

Home of the week

Famous politicians walked the marble floors of this Tuscan home, says Victoria Brzezinski

A grand house with pale stone façades, a bell tower and neat green shutters, Villa Medici Nugola is quintessentially Italian. This 17th-century hunting lodge nestles in olive groves with views over the Tuscan countryside. The original house, on the edge of the village of Nugola in the Livorno district, was once owned by the Medici dynasty. In the 19th century the ancestors of its present owners, the Traxlers (descended from Swiss aristocracy), developed the house and grounds into an agricultural estate. Samantha Traxler, who is coordinating the villa's sale and has spent many summers there, says: "They were engineers and very forward-looking — the only thing they had to import was salt. In the 1870s they replaced the wooden beams with metal to protect it against seismic activity. When there have been earthquakes you feel the tremor but, because of the elasticity of the materials, luckily there has been no damage. In England you touch wood, but in Italy you touch metal for luck."

The six-bedroom house, set in 21 hectares of land, is on the market for €4 million (£3.38 million) with the estate agent Casa and Country. The villa is 20 minutes south of Pisa, 20 minutes from the beaches of Castiglioncello and Tirrenia, and an hour from Florence.

Samantha's mother, Pauline Rathbone, lived in the house from 1995 until her death a few years ago. She was an Anglo-American who fell in love with Vieri Traxler, an Italian diplomat in the 1950s. Her father was the Conservative MP John Rathbone. When he was killed

in the war, her mother, Beatrice, took over his seat. Her stepfather, Paul Wright, spent seven years as head of the British Information Services, an agency that promoted British views, particularly in the US, and served as ambassador to the Democratic Republic of Congo.

"A few British celebrities turned up in this little corner of Tuscany, most in the 1970s and 1980s," Samantha says. "We were often joined in the summers by my uncle, Tim Rathbone." He was the Conservative MP for Lewes and godfather to the former prime minister David Cameron. Woodrow Wyatt, the politician and journalist, and Roy Jenkins, the first leader of the Social Democratic Party, would play cricket on the lawn while the Labour MP Leo Abse stayed in a villa five minutes away.

Many old properties in the area went through a transformation in the Seventies. Luckily, "Nugola never had that," Samantha says. "It has remained the same over the past 100 years."

It could now benefit from new kitchens and bathrooms, but retains beautiful original features: Venetian marble flooring and fireplaces; ceilings painted with frescos; and 400 sq m of wine cellars below the garden.

La Scala in Milan, the world-famous home of Italian opera, had electric lighting installed in 1883 and it is thought that Villa Medici Nugola was the first privately owned home to get the same treatment that year.

Outbuildings include the Fattoria, the farm's old admin building, which holds three apartments. There are also olive groves and woodland (with truffles) that borders acres of vineyards owned by the Frescobaldi family, who have been producing wine in Tuscany for centuries.

€4 million

