

HORSE & HOUND

TRAINING SPECIAL

Harry Meade

Essential exercises for horses at any level

Plus your guide to interval training



Harry Meade riding eight-year-old Quid

IRISH HUNTING

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Gearing up for the Grand National with Lucinda Russell

PLUS
Meet Lottie Fry's next superstar Kjento

Castello di Reschio offers luxury accommodation and dressage tuition up to grand prix level – as well as plenty of opportunities to relax



A slice of paradise

Becky Murray travels to Umbria and finds a haven of exquisite horsemanship, rest and gastronomy

WHEN I arrived at Hotel Castello di Reschio in Umbria, I established pretty quickly that I truly had arrived at a piece of Italian paradise – and that was before I'd even seen the impressive equestrian facilities.

The hotel sits within an ancient castle, on a 1,500-hectare estate with 360° views. The estate was bought by Count and Countess Antonio Bolza in 1984, who set about regenerating the land and reconstructing the on-site farmhouses before their son Count Benedikt took over in 1999. Count Benedikt and his wife Donna Nencia lived in the castle with their children, before converting it into the 36-room hotel, which opened its doors in 2021.

For my three-night visit I stayed in a magnificent and incredibly spacious open-plan San Michele suite, complete with its own private garden, situated just outside the castle walls by the former church. From the four-poster bed and beautiful dressing table, roll-top bathtub and handcrafted

“I knew I was watching a true horseman at work”

ON ANTONELLO RADICCHI

bath salts, heated floors, in-room bar – not to mention the prosecco, Reschio gin and honey, olives, and chocolate cake – I had everything I needed and more, and could have quite happily remained there in my own bubble for the duration of my stay.

But I had a castle to explore, and more importantly horses to greet. Although my first riding experience wasn't booked until the next day, I was made to feel more than welcome when I ventured to the stables to meet the horses and admire the facilities.

Reschio is home to a pure-bred Spanish stud, founded by Count Antonio in 1999 with broodmares sourced from Spain.

The equestrian facilities include the “teatro equestro” (a large covered school), an outdoor arena with mountain views, an airy barn with stables and attached turnout pens, washdown areas with solariums, an enviable tack room, and pasture turnout paddocks. The riding school caters for all abilities, including young children. You can enjoy hacks in the Italian countryside or lessons on a range of dressage horses, some trained to grand prix level, with head trainer and master horseman Antonello Radicchi, and his wife Francesca.

ON day two I was booked for a hack with staff rider Natascha. I was presented with my horse, Da Vinci, a tall, striking grey gelding bred at the stud. After a quick assessment with Natascha and Antonello in the arena before we set off to ensure I was comfortable, we ventured into the wide landscapes of the Italian countryside.

As the owner of a barely 15.2hh part-bred Connemara pocket rocket, I was

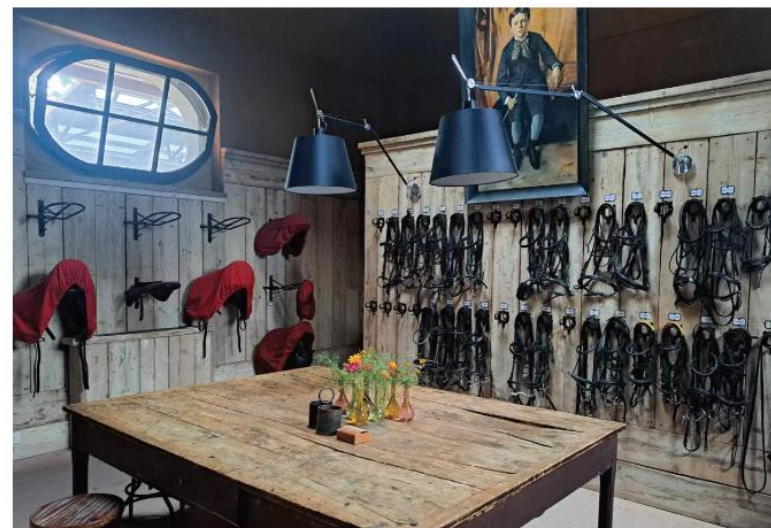
Pictures courtesy of Hotel Castello di Reschio and by Becky Murray

grinning as I adjusted to Da Vinci's huge, floating paces, and when we had our first canter I was in heaven. Da Vinci was elegant, well-mannered, relaxed, and a pure joy to be on – a testament to the life and training he has at Reschio.

Natascha was the ultimate guide, informing me of the passion that goes into the horses, their routine that consists of as much rest as exercise, and the philosophy of the training at the riding school – which includes most of the horses being trained and ridden in bitless bridles. Before we arrived back at the stables Natascha taught me how to ask Da Vinci for a Spanish walk, and my day was made.

The next day I was treated to a dressage display and a lesson with Antonello. When I arrived at the arena Francesca was warming up Principe, a brother of Da Vinci, before Antonello gave me a ridden demonstration. As I watched Antonello's effortless and minimalist aids, and the harmony he had with the horse, I knew I was watching a true horseman at work.

And then it was my turn. I must confess, as a rider who is more used to the showjumping ring than being inside the



The spacious and atmospheric tack room – part of Reschio's superb facilities

white boards – for very good reason – I was a little nervous to ride in front of such a master of his craft. But my worries eased away very quickly when Antonello's face lit up with a smile, and he encouraged me to “find my music” with Principe. We started off in a bridle with a bit to ensure my aids were clear and correct under Antonello's guidance; the philosophy of his methods is focused on soft hands, asking with the leg but never nagging, and most importantly ensuring your timing is perfect.

I wasn't sure what my lesson would entail, but I was thrilled and awe-struck to ride advanced dressage movements, something which I have only ever dreamed about. We worked slowly up through every movement to ensure accuracy; nothing is rushed, and if it's not correct you do not proceed. It really was communication in its purest form. I definitely did not get everything perfect, and when Principe fell in to the right occasionally – as my mare does at home – I realised I really do need to sort out my wonkiness in the saddle! But that said, I was lucky enough to ride passage, piaffe,

Below: the Palm Court. Right: Becky with Principe, who was bred at Reschio's stud



canter half-passes and flying changes. We then switched to the bitless bridle. I was told about the difference in aids, and how it was even more important that timing was correct to ensure my requests of Principe were clear. At Reschio the horse always comes first, as he should. When I finished my lesson I was thrilled when Antonello told me I spoke the horse language, which felt like a rite of passage.

The experience Principe gave me was a gift I'll cherish for a long time. I found myself thinking about what I'd learned for the rest of my trip, and while I knew I wasn't going home to suddenly turn my mare and myself into dressage superstars overnight, I certainly had learned more about listening and talking “horse”, and that was something I could put into practice in my everyday riding.

I took away so much from one lesson, and can only imagine how much you could learn from Antonello if you were lucky enough to be staying longer, or were one of his regular pupils who live locally.

“The experience he gave me was a gift I'll cherish for a long time”

ON BORROWED HORSE PRINCIPE

WHILE Reschio is an equine enthusiast's dream retreat, there are many other activities to enjoy, making it perfect for a couples' getaway, parent-child weekend, or just a friends' holiday. Electric bikes can be

hired to explore the estate, or you can have a cooking lesson, or play tennis. There are beautiful courtyards to sit in, you can enjoy cocktails and listen to a pianist in the Palm Court, or explore the castle's secret spaces inside the tower.

The pool area was a relaxing place to





laze around with a good book and blanket, and I found myself spending a lovely afternoon in the warm autumn sunshine reading. I was also treated to one afternoon in the luxurious and tranquil Bathhouse, the onsite spa that sits beneath the castle, where you can indulge in a range of treatments, and spend time in the sauna, steam room, and Roman baths.

A highlight of my trip was a fascinating foraging walk with botanist Selvatica, who had encyclopaedic knowledge. Although it sadly hadn't been a great season for truffles, we picked a variety of flowers and plants, with which we made herbal tea. Selvatica spoke passionately about what we could learn from the land, such as where certain plants grew in abundance – or had disappeared entirely – which suggested where land had been overgrazed historically. It led me to think of my own grazing land at home and how it compared.

I learned about which plants and herbs can help with niggles and ailments, aid things like digestion and joints, and the

Above: the large covered school. Right: Becky and Da Vinci both take time out

ones you should very much avoid. She also showed me around Reschio's wonderful herb and flower garden, produce from which is used in the hotel's two restaurants.

ITALY, of course, is renowned for its food, and I was very much looking forward to this part of the trip.

Reschio has two restaurants, the formal fine dining option Ristorante al Castello, and the relaxed Ristorante alle Scuderie, which features live blues and jazz music performances some evenings.

I was determined to try some new foods while I was there, and I can only describe the offerings as out of this world when it came to flavour and presentation. The restaurants and the staff went above and beyond, and as a sole traveller, I loved having the time to take in my surroundings and really enjoy what I was eating. One evening I had a celeriac



flan, with a poached egg, and mountains of black truffle, followed by pistachio crusted pigeon, and another evening I had partridge tortelli. And naturally, when in Italy, I also had to try the risotto and pizza. The hotel could be known for its food alone, and I'd go as far as to say it really was some of the nicest I've ever had.

The moment I arrived at Reschio I felt that I had joined a little hidden community within the castle walls, where it was for once easy to switch off and forget about the outside world. When I left, I felt sad to be leaving it behind. Anyone who knows me knows that I am someone who falls in love with new places easily, but Reschio – and particularly Da Vinci and Principe – really did steal a little piece of my heart. **H&H**

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Stayed at: reschio.com
- Cost: hotel rooms start from €870 per night, and suites start from €1,200
- Hacking: one-hour, €260 for one person; €140 for additional rider
- Riding lesson with Antonello Radicchi: from €205 per person
- Additional activities: costs vary

“The hotel could be known for its food alone”

The hotel, in a converted ancient castle, sits within its own 1,500-hectare estate in the Umbrian countryside

