

Driving
INSIDE

THE SUNDAY TIMES SECTION 8 | SEPTEMBER 1, 2013

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WITH INTERIORS AND GARDENING

FIRST-TIME BUYER SPECIAL

The key to your kingdom

Our comprehensive guide to
making the biggest financial
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Puglia goes
upmarket ★ How
to be a good
gardener

YOUR
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HOME

NEWS IN BRIEF

Yankee positivity

Despite economic gloom, mainstream house prices in America are 9.3% higher than they were a year ago, with new home sales at their highest level for five years. Knight Frank's latest US Insight report reveals that the median price of luxury condos in New York rose by 8.2% in the first half of 2013, with international buyers accounting for a third of sales above \$3m. In exclusive Manhattan, however, the number of homes for sale is at a 12-year low, and co-operatives reported little price change. The Hamptons — first choice for wealthy New Yorkers seeking second homes — recorded its highest number of second-quarter sales since 2006.



The new Riviera

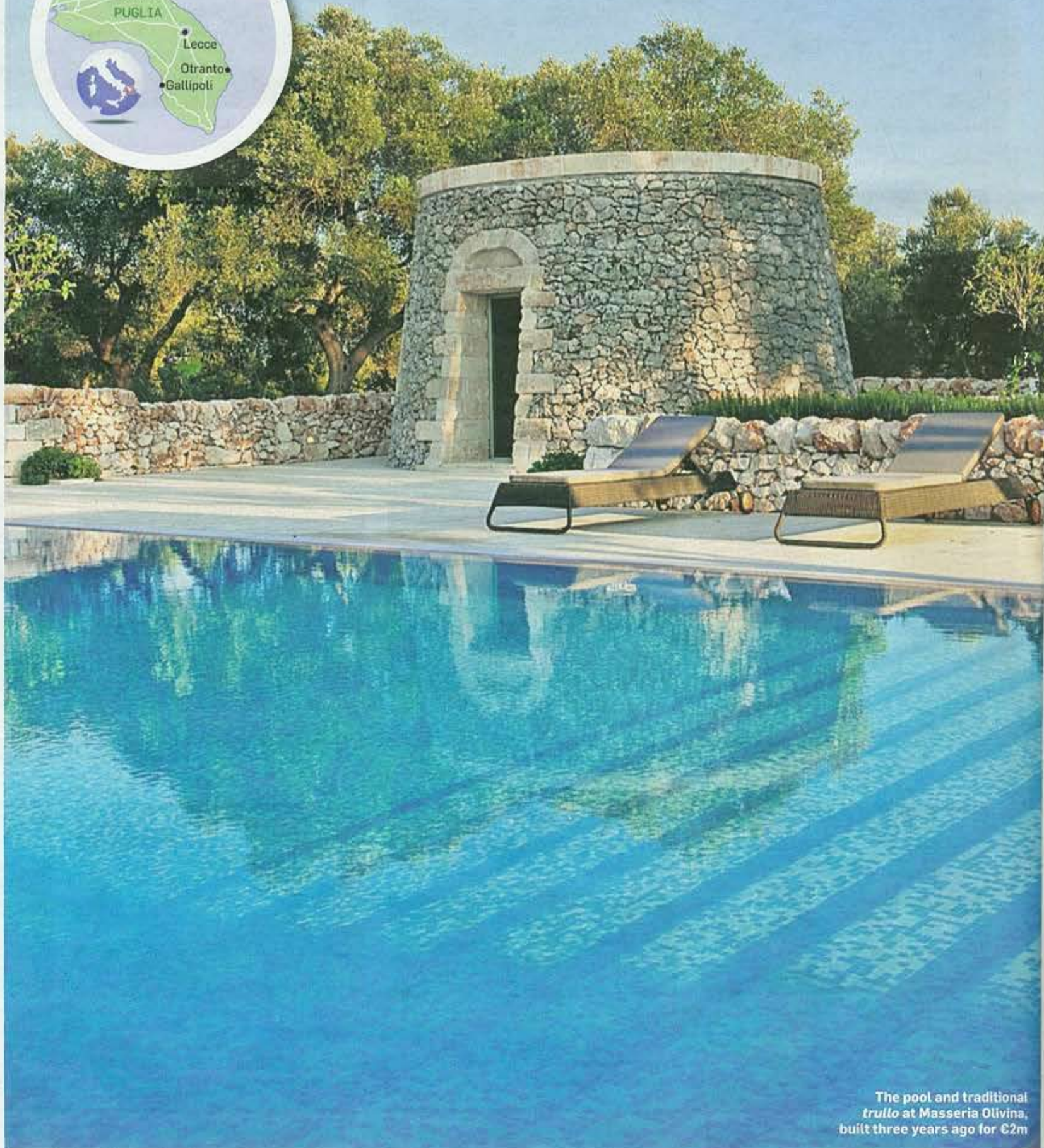
Provence's coastline isn't as familiar to British buyers as the Riviera, but that could be set to change. Home Hunts, a luxury overseas buying agency, says it has seen a 60% increase in inquiries since March, chiefly in larger local towns such as Hyères and Toulon. This has been fuelled by better TGV access and smaller airports opening in the region. The typical British buyer has a budget of €800,000-€1.3m and is in search of a sea-view villa or a traditional stone farmhouse further inland.

Luxury in Oz

A new record has been set for the highest price paid for a flat in Australia. The Sulman penthouse, atop the Residence Hyde Park in Sydney, has been sold to a private buyer for A\$17m (about £9.8m). Spread across one floor, the flat has three bedrooms and huge wraparound terraces; above it are a private roof terrace, a pool and a spa, all with panoramic views over the city's most celebrated structures: the Opera House and the Harbour Bridge. Nigel Napoli, a divisional director at Savills in New South Wales, said the sale demonstrates that the top end of the luxury housing market in the city is gaining momentum.

Deep south

Priced out of Tuscany? Puglia, on the heel of Italy's boot, is the latest hotspot for British buyers. And you don't have to do up a crumbling villa: for an instant classic, buy a new-build in traditional stone, says **Karen Robinson**



The pool and traditional trullo at Masseria Olivina, built three years ago for €2m

360°

Explore the €3.5m La Spinetta *masseria* on a 360-degree tour thesundaytimes.co.uk/360

Essentis

“WE COPY THE SHAPES AND TECHNIQUES MASONS HAVE BEEN USING FOR CENTURIES

Stone vaulted ceilings are hallmarks of Essentis properties, as seen here in *Masseria Olivina*. Below, *La Spinetta* was built to order for €3.5m



the original *masserie* are huge, even bigger than ours. They're not manageable."

La Spinetta, recently completed for a British owner on 12 acres of olive groves, sits around a U-shaped landscaped courtyard with a 20-metre pool and outdoor cooking, dining and living areas. The indoor space covers 325 sq metres (3,500 sq ft), with six bedroom suites. It cost €3.5m and is let for up to €15,000 a week. "Thirteen months ago, there was nothing here," Carlucci says of *La Spinetta*, his 22nd *masseria*.

Carlucci, who grew up in Matera, in the neighbouring province of Basilicata, began his foray into Salento by building up a land bank of olive groves between Lecce and Otranto, using local negotiators who could talk to the owners in their own dialect. This part of Salento is known as *Grecia Salentina*, and the odd Greek shop sign and the *Grico* dialect betray its past. (The Turks also passed through, and built the castle at Otranto.)

So he had the land and, it would appear, the goodwill of the local planners — it takes just three months to get a project approved, he says. The charismatic *Nichi Vendola*, governor of Puglia, has a high-profile green agenda, so it must help

that Essentis houses have ecofriendly features such as photovoltaic solar panels, geothermal pumps and rainwater collection systems, to augment the artesian well on each property.

It was obvious that Carlucci would have to build in the creamy white local stone, *pietra leccese*, and the rougher, more porous *tufo*. But, while there is no shortage of quarries full of the stuff, people who know what to do with it are rather more elusive. "Puglia used to have thousands with the skills to work with stone," he says. "I have created a stone-masons' academy to make sure the skills are handed down. The few masons left are aged 60 to 90, they deserve to be retired, but I've turned them into professors to train the young. I had to find young people to put together with old people's memories. The men in our academy can do anything you can see in Lecce. [The town is famous for its ornate baroque stonework.] Though, of course, we're not building churches."

We turn off down another dusty track, through seven acres of olive groves, to *Masseria Romantica*, where we find the

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VOTE FOR BRITAIN'S FUTURE HOME

Homing in on design excellence: Vote for "Britain's Future Home"

The six finalists for the Homebase sponsored Sunday Times British Homes Awards design competition for Britain's Future Home are revealed and can be viewed on www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/britainsfuturehome. Cast your vote for the concept you think works best and have a hand in building homes you love.

A major challenge for housing today is the provision of sufficient quantities of homes that people want to live in; that are practical and flexible through all life's changes, whether welcoming a new baby, returning teenager or elderly parent in the home.

So the 2013 British Homes Awards challenged architects to design a model family home with a focus on the inspirational use of both internal and external space, considering requirements of privacy, light and amenity.

Prestigious award-winning developer Lower Mill Estate (home to Sun House, the British Homes Awards "Small House of the Year 2012") is proud to partner with the Competition and plans to build up to 15 units of the winning design, realising the architect's dream.

Vote now for the home you want to live in at www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/britainsfuturehome

For more information on the British Homes Awards go to: www.britishhomesawards.co.uk

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Paola Van den Brande and her daughters, Chloë and Anjelica, at Il Trullino. The entrance, left, features antique Flemish doors

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academicians hard at work in the summer sun. (They begin at five and knock off at two, as the heat of the day starts to bear down.) Impressively, they manage to wield the special stone-cutting axes while not letting their fags drop out of their mouths. The €2.5m project is nearing completion, with 310 sq metres of guest quarters and living and sleeping areas taking shape around five courtyards.

The 51-year-old Osvaldo, father and son of stonemasons, is in charge as the team of 10 (from a total of 42) cut each piece to create the pointed sections that will form arches and ceilings. "We copy the shapes and techniques that have been done for centuries," Carlucci says, pointing out the Roman arches in the cloister that connects the kitchen and the living room. "Between the stones is natural lime from a traditional formula, from stone prepared in olive-wood furnaces."

Essentis houses have vast fireplaces and high stone ceilings formed into barrel shapes, star vaults or the rectangular form known as *padiglione*. Local materials are used wherever possible, including pale bronzed limestone for flooring. Apicena marble is used in the bathrooms, and the Carletons' sleek kitchen was made from walnut by a local carpenter and complements the high-tech Boffi Zodiac Quartz work surfaces and Siemens appliances.

Outdoors is where most of the life goes on in Essentis's modern holiday *masserie*, and the courtyard



concept makes the best of it, with landscaping of box parterres and lavender or other strictly indigenous planting, as well as shaded cloisters, large swimming pools, pergolaed dining areas, pizza ovens and ample sitting and lounging sections. The olive grove perimeters are girded with dry-stone walls.

Paola Van den Brande, an internet entrepreneur, and her financier husband, Jan, who live in London's Canary Wharf, got Carlucci's builders to create the entrance to their courtyard from huge antique Flemish doors when they became early adopters of his product in 2007. Il Trullino — there's a guest bedroom in a restored *trullo* in the garden — has fewer green features and is heavier on the wood in doors and window frames, showing how Essentis's style has evolved over the

years. With subsequent additions, the total budget was about €1m — today, it would cost double.

The five-bedroom property has been a holiday home for the couple and their daughters — Anjelica, 9, and Chloë, 6 — and Paola says she lets it to friends for €5,000 in the summer. They get 100 litres of olive oil a year as "rent" from the farmer who tends their five acres, and they can feast on produce from their kitchen garden and oranges from the trees on the courtyard. Essentis provides gardening, pool cleaning, maintenance and security services for €1,200-€2,000 a month, and supplies a "house manager" to look after holiday lettings for an extra fee.

From her extensive roof terrace, Paola says, "you can see three towns, and on a good day you can see the sea". Each of Carlucci's houses has the sense of being utterly isolated, with olive trees and cicadas the only neighbours for miles. In fact, discreetly tucked away off the main road through his "patch" between Lecce and Otranto are several historic towns, including Martano, where the Greek influence is strong, Serrano, its cathedral prominent on a rare hill, and Carpignano, with its Moorish palazzo.

"I've built 22 houses already, I think I can do another 30," Carlucci says. He reckons that Puglia "does not yet have a real-estate market to justify my prices", but he "has been fully booked every year", and new clients signing on now to pick their plot and customise their design will have to wait a year before building can commence — houses usually take 12-15 months to complete. The more land you buy, the bigger the house you can have. The most expansive project to date has been 700 sq metres of house on 50 acres — and it cost €10m.

Carlucci, who describes his style as "contemporary Mediterranean", says that its success depends on the "essential simplicity" of the *masseria* itself. Simple, maybe — but not getting any cheaper in Italy's newly fashionable heel.

☎ 020 7352 9384, essentisproperties.com

The historic port of Otranto is a 10-minute drive from Masseria Olivina



Overseas houses of the week

Lakeside home of the week \$3.45m

Mystery Lake, in Pound Ridge, New York, is for sale with real acting pedigree. It was built in the 1970s, when it was home to Jessica Tandy — the British actress who won an Academy Award in 1989 for her starring role in *Driving Miss Daisy* — and her second husband, the *Cocoon* actor Hume Cronyn. Set in 22 secluded acres, but only an hour by rail from the city, it has more than 5,000 sq ft of dramatic living space, including five bedrooms, as well as a boathouse and an L-shaped pool overlooking a lake. Its new owners will be in good company — Richard Gere, Susan Sarandon and Vera Wang have all lived nearby. *Houlihan Lawrence*; 00 1 914 234 0506, houlihanlawrence.com



Balearic home of the week €695,000

If sea views are what you want, head to the pretty beach resort of St Elm — named after St Elmo, the patron saint of sailors — in the southwest corner of Mallorca, with the peaks of the Sierra de Tramuntana as a backdrop. This modern three-bedroom house sits right over the crystal-clear water, next to a small beach. Built in 1955, it was recently renovated, with bright, light contemporary interiors, and there's a fireplace for winter breaks. *Engel & Völkers*; 00 34 971 674780, engelvoelkers.com



Beachside flat of the week £89,000

This three-bedroom, three-bathroom duplex flat is pretty basic — but it's for sale fully furnished and is in a great spot for exploring Turkey's Turquoise Coast. On a development in Calis, a 4km stretch of beach just a 15-minute drive from Fethiye's historic town centre and 45 minutes from Dalaman airport, it's within easy reach of traditional villages such as Yesiluzumlu and Kemer. Fethiye's main bus station has daily routes to ancient sites across the country. *Oceanwide Properties*; 020 7424 7892, oceanwideproperties.co.uk