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**Debbie
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Debbie Travis

Living her dream BY FAY SPLETT

To most people in Canada, Debbie Travis is a household name. We were first introduced to her through her instructional painting videos, books and a hit television series called *Debbie Travis' Painted House*, which won her two Gemini Awards.

Additional series, guest appearances and creative projects followed, and it's here in Canada that she runs her production company. However, with homes in Tuscany and in London, her time is now stretched between the two continents.



Born in Blackburn, Lancashire, England, Travis immigrated to Canada in the late eighties and raised her family here. While living in Montreal, Travis redecorated the Victorian house that she was living in, using various paint effects. She formed a small decorating business, which grew to include commissions from department stores, theatres, reception halls and private homes – ultimately attracting media attention..

To her credit, Travis has now published nine books, with a new one in the works about following your dreams. She has created several home decor product lines, including The Debbie Travis Home Collection at Sears, inspired by her Tuscan lifestyle. Pillitteri Estates Wines in Niagara-on-the-Lake produces Debbie Travis Pinot Grigio, and they have plans to expand the line. Travis also writes a weekly syndicated newspaper column, and has produced several documentaries and hit television series that are aired around the world.

Adding to her list of accomplishments, Travis owns and runs a villa in Tuscany, and has developed her own line of olive oils, rosemary and lavender



products, which are available through her online store. When asked if she has any intention of retiring, she said, "I'm not one to stay idle. In England, I think the retirement age for women is around sixty-seven, sixty-eight. Our generation is living so much longer. Women in their fifties are so much fitter and healthier. So many people are looking for their next chapters – not retirement or inactivity. I've had the privilege of getting to a certain age, and I can choose to do what I want with my life – I can choose to do what I love and what makes me happy."

Her home in Tuscany is at the top her happy list. First aired on Oprah's OWN Network, the transformation of this home was documented in a series called *La Dolce Debbie*. Over a period of five years, this centuries-old villa was lovingly restored. Today, Travis, along with her husband, Hans, and their extended family, host women's getaways, as well as gourmet and business retreats.

I had the pleasure of visiting Travis' property in Tuscany last year. Each room is stunning and unique with her personalized accents and tasteful decor. Travis is in her element and delights in showing her guests around her villa, commenting on found objects and where her inspiration came from for each space. "It's like watching someone opening a present." said Travis, referring to her guests' reactions when she shows them their room.

Her attention to detail was apparent everywhere I looked. Travis hired local craftsmen and artisans to hand plaster walls and restore the stonework. She sought out materials from architectural salvage sites in order to repair the floors, ceilings and



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Guests make limoncello with fresh lemons from the trees on her terrace.

Photography, (top) Max Rosenstein; (below left) George Ross

Photography, (kitchen and landscape) George Ross; (bottom right) Max Rosenstein



Fresh, farm-to-table produce from the villa's organic garden.



With more than 900 olive trees on her property, Travis' whole family is involved in the harvesting.

the buildings. Found items, like old doors, were repurposed as coffee tables, and water troughs were transformed into sinks and planters.

The kitchen is a chef's dream filled with shiny copper pots, and open shelves lined with both old and new items. Extensive countertops accommodate guests for cooking classes, where participants learn to make hand-rolled pasta and tiramisu, as well as limoncello from lemon trees on her terrace. Fresh, chemical-free vegetables are grown in her garden, and the organic

wine and olive oil that she serves are products from her 100-acre property. "People are craving the real deal," said Travis. "Farm-to-table food, homemade and homegrown products. More than ever, people are escaping. People are being drawn to simpler lifestyles, going to retreats, eating organic, and focusing on their health and well-being."

Travis' Tuscan retreats aren't all about food and wine. With her flair for design, she's created an exquisite setting where people can come to relax in an environment that's free from work-related schedules and personal obligations – where people can reflect on their lives and next chapters. "That's what makes me happy – giving people an experience on a one-to-one basis. Giving them a leg up to have the courage to follow their dreams and, in doing so, being a part of their lives forever."

Following my return to Canada, as we chatted on Skype, Travis tossed another log on the fire at her villa in Tuscany and was enjoying a glass of wine, while I was sitting in Toronto. We talked about the ability to work remotely in this technical day and age. She had just popped down from her home in London, only two hours away by air. "I can work anywhere," she said. "I am choosing to do what I love and it makes me happy. I am living my dream." ■

Photography, Max Rosenstein

PRODUCT SHOWCASE



Magnolia Homes ▲ by Joanna Gaines

Styled after an early office piece, Joanna's Primitive Cabinet Armoire offers style and functionality, and is covered in a beautiful, dusty grey-green patina finish with rubbed wood tones showing through. This armoire includes small file card drawers, deep drawers and adjustable shelves for plenty of storage. StoneyCreekFurniture.com



Kohler Composed ▲ Collection

Composed is one of Kohler's newest collections. This gorgeous bathroom faucet epitomizes the ever-popular minimalist design with refined curves, making it an elegant, timeless piece. Atlantis Bath Centre is showcasing several pieces from the new Composed collection. Visit the location nearest you to get started on your new bathroom renovation. AtlantisBathCentre.ca

Liberate Your Hands ▶ – Tap Your Feet

The GROHE foot-activated faucet delivers a totally hands-free experience. Water flow is activated with a simple tap of the sensor with your foot. Water temperature can be pre-set, and the faucet can still be operated as normal. A retro-fit kit is also available to convert any GROHE pull-out kitchen faucet. GROHE Foot Control faucets are available at The Water Closet. Grohe.ca / WaterCloset.ca



▶ Better Health Made Simple

Do you find the vitamin aisle confusing? Not sure which products to take? Start with Jamieson Essentials. Four products recommended by the experts at Jamieson as a foundation for good health, include a multivitamin, omega-3, probiotic and vitamin D. JamiesonVitamins.com



Enjoy the smooth taste of Debbie Travis' Pinot Grigio

A Fine Wine ▲

Pillitteri Estates Winery in Niagara-on-the-Lake introduces The Debbie Travis Fine Wine Collection. The first in this collection is a crisp Pinot Grigio that is smooth, aromatic, floral and fruit-driven. Available through Pillitteri and the LCBO while supplies last. Pillitteri.com



Practical Storage ▲ Solutions

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