

Building the Dream

The builders have returned from their summer holidays and Jane Smith has set them to work on finalising the external plumbing arrangements and connected heating systems...



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The vines were full of succulent grapes and the landscape looked beautiful. It was September, my favourite month, and our team was back on track after a month off to recharge their energies. Giovanni, our scavatore (the man with the digger) commenced work on the drainage around the house exterior. Now that the house had its surrounding concrete walkway, alongside it Giovanni could dig all the drainage channels for the soil pipes, waste water and rain water evacuation. All the small tubes which exited the bathrooms and kitchen had been laid under the walkway by our builders and Giovanni needed to put a tube system in place to link them and to take the waste away into one huge septic tank which was buried in our field. He is a maestro with the digger, and just one week later everything was finished and the soil perfectly replaced.

Meanwhile, inside the house, the underfloor heating system was being laid by Smurf (the plumber). Over 2km of flexible hot water tubing wound its way around the black plastic 'carrier carpet' (see photo top right). This was then covered with a layer of light cement. Floor tiles would then go on top. Every room would have heating which would be mainly powered by a termocamino in the kitchen (a glass-fronted wood burning fire linked to a massive hot water tank). This wonderful thing is rather like an Aga in that it has become the glowing centre of the kitchen in winter; you can even barbecue on it.

We also placed two large solar panels in a field above the house (we are not fans of panels on house roofs) to

supply our house hot water. Our builder created the concrete platform for the panels and Smurf ran the relevant tubing. Even in winter, as long as the sun shone, we would get a good supply of hot water. As an emergency stand-by, we also had a gas boiler fitted. While we were laying the drainage outside, we also laid pipes from the solar panels to the pool so that we could extend the 'pool season' by one month either side of the summer. (All pretty 'eco!')

This month our 27 windows arrived too. We had chosen hardwood-framed double-glazed windows, traditionally made by a local craftsman and painted a soft blue/grey. This is a traditional colour for country house windows in Le Marche and it makes the house blend into its environment exceptionally well. We chose to have all the bathroom windows on a tilting mechanism, to enable ingress of air without compromising the house security. We would soon have external doors to match, but these wouldn't be fitted until the floors were laid.

Finally, we also had two staircases made and could finally dispense with the two ladders to the upper floors! This also allowed the builder to install three Velux windows in the loft space that would become our office, with a grand view of the Sibillini mountains and valleys.

The whole team worked tirelessly throughout September; knowing that we intended to move back into the house by mid-November was a huge motivator. Would we achieve this? My next two instalments will give you the answer! ■

