

## OVERSEAS

The Chiana Valley, nestled in the southern tip of Tuscany and Umbria, offers second-home buyers the chance to sample an Italian way of life that is rare in its more developed

neighbour, Chianti, to the north.

The Val di Chiana is, according to locals, the authentic Tuscany. It is what Chianti was before international buyers rushed in to renovate every farmhouse within an hour of Florence.

Until now the Chiana Valley, which stretches south from Arezzo to the tiny thermal-spa town of San Casciano dei Bagni, east to the medieval town of Cortona and Lake Trasimeno in Umbria, and west to the vineyards of Montepulciano, has been relatively inaccessible compared with Chianti.

However, a €3.5 million (£3 million) upgrade to Chiusi-Chianciano Terme railway station will turn it into a regional hub for high-speed services from next year. At the moment the fastest train from Rome to Chiusi takes 78 minutes and from Florence or Perugia, about 65 minutes.

While the new rail service may be bad news for those who bought in Chiana on the premise that it was off the beaten track, including the actor Colin Firth and more recently the singer Ed Sheeran, it will be a blessing for commuters, tourists and second-home owners who would rather forego the motorway. It is an hour's drive from Perugia to Chiusi, 90 minutes from Florence and almost two hours from Rome. The area also offers better value for money and a greater variety of properties than Chianti where, according to Annabelle Dudley, the head of Italian sales at Savills, "every ruin and shed has been done up into something".

Despite being the setting for Frances Mayes' book, *Under the Tuscan Sun*, about restoring a villa, the countryside of Chiana is still dotted with abandoned farmhouses ripe for restoration. Dudley says that many have planning permission. There are also smaller projects in the offing; Savills has a two-bedroom home that needs modernising for €400,000. "A sum which wouldn't get you very far in Chianti."

Dudley says: "Chianti held its value in the recession and has kept it. The 30 to 50 per cent depression elsewhere in Italy wasn't really seen to such an extent there, where British buyers didn't need to sell. In Chiana, you are beautifully positioned and able to get more for your money.

"I like the countryside. It's very open,



Casa Cerretella in Cortona, Tuscany, has five bedrooms and is on the market for €625,000 through Abode

# Living the Tuscan dream — for less

Priced out of Chianti? Head south to the Chiana Valley, which has renovation projects galore, says Carol Lewis

with rolling fields and lots of authentic villages, where you are likely to be a novelty rather than the norm as a British homeowner. In restaurants you don't hear English being spoken at every table. It is perfect for those that want to immerse themselves in the Italian way of life."

Jeremy Onslow-Macaulay, the managing director of Casa & Country Italian Property, agrees: "Property in Chiana is about 30 per cent cheaper than in Chianti. People come to us with €800,000 to €1 million and say: 'I want a stand-alone villa with a swimming pool and a hectare of land in Chianti' and we have a real struggle to find anything. In Chianti you would need €1.5 million, or more, but in Chiana we could find something lovely.

"That is not to say we couldn't find



Above and top right: Giardini di Borgo 69 in Pozzo della Chiana will consist of 12 homes, each with a private terrace or garden and luxury interiors

you something grand in Chiana — there are some beautiful big estates as well as ruins to do up. You can get a farmhouse in need of modernisation, with a couple of hectares, for €500,000 towards Lake Trasimeno. The area between Lake Chiusi and Lake Trasimeno, in Umbria, with its rolling hills and little villages, is particularly lovely. The other place that sells well is Cortona, which has quite a following, attracting an arty, cultured set," he says.

