

# Castello del Nero Review - A New Five-Star Luxury Resort in Tuscany

By [Susan di Rende](#)



To describe the Castello del Nero in the Chianti region of Tuscany as a five-star luxury hotel and spa does not do it justice. Words like 'five-star' and 'luxury' define a certain class of resort, whereas the Castello del Nero is above and beyond classes and comparative definitions. It is a unique destination without reference to anyplace else and where the stay is beyond compare.



Located between Florence and Siena, this 12th Century castle presides over 700 acres of rolling Tuscan hills. Because it owns such a vast estate, the hotel controls not only the immediate grounds of this resort, but the panorama that unfolds before you whether in your room, your bath, lounging on the terrace or strolling through the Marchesa's poplar alley. Electrical and telephone cables have been placed underground and out of sight. There is nothing to mar the timeless vista. Open the window of your very own 'room with a view' and behold a landscape so perfect that could have come from a Merchant-Ivory film.



he property has gone through a 2 1/2-year renovation that coordinated closely with the Italian government departments overseeing historic preservation to retain authenticity while repairing and modernizing. The labors have resulted in an unparalleled experience of living in a true castle in aristocratic ease while enjoying modern comforts and convenience.

Ancient stone walls and terrazzo floors can feel cold at first to an American used to wall-to-wall carpets. Carved antique furniture invites less sprawling than the typical couch and Lazy-Boy ranged in front of the television. High ceilings with wood beams feel less enclosed and more exposed than most houses in the States. The space does not invite you to hide in your cocoon, but to expand and extend yourself to a lord's or lady's sense of dominion. The halls are wide, the terraces broad, the windows enormous as would be fitting for a home of giants. Life this large demands **greatness, and you feel it in your bones even while lounging in the spa or writing at your desk**





My companion and I arrived after dark, and our internet directions got us a bit lost. We were finally on the right road looking for the gates to the entrance in the dark. As most signs in Italy are unlit, we were creeping along, staring down every lane and wondering if we had missed it. When I remarked that 'castello' meant castle, she pointed up the hill and said, 'You mean like that?' 'That' was a solitary and imposing edifice dominating the valley. We drove in through two sets of gates up the drive to the rear of the castle where we were met by porters and ushered inside.



The reception area is a large, high-ceilinged hall. It was once the entry for carriages to drive up and collect or deposit their passengers. The front of the castle is on the side facing the terrace and valley. There the heraldic crest hangs over the door to welcome visitors. The antique furniture in the lobby and throughout the building has belonged to the household over time. The resulting feeling is being in a real castle, one with history and tradition, and not a theatrical conception of the idea of a castle.



Straight through the foyer and the door leads out to the spectacular terrace. Wide and broad, with benches and, in summer, tables and lounge chairs, there is no better spot on this great earth than this prospect of the Val di Pesa. Some beaches and mountains might be as beautiful, but in Tuscany, the scale of the land is in perfect proportion for human life. The valleys and hills are friendly in size, the distances reachable, the shadowed nooks sweet, the sunny hilltops happy. Nature does not overpower with its operatic beauty, it caresses and sings folk tunes that proclaim the earth as made to measure for humankind.



Our room, 114, was wonderful. One of only six with a floral four-poster bed by a local designer, it was spacious and comfortable with a couch and easy chair. The furniture is painted in the Tuscan summerhouse style. The bed is draped with a light cashmere blanket. The bath is enormous and has a window of its own overlooking the grounds, thanks to this being a corner room.



The baths here deserve special mention. They call them 'parlor baths' because they are full-sized rooms in their own right. Double sinks, an enormous tiled shower, commode and bidet, and a giant claw-foot tub not only fit in the space, but there is room to dance to MTV in the middle. (The bath has a television of its own.)



The renovations just having been completed this last spring, the hotel has everything modern you could wish for. An electronic key system controls the lights as well as the lock. Flat screen television/computer monitor with wireless keyboard so that you can access the internet from your room if you wish. There is an ethernet hookup if you brought your laptop, though access to the internet is extra, as it is almost everywhere in Italy.



The hotel has some extraordinary rooms that are one-of-a-kind. There are a number of fresco suites, rooms that have painted images on the walls that have been lovingly restored. There is one suite on the ground floor that is a marvel of decoration. Stepping into it is like stepping into a fairy tale. Every inch is painted in delicate colors and exquisite detail, so much so that the restoration did not allow the construction of dividing walls or plumbing to come through the walls. In the bath, all the pipes and electrical wires come up through the floor around an island of sinks, showers and tub to leave the precious frescoes undisturbed



Another wonderful suite is the Galway Suite, named after Sir James Galway who came and gave a concert at the hotel opening. This suite has its own private terrace overlooking the valley. It is like having your own private apartment in Tuscany, and in summer you could spend days simply lounging and dining on your terrace and lose yourself in the timeless view.



The activities at the hotel itself are exquisitely simple. You can stroll down the Marquesa's promenade, swim or float in the pool, read or play cards in one of the common areas, or just watch the light change across the valley. There are two tennis courts with lights so that you can play after the sun goes down. There is a gym in the oldest part of the castle, juxtaposing the historical charm of the stonework with the most up-to-date, user friendly equipment.



For drinks and dining there is a bar where I ate a simple lunch of home made pasta by the fireplace. I confess that I hardly remember the dish as I was in raptures over the taste of the olive oil. The hotel serves olive oil made from the product of its own trees, and I dipped a bit of the hotel-made focaccia into the oil before my meal arrived. The oil was so fresh and full of flavor, I was in a state of food ecstasy savoring the layers of floral and green flavor that traveled over my taste buds.



The La Torre restaurant in the hotel offers first-class dining in a warm space whose arched windows open out to the valley. The dinner served was superbly prepared, with a variety of taste and texture in every dish. The lighting is a bit dim for my taste, but it does create a sense of intimacy and mystery among the ancient arches.



The ultimate activity at the hotel, however, is the spa on the premises, a holistic retreat built and run by [ESPA](#), a leader in luxury spa destinations. As Nathalie Beaugonin, the Sales and Public Relations Manager, explained, 'We brought in ESPA to design and build the spa. We are experts at hotel management, not spa management, and we wanted our spa to be the best. We partnered with ESPA and together have created a destination spa unique in the region.' The pools and relaxation lounges in the spa look out under the arches to the panoramic vista and make for a sublime experience. I enjoyed the heat and jets of the vitality pool with the moon on my shoulder and was in a state of blissful relaxation even before my hot stone massage and facial.



The grounds of the Castello del Nero includes a chapel, and I can think of no more romantic place to hold a wedding. Originally the country residence of the Florentine del Nero family, with their greyhound coat of arms and historical importance in that city. It was they who built the chapel in the late 1700's. When the del Nero family line died out, the estate was taken over by the Torrigianis, another noble family of the region. Late in the 19th Century, Carlo Torrigiani, together with his American wife, Anna Frey, had a particular love for the castle and its farm land, and it is there that she wished to be buried in 1917. The chapel is dedicated to her and to the great love they shared with each other and this beautiful estate. The spa, the kitchens, the gardens with their ancient cedars and cypress, the timeless view and the impeccable staff make it a dream wedding destination.



For those who want a bit of city life, there is a twice-daily free shuttle to Florence, a half-hour ride. All the other sights of Tuscany, Siena, Lucca, San Gimignano, all are a short drive away. Those are worthy sights for people who want to see them, but I, for one, can think of no place I would want to go that would require me to leave the Castello del Nero for even a day of my stay there. Let the world turn; I, at the eternal center, am still.



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