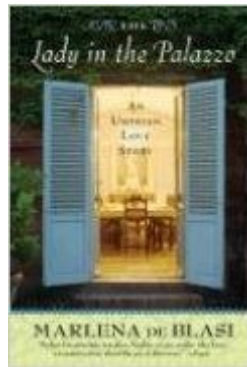


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# The Lady In The Palazzo: An Umbrian Love Story



## Synopsis

Marlena di Blasi seduced readers to fall in love with Venice, then Tuscany, with her popular and critically acclaimed books *A Thousand Days in Venice* and *A Thousand Days in Tuscany*. Now she takes readers on a journey into the heart of Orvieto, an ancient city in the less-trodden region of Umbria. Rich with history and a vivid sense of place, her tale is by turns romantic and sensual, joyous and celebratory, as she and her husband search for a home in this city on a hill—finding one that turns out to be the former ballroom of a dilapidated sixteenth-century palazzo. Along the way, de Blasi befriends an array of colorful characters, including cooks and counts and shepherds and a lone violinist, cooking her way into the hearts of her Umbrian neighbors. Brimming with life and kissed by romance, *The Lady in the Palazzo* perfectly captures the essence of a singular place and offers up a feast—and the recipes to prepare it—for readers of all stripes.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Following *A Thousand Days in Venice* and *A Thousand Days in Tuscany*, de Blasi's new book, set in Orvieto, is ostensibly about her effort, with her Italian husband, first to find, then to renovate and at last to move into the ballroom of a splendid, dilapidated medieval palazzo. The renovation becomes an engrossing portrait of the town and some of its inhabitants. Nothing goes according to plan or schedule, but de Blasi uses the years (literally) of waiting to explore the life of the town, centering on the home-based *caff  *-kitchen of her friend Miranda and the *caff  *'s patrons. De Blasi's exuberance and her American disregard of Italian class distinctions at times distress her

new friends and also her husband, but eventually, almost by accident, she pulls off a coup of diplomatic d'ÃfÃ©tente just after they finally set up housekeeping in the palazzo. Vivid writing and an affectionate appreciation of the sounds, scenes and flavors of Italy, as well as of the somewhat eccentric Umbrians she meets, will charm lovers of that country. (Jan. 26) Copyright Ã © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In previous books having chronicled her emigration from St. Louis to Venice and her subsequent sojourn in Tuscany, chef and writer de Blasi pulls up stakes again and decamps to Umbria. Her first encounters with locals leave her wondering if Orvieto really is for her. Umbria, de Blasi contends, differs from other Italian provinces because it touches neither the sea nor another country. Its central location gives it characteristics of both north and south. Despite Umbria's singular physiography, Orvietans are even more guarded and distant than the neighboring Tuscans. After a few false starts, de Blasi and spouse settle into a decrepit palazzo of uncertain vintage. The owners promise renovation, but handshake agreements rarely turn out as either party might expect. The chef in de Blasi rebels at the compact kitchen with its tiny refrigerator, single-burner stove, and multiple microwave ovens. But the land's charms counterbalance these shortcomings. Mark Knoblauch Copyright Ã © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

There are a number of wonderful things about De Blasi's book and one somewhat irritating aspect. I'll kill off the irritating one first. For some reason, she uses a mechanism that works in speech but, for my taste, fails in writing. She ends a sentence and then finishes the thought in the next sentence without using a connecting word or phrase. An example: "Like the ladies up in Buon Respiro, we forage, too. For wild asparagus...or pirates beard...or the silky transparent cress..." At times, I found myself falling out of the enchantment of the writing as my brain searched for the connector. Shaking my head in irritation. (I'm sorry. Couldn't help it...) Otherwise, this is a beautiful book. I was expecting another thin offering written by an enthusiastic ex-pat with marginal writing skills and was pleasantly surprised to get pulled into a skillfully crafted narrative. In short, the author and her husband search for a home in Umbria and find it, but the struggle to make it their own is long one. Along the way they bring together a set of people from different classes of Umbrian society and ply them with food, color, and music. Also, along the way, the author did just what a good author shouldÃfÃ©Ã â -Ã â •she made me want to be there. De Blasi is a first class observer of people

and her descriptions of them are rich and earthy. She, herself, comes across as mildly eccentric and happy about it. She is willing to reveal some of her own personal insecurities, but does not dwell on them, which I found to be an endearing trait. As the work progresses, she introduces other mild eccentrics, each with their own beauty, scars, and weaknesses. In the end, she brings the reader to a dinner party in their remodeled home (the ancient ballroom of a noble family near the duomo in Orvieto) and seats them around a table with pineapple legs. Around that table are a collection of persons that she was warned could not be brought together in Umbria...oops. All in all, a good read.

These books are all very easy reading, particularly if you've been to Italy. You'll recognize the basic elements of the culture she describes, but be enlightened by her education in the regional ways of thinking, living, and cooking. She transports you to each region in which she lives. Magical! Occasionally her metaphors and adjectives get a little blowy, so you have a hard time understanding her meaning, but that issue is completely outweighed by all pleasure you'll get from her. Prose, the evident love she has for the people, the food, the culture of Italy.

A delightful romp through the nuances of the rich (and to me, not famous) families of Orvieto. Having visited the "rock" several times for long periods, it was a very fun read. The beautiful city and surrounding countryside came to life in Ms de Blasi's tale of moving to and renovating a home in Umbria. Moving on to her earlier book about Venice.

Everything di Blasi writes is wonderful if you like food and have a genuine desire to know what it's like to become part of the places where she and her blueberry-eyed Venetian husband, Fernando, travel. They worm their way into the bosom of each community in which they live (one per book), making friends, making a new home, and cooking whatever is fresh and ready to become a mouth-watering lunch or dinner. I highly recommend each of her books, of which this is the fourth. They can be read out of order but I think the reader will get more out of them if they're read in chronological order.

The author's writing style is painful. She takes a paragraph to describe in lavish terms what could be stated simply and elegantly. Wordy.

I love every book she has ever written

When I travel, I enjoy reading novels about the place I'm going to - it adds an extra dimension to all of the new sights and cities. To this end *The Lady in the Palazzo* was a good book to read about Umbria, with lots of fun anecdotes about the towns and culture of the region. However the writing is run-of-the-mill and at times awkward. For example, in the middle of the book two chapters are devoted to the back stories of the novel's supporting characters. While flashbacks like this can be an interesting literary device, these chapters seemed like they were just randomly and clumsily pasted into the middle of the novel. What's more, the book's finale seemed like it was more for the author's benefit than for the readers (I won't spoil it).

This book is a beautifully and masterfully written memoir about living in Umbria. Any Italophile will relish this book and delight in its sensory indulgences.

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