



## V's views

By Verity

It is hard to believe that we are almost half way through our second season already, how time flies when you're having fun! Knowing what to expect and being slightly better prepared on most fronts has definitely helped. We are lucky enough to have Kim back with us for a second season after her exciting winter in France. Kim left us in October last year and after a spell in the UK began a ski season in Vaujany as a chalet host, having never skied in her life before. As if that weren't challenge enough for Kimbers, the chef at her chalet was sacked after only 3 weeks

area than I had hoped, and I am thrilled with the colours that are beaming from the front of our house at the moment. The colours everywhere in Tuscany this summer are spectacular thanks to the unseasonable high temperatures a few weeks ago and enough rain here and there to stop all turning brown and crispy. It must have been a record year for roses - they put on the most spectacular display both here throughout May...though I'm claiming all the credit with my newly acquired pruning skills. [Fair enough - Ed.]

### Editor's note

Well, I still have my job, but barely. Pressures of work have meant that I have not been quite as regular or frequent with these newsletters as I would have liked. I have been trying to calculate the carbon saved by sending out fewer newsletters in the hope that V may see my sloth in a positive light. I've spent around 3 days on the calculations so far - that's quite a lot of electricity. Plus I think I may have vented more carbon into the stratosphere charring the toast this morning than I'll ever save being lazy. I've spent another couple of days (more electricity, more carbon) on the new newsletter design. Like it? Hope so. It probably cost the planet another couple of years.

Anyway, less chat, more...chat.

Simon [Editor-in-Chief, more probationary than ever]

### The sweet road to Patrignone

Today, they came. Shiny machines with flashing lights and lorry loads of gravel. Having waited for months, they finally came to fix the road today.

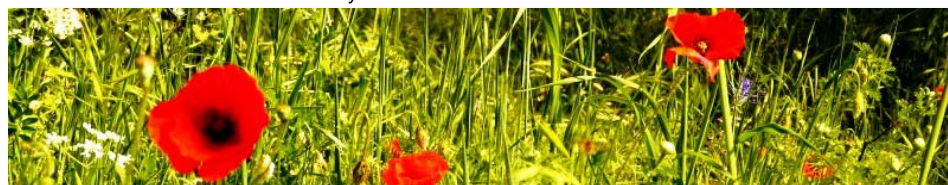
And it's beautiful. A work of art. It's so flat, so smooth, and slightly springy under foot...you could eat off it, sleep on it... wild orgies with piles of naked bodies lying languidly across the top of it. If Leonardo had seen such a thing, he'd have written backwards about it and painted it. Dante would have spun a verse or two about it.



It'll be gone before you ever get to see it. But for today, and possibly most of tomorrow, the road to Patrignone is gentle, and smooth, and quiet, and not in the least bit dangerous.

### Carla's Limoncello

10 lemons, 1 litre of alcohol (usually 90%), 1 litre of water, 1 kilo sugar  
Carefully remove the lemon peel without the pith and immerse in the combined liquids and sugar. After several days remove the peel and taste. If you would prefer a more lemony taste, replace the peel and leave again. If you are able to consume fairly quickly try adding some cream and keeping in the fridge...my personal favourite, not that I will be indulging for a while!



and Kim was generously offered his job of cooking for up to 28 guests, 6 days per week including breakfast, afternoon tea, children's supper and a 6 course evening meal for adults. I would have turned green and ran, but not our Kim. She coped admirably and is now looking for a similar role for the winter ahead. Sam and Harvey are thrilled to have her back, as am I. Not the least because I'm now almost 6 months pregnant and starting to swell some [I'll say - Ed] and I'm struggling to move at quite the same pace as last year. The new addition should arrive somewhere in the middle of October, all being well, so we will keep you posted (all fingers crossed for a girl please).

I am extremely proud to announce that my veg patch is flourishing nicely with carrots (not a raging success but we should have a dozen or so bunches [A feast! - Ed]), onions and garlic (almost done), a few melon plants, purple sprouting and green broccoli are on their way and my pride and joy, my 3 varieties of tomato that I have grown from seed and have oodles of baby toms decking their branches. Of course we have yet to taste any of it but I'm sure it'll be delicious and if not we'll say it is anyway. The wild boar have been spotted close [very close - Ed] by but they appear to be more interested in the fallen white mulberry's and apricot's for now...phew! I have managed to do more work on the garden in terms of replanting the pots and the front gazebo

I continue to spend plenty of my time on my other superpower, cooking. Kim and I make quite a team, and our experience and confidence is growing. We are trying to vary our menus and experiment as much as we can. I have become a regular at Castellina market on a Saturday and really look forward to each season's fresh crops, all presented so beautifully.



Of course summer has mouth-watering peaches, plums, nectarines, melons, borlotti and broad beans [beans never make my mouth water - Ed], and those amazing tomatoes that really smell of tomatoes. One dish that is proving extremely popular with guests is our *Spaghetti Al Limone*, a really lovely summer dish that you can turn out in 10 minutes flat...here's the recipe along with Carla's delicious Limoncello recipe as requested!

### Spaghetti al limone

Serves 6

500g spaghetti  
30g butter  
250ml thick cream

Juice and zest of 1 large lemon  
4 tbsp good brandy  
120g grated parmesan

Bring a large pot of water to the boil. Meanwhile grate the zest of the lemon finely and add to the butter in a pan. When it begins to bubble, add the brandy and cook until it has almost evaporated. Add your pasta to the boiling water and cook as per packet instructions. Add the cream and lemon juice and bring to the boil. Season and remove from the heat. When the pasta is cooked, drain, reserving a couple of spoonfuls for the sauce and then toss it all together with most of the cheese. Use the remaining cheese to serve.



## Holes that hurt my head

By Simon

We've done some pretty big things since we got here, many of them way out of our comfort zone. But 'The Big Ditch Project' really was something else. Why I start these things, I don't know, but start it we did, and finish it we did. But not without 5 weeks of back-breaking work, lots of sleepless nights, and moving a small mountain, or two.

The overflow from our septic tanks used to feed into an underground pipe which travelled past Tinaia and exited from a terrace wall in the field below. This toxic loo-juice then just ran down the hill, creating large pools of stagnant smelly water for mozzies and flies to lounge in. Very country, very Italian, but not pretty.

So, something had to be done.

A local geologo drew up plans to build 3 underground filters. The waste water would filter through sand, bacteria would eat the filth, and the resulting water might then be reused for watering plants, saving us 1000's of litres of water a year. So, we marked out our trenches, bought 80 cubic metres of gravel, another 80m<sup>3</sup> of sand, and two lorries full of materials. The excavator arrived, the sun came out, the work began.

Now these 'ditches' are feats of engineering on a par with the Coliseum itself [kinda – Ed]. The two longest ditches are 40m long each, 1m wide, and 1.5m below ground minimum, 3.5m max. And the slope had to be around 0.4%, i.e. level, with just an off-white hint of a slope.

This is a hard thing to do.

Not the least because every now and then we'd come across a rock the size of a Cinquecento, and clay so fiendishly frustratingly awkward that every time we finished a stretch of trench, the walls would collapse and we'd have to

start again. We might have a great day, only to arrive the next morning and find half our work undone overnight.

And I won't say it wasn't dangerous, because at times it was really bloody scary (more than I ever let on to V for sure). At one point I was desperately trying to put in a pipe before a single slab of clay the size of a white van slipped slowly but surely towards me. And some of the things Ettore did in that digger were *not* in the instruction manual.

We started at a steady pace, but found our work eroding at an ever increasing rate; the deeper we

went, the quicker the trench walls collapsed, and the scarier things got. So we picked up the pace, working from dawn to well into the night, often past 10pm. At one point I was driving the tractor at



break-neck speed fully laden with sand or gravel, weaving in and out of tightly-packed olive trees with only a head-torch for light. (My tractor? Headlights? Are you kidding?)

Also not in the instruction manual. But it worked. Nicu and Ettore would spread the gravel or sand



and extend the filter pipes while I tore off to load up with more. Teamwork.

And then I managed to break the digger, not once, but three times. OK, it was my first time on a digger and maybe they weren't meant to plough through thick sticky mud a foot deep (did I mention the torrential rain half way through the project? - there was torrential rain, lots of it, half way through the project), but it was a rental, and I needed to finish the job. More haste, less speed, yada, yada, yada.

And the results? Well, there's no Shrek ending, not yet in any case. All the filters are working well, as far as we can tell, but the water coming out is clear but a bit smelly. I'm certainly not planning on using it for my coffee just yet. It may take several months for the funk-eating flora to do their stuff, so I'll report on this again later on. But things are much better (and more hygienic) than they were, so I'm feeling fairly happy with things so far.

### Our oil matters...in Vancouver

*Oil sales have been brisk this year, with several ex-inmates asking for large additional shipments for friends and rellies. In addition to this I've shipped a big order to a new deli opening in Vancouver ([Mouse Trap Deli](#)), and I am just about to ship 250 litres over to [Chambar](#), an amazing restaurant in Vancouver run by my good friends Karri and Nico who are opening a cooking school in a few weeks - knowing them, it'll be a huge success. The rest I am keeping back for guests and our dedicated oil junkies in the US, but I'm hopeful I'll be out of oil by the time we come to pick in November. Job's a good'un. Oh, and the trees are looking great, with the new olives already clearly visible...how exciting!*

*By the way, I'll be starting to recycle wine bottles as oil bottles. From now on guests will have a choice and will pay less if they choose the recycled glass.*

### The Tuscan Balloon Fiesta

*A story covered on our blog some weeks ago ([here's the full story](#)) but worth a re-hash. Mark and Philpa drove their hot-air balloon all the way from Bristol and gave us some amazing views of Siena and Tuscany. There were a lot of early starts, but it was fantastic fun and we really hope they'll be back next year. How's this for a view...?*



### The wild-boar invasion

*Wild piggies are a shy breed. Or so we thought. They've been seen very close to the house recently, even in daylight. Bold as brass! Simon saw a big one, 90kg+, right next to V's veg patch! Cheeky sow. Fetch my gun boy! Pictures as soon as the buggers will sit still...*



## Other news

### First wedding of the year

Again, a story covered at length [in the Blog](#), but worth another mention if only for a chance to show *the* picture, again! A lovely wedding, a great picture (or two), and really smashing people. Congratulations Emma and Jamie! Also starring...



### We are way too connected

One of the unfortunate side-effects of linking up to the outside world at any speed is that we're taking the social networking/marketing thing a bit more seriously. So if you want to keep in touch with what we're up to on an hourly basis (rather than once every 4-5 months), so have SO many options you are going to wander how you ever managed to get by without us.

Just click on the logo to follow the link...

Simon is on Twitter as Tuscany_Advisor	
Simon is also on Facebook	
As is Verity	
We've started something called Friends of Patrignone on Facebook, which you'll find if you become bezzie mates with us	
And...Simon has a blog he updates every couple of weeks	
There are a few TripAdvisor reviews out there now. (Thank you to all of you who've posted there – the cash is in the post.)	

### And finally...

Charlie and Lola are becoming increasingly popular. In fact they are way more popular than we are. Which is a shame. As we're nice too, mostly. And we speak, which I thought would be a plus.

Anyway, the latest is that these fine mutts have been invited as ring bearers at the wedding of a lovely couple who stayed with us earlier in the year. Harvey says negotiations are at a sensitive stage, but the deal could run into two figures. And sweets. And an iPhone. And a motorbike.

Charlie and Lola: also available for christenings and children's parties.

[Thanks for the picture Char – Ed]



### Broadband ...well...nearly

*They came, they tinkered, came back, tinkered some more, scratched their chins, expelled some air, and finally buggered off. No broadband. So I gave up. Then someone gave me a phone number, who gave me another number, who gave me another number, and would you Adam-and-Eve it, someone came, went on the roof, stuck up an antenna, and plugged me in. And the reason I can email this newsletter to you in a couple of minutes instead of 3½ days is because we are now the proud owners of a 1Mbit microwave link. Broadband, not exactly, but a squillion times better than what we had, oh yes. So we now have a mini wireless network accessible from the courtyard, and when we get 2 or 3 people iPhoning or lap-topping out there while I'm behind my desk, it's just like having a real job again, working in an office, surrounded by people tapping away. It's kind of cute, in a sad way.*

### Business as usual...almost

*The global down-turn has hit many local businesses badly, and of course for many people everywhere things are a great deal more serious than a cancelled holiday to Italy. However, I guess we've been very lucky so far. Bookings are roughly on a par with last year which means we're keeping our heads above water – not bad for our second season. But we're really hoping that next year sees a return to normality for everyone, not just us. Fingers are crossed.*

### STOP PRESS

*We went for V's second scan yesterday, and...it looks like poor Alfonso (or whatever we decide on) might be spending more time in pink than is healthy for a full-blooded ½ Italian male.*

*That's all for this edition. Please let us know if you have any ideas or suggestions.*

*A la prossima... Simon.*

*If you would like to know more about Podere Patrignone, visit us at [www.patrignone.com](http://www.patrignone.com) or email me at [simon@patrignone.com](mailto:simon@patrignone.com).*