

TOSCANA RESORT CASTELFALFI, TUSCANY, ITALY



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Historical splendour, natural beauty and elegant luxury, all wrapped up in an eco-friendly estate. Emma Kennedy enjoys sundowners and sunsets in the heart of Tuscany.

A bean bag is not my natural seat of choice, unless it happens to be perched on manicured lawns overlooking a vista of rolling Tuscan hills at sunset, that is.

Welcome to Castelfalfi, possibly the brightest jewel in Tuscany's rich crown. Sitting high upon a hill looking down upon the undulating Tuscan countryside, is the remote Borgo, Montaione. With a dwindling population following years of neglect, it has recently been given a new lease of life through the arrival of Toscana Resort Castelfalfi.

Located in the heart of Tuscany, between Florence, Pisa, and Siena, this beautiful medieval village has been sympathetically restored. Derelict farmhouses are now privately owned villas, and a further 12 apartments are dotted across the estate. There are two main hotels: La Tabaccaia, a former tobacco factory, is now home to a 31-key boutique hotel and Il Castelfalfi, the 120-key flagship hotel, delivering all the luxury one would expect from a 5-star resort.

The Etruscan Borgo is built along a central pedestrianised road which leads up to the eponymous castle. Peppered with striking sculptures, boutiques selling understated Italian style, art galleries and a bar frequented by locals, there is the authentic feel of Italian village life- albeit a very well-heeled one. So much so that the term resort feels at odds with the surroundings, and anyone looking for an all singing, all dancing Italian jazz hands experience, is going to be disappointed. Instead, they will be greeted with panoramic views over 1,100 hectares of unparalleled beauty, 25 organic vineyards, olive groves, vegetable gardens to supply the resorts many restaurants, and not one but two golf courses, one of which happens to be the largest in Tuscany. And by the way, that really is just for starters – read on for the full line up.

The modern hotel, blends into its surroundings seamlessly. It's low slung and unobtrusive, as if not wishing to draw attention to itself. But in case you were in any doubt as to the calibre of Castelfalfi, a bright red Ferrari, parked on standby outside the entrance, shouts 'look at me' – ready for any speed loving guests to hire.



Above: Lobby. Top: Executive room with view

Once through the glass doors, the unassuming façade makes way for a stunning interior. Contemporary and achingly stylish, the spacious lobby sits on a pale marble floor. A central table filled with wildflowers from the estate invites you in and is a welcome change from the usual formal arrangements favoured by most 5-star hotels.

Following the purchase of Castelfalfi in 2021, Indonesian businessman Sri Prakash Lohia, commissioned Milan based interior architects CaberlonCaroppi to re-design the existing interiors in all the common areas plus half of the rooms and suites, with the remaining scheduled for 2023.

One imagines designing sympathetic interiors for a modern structure, built in an ancient Tuscan village requires careful thought and consideration. I caught up with co-founders Chiara Caberlon and Ermanno Caroppi, to discover more about their approach to the design brief.

"The client asked us to impart a strong character to the space. As a studio we often work in the luxury market, so we know that beyond the high quality of furniture and materials we must create a space that tells a story in great detail. The concept was primarily to convey the old village and Tuscany as a whole, but with an optic towards interconnection with the world, as hinted by the marble globe at the entrance."

Ahead of the main entrance is a wall of display cabinets, housing an eclectic mix of rare books, artefacts, marble busts and object d'art, all with an international flavour. The globe is the central focal point, a contemporary piece that immediately draws the eye. The bespoke cabinetry is a simple but smart concept, offering multiple points of interest across the lobby, bar and restaurant areas.

Caroppi continued "We decided to create a large library, where both local and international art pieces are exhibited. Like a wunderkammer, a true exhibition of curiosities that reinforces the concept of travel, as it is precisely from the exploration of the world that the most wonderful objects are collected."

Two upwardly spiralling velvet sofas punctuate the cool marble floor, in soft earthy tones – perfectly positioned for people watching. Overhead a contemporary lighting installation, makes a golden statement as it casts a warm glow upon the airy space.

Flanked by two contemporary brass-work screens, shallow steps lead down to the Ecru bar and restaurant areas. Divided by the walk-through to the outdoor terrace, the bar area is a milieu of velvet club chairs with brass tipped cigar legs, bespoke curved sofas, and black marble-topped pedestal tables. The back-lit bar, served by handsome barstools is designed to perfection. The adjacent restaurant continues in the same chic style, with the introduction of a long, sumptuous central banquette. The design is coherent and luxurious, with a splash of art deco splendour in colours that are subtle and beautiful, reflecting the scenery beyond the floor to ceiling windows.



"The inspiration is the village itself" confirms CaberlonCaroppi. "From the colours of the hills that surround it to that of the brickwork, we allowed ourselves to be guided by these inspirations to choose the entire colour palette of both the common areas and the rooms. Many details, such as the wallpapers, the textures of the fabrics, recall both the mellow panorama and the area's typical handcrafting."

The design excellence is echoed in the elegantly reimagined guestrooms. Marble surfaces, framed mirrors with gentle curves, and dark wood with brass detailing house all the accessories one would expect, but the star of the show is a striking textile print of a Tuscan landscape behind the bed. Each room comes with a large and luxurious bathroom, with deep baths, huge showers and double sinks, all swathed in travertine.

Located on the ground floor of Il Castelfalfi, is the Spa. With indoor, outdoor and hydrotherapy pools, a Finnish sauna and bio sauna along with all the treatments you could possibly wish for, it doesn't disappoint. The well-equipped gym and fitness studio is next door, and a comprehensive timetable of fitness classes is available, but for old school lying-by-a-pool with a cocktail experience, the main hotel pool is the place to be.



Aperitifs are best enjoyed from the terrace of the Ecru bar that gives way to manicured lawns, where grass mowing robots quietly whirr about their business. Taking in the view is a trance inducing activity, and all sense of time vanishes, along with your aperitif.

Dotted around the estate are six restaurants, each offering something different. From classic pizza and pasta to authentic Tuscan dishes, there are daily menus, all prepared with local produce from the estate and surrounding areas. It would be remiss of me at this point not to mention the exceptional wines produced on the Castelfalfi vineyards. In total there are six organic wines including an exceptional Chianti DOCG and their pride and joy, Poggio alla Fame. Though not strictly classed as one of the 50 'experiences' on offer, taking time to work out my favourite tippel over dinner, was definitely one of the most enjoyable.

There are many reasons why Castelfalfi stands apart from its neighbours, from its rich history to the extraordinary sense of calm that takes over from the moment you arrive. With a raft of nature-led experiences on offer from horse riding to trekking, truffle hunting to bee keeping and everything in between, how to while away the hours is never an issue. Fitting it all in however, is a different matter. The historical estate is fully organic and sustainable, kept hydrated by its own water system and fuelled by its own powerplant. Keeping it simple, a tour of the vineyard and olive groves, followed by wine and olive-oil tasting is the perfect introduction to understanding the lay of the land. A round of golf (or a buggy tour for non-golfers) is a must, and for those looking for something a tad more challenging, an afternoon of archery and bushcraft, followed by a climbing wall and zip wires in the adventure park should tick the box. Back in the village there are cookery and pizza-making classes on offer and the promise of art and photography courses to come. And best of all? The opportunity to take to the skies at sunset and finish the day in a hot air balloon. The jury's still out on the Ferrari.