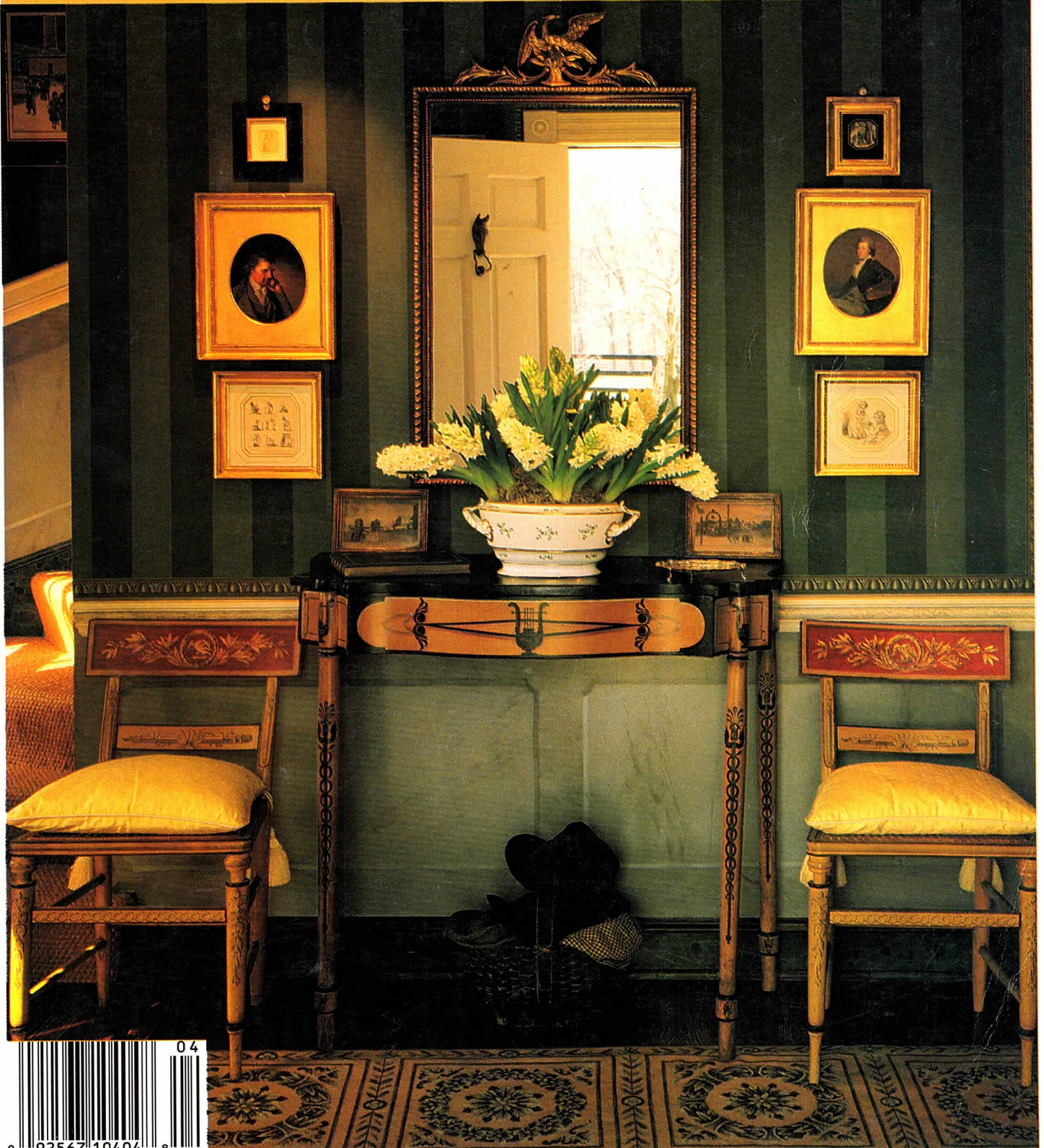


Southern Accents

The magazine of fine Southern interiors and gardens

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HIDDEN PLEASURES ❖ ENGLAND, FRANCE, ITALY



— EDITOR'S NOTES —



ABOVE: Renowned conductor Robert Shaw and his wife, Caroline, found their ideal second home in the French countryside. The once-abandoned farmhouse is now a cozy retreat.
BELOW: Our good friends Rebecca and Bob Moody with Luke on their balcony in Tuscany.



So what's a house in France, even the South of France, doing in *Southern Accents*, which draws all of its material from sixteen states in the Southern region of the United States? The summer home of Atlanta's esteemed symphony conductor emeritus, Robert Shaw, initiates a feature which inhouse we call "Southerners Abroad." Written by former Editor Nena Griffith, the story begins on page 170 and chronicles the Shaws' restoration of an abandoned stone house, rich in character and true to its own regional heritage.

Still, we didn't make this departure lightly, and we didn't do it without asking you first. A little over a year ago, we commissioned research among a large sampling of representative readers. One of the questions we asked was, "Would you like to see the second homes of Southerners who live in or spend part of the year in Europe?" When two-thirds of you indicated a real curiosity about these second homes, we took it seriously. Certainly our primary focus will always be on the style and talents of the South, but would you like to see one or two European homes of Southerners in our early spring issue each year?

The March-April issue, which also carries our "Accents on Europe" special section, seems the perfect time to introduce the home of a Southerner abroad. On page 128, Philip Morris examines house rental as an alternative that allows "longer, deeper, more leisurely exploration of a particular region." He follows a Birmingham couple who rent a house in Tuscany and details the surprises—some delightful, some dismaying—of renting a house in Europe. ◇

Kathleen Dean

Accents on Europe



Lingering In Italy

Hidden among landscapes of tranquil beauty and soft light, rental houses in Tuscany offer the traveler a richer, more peaceful experience

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY PHILIP MORRIS



For travelers who have covered the broader field in Europe, a longer, deeper, more leisurely exploration of a particular region has appeal. More and more people have “done” the Cotswolds, the Loire Valley, or Provence, often in the company of friends. And near the top of any places-to-linger list should be Tuscany.

One of twenty regions within Italy, Tuscany lies north and west of Rome with a richly varied landscape extending from the arc of the Apennine Mountains to the Mediterranean. The city of Florence, located in the northern section of the region, is the capital and dominant city, a position it has held since the Renaissance. Siena, with its celebrated Il Campo plaza and Palio horse races, commands three hills at the center of Tuscany. Pisa, with its tower both leaning and beautiful, lies west near the sea.

It is this network of art-encrusted towns perched on hilltops or nestled in river valleys that draws and holds visitors just as it has held its proud Tuscan natives. Imagine looking down from a stone-paved street at the edge of a stony town to vineyards a thousand feet below—like a view from a balloon. Or climbing narrow passages up to a convent chapel to discover frescoes fresh as dawn. Around every turn in Tuscany there is something worth the trip.

For Birmingham, Alabama, interior designer and watercolor artist Bob Moody, who with wife Rebecca and three-year-old Luke spent a month last fall in a house near Siena, the surprise was the land itself. “As a student of architecture, I intended to be looking mainly at buildings,” says Bob, “but the rural landscape was most fascinating. When we arrived, the summer

TOP LEFT: Bob Moody painting the setting south of Siena by morning light.

LEFT: One of Bob's watercolors shows the Tuscan countryside extending beyond the house they called home for a month.

crops had been harvested. There was great beauty in the plain old dirt, and by the time we left, we could see bright green wheat sprouting in the plow tracks. It was like they had changed the set between acts in an opera."

For Rebecca Moody, who took principal responsibility for setting up a household in an unknown territory, the month seemed more like an earthy play with many surprises.

"The rhythms of the day in Tuscany are so different from ours. We were on vacation, so we wanted to take time getting going each day," she explains. "About the time we would arrive at a town, everything would shut down for the very long

midday break. When we'd arrive back home, the food shops would be closed. And in the evening when everyone was out promenading is when most American families have settled in for the evening."

They soon adjusted as much as they could with Bob's painting schedule and young Luke's decidedly non-European cycle. Food for

the evening would be bought before noon, usually including a picnic lunch to be enjoyed along the way.

Being in a house deepened the experience. Though it was modest, it sat on the grounds of an estate with room for subjects for painting and room for Luke to play just outside the door. As with many European houses available for rental, things taken for granted Stateside are not always found.

"We'd love to have had laundry equipment [they hand-washed their clothes], but there was an advantage to not having many of these things," Rebecca confides. "We had to get out and enjoy and entertain each other. Luke used his imagination in playing. And I found that life was great without the telephone and television, which drive me to distraction here."

While the Moodys understand that many people would prefer full-service hotels and city life, they would go again for a rural or village setting. The issue of preference underlines an important consideration in extended stays: it is not just the house but the way it will be used. Those expecting visitors, for example, may prefer walk-to-town locations for convenience and flexibility.

The rich choices of Tuscany should serve all possibilities: a breathtaking town set in one of Europe's most fertile agricultural regions, art and architecture of the highest order, and food that is as close to the earth and seasons as the region. ◇

Phil's Suggestions

Florence, with the Italian Renaissance concentrated within walking distance, is an unparalleled destination and a manageable place. Spring and fall are ideal, both for weather and crowds. Tours to Siena, Pisa, and other sites in Tuscany are easily arranged through hotels. In addition to guides (Michelin's *Italy*, Baedeker's *Tuscany*), general information, maps, and hotel listings (not restaurants) are available free through the Italian State Tourist Office, 630 Fifth Ave., Suite 1565, New York, NY 10111. Allow approximately one month for handling. Touring by train in Tuscany is complicated by the fact that Medieval hill towns were not built for railroads. But since auto access is restricted to most town centers, train/taxi/bus transport is still a good alternative for many locations. Auto rental is an option, though even with detailed road maps navigation takes great attention.

Settling In

Renting houses or apartments may appeal to those planning an extended visit, and there are U.S. agents to handle such. Ginny Burton, president of European Rental Houses in Atlanta (404/231-0260), recommends thorough checking of references and an understanding of just what is offered. For example, American expectations for kitchens, washers and dryers, etc., may not be satisfied. Another possibility: most towns in Tuscany have tourist information offices that should have bilingual listings of properties available for rent. Checking out accommodations for a return visit could be productive.

ILLUSTRATION BY MELANIE MAGEE

