



Palazzo bellissimo!



Johanna Thornycroft explores the palace where a NZ House & Garden winner and friend will enjoy the holiday of a lifetime PHOTOGRAPHS: ANDREAS VON EINSIEDEL



## GOING PLACES

**PREVIOUS PAGES:** The grand first-floor landing has 17th century tiled floors and elegant palladian doorcases. The painted wooden seats are typical of the period. The table in the Green Room is set for dinner with fine linen and china including some Bulgari pieces. A 1660 Gobelins tapestry on a small landing leading to the Ruspoli apartment. Polidotted niches on each landing house marble busts of Roman emperors. The antique gilt chairs are upholstered in gold damask. On the far wall is a marble-topped 18th century console table.

Even after ten or more visits to Rome the surge of excitement when another trip is planned is palpable. No matter how short the visit there is always a discovery to be made.

So when NZ House & Garden asked photographer Andreas von Einsiedel and myself to do a story on a palazzo in the centre of the city we were delighted. We had no idea what to expect apart from the fact that we were to be working in a very special place. Palazzo Ruspoli, owned and occupied by the Prince and Principessa Ruspoli, is one of those 16th century architectural gems visitors to Rome search out. Although it's not open to the public like the Villa Doria Pamphili or Palazzo Colonna, this historic suite of rooms has been transformed by Letizia Ruspoli into what is probably the world's most fabulous b&b.

The drama begins on arrival. The faded ox-blood exterior towers above the street. Eight-metre-high original wooden doors open into an ochre-washed courtyard set about with Roman archaeological finds. ▷

**THIS PAGE:** The view across the Yellow Room to the Green Room. The hand-stencilled walls look like old fabric. The 18th century German walnut writing desk is one of the few non-Italian pieces in the apartment. Above it is an 18th century view of Naples.





## GOING PLACES



The courtyard is strangely quiet and extremely beautiful. Broad marble steps lead to a tiny old-fashioned lift which takes us to the second floor where we are ushered into the first of three exquisite interconnected rooms.

The Principessa is there to meet us and although we are very late she welcomes us with the utmost charm. We are to spend two nights in La Residenza Napoleone III.

Renovated and decorated by Letizia, it is furnished with family antiques and silver, monogrammed family linen, fine 17th and 18th century paintings and cleverly hidden mod cons, including the air-conditioning essential in Rome's August heat and humidity.

It is named after Louis Napoleon, Emperor of France, who with his mother Hortense de Beauharnais stayed in these rooms from 1827-1830. They were among a glittering and lengthy list of important visitors – from cardinals and

diplomats to emperors and grand dukes and more recently King Juan Carlos and the Prince of Wales.

Letizia says the idea for the palazzo apartment came from a magazine article which told of an Indian maharaja who in the 1980s created a suite of rooms for guests in his Jaipur palace.

"I always hoped that one day I could do the same," she says.

The first room, the Green Room, features an over-scaled pattern stencilled on to the walls. Aged and distressed it is difficult to tell it is not fabric.

Used as both salon and dining room – where one can light a fire in the winter – the room houses an important collection of capriccio paintings – 18th century studies of picturesque Roman scenes assembled by the artists to create a pleasing rather than a truthful record of the city. They were a popular purchase for those on an 18th century grand tour. ▷

Old silk from the family's Tuscan estate was used for the bed hangings and antique family linen for the bed. Cushions on the stool are made of old velvet damask worn with silver thread. An oil painting by Isaac de Moucheron, one of a set of six, hangs on the headboard. Paintings also cover swing doors to the bathroom and kitchen. Soft yellow-gold marble lines the en suite.

GOING PLACES



Letizia has provided a detailed guide to the contents of each room, including an extraordinary set of six bucolic landscapes by Isaac de Moucheron painted in the late 1600s and hung in the bedchamber.

"My husband, who had always known this room as a dining room, thought I was mad to make it a bedroom but he came around to the idea."

One special touch is a collection of CDs and films – Italian operas and films such as *Roman Holiday* – set on the bedroom window seat. For perfect viewing a giant electronic screen silently descends from the superb 16th century painted and beamed ceiling.

The Yellow Room or salon has a huge television cunningly hidden behind a painting, a fax machine tucked into the drawer of a magnificent German walnut desk and a line for the laptop, but who wants to keep in touch with the office while in Rome?

Also hidden behind two enormous paintings hinged to doors are the yellow marble bathroom and tiny but well-



*Principessa Letizia Ruspoli. The roof terrace has breathtaking views of Rome and is used mostly for evening drinks and breakfast.*

equipped kitchen. Apart from some water perhaps or champagne from the fridge it's hard to imagine it is used as there are hundreds of restaurants within minutes of the palazzo.

When the weather is good, which is most of the time, breakfast is laid on the roof terrace. Reached by a wooden staircase off the landing and filled with potted plants and a sail-like canvas awning it feels as if we are on top of the world. The views across the city are spectacular, day or night.

For first-time visitors to Rome the plethora of sights can be overwhelming but for me the most important and inspiring building on earth is still the Pantheon – and like so many must-see architectural masterpieces, it is an easy walk from the apartment.

It is impossible to explain what a treat it is to stay in such a magnificent place. The photographs speak for themselves and anyone lucky enough to spend time at the Palazzo Ruspoli will never forget the exceptional hospitality, the magnificence of La Residenza Napoleone III and the overwhelming sense of being part of this great city. □ Spend three days at La Residenza Napoleone III as part of our 10th birthday travel prize. See page 162 for details.

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La Residenza Napoleone III at the Ruspoli Palace



Malvasia Villa in Lornano, Tuscany

splendour of the apartment within the Ruspoli Palace (see previous pages). Our prize holiday ends with the Cathay Pacific flight home on 20 June but winners may choose to extend their stay in Italy at their own expense.

Eurovillas & Tours' range of villas and the apartment in the Ruspoli Palace can be visited on their website [www.eurovillasandtours.co.nz](http://www.eurovillasandtours.co.nz)



#### THE PRIZE

- Two return business class airfares flying Cathay Pacific Auckland/HongKong/Rome (includes flights from Wellington or Christchurch). Tickets do not include airport/country taxes
- Seven nights at the Malvasia Villa in Lornano courtesy of Eurovillas & Tours. The villa is available for our prize winners from 11-18 June 2005
- Seven days' car hire (11-18 June) courtesy of Jetage Marketing

- Two nights (18-19 June) in the magnificent La Residenza Napoleone III apartment at the Ruspoli Palace in Rome
- Total prize value is around \$25,000

#### HOW TO ENTER

All it takes is your name and address on the back of an envelope sent to: NZ House & Garden/Luxury Italian Tour, PO Box 6768, Auckland before 1 November, 2004. See page 12 for conditions of entry.