

Ruins to reality...

Kevin Gibney of Marche Homes Direct offers *Italia!* readers five practical steps to successfully restoring property in the region of Le Marche



Above: Kevin Gibney on site and the finished property. Below: the original ruin and work in progress

To get what you want, without problems, you need to have a reality-based, businesslike approach to the restoration process," says Kevin Gibney, director of Marche Homes Direct, an officially registered company that buys, sells and restores homes in Le Marche, Italy.

That quote should hang from his office walls, as 'reality-based' and 'businesslike' are phrases that pepper the conversation of this transplanted New Yorker, who brings his own energy and passion to the business of buying and restoring properties in Le Marche. "We've all seen the television shows and read the blogs where the Italian dream goes wrong. It doesn't need to be that way. Our approach at Marche Homes Direct guarantees a

satisfying and positive experience, and our client references prove it."

Read on for Kevin's practical guide to buying and restoring property in Le Marche, and his suggestions for turning your ruin into reality...

1 PICK THE RIGHT PROPERTY & BE DECISIVE

A successful restoration starts with picking the right property, whether it's a standing house to restore or a pile of stones. Kevin advises you to "have a thorough look at the market, understand that the 'perfect' house doesn't exist, narrow down the choices, make a decision and get on to the restoration – you'll be enjoying your home that much sooner."

2 KNOW WHAT YOU WANT & WHAT YOU CAN SPEND

The client's wishes, well-defined, are key, as Kevin emphasises: "We rely on clients to articulate, both in words and images, what they want and how they want their house to look and feel. This input is critical. Equally important is the money side of the equation – we need to understand the client's budget and then we can deal with the reality of meshing budget and design expectations together."

3 CHOOSE A SEASONED RESTORATION TEAM

The restoration team you choose makes a difference. "From the start I have insisted on a seasoned team of experts," says Kevin. "My team is exclusively

Italian – Italians who understand budgets and deadlines. This team of professionals is also deep: four builders, two architects and so on."

4 SPELL IT OUT & GET IT GUARANTEED

Restoring a home in Italy is a big investment. Not knowing the language or laws can, if left to chance, lead to problems. Kevin explains: "The Italians have a great phrase, 'nero su bianco', which means that it needs to be written or it's not real. We insist, from the very start, on the involvement of a bilingual lawyer and on fixed price, fixed term contracts that spell it all out – from bathroom faucets to exact terms of payment. This 'Restoration Roadmap' keeps everybody on the same page."

5 TRUST THE PROFESSIONALS AND GOOD THINGS HAPPEN

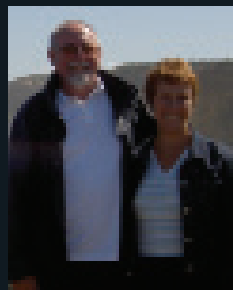
"Trust is an overused word in business, but it's essential to the restoration process," says Kevin. "Because while this is a business transaction, there's a strong personal component and trust is key to making it all work. As trite as it sounds, we really do develop a strong personal bond with our clients during the process and we're actually friends after we deliver the keys," he says with a smile. ■



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THINKING OUT OF THE BOX



LINDA & JEFF MARSTON

Italy lovers from Harpenden, England, property in San Ginesio

Linda and Jeff Marston are just weeks away from breaking ground on their custom-designed Le Marche restoration. "It's a shame we didn't meet Kevin Gibney and his team at Marche Homes Direct the first time we came to Le Marche. We'd had one of those unsavoury experiences you see on

the television programmes. We were wary." However, the lure of life in the Marche countryside was so strong that Linda and Jeff decided to try it again. They were still determined that they wanted a finished house and met up with Kevin. However, after asking lots of questions and listening to their answers, Kevin asked why they weren't looking at ruins for restoration. "Kevin's 'thinking out of the box' made us to do the same and we started looking the next day. We found the perfect ruin at the right price." Kevin introduced the couple to Giovanna Salvucci, of Marche Legale. It was key because as the Marche Legale and Marche Homes Direct teams studied the property in depth, a number of complexities presented themselves that seemed insurmountable. Giovanna's legal skills and Kevin's creative negotiating combined to find a way to move forward, protecting their interests and preserving their dream. "Not only did we buy from Marche Homes Direct, we're restoring through them as well with Marche Legale handling the fixed price building works contract."

A SMART PLAN FOR UNCERTAIN TIMES



JANET HARVIE

Lawyer from Edinburgh, property in Falerone

Edinburgh-based lawyer Janet Harvie and her husband, George, are pursuing their Marche restoration along unusual and creative lines: with fixed prices, flexible payment schedules and project suspension options, all of which allow them greater peace of mind in a time of economic uncertainty. "Originally

our plan was to buy and restore in Italy, perhaps five or ten years from now," Janet explains, "but we saw lots of uncertainty out there with prices going up and the pound going down, and wanted to get our foot in the door earlier. Plus, Kevin Gibney of Marche Homes Direct showed us a number of great properties, and when we fell in love with one it was hard to postpone the dream. However, work commitments and the ages of our children mean we're not able to make full use of the property right now."

Her husband George continues, "Kevin came up with a creative solution where we could buy now and restore over time, paying the builder a fixed price, in stages, as work phases are completed. Plus, if necessary, we can indefinitely suspend work at predefined stages, all of this contractually stated. Without this creative tailor-made payment plan from Marche Homes Direct and the sound advice of our Italian legal counsel, Giovanna Salvucci of Marche Legale, who is also handling our residency applications, we could never have gone ahead with the purchase. Having come this far, we appreciate all the more the need to have a team like this one to help us through."

Le Marche is a sure investment for property buyers



Does buying in Italy seem fraught with uncertainty? Don't miss out on this opportune time to invest in one of Italy's most attractive regions. **Kevin Gibney** from Marche Homes Direct tells you how to eliminate the risk as you pursue your Le Marche dream...

Kevin Gibney has been there. He is director of Marche Homes Direct, a registered Italian company that sells and restores country properties in the Le Marche region. He has bought, sold and restored homes for himself and for clients. "As a buyer, I always asked myself: 'Why can't this process be clearer, more certain...?' Why is so much left undefined?' Just chalking it up to the 'Italian way' never cut it for me. Surprises are never a nice thing. So, I have built my company on the premise that it can be clear and certain, at every step in the buying process. And let me tell you that with all the economic uncertainty of 2009/2010, this has been a winning strategy for Marche Homes Direct and our clients."

GETTING TO YES WITH LEGAL CERTAINTY

The company has made it standard procedure to immediately refer new clients to a lawyer. Gibney says, "I always get this surprised look from clients when I tell them in the first five minutes that they should immediately get sound legal advice, before they even find a property to buy. It's like they're wondering why in the world a person who is trying to sell us something is telling us to see a lawyer."

It's simple. Foreign buyers want to feel comfortable and protected. They don't know the rules of the game. They sometimes don't even know the questions to ask. Who better to ask than an impartial attorney? That is why Marche Homes Direct teamed up with Marche Legale and *avvocato*

A sea view property in Le Marche



The rolling hills of Le Marche



(attorney) Giovanna Salvucci, an English-speaking Italian attorney with more than 20 years' experience and an expert in ex-pat legal matters. Says attorney Salvucci, "My job is to do for the foreign national what I would do for an Italian client. That is, to protect the client to the full extent the law allows, whether it be for purchase agreements, restoration work contracts or various types of financing scenarios. On a human level, people have heard all the negatives. They are looking for certainty and protection. I seek to make people comfortable while ensuring that all agreements have the legal force that is all too often absent in more 'informal' types of agreements that create surprises and cause problems. Italian law is very clear. There should not be any problem protecting clients' interests."

TAKING IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

In these uncertain times, creative approaches to property sales and restorations are a must. By bringing the legal aspect to the forefront, Marche Homes Direct has opened up a broad range of services and tactics to give clients the legal certainty they need to purchase and restore homes; to profit from creative tactics such as owner-financing, extended payment terms and guaranteed fixed price restoration contracts. Taking it to the

next level, after the sale, Marche Legale assists clients to establish residency in Italy, estate planning, insurance matters and, for those realising the dream of starting a business in Le Marche, the legal and accounting assistance to register a company.

A BUTTONED-UP TEAM FOR UNCERTAIN TIMES

"Clearly, this a different world," says Gibney of Marche Homes Direct. "The old ways of selling and restoring properties are long gone. Clients today expect the same level of certainty, creativity and service they would get back home. That's exactly what we strive to provide with our approach to property sales and restoration and our team of Italian professionals." And that team goes beyond *avvocato* Salvucci of Marche Legale to include top *geometras*, builders and other service providers that form the Marche Homes Direct team. Concludes Gibney, "Crisis or no crisis, you always need a buttoned-up approach." ■

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PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER



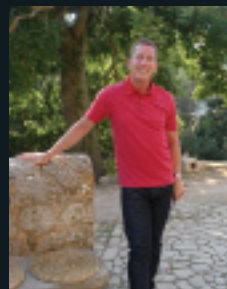
KAREN STOREY
Management Consultant in Dubai, by way of Northumberland Property in San Ginesio

Karen Storey is a busy lady, with her partner, Grahame Edwards, she's finishing a three-building complex, formed an Italian holiday rental company, established residency, and will power it all with the area's first 100% self-sufficient eco-friendly energy system. "Needless to say,

this a big project," explains Karen, a management consultant based in Dubai, "and finding the right property is a big deal. Then there's all the rest of it, plus we were doing all this from 3,000 miles away. It's all about finding the right people on the ground. Without a top team, like the one we've found in Kevin Gibney and Marche Homes Direct, you could never do all the things we're doing here, and certainly never in such a short time." As with any financial and property undertaking you also need a good lawyer, and she says, "With Giovanna Salvucci of Marche Legale, we're able to avoid the negative stuff you see on TV. A Marche restoration with this team can actually go really well.

"Kevin's Marche Homes Direct team has delivered. And, Giovanna has given it all the legal 'teeth' to protect our interests – purchase contract, residency, estate planning, guaranteed fixed price building contract, supplier contracts and establishing our company. She's been there to make sure we sleep nights," laughs Karen. "We can't wait to be handed the keys."

JUST LIKE BACK HOME



ADAM HALL
Architect based in Liverpool Property in San Ginesio

Liverpool-based architect Adam Hall and his brother, Oliver, own a farmhouse in southern Le Marche. "We'd visited several times, meeting with agents, but we kept coming up empty. Then, we met Kevin Gibney of Marche Homes Direct – energetic, knowledgeable and creative. He listened to us. We

saw multiple properties, each perfect for us, with one in exactly the right location, at the right price. Then, I said, 'Kevin, this property is great, but that one up the hill must be awesome and the view will be even better.' He agreed, but said it was beyond our budget. It was €220,000, our budget €160,000. Kevin went to work, getting the price down to where we needed it. More than that, he negotiated an extended payment plan with the farmer/owner that made the whole thing work. We went for it.

"We wanted to lock-in details of this unique purchase and payment arrangement. Kevin referred us to Giovanna Salvucci, of Marche Legale, an English-speaking Italian solicitor. We could not have been more comfortable. We left for home with a contract as solid as any we'd used in our UK property investments. Giovanna made us feel as confident with the purchase in Italy as we would have been buying around the corner in Liverpool."