

Altina

14 September

We left Sibiu, accompanied by Simona, travelling along a quiet route through the Hartbaci Valley. The first stop was at the village of Altina to see the private collection of Stefan Vaida, a conservator who had trained in Sibiu. We saw a mixture of furniture, costumes and household artefacts collected by Stefan from Saxon, Romanian and Roma sources in the local area. Only part of the collection could be seen as the house was being modified so that Stefan's brother, an architect, could return to live in the village. Entry was through double doors and a wide stairway to the upper floor. The walls were plastered and painted with a scumbled wood grain effect. The upper section was decorated with stencilled flowers. Half the group at a time then walked across a set of loose planks to see the collection.

Stefan explained that several of the 'good room' items such as the maternal bed of the parents, and chairs, had been put in store for the duration of the building work, but we were able to see clothing, carpets and some Romanian painted wood items. Pottery was displayed along the upper parts of the walls, together with an icon on glass draped in woven fabric. Stefan spoke especially about the wedding costumes and the variation in wedding hat design among different ethnic groups. Among the Roma pieces were a brass tankard and ladle. The most unusual object, some 40cm high, appeared to be made from stone, with a featureless head and upper body. This was said to be a 'home sacrifice', buried in a foundation before building.

While waiting our turn in the yard it was interesting to see the materials being used in the restoration work: clay tiles, bricks and Stefan's father sorting the wood for the roof. The barn at the end of the yard displayed the skulls of an enormous ox and horned skulls of sheep.

Simona, Stefan and Stefan's mother



We went on to see the oldest house (1508) in the village, where Stefan had been involved in the restoration. Financial assistance had come from UNESCO and Prince Charles. The house is now used for weaving classes attended by six girls at weekends, and we saw examples of their work in striped red and green patterns. The visit ended with a walk through the village, past the fortified church, to Stefan's mother's house for coffee and cake in an open sided barn. There we saw wooden items such as a barrow, an enormous beam (from a wine press?) and a well-ventilated outside lavatory.

Roy Tomlinson

A corner in Stefan's museum, Altina



David and Chris walk the plank, Altina

