



LIVING THE GOOD LIFE AND OFFERING THE BEST OF EVERYTHING AT HER LUXURIOUS TUSCAN VILLA

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Looking like a scene from *Under the Tuscan Sun*, the romantic stone villa sits high on a hill with an infinity pool overlooking olive groves. It's a view that "will bring you to your knees" according to its owner Debbie Travis. Yes, it's that Debbie Travis; the gorgeous, perky blonde decorating diva with the lovely British accent, whom we followed for years on her string of hit TV decorating shows like *Debbie Travis' Painted House*, *Debbie Travis' Facelift*, *All for One* and *From The Ground Up* (filmed in Oakville). Today, Travis is living her dream, of owning a villa in Tuscany, Italy, where she hosts retreats to help guests follow their dreams.

For anyone who is stuck in a career rut, needs a change of pace, or has always dreamed of pursuing an unfulfilled passion, Travis has a message for you in her new book *Design Your Next Chapter: How to Realize Your Dreams and Reinvent Your Life* (Random House Canada). "Anything is possible—you just have to find a way to make it happen," says Travis. "It may not be this—not everyone moves to Tuscany, but what did your younger self dream of doing? Maybe you wanted to sing, bake or open your own coffee shop. It is simpler than you think. The timing may not be right, but you can start to develop a plan now and put it down on paper." »



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Guests can catch some R&R outdoors or inside the luxurious spaces decorated by Debbie Travis.



«Don't let the fact that you have never owned a coffee shop or have never studied music stand in our way of reaching your dream, advises Travis. The former model turned television producer/host speaks from experience. "I am not a designer and never was, and am self-taught," she admits. "When I moved to Montreal (from Britain), I was married (to Canadian television producer Hans Rosenstein) and had a child, and I taught myself how to paint and decorate rooms. I then created a video and it was really a pioneer of television decorating shows, with *Painted House*. It featured painting techniques, which were very popular in Britain, but had not yet emerged in North America. No one else was in front of us so we could do whatever we wanted."»

Travis is also the bestselling author of nine decorating books, has a syndicated newspaper column, is a sought-after public speaker and has her own home collection with more than 1,000 products. As a wife, mother of two boys (Josh and Max) with a relentless schedule, Travis found herself exhausted and realized something had to give so she could spend more time with family and friends.

"I had been doing TV shows for 25 years—and we still are, but I got to the stage where it was *déjà vu*," explains Travis. "I wasn't learning anymore, and I thought, this is crazy. I'm bored, and if I am bored, viewers will be bored." »

“THIS BOOK IS NOT ABOUT BECOMING THE NEXT RICHARD BRANSON OR BILL GATES—IT’S ABOUT OPENING THAT COFFEE SHOP OR BAKE SHOP, BEING A SINGER, OR WHATEVER YOUR PASSION MAY BE.”



Travis's Tuscan Villa and infinity pool overlooking the countryside.

«Deep down, Travis had a secret. She had read—and reread—*Under the Tuscan Sun* by Frances Mayes. She and Rosenstein rented a villa in Tuscany with friends and Travis dreamed of one day owning a villa in Tuscany. Mercifully, so did Rosenstein. As the couple fell more in love with the idea of moving to Tuscany, Travis's vision included the notion of sharing her love of Italy with others. In 2009, she rented a villa in Italy and held her first women's retreat.

“Eighteen people signed up right away, and since I took all of the registrations ahead of time and rented the property, it cost us nothing to run,” says Travis. “I will never forget the magic of our first retreat. It was like a light bulb went off for women as they discovered their dreams.”

Travis continued to run annual retreats at the rented villa while she and Rosenstein searched for their own place. Travis had created a vision board of what her dream villa would look like—complete with stone columns and olive groves. Rosenstein found a secluded 100-acre property near the famous medieval towns of Montepulciano and Pienza. It had a stone tower and farm built in 1275. Yes it had columns and olive trees, but it wasn't quite what Travis envisioned.

“It was a very poor farm with pigs running around,” exclaims Travis. “It was more or less a pile of stones. I hated the property, and it was cold and foggy, and I didn't even want to get out of the car to look at it. But the next day we went back and discovered a view that will bring you to your knees.”

It took a team of contractors nearly four years to makeover (to use a decorating term) the property into the elegant boutique hotel it is today. Villa Reniella now features 14 luxurious suites with private gardens as well as the main villa.

“I want every woman to put their hands in my hands and discover an experience that would take your breath away,” says Travis. “I call the





Villa Reniella features 14 luxurious suites with private gardens.



Villa Reniella's decor can be described as "rustic chic, slightly industrial; with walls that are two feet thick."



A big island where Travis and her retreat guests gather to share wine and conversations.

decor rustic chic—slightly industrial, with walls that are two feet thick. My living room has 11 columns. It's simple, but perfect. We offer the best of everything from the finest Italian linens to the best food. Many people start to cry when they first see the villa and the view."

Whether visitors are at a crossroads in their career or life, or just want a luxurious getaway, Travis has shared her Tuscan experience with more than 1,000 visitors over 10 years. Retreats are offered eight times a year for men and women with themes like Tuscan Mind & Body Week, Tuscan Girls' Getaway, Tuscan Gourmet Week and Shop, Wine & Dine Retreat.

Villa Reniella can also be rented for corporate or couples retreats with customized menus and activities. Last year Travis welcomed a Women of Influence group from various parts of Canada. In June, the villa hosted a classic car rally with vintage car enthusiasts from all over Europe.

"Our retreats are like summer camp for adults and they behave just as badly!" jokes Travis. "I have to tell CEOs to go put their shoes on because we are going for a bike ride. We laugh, we talk, and we drink. We bike through our olive groves and past vineyards and fields of lavender. There are daily yoga sessions and massage treatments and private time with our life coach and certified nutritional therapist and delicious meals prepared by Chef Francesco."

Design Your Next Chapter is sprinkled with inspiring stories of real people who have spent the week with Travis at one of her Tuscan retreats and are now following their dreams. Like the attorney who gave up her law career to become a singer or the woman who started her own cosmetic company and was headed to the Oscars to fill goodie bags for celebrities with product samples. The book is a realistic how-to cultivate your dreams. This includes "Debbie's Ten Commandments" to overcoming your fears to make your dreams a reality. »



Luxuriously decorated guest rooms.

« “Fear is what holds most people back—I’m not tall enough, or rich enough, or...many are just excuses,” explains Travis. “Fear is real, but you have to put it into perspective. Fear is not being able to pay the mortgage or having a sick child, or dealing with things you have no control over. Write down a list of your fears and the negative aspects of making a change. The list will be long. Then write down the positives. Cross off the excuses and then departmentalize the real fears. I advise people to have a panic of the month. If your fear is how you are going to educate your kids, worry about that in April and figure out a way to make it work, and then move on to your next fear. The best thing you can have is control. You may have to sell the house and buy a one bedroom flat, but there is always a solution.”

Through her retreats, and book, Travis’s goal is to ignite the passion within each of us to follow our dream. “Sh**, if I can do it, so can you,” she says. “This book is not about becoming the next Richard Branson or Bill Gates—it’s about opening

that coffee shop or bake shop, being a singer, or whatever your passion may be. Reach out to people who are doing what

you want to do. Go and speak to coffee shop owners in your town and ask them how they did it. Successful people like to talk about how they made it. I created a TV show about moving to Italy and interviewed hundreds of people who followed their dreams and not one of them said they regretted their decision. Sure, there are times when I wake up at 3 a.m. and wonder what the hell I’ve done, but that’s normal.”

Now it’s your turn, says Travis. *Design Your Next Chapter; How to Realize Your Dreams and Reinvent Your Life* (Random House Canada) is available at local bookstores. For information on Debbie Travis Tuscan Retreats, visit tuscانetaway.com.

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AND REINVENT YOUR LIFE

DEBBIE
TRAVIS