

Agia Paraskevi - The House on the Hill. (Part 2)

The house was spotless and full of charm- rebuilt 40 years ago from a stone ruin with walls a foot thick. Inside it is cool. Already we love every inch of it. Downstairs a kitchen and living room with shutters in soft pastel olive, upstairs a bedroom with terrace and bathroom of blue Italian tile, reached by outdoor steps lined with colourful plants. On the far side, a sheltered garden and BBQ grotto built into the rockside are shaded by a large almond tree and massive pink and white chrysanthemums. Below a small separate guest house with bedroom, kitchen and bathroom. We had three aims- to renovate the guest bedroom, to make another tiny terrace on the guesthouse roof for the stunning views and to put our own feel into the house. And so we started ...with 12 trips up and down to empty the trailer. More to tear out cupboards and bed and replace them...

Everything you need is on Leros. You just need to understand how to ask for it. In short, you need a "fixer". Ours is Alexi "Skibby" – the original Greek owner and builder of the house, who after adventuring around the world, now lives as a fisherman, retired on a pension from Sweden. Through him, (speeding ahead on his scooter to local traders to bargain on our behalf) we got the best deals on tables and chairs, a new cooker and outdoor mattresses. Airconditioning was replaced by "George the American" in record time.

Furniture was hand carried up the hill and neatly installed... on another house terrace...and had disappeared when we went to retrieve it. Much shouting and arm-waving ensued till we met Costas (much puzzled neighbour who wondered why he was suddenly the recipient of new furniture...and had put it inside for safe-keeping.) We met our charming German neighbours. And we painted furniture and doors, built outdoor sofas and small blue fences for the terrace, hung small tin ships, filled pots with plants and glass jars with wild flowers



Nor could we have done so much so fast without Ann & Bjørn- the previous owners who provided the warmest of welcomes and introduced us to the local "Swedes" at a delightful taverna lunch, helped us at the water office, electricity, bank and accountant... And to Vallandi, the ever- patient painter who lives up the path and will whiten the house and varnish the terrace stone floors and who built in record time, a lovely stone floor for the new terrace, adding a little pebble mosaic with stones he gathered himself on the beach. (can you imagine tradesmen doing that in any other country?! come on..) and touchingly, he shyly presented us with a stone slab he'd engraved with a sailboat and our initials for the wall.- his own idea (and here I discovered that Christine in Greek begins with an X).



Sailors' Easter lunch put on by the marina



Vallandi also brought us fresh laid eggs and home-made Easter biscuits. So many small kindnesses...free mint from the garden centre and extra cakes to try, a little extra discount at the electrician with a wink and a nod because "now you're one of us." And they mean it.



For Jan's 65th birthday, a local artist painted on wood (an old greek tradition) his "taberna" sign to hang in the garden or yard at ouzo time!