

# LIVING IN ITALY

THE REAL DEAL

Version 1.0

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# LIVING IN ITALY

THE REAL DEAL

Stef Smulders

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*For Nico*  
*My own padrone di fiducia*



*It once occurred to me that one way to talk about Italy would be simply to make a list of all those Italian words that are untranslatable, or whose translation tells you next to nothing, and then give dozens of anecdotes showing how they are used.*

An Italian Education - Tim Parks





# November 2008

When we bought our home nine months ago it was ready to move into. And now?

We are shipwrecked in the kitchen of the downstairs apartment. A single sheet of plastic between the hall and the sitting room is the only thing that protects us from the heavy dust of the building site. All day, we are assaulted by the sound of workmen shouting, drilling and hammering. A couple of hours ago the electricity cut out and it's starting to get chilly in here. Every evening we escape upstairs via the dusty, grimy staircase, where we try to find solace by watching TV in our future living room. The living room is also separated by a sheet of plastic from the kitchen, the bedroom and the office. There are gaping holes in the walls in all of these three rooms, made weeks ago in preparation for the doors and a new window. Now they are serving as tunnels bringing in the draught and the cold. Exhausted and numbed from the endless turmoil surrounding us, we are staring out into space in silence. We are hardly aware of what's on the screen.

WHAT HAVE WE LET OURSELVES IN FOR?



I

Pavia

SEPTEMBER 2007 – FEBRUARY 2008



## Non ci sono problemi

With my right foot still on the pavement, the estate agent's car was already pulling away. My reaction was fast: I pulled both legs inside and slammed the car door, averting an accident. The estate agent obviously had no time to waste! We were going to look at two properties in the Oltrepò Pavese, the area lying south of the river Po, which traverses Northern Italy. I sat in the front and the estate agent prattled on in hundred-mile-an-hour Italian. I only understood bits of what he was saying, partly because I was too disconcerted by the traffic which we were navigating with Italian flair.

For the last few weeks, we had lived in the quiet, historical, university town of Pavia. In the next 6 months, I was going to continue with my MA in Medieval Culture, and my husband, Nico would enjoy his well-earned sabbatical. He was going to Hoover, do the shopping and cook, whilst I could immerse myself in times gone by. But there was this secret, unspoken wish that didn't leave us alone: could we...., what if we..., imagine if...?

And already, just a couple of weeks into our stay in Pavia, we started looking at properties, with the intention of permanently settling down and setting up a B&B! Soon after our arrival in Pavia, we discovered the wine region of Oltrepò Pavese, an area about half an hour's drive to the south of Pavia. It was love at first sight. What beautiful countryside! And this is how our secret wish began to take shape: to find our own idyllic home on the top of a hill with panoramic views! In one of the free leaflets from the numerous estate agencies (*agenzie immobiliari*), our excited eyes spotted the perfect house that ticked all our boxes. We were now

on our way to this house, with an estate agent whose main talents seemed to be smooth talking and rally driving.

Once we got out of Pavia, the roads became quieter and I was able to follow Olita's - as he was called - Italian a bit better. He was busy showing off his property know-how and reassuring us about the top quality of the houses we were about to see. If there was anything not to our liking, it could be easily sorted, without any additional costs, he said. He had already made an agreement with the owners. "*Non ci sono problemi!*" he exclaimed with much enthusiasm. If we didn't like the colour of the house, it could be painted over, before completion, in any colour at all, even violet, maintained Olita. "*Non ci sono problemi!*" And the garden that had become a jungle from months (probably years?) of neglect would be completely cleared out, just for us.

We took in the landscape in front of us: it was mainly flat, covered in rice fields (growing the famous Italian *risotto*), farmland and poplar plantations, as far as the eye could see. Along the country road, we were driving past settlements: an endless mish-mash of houses and farm buildings of all shapes and sizes. We raced through small villages with stores, restaurants and cafés. Olita was consistently indifferent to the numerous white traffic signs warning of upcoming speed cameras. Did his employer pay the fines? Or was it going to become a hidden charge on our bill? We were fully aware that we were going to have to pay Olita commission if we were to buy our house through him. We had done our homework in the Netherlands and were well-prepared for all the traps that a would-be house buyer could fall into when trying to buy a house in Italy. We were on high alert! Olita, unaware of my misgivings, drove on at full speed. Here and there along the side of the road, there were small shrines erected by friends and relatives of beloved maniacs, who

had died in tragic road accidents. Olita didn't seem to worry about suffering the same fate; he overtook slow drivers without mercy, regardless of whether the white line was broken or solid. Later on, having lived in the Oltrepò for several months, we discovered a *santuario* nearby; a memorial chapel for all the victims killed in road accidents in the area. The legendary recklessness of Italian drivers might have some foundation after all. Olita, for his part, did his utmost to conform to the stereotype. Occasionally, we met two cars side-by-side coming from the other direction, but luckily three cars in a row could easily be accommodated on this two-lane road. *Non ci sono problemi.*

We reached Ponte della Becca, the one kilometre long iron bridge built in 1912 that spans the merging of the Po and the Ticino. The Oltrepò stretched on the other side, flat at first, but soon undulating with hills. There in the distance our dream house was waiting for us somewhere. We saw the first vineyards appearing here and there. On one of the hillsides we spotted a remarkable-looking castle and we inquired about it from our local regional expert, a.k.a. Olita. "Which castle is that?" we asked full of curiosity. He didn't know. But "*Non ci sono problemi,*" he would investigate and let us know. Maybe our house was not going to be violet after all.

It soon became apparent why Olita was in such a hurry: he was lost and was zooming up and down the hills in search of familiar landmarks. Against all expectations, we managed to find our chosen house, which didn't look as perfect as we at first had thought, not even if Olita would have it painted violet. On one side it leant against a slope, and the other side was blocked from view by an unsightly shed. The garden was no bigger than a postage stamp. What a shame. Luckily, on the advice of Olita's *Agenzia*, we had also made an appointment to view another

property that was on offer at a bargain price. This second house didn't look appealing in the brochure: a faded grey concrete block without any character. But now that we were here...we might as well take a look.

It took Olita a lot of cursing and muttering under his breath during the second stretch of our mystery tour, to finally bring us to the cheaper property. The frontage made no false promises. There were not enough colours in the rainbow to change that. But the inside! The house was made up of two apartments, each a hundred square metres. The downstairs apartment was completely modernised, had brand new flooring, central heating, a fitted kitchen, and there was a sitting room *with* sofas and a ready-to-go modern bathroom. The apartment was ready to move into as soon as gas and electricity were connected. We felt enthusiastic.

After having seen the downstairs flat, Olita led us upstairs and opened the shutters of the bedroom overlooking the valley. An enchanting view of rolling hills and vineyards in the style of impressionist paintings unravelled before our eyes. In the distance, we recognised the characteristic but still enigmatic castle from earlier. And a bit further on, there was *another* castle. And over there *another* one. We were sold. *Non ci sono problemi!* For once we all agreed!



# Via Moruzzi

Our base in Pavia, which we were renting until we found a house to buy, was a flat owned by Giorgio and Franco. It was a lucky find. In the summer of 2007, we visited Pavia for a week to find an apartment for my six months study abroad and Nico's sabbatical. At first, that week seemed as if it would end in total failure because all the suitable apartments we found on the Internet in the Netherlands fell by the wayside one by one. In one case, for example, we were allowed to view our chosen flat but later it transpired that it wasn't quite clear whether the present tenants were really going to leave. Why didn't the owner tell us this earlier, we wondered feeling annoyed. What was the point in looking at a flat that wasn't (yet) available? Did the owner worry that he would disappoint us and let us carry on with the viewing? But now we were even more disappointed. Maybe this is the Italian way of doing things, we thought, quite put out by the way things were handled.

We had nothing left but to hope that the last of the apartments we had selected was still available and that we would like it. Although our appointment for the viewing was later on, in the evening, we decided to have a quick look around the neighbourhood in daylight. We saw at the entrance, where the doorbells and tenants' names were listed next to the apartment numbers, that the name plate next to our chosen apartment was empty. The flat was seemingly still free: that was at least a positive sign! We returned that evening, full of expectations, and rang the bell. But what on earth was that? We stood looking in disbelief at a name next to the number of *our* apartment! That could only

mean one thing, we concluded crestfallen: the flat had been rented out today. But surely the owners wouldn't let us make a wasted journey? Did we check properly this morning? Was it just the name of the previous tenant? We hoped for the best and pressed the button again.

The gate buzzed open and we entered with apprehension. The apartment door was opened by a young couple, with deadpan faces. They showed us around the whole apartment, explained its pros and cons and provided other useful information. It turned out to be a quite sparsely furnished, minimalistic and not too spacious dwelling, but because we had no other alternatives, we offered to rent the place at the end of the viewing. "Yeah," said the girl a bit sheepishly, "there is a little problem." The flat was indeed already rented out. This crucial bit of news had a devastating effect on us. What were we supposed to do now? We would never have enough time in the remainder of the week to find another place. The girl saw our desperation and took it to heart. Suddenly she remembered a friend who had a furnished apartment that he might be prepared to rent out. "Yes please, we are very interested," we both shouted, clutching at straws. So she rang her friend, Giorgio, who agreed to meet us at Pavia train station and take us to his flat on Via Moruzzi.

Arriving at the station we couldn't see any Italian who looked like they were there to meet someone. We decided to wait at the entrance. Before long my mobile was ringing. "*Sono qui*, I am here," I heard a voice say, and at the same time saw a man approaching us: that must be Giorgio. He had been observing us from a distance to decide whether we were *persone serie*, serious people. Luckily he must have thought so and soon we were driving up behind him to the flat that was going to be our salvation. To our great relief, his parents' flat (because that's what it was),

was by far the best of all the accommodation we had viewed. Our trip was a success after all, not thanks to our careful preparations, but because of the quick thinking of an Italian, who knew someone, who... Was this a taster of our forthcoming experiences in Italy?

## Vista sui tetti di Pavia

*La Nagel*: with her oversized sunglasses (dark round lenses surrounded by thick plastic frames), which she had just unearthed from the depths of her handbag to protect her eyes from the strong Italian sun, she bore a strong resemblance to Sophia Loren in her heyday. She was a researcher in Medieval Astrology and my future collaborator at the University of Pavia. Her straight hair, dyed raven black, gave the impression of an eventful past, a girl who must have turned many heads in her day. But today, the staircases of the old university buildings demanded her every last breath and she did her utmost to avoid the characteristic cobblestones of Pavia's historical streets: her fashionable shoes and tired feet couldn't even contemplate walking over them.

She lived in Milan, as did nearly all my other colleagues in the faculty, and commuted every day by train to Pavia. The journey was too dangerous by car because in the autumn the plain of the River Po is shrouded in a persistent, thick fog that can last for days. The sub-faculty, Medieval Philosophy was led by *la professoressa* Crisciani and was made up of five researchers, all of them women. Last year, I had succeeded in convincing *la professoressa* that her research group would be the perfect setting for my placement. But when I turned up last summer to visit the group for the first time, they could barely hide their astonishment. They expected the intern to be a woman. The fact that on my profile picture which I e-mailed to them I was obviously bald and was sporting a beard, was apparently not enough evidence to prove my masculinity. General common sense does not seem to apply to Medieval Philosophy!

I received a warm welcome, nevertheless, and my arrival was celebrated with lunch at a restaurant in Pavia's city centre, called the Osteria alle Carceri, the dungeon inn so to speak. Hmm, could I detect a hint of foreboding in this name? Following *la dottoressa* Nagel's advice, I ordered a *risotto bianco*, which promised to be delicious. But to me, the *risotto* seemed only to consist of rice, butter and cheese without any further ingredients, it tasted rather plain and bland. To the unexpected question of whether I liked it, I of course answered "*buono*" in order to avoid antagonising my medieval friends at such an early stage. Luckily, some time later, completely out of the blue, Giorgio forbade me ever to visit this very restaurant, as it was well-known for its over-pretentious food!

After lunch, *la professoressa* made a quick exit. She was not heading to the university; instead she was going home to look after a sick elderly relative who had suffered a stroke recently. My *professoressa* was very sorry to say goodbye to me so soon, but she was certain that we would come across each other regularly in the next couple of months. *La* Nagel was in charge now to give me a tour of the centuries-old university. She showed me the university buildings, the anatomy room and the library. At one point the conversation turned to where I should stay in Pavia during my 6 month-long visit. My *dottoressa* hadn't the faintest idea how much trouble it had caused us in the last couple of days just to secure a roof over our heads. Her advice was well-meant albeit naive: "*Dovreste prendere un appartamento con la vista sui tetti di Pavia!* You ought to hire a nice apartment with a view across Pavia's rooftops!"

## Persone serie

This was the last straw! Giorgio was burning with rage because of his brother's Franco's last comment, made in jest: "*Siete quasi clandestini!* You are some sort of illegal immigrants!" How could he say something like that, how could he act so *maleducato*, blunt, towards such respectable people as we were in Giorgio's eyes. *Persone serie, persone brave*. Because of the way Giorgio emphasised that last bit, we got the impression that he didn't come across many people like that in Italy. Is Italy full of untrustworthy characters who cannot be taken seriously? Who say one thing and do another? We would soon find out. Luckily, according to Giorgio, we didn't belong in that category.

Although they were brothers, Giorgio and Franco had strikingly different personalities. Giorgio was short and squat like a rugby player with dark wiry curls; he had a beard and wore glasses and everything he said seemed to have been well thought out. He often had an introspective air about him. Franco, on the other hand, was tall and slim, with thinning hair, and had no beard or glasses (the latter for reasons that would become apparent later). Franco moreover, had a nervous energy that didn't let him sit still, paired with impulsive tendencies: he blurted everything out directly whilst looking straight at you as if waiting to see your reaction. Each brother seemed to impersonate a different aspect of '*the Italian*': Franco, the jovial, carefree, cheerful, not-to-be-trusted Italian of the proverbs, as most outsiders imagine them; Giorgio, the caring, pessimistic and slightly depressed version of the Italian, the kind you come across in Italy quite often. It's not for no reason that many Italians will

answer 'how are you?' with "*non c'è male*" 'not too bad' instead of with "*bene*, very well". Franco always greeted everyone with a deafening "*Tutto bene?*" He meant this as a rhetorical question because he repeated it every time you fell into a momentary silence: "*Tutto bene?*" He never really listened. Giorgio, on the other hand, often engaged you in deep and serious conversations about the shortcomings of Italy and its people and about the bleakness of his own prospects. Like every coin, Italy seems to have two sides: manic and depressed.

The exchange intensified between these brothers representing the extreme polar opposites and (we felt) it was growing into a full-blown argument. We understood very little of what was said, we picked out the words "Schengen" (pronounced: shyenghen) and "*Sei pazzo!* You are crazy!" Disagreement? Oh well, this was just the typical way feelings were expressed, in keeping with the Italian temperament. A good example of 'much ado about nothing'. When the dispute was finally over, Giorgio carried on irritably with the complicated and extensive paperwork that the anti-terrorism legislation required him to fill in. We were renting his apartment as foreigners with temporary residence permits and the Italian government needed to know all the ins and outs.

Giorgio's and Franco's flat forms part of a so-called *condominio*, an apartment complex. These can be found all over the small town suburbs in Northern Italy: 3-4 storey buildings, surrounded by a garden, with their own car park and protected by a metal railing. The gate securing the area surrounding a *condominio* (safety first!), is not just an ordinary one, but a *cancello a telecomando*, a remote controlled gate! And it's also fitted with a flashing light because a house or a *condominio* without such a gate and orange light is like a monarch without a crown. You have only really made it in life if you successfully moved into a house

equipped with *both* an automatic, remote controlled gate *and* an orange flashing light. There were also supposed to be little warning signs to prevent accidentally trapping children completely automatically between the wall and the gates and squashing them into French fries when opening the gate. Safety first.

The flats in Giorgio's and Franco's *condominio* were accessible through a shared lobby. There were no external corridors. The basement consisted of small box rooms and garages. The management of the *condominio* was carried out by an unavoidable group of owners, the 'neighbourhood watch' who (safety first) ensured cleanliness, peace and routine. The *condominio* was situated in Via Moruzzi, west of the city centre and Pavia's railway station. It was surrounded by a beautiful garden and there were plenty of covered parking spaces reserved for each flat. The wall in the brand new lobby was clad in polished natural stone. And of course we received our own genuine *telecomando* for the gate, which was naturally equipped with a lovely flashing orange beacon. But first, we had to be cleared of any suspicion of subversive intentions that could possibly link us to terrorists. Giorgio did his best to arrange this for us, but the pile of paperwork full of official jargon made it a nearly unbearable chore.

Whilst Giorgio was focused on deciphering the instructions, Franco, completely unaffected by the previous argument, started up a friendly chat. About reading glasses and the dangers of wearing multifocal lenses, for example. Franco had heard stories from people wearing varifocals who fell down staircases because they couldn't see the steps properly. "Deadly!" he asserted. He was adamant not to wear glasses of that sort or, to think about it, of any sort, even though he was short-sighted. As a result, he read



the year on our 1875 Bols Genever Gin bottle as 1575. Franco was preoccupied, just like nearly all Italians, with danger and health. We noticed this when he showed us around the neighbourhood, shortly after we had moved into the flat. He pointed out the hospital, the *farmacia*, the pharmacy and the headquarters of the Red Cross *and* the Green Cross, all these facilities available to us within our district. We as *persone serie* were completely safe, he seemed to say.

By now we had already spent a couple of weeks living in Giorgio and Franco's flat, who on this fine evening cleared us of any suspicion of terrorist activities. We had to drink a proper Dutch toast to that. Bols Genever from 15... no, wait, 1875.

## La perizia

“The ceiling is two and a half metres high, you see,” said Olita, the estate agent, in a self-assured tone. “No, it’s two metres seventy,” came the impassive correction from Luigi Buttini, our hired *geometra*. A *geometra* is a typical Italian professional, whose expertise encompasses everything from architectural engineer to planning specialist. He is virtually indispensable when buying and vetting a house. We hired Buttini to inspect the house in the Oltrepò which we set our heart on. We were already pretty taken by the house but we wanted to avoid ending up with a fool’s bargain. The fact that we couldn’t trust our estate agent Olita in this respect had already become clear at our first viewing.

“Two metres fifty,” countered Olita, annoyed and abrupt because of Buttini’s correction. “Let’s measure it,” concluded Buttini, sure of himself and equipped with all the necessary tools to make this possible. The result of this little duel of masculine egos was that the height was established as two metres seventy-five, meaning our *geometra* won. We suppressed a smile. Both men had been trying to get on top for some time now, Olita always on the alert for any mistakes Buttini could be caught making.

Buttini checked everything: did all the measurements tally with those in the land registry? Had anything been modified or extended illegally? Was the size of the plot of land correct? “È tutto in ordine, non ci sono problemi,” Olita shouted out time and again, offended that we brought in a real expert to check on him. But we were well prepared, and we bore firmly in mind all the disasters that could befall someone trying to buy a house in Italy. There

was already something that didn't seem to be right: the piece of land that Olita's advert promised us was at least two thousand five hundred square metres. On our first visit, he showed us the borders of the land, which according to him extended to the end of the little brick building, called the *rustico*.

Back home after the viewing, in the middle of the night, awake with excitement over the fact that we had probably found our dream house, I suddenly realised that this couldn't be right. I thought that the amount of land around the house seemed to be too small (where was the swimming pool supposed to go?) and this could be a reason not to buy. But wait a minute, I thought: the house itself measures 11 by 11 metres, which is 121 square metres. The house should fit into the land over 20 times. But that was impossible on the piece of land that Olita had shown us.

Now that we had brought our own surveyor, this question should soon be resolved. The stocky figure of Buttini was wading through the tall weeds (an outstanding job for Olita?), stumbling across leftover roof tiles that had been thrown away haphazardly by roofing workmen. Olita was bounding along behind him like an overexcited puppy. Panting for breath, he called out one more time, warning us that the grounds beyond the *rustico* did not belong to the house and that we shouldn't be trespassing: it was *proprietà privata!* With slight panic in his tone, Olita shouted across to the owner to ask for his support. But the owner stood at the front of the house and didn't hear him. Buttini pushed on, entering illegal territory. Or maybe not? No, because he concluded that our piece of land stretched completely to the walls of the neighbouring house. The land registry documents confirmed this fact. Two nil to our *geometra!*

Olita was becoming ever more miffed and he had already started the day off in a bad mood. "You are late," he called out in

annoyance. “I don’t think so, we agreed half past nine,” I said. “Nine o’clock!” he insisted. The owners had also had to wait half an hour, but they didn’t hold it against us. “*È tutta colpa sua,*” said the lady of the house smiling at me. “It’s all his fault.” It was clear that they weren’t on the best terms with Olita either. We could turn this to our advantage. I asked the woman if there was any other interest in the house at present. “There is *some* interest,” she said, but she didn’t sound convincing.

Olita rang us a couple of days later to ask us in an aggressive tone why we hadn’t let him know yet whether we were going to make an offer on the house. Namely, everything was in order, we only needed to pay a deposit and sign a temporary sales agreement. But we - being well-prepared - had other ideas and we made this clear to him: “First we do a *perizia*, a survey, then we examine all the paperwork: the land registry, the ownership documents, outstanding debts, etc.. Then we will see how it goes.” “Shouldn’t we actually check if the neighbours would want to buy the land?” we asked our expert. According to the law, neighbour farmers have the first priority to buy when someone is selling farmland adjacent to their properties. “*No, no, non ci sono problemi,*” called out Olita immediately, but he was going to check just to be on the safe side: we were right.

In an hour or two, Buttini came to the conclusion that it all looked pretty good, and even better: a house as big as this for this asking price was a real *affare*, bargain. Now we only needed to go to the town hall in Montecalvo to make sure we would not stumble on any difficulties regarding the land-use plan, and then we could finally make our first offer on the house. We felt the tension rising. Could anything still go wrong?

# Software potente

The telephone started ringing in our flat in Pavia. It was Giorgio, sounding rather sheepish. At first, he confessed, he had been in doubt whether to call us, but there was no alternative, because there was a problem. He found it really embarrassing having to do this, and he even considered not ringing us at all. In the end, he had decided that it was better to talk to us about this issue, but now he had doubts. “Come on, just spill the beans!” we insisted like Dutch foreigners, not appreciating the delicacy of this Italian embarrassment. Well, he had counted the first rent that we had paid, and it was a hundred euros less than expected. We were amused by all this hesitation from this timid Italian who had got himself in a fix because he didn’t want to offend us and as a result he had nearly lost out on a hundred euros. We invited him to come over; we could pay the outstanding amount immediately. “No, no, it can wait, it’s not a problem,” he was evading our invitation. But we insisted on paying him now, so that we would avoid months of awkwardness and avoiding each other.

Giorgio arrived together with his brother Franco and decided to take this opportunity to connect us to the Internet. We had a telephone, an ADSL-router, and our laptop was ready. The only thing missing was the Alice software that the Italian internet provider *Telecom Italia* used. This publicly owned company is not famous for its user-friendly software, and rumours regularly surface of Telecom’s bureaucracy, whispered about with barely veiled contempt in bars and cafés by unlucky victims. The first problem in our case was not with the software but with the electric cables: we needed an extension lead. We could construct a

temporary set-up just for installation purposes, but in the long-term, we needed a permanent solution. “*Ce l’ho a casa,*” said Franco. “I have one at home.” But his wise words fell on deaf ears. Giorgio and I were already completely lost in the Alice software, and we stopped responding to outside conversation. We quickly started to feel like we were trapped in Alice in *Wonderland*. It was such a mess! Franco repeated that he had an extension lead and he could go and get it. But, again, he got no reply.

“*Per continuare si deve installare il nostro software potente,*” announced Alice happily. “Now you need to install our powerful software.” I glanced at Giorgio with some disbelief. He understood immediately and said in an ironic tone: “Well? Do you want that powerful software from Telecom Italia on your PC?” “*È proprio la parola potente che mi fa paura,*” I grinned. “It’s the *powerful* bit that I am worried about.” But we had no other choice and with my eyes firmly shut I pressed ‘*Installazione*’. Beyond all expectations, everything went smoothly and the software got installed. In the meantime, Franco repeated two more times that he had an extension lead and he could go and get it. By this point he was pacing nervously up and down the room. “What’s the matter?” asked Giorgio. “I can get the extension lead, give me the car keys, I will be back in a minute,” answered Franco grumpily. Giorgio did as he was told.

Franco was away for over an hour with Giorgio’s car, who was therefore stranded in our flat. Have a drink then, a bit of Bols, the genuine Dutch *grappa*. “No, no, maybe just a sip,” said Giorgio. They became several sips whilst we were waiting for the extension lead. In the end, we heard Franco outside, parking the car. Downstairs the hall door slammed. He burst in in a fit of anger and frustration. He couldn’t find the lead anywhere. He had turned the whole shed upside down because it had to be there

somewhere. A couple of days ago he had it in his hands. “And now it was nowhere to be seen, *porca miseria!*” We comforted him with a shot of special Dutch *grappa*. Nothing bad could befall us now: our software was *potente!*





# Villa I Due Padroni

A couple of years have passed and the stress created by the building work is a distant memory. Well, nearly. We barely remember what Torti looked like. And what was the name of that estate agent again?

But joking aside: we never regretted emigrating to Italy and starting a B&B here. From the very beginning (that first dive into the pool) there was a lot of interest in our accommodation, especially from the Netherlands and Belgium. So much so that every year we unfortunately have to turn many people away. In the summer we have the pleasure of receiving new guests every week (or every two weeks). Guests who, without exception, delight us with their cheerfulness and enthusiasm. We enjoy being hosts and giving our guests lots of hints and tips about what to see and where to eat out. And we look forward to their stories at the end of each day. We have found our vocation!

The Oltrepò Pavese has well and truly become our home in these past five years. The rolling hills, the beautiful views, the climate, the Italians with their funny ways and the fantastic food: we couldn't live without it. We are going to stay put for some time. If the stories in this book have whetted your appetite for an Italian adventure, we invite you to come and explore this lovely region. Visit our website [www.duepadroni.it](http://www.duepadroni.it) to find information and photos showing you what you can expect. But make sure you book in good time! Who knows, we might meet soon.



# Glossary

- a norma* – standard, according to regulations
- a offerta* – voluntary
- a posto* – OK
- a voce* – read out loud
- acquedotto* – water supply
- affare* – bargain
- agenzia immobiliare* – estate agent
- aglio* – garlic
- agriturismo* – holiday let on a farm
- all'improvviso* – unexpectedly
- al dente* – just cooked
- alle urne* – to the polls
- amico* – friend
- andata e ritorno* – there and back
- antennista* – TV aerial installer
- antipasti* – starter
- aperitivo* – aperitif
- architetta* – architect
- argento* – silver
- arte povera* – 'poor art', artistic movement making use of common materials
- articolate* – folding, on hinges
- asse* – toilet seat
- assegno* – cheque
- astemio* – teetotaler
- autista* – chauffeur
- autonomo* – independent
- bagnato* – soaked, wet
- bagno alla turca* – squat toilet
- barista* – barman
- barrique* – oak wine barrel
- bastardo* – bastard
- bloccato* – locked up (knee)
- borlotti* – a kind of bean
- bozza* – draft
- brutto* – ugly
- buffone* – joker
- buongustaio* – foodie, gourmet
- buonissimo* – very good
- cancello* – gate, fence
- cantina* – basement, wine cellar
- cantina sociale* – cooperative winegrowers' association
- canzone* – song
- caparra* – deposit
- capo pigro* – lazy boss (Torti)
- capriolo* – roe deer
- casalinga* – home-made
- cent'anni* – cheers
- chimica* – chemical adhesive
- ciabatta* – slipper
- cin cin* – cheers
- cipolla* – onion
- cipollata* – onion festival
- clandestini* – illegal immigrant
- codice fiscale* – national insurance number
- cognome* – surname

*collaudo* – the Italian version of the MOT

*colonello* – colonel

*colpa sua* – his fault

*come mai* – how come

*comitato* – committee

*commercialista* – accountant

*complimenti* – compliments

*compromesso* – preliminary sales contract

contract

*computo metrico* – itemised

overview

*condominio* – apartment-complex

*contatore* – meter

*conto corrente* – current account

*contraddizione* – contradiction

*coppa* – cured ham

*coppia di fatto* – partnership

*copritetti* – roofer

*così così* – so so

*crostata* – fruit tart, pie

*cucinare* – to cook

*dentista* – dentist

*di fiducia* – trustworthy

*di una volta* – as in the old days

*digestivo* – after dinner liqueur

*dilettanti* – amateurs

*disegno* – design

*dizionario* – dictionary

*dolci* – desserts

*domani* – tomorrow *donazione* –

gift, present

*donne* – ladies

*dottorandi* – PhD students

*dottoressa* – woman holding a doctorate

*è lui* – it's him

*è piccolo il mondo* – it's a small world

*elettrodomestici* – household appliances

*elicottero* – 1. Helicopter 2. machine that applies paint

*emozione* – emotion

*enoteca* – wine shop

*erbette* – a type of edible weed

*espresso* – espresso coffee

*extracomunitari* – people from outside the EU

*falegname* – carpenter

*fannullone* – fool

*fare bella figura* – to make a good impression, look good

*farmacia* – pharmacy

*farmacista* – chemist

*fatta in casa* – home-made

*frane* – landslide

*fratelli* – brothers

*frazione* – hamlet

*frittata* – omelette

*funghi porcini* – wild mushroom

*fuori* – crazy, 'out of it'

*gabinetto alla turca* – squat toilet

*geometra* – architectural engineer

*ginocchio* – knee

*giornalista* – journalist

*gnocchi* – gnocchi, soft dough

dumpling

*gnocco fritto* – fried dough  
 dumpling  
*gommista* – tyre salesman  
*grande lavoro* – building project  
*grappa* – alcoholic spirit made of  
 grapes

*gru* – crane  
*idraulico* – plumber  
*il bagno* – the toilet  
*il water* – toilet bowl  
*immobiliare* – real-estate  
*impari* – odd, unequal  
*importazione* – importation  
*imposta di bollo* – tax stamp  
*in bollo* – level  
*in collina* – in the hills  
*in omaggio* – for free  
*in ordine* – OK  
*infortunato* – accident, misfortune  
*ingegnere* – engineer  
*interruzione* – interruption  
*intonaco* – plaster  
*isolante* – primer  
*macchina* – car  
*laboratorio* – workshop  
*lavanderia* – launderette  
*luce* – light, electricity  
*macchina* – car  
*mafia* – mafia  
*mal di testa* – headache  
*maleducato* – ill-mannered, rude  
*malumore* – bad mood, bad  
 temper  
*marmi* – marble plates  
*medico* – doctor

*melanzana* – aubergine  
*meno male* – thank goodness  
*meridiano* – southerner  
*meteo* – the weather  
*mi dica* – go on, can I help you  
*moca* – percolator, mocha coffe

pot

*modulo* – form  
*monosillabi* – monosyllables  
*muratore* – bricklayer  
*nascosto* – secretly  
*nocino* – walnut liqueur  
*nome* – first name  
*non c'è male* – I'm OK  
*non ci sono problemi* – no problem  
*non sei capace* – you can't do it  
*non sta bene* – is ill  
*non trasferibile* – non-transferable  
*nonna* – grandma  
*notaio* – solicitor, notary  
*occupato* – occupied  
*ora solare* – winter time  
*ora legale* – daylight saving time

(summer)

*orata* – sea bream fish  
*orto* – kitchen garden  
*orzo* – a drink made with barley  
*padrini* – godfathers  
*padroni* – masters  
*pagine gialle* – the Yellow Pages  
*palazzo* – palace  
*pancetta* – pancetta bacon  
*passeggiata* – a walk  
*passione* – passion  
*pattini* – skates

*pavimento* – floor  
*pazzo* – crazy  
*pendenza* – slope  
*pericoloso* – dangerous  
*perizia* – technical testing  
*permaloso* – prickly, touchy,  
sensitive  
*permesso* – permitted  
*persiane* – shutters  
*persone brave* – good, honest  
people  
*persone serie* – serious people  
*piano piano* – slowly, take it easy  
*pico bello* – perfectly done  
*polenta* – polenta, maize flour  
*ponte* – long weekend, bridge  
*porca miseria* – what a disaster  
*potente* – potent, powerful  
*poverino* – poor creature  
*pranzo* – lunch  
*prenotazione* – reservation  
*prestito* – borrowing  
*presto* – quick  
*prete* – priest  
*preventivo* – quotation  
*primi* – main courses  
*la professoressa* – university  
lecturer (female)  
*progetto* – project  
*pronto* – yes, what's up  
*pronto soccorso* – First Aid  
*proposta d'acquisto* – a formal  
offer of purchase  
*proprietà privata* – private  
property

*prosciutto* – ham  
*prosecco* – sparkling wine  
*punto panoramico* – panoramic  
viewpoint  
*puntuale* – punctual  
*quantità* – quantity  
*radicchio* – Italian leaf chicory  
with red leaves  
*raffreddore* – cold (illness)  
*ravioli* – ravioli  
*razza maledetta* – cursed race  
*residenza* – residency  
*ricorsa* – modification  
*riduttore di pressione* – pressure  
regulator  
*ringhiera* – railing  
*riscaldamento* – heating  
*risotto* – risotto  
*robinia* – locust tree  
*rompere i coglioni* – to annoy,  
bother someone  
*rustico* – brick shed  
*salame* – cured sausage  
*salami* – salami (cold meat cuts)  
*salotto* – living space  
*salute* – health  
*salvavita* – circuit breaker  
*santuario* – temple  
*sbagliato* – wrong  
*sconto* – discount  
*secondi* – second courses (meal)  
*segnalazione* – signs  
*signore* – ladies  
*signori* – gentlemen  
*silene* – red campion (wild flower)

*soldi* – money  
*sommelier* – wine connoisseur  
*sopralluogo* – on-site inspection  
*spettacolo pirotecnico* – firework  
display  
*sportello* – customer service  
window, counter  
*spumante* – sparkling wine,  
champagne  
*stanza* – room  
*stasi* – stalling  
*storto* – askew, lop-sided  
*strollato* – cement layer  
*stufa* – (woodburning) stove  
*subito* – immediately  
*tabaccheria* – tobacconist,  
newsagent

*taglia media* – medium-sized  
*tartufo* – truffle  
*telecomando* – remote control  
*tessera sanitaria* – insurance  
certificate  
*torcicollo* – stiff neck  
*torrente* – creek, stream  
*trave* – supporting beam  
*tubi* – pipes  
*tuffo* – dive  
*turbativa* – disruption  
*tutto bene?* – everything OK?  
*veline* – eye candy, pretty women  
(on TV)  
*vergognati* – shame on you!  
*vertigini* – dizziness  
*vieni* – come here





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