



DESIGNER DIVA to... OLIVE OIL PRODUCER?

AN INTERVIEW WITH DEBBIE TRAVIS

BY BONNIE WAGNER-STAFFORD

Debbie Travis is a household name to many across North America thanks to her popularity as host of popular television shows like Debbie Travis' Painted House and Debbie Travis' Facelift. Debbie has a condo in Toronto, but lately she is spending more time in her Tuscany Villa. Here's our conversation.

Debbie, Torontonians know you as a designing diva offering great tips for painting, renovating, and other tips for the home. How did you come to be a producer of olive oil?

I fell head over heels in love with Italy about 12 years ago while filming episodes for Debbie Travis' Painted House. We were shooting segments about Italian design in different regions of the country and the life here intrigued and inspired me. My husband and I started the long journey of purchasing a property here. Our little corner of paradise is part villa, part farm that began life in the 13th century as a medieval tower. We have 100 acres that include woodlands, vineyards, lavender fields and 800 certified organic olive trees.

Is olive oil always healthy?

Much of the Italian olive oil we have in our supermarkets is very low grade. A lot is actually oil from other countries and only labeled in Italy. Read the labels and look for organic, extra virgin, cold-pressed olive oil. Never buy olive oil in a clear container, it should be always dark and the harvest date should be on the bottle. Good olive oil is at its best for about a year and should be consumed within two years of its harvest.

How would you describe the difference between life in your Toronto condo and Tuscany?

Toronto and Tuscany are about as far apart as you can possibly imagine. I designed my condo in Toronto to be a haven of modern design and I love my busy time there. Every couple of months, I come back to Montreal and Toronto for my big city fix, and then I look forward to being back in Tuscany where I have designed my 14-bedroom property with my Tuscan Girls' Getaway in mind. I have created an oasis of peace and tranquility where women can leave their busy lives behind for a week and immerse themselves in the Tuscan life and enjoy the camaraderie of other like-minded women.

Is there an interesting find from your Tuscan renovations that might apply to those of us moving into and renovating or decorating our new urban condos?

Absolutely! The latest trend is industrial chic. Mixing antiques with modern is now the hippest urban style and looks fantastic in any home. I am mixing old factory windows, wooden benches with colourful patinas and vintage metal trunks with high-end furnishings and luxury Italian linens.

Okay, back to olive oil. You've had 2 olive harvests now. Do you have a lot more to learn?

I am learning new things every day. Every farmer I speak with has a different method for doing the same thing and I am having the best time ever, trying out the things that I have learned. This fall I am sharing the harvest experience with 16 Canadians who will stay in luxury accommodation, enjoy al fresco lunches among my olive groves and take part in a tradition as old as time.

Debbie's olive oil can be pre-ordered online starting in late September on a first come, first-served basis. Only 600 bottles are produced.

Link to order olive oil:

www.debbietravis.com/olive-oil-2014

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