



UNDER *the*



## AN AUTHENTIC NORTHERN ITALIAN COUNTRY VILLA ADDS RICHNESS TO NEW JERSEY'S HORSE COUNTRY

*Text by Bonnie Clark   Photography by John Perrotta*

# TUSCAN SUN

It's a home that makes the heart yearn for all things Italian – Vivaldi, Da Vinci, Brunello di Montalcino. Set on 4 acres in Colts Neck, 187 Heyers Mill Road is a palatial Northern Italian country villa that offers every authentic architectural and design element, from stately Corinthian columns to interior crown moldings, and most dramatically, the piazza with outdoor kitchen and living room.





**F**or homeowners Lance and Ellen Primis, the four-year process of designing and building the villa was the culmination of a lifetime spent traveling to Italy and designing homes around the world.

"This was our sixth or seventh home," said Mr. Primis, former COO and president of The New York Times Company. "We knew this would be our last new construction, so we poured everything we wanted into it and were thrilled with the way it turned out."

In 2003, the couple purchased the 4-acre property, which, at the time, housed a small cottage and horse barn. When construction began two years later, the homeowners set up temporary residence in the cottage, allowing them to supervise and weigh in on even the smallest detail.

The goal was to build a truly authentic Northern Italian country villa. They chose rustic materials such as woods and limestone in hues of light yellow and gold to give a sense of age to the home. In keeping with tradition, materials at the base of the home are rougher and become more refined as the home gets closer to the Heavens.

Rising 7-to-10 feet from street grade, the seven-bedroom, 10-bath villa is constructed from ArcusStone, a limestone mix that provides the look of limestone, but requires minimal maintenance. Other notable features include 18-foot ceilings on the ground floor, curved edges, a 30-foot tower that brings light to the kitchen and a master bathroom with a 4-by-8-foot glass-plate window overlooking a beautifully landscaped private garden. The home was even designed to track the course of the sun during the summer months.

"We wanted to create the feeling like you are someplace else," Mr. Primis said. "We love the exterior look that we created."

Of course, the highlight of this architectural gem is the piazza, which provides the ultimate indoor/outdoor environment. The literal and figurative centerpiece of the home, the piazza boasts an outdoor kitchen and living room with fireplace

and full private bathroom, as well as in-ground heated pool with fountain, hot tub and sun shelf. Two large second-floor terraces overlook the spacious surroundings.

Inside the 12,000-square-foot home, an abundance of light floods the first-floor gallery, which is filled with Mrs. Primis' own works, mostly oils and acrylic impressionist pieces. An artist who once studied in Northern Italy, Mrs. Primis was largely responsible for designing and decorating the home – which features many unique elements such as multiple islands in the kitchen, archways and a breakfast nook with a hexagonal-shaped ceiling area to echo the shape of the table.

"This was a grand project for us," Mr. Primis said. "We were patient and didn't mind decision making. It wasn't unusual for us to take an entire day just to decide on doorknobs."

Aside from the spectacular design and décor, the villa is also fully equipped with the most advanced state-of-the-art technology and systems, including a fully finished basement featuring 14-seat stadium theater with a custom-made, 12-foot screen and top-of-line Sony projector mounted to the ceiling.

Not surprisingly, the Primises, who split their time between Colts Neck and Naples, Fla., wanted to create an amenities-rich retreat, where they could spend quality time with their two grown children and three grandchildren.

"We love having guests and family," Mr. Primis said. "No place is off limits. We do lots of eating and grilling outside, enjoying the pool while the kids watch movies and pop popcorn on the popcorn machine."

At the Primis household, there is always room for an extra guest. In addition to the seven bedrooms in the main villa, the property also houses a private guest cottage, which is situated directly over a driveway in a style reminiscent of the Ponte Vecchio. Elaborate entertaining is made easy with a butler's pantry, rear entrance and an assortment of top-of-the-line appliances.

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The crowning glory of the Northern Italian country villa is the impeccably designed landscaping, which is immediately evident upon entering the property and traveling up the driveway lined with 30 cherry trees and stunning exterior lighting.

Mr. Primis said the home has become somewhat of an attraction in this affluent suburb, widely known as "New Jersey's Horse County." Throughout the build out, many curious onlookers asked to take a look around. And in the last few years, he's noticed many other homes being built that also adhere to traditional architectural styles.

"These old farms provide wonderful sites for people to build homes that fit their vision," he said. "When you have so much land, it's great to look at it as an opportunity to really showcase the property." ■



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