecorino)

### Method

Roll out the puff pastry and lay it in a baking dish. Prepare the vegetables, chopping them into small cubes. Heat garlic oil and olive oil in a frying pan and add the vegetables, salt and pepper. Cover with a lid and cook for 20 minutes on a low heat, stirring occasionally. Let them cool a little before putting them in the puff pastry shell and covering them with cheese. Decorate the tart with strips of pastry and bake for 20 minutes in an oven set to 180 degrees C.

## Risotto (Italian rice with mushrooms)

### Ingredients

400g rice (Arborio for risotto)  
Olive oil and garlic oil  
Fresh parsley  
1 small onion  
300g porcini mushrooms  
Garlic  
Salt, pepper  
120ml white wine  
½ litre vegetable stock

### Method

Cube the mushrooms and chop the parsley. Heat the olive and garlic oils in a frying pan. Add the mushrooms, parsley, salt and pepper and cook over a high heat, stirring occasionally. Soften the garlic and onion in some olive oil in a separate pan. Add the rice to this pan and toast it slightly, stirring all the time.

Pour in the wine and let it steam, stirring. Add the cooked mushrooms and ½ litre of stock. Cover and cook on a low heat for about 15 minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove the pan from the heat, add 2 teaspoons of butter – and serve immediately.



## Vitello tonnato (Veal with tuna sauce)

### Ingredients

600g topside of veal (pork could be substituted)  
250g tuna (tinned with water)  
100g capers  
250g mayonnaise  
125ml olive oil  
125ml white wine  
Salt & pepper

### Method

Blend the tuna and capers and then mix with the mayonnaise until creamy. Then heat 125ml of olive oil in a casserole and put the topside in it, seasoned with salt and pepper. Brown the joint well and cover the pot with a lid. Add the white wine and cook for about 15 minutes. Then lower the heat and cook for a further 40 minutes, basting occasionally. Allow to cool and then remove the meat from the casserole. Slice the meat thinly and cover the slices with the sauce. Serve cold.

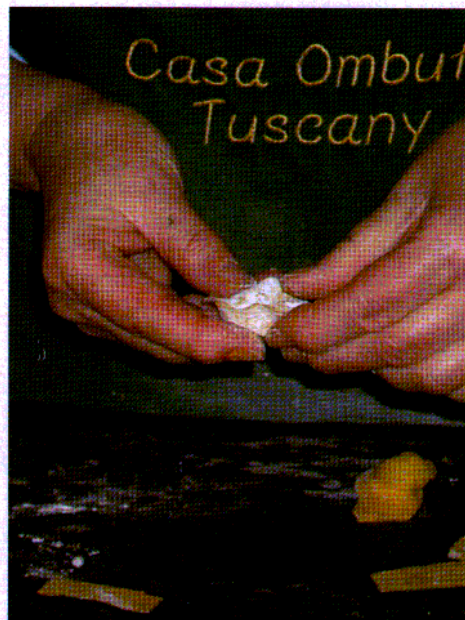
## Panna cotta (Baked cream tart)

### Ingredients

500ml cream  
3 egg whites  
1tsp vanilla essence  
100g pine nuts  
Brandy  
125g sugar  
Sugar and water for caramel

### Method

While the oven is heating to 150 degrees, put the cream in a pan on the stove and bring it to boiling point (but do not boil). Take it off the heat and put it in a bowl. Mix the egg whites, vanilla and a small shot of brandy with a whisk and then slowly add the sugar. Mix well until the mixture is fairly stiff and then pour it into the hot cream. Make the caramel by heating the sugar with a little water until it boils and turns golden brown and pour it into small tins or ramekins. Add the pine nuts and then the cream mixture. Put the dishes in an oven tray half filled with water and bake for about an hour. After cooling, put them in a fridge to set (about 12 hours). To serve, turn them upside down onto dessert plates using the back of a knife to slip them from the sides of the container.



## Fact File

Lola flew to Pisa from Birmingham courtesy of MyTravelLite.  
Web [www.mytravellite.com](http://www.mytravellite.com)

Her car, a Jaguar X type, was hired from Auto Europe who have offices in most European airports.  
Tel **0800 169 6414**  
Web [www.auto-europe.co.uk](http://www.auto-europe.co.uk)

Cookery courses at Casa Ombuto run from Saturday to Saturday. To find out more about Casa Ombuto cookery courses visit:  
[www.italiancookerycourse.com](http://www.italiancookerycourse.com)

To rent Villa Canova at Poppi, see their advert in our Italian section on page 230

