

The best of both worlds

When old and new design combine something spectacular can happen, as Italian village Colletta di Castelbianco proves. I found out about the exciting restoration project that is setting a new standard for holiday homes

words by
Kate Williams

Overseas property has been big business for some time now, though this is no news to property developers. The overseas market is swamped with cheap homes, empty apartments and bungalows still waiting to be filled by second-homers and savvy investors. Of course some places are more popular than others but one thing is for sure, with the Credit Crunch in full swing the British public is less likely to invest than ever before. This is why when a truly beautiful and unique property opportunity arises it deserves to be acknowledged. Colletta di Castelbianco in Liguria Italy is one such opportunity.

The award winning development, a restored 13th century hilltop village set midway between Genoa and Nice, is a spectacle to behold. The village is a restoration project of an ancient settlement designed by architect Giancarlo De Carlo and developed by Colletta di Castelbianco Srl, who initially restored the village turning it from abandoned ruins, uninhabited for thirty years, into a habitable village in 1998.

More recently Colletta di Castelbianco Srl went back to the project and, in conjunction with Re-

alitalia – a luxury homes developer – redesigned the living spaces to sumptuous standards.

Luca Catalano, a director of Realitalia explains: 'In 2001 when we arrived in Colletta the vision was there, and the work done on the buildings was exceptional. The homes though, we felt, did not match our standard in terms of convenience and use of space. So we worked intensively on each single property and on the organisation of the on-site services.'

While redesigning the interiors of the village, Realitalia and Colletta di Castelbianco Srl took the opportunity to modernise the area with the most up-to-date technology available, using fibre wiring in all buildings allowing high speed connection for the Internet as well as satellite TV and a telephone connection to the village switchboard.

The end result is a picture perfect view set on a hilltop with stone built houses and cobbled streets amongst beautiful squares entwined around a swimming pool, communal gardens, sauna and open air summer theatre available to all the villagers.

The accommodation offers contemporary living spaces with rustic views of Italy and is just 15 minutes away from the sea situated in the western Ligurian

Riviera that boasts an 18-hole golf course nearby.

Naturally in this day-and-age however, there is only so much time that one can enjoy unwinding before a nagging reminder of the work you have left behind makes its way back into your consciousness. Mindful of this, and in a bid to make the village as appealing and practical as possible without losing any of its historical charm, a number of individuals who already own properties in Colletta di Castelbianco set up a centre of business which they run in the village. 'It is a wonderful concept and one which further enhances the village's sustainability', says Luca Catalano. 'A group of owners, who love their visits to this stunning location, came up with this idea and together with Realitalia we have made it a reality.'

As a result a 150 square metre building has been converted, providing two business rooms, offering broadband and wireless Internet access in each of the meeting/conference rooms and a telephone system with teleconferencing and fax/email facilities. There is also plenty of audio and visual equipment and a cinema room. The facilities are also intended to serve an active community with courses, cooking classes, wine tasting, book presentations, art exhibitions and seminars, available to owners and visitors alike.

The business centre also provides an opportunity for home-owners to rent, out of season, to those who are looking for a break, but also need to have constant contact with home life and as a result has seen the village hailed as one of the first high speed e-villages in Europe.

Residents behind the innovative business centre include Peter Moule, an entrepreneurial businessman who found fame on the popular television programme *Dragon's Den*. Already a successful electrical distributor he approached the notoriously hard to please 'Dragons' with a £1 gadget called 'Choobox', designed to protect electrical connectors, and now has a multi-million pound deal with one of the world's biggest electrical distributors, making him the biggest success story the television show has ever produced.

With the success of *Dragon's Den* behind him and an eye for a good idea, Peter was immediately taken with the unusual village and bought a property there two years ago. 'I had already decided I wanted a home near the sea and mountains so the Colletta di Castelbianco location was perfect', he tells me. 'The community in Colletta is wonderful and to be honest that was part of its charm. The people there are all delightful and friendly and from various corners of the world. The way the development is run is perfection and is a busi-

ness man I appreciate the efficiency of Realitalia.'

In fact, Peter was so taken with the project that he is to front a new television programme on the village, Home and Garden TV's *International House Hunters*. 'The new programme, which is taking six days to film on site, will appear, I am told, in 130 countries', says Peter. 'The programme



Opportunities in the overseas market

For agents looking to increase their revenue stream, the overseas market can seem an attractive option, provided the development is something special like the glorious Colletta di Castelbianco.

Luckily, Harlequin Property, one of the biggest property developers in the Caribbean is looking for representation from British estate agents for their flagship development, Buccament Bay on St Vincent and the Grenadines. Situated on the West coast of the island, just 15 minutes from the airport, it offers a selection of studio, one- and two-bedroom apartments along with one- and two-bedroom cabanas and a selection of plantation houses set around a lagoon within its own private bay.

Each property comes fully furnished to the highest standards and facilities include swimming pools, gymnasium, full hotel facilities, spa, restaurants, bars, sports facilities, shops and water sports. In addition there will be a casino and a marina which will be home to a restaurant themed around a pirate ship.

With many developments in the Caribbean currently claiming two years guaranteed rental income of 10 per cent, followed by a five year 50 per cent room share rate, a new breed of investor is emerging to take full advantage of the profitable overseas market and you as estate agents now have the opportunity to join them.

www.harlequinproperty.co.uk

is to show the brilliance of the concept and execution of Colletta di Castelbianco. 'We are thrilled with the success of this entrepreneurial homes project and feel that it allows this beautiful, quiet and distinctive village to have new life breathed into it via modern day technology.'

Colletta di Castelbianco encompasses the allure of historical architecture and

the practicality of modern amenities to make a truly interesting and coveted proposition proving popular across the globe, and demonstrates that even in times of financial strife attractive property opportunities can still capture the imagination of the public.

Old magic and modern design – the best of both worlds.

WORLD TRAVEL MARKET WELCOMES 10 NEW UK EXHIBITORS

World Travel Market have announced there will be 10 new exhibitors from the UK and Ireland at the 2008 event. With over 5,000 participants