

The big reveal



Sealed behind a metal door for 40 years, this hilltop palazzo in Umbria was forgotten and unloved, until one intrepid architect chose to step inside

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‘It was as if someone had dined and left at once, leaving everything as it was,’

says architect Patrizio Fradani, recalling the first time he entered his new home, which had been sealed behind a heavy metal door for almost half a decade. ‘The furniture, tableware, plates and cutlery were all covered in a thick layer of dust. It looked like a film set; truly fascinating, but also really bizarre. I couldn’t open the shutters as they were falling apart, so I saw the entire apartment by torch light.’

It was an unconventional and slightly *Scooby-Doo*-like introduction to the 14th-century palazzo, but for Patrizio and his husband, Mark, it would have taken more than dust and cobwebs to dissuade them from buying the largest and grandest residence in the building. Located in the medieval Umbrian mountain town of Monteleone d’Orvieto, the property offered a connection to Chicago-based, Italian-born Patrizio, who had holidayed with his family in the area as a child. This project was a return to his roots.

Once the home of prominent olive oil producers, the palazzo had been broken up into separate apartments in the years before it was abandoned. Keen to retain a link to the past, the couple were selective about which of the original features they wanted to keep, restore, change or let go. Of course, there was never any debate over whether or not to preserve the numerous frescoes, which vary from Roman-Pompeii scenes to Victorian chinoiserie and even tropical influences. They provide a direct and important link to the building and area’s history – some of the walls even revealed craftspeople’s drawings and notes scribbled onto the plaster. ‘One mocking sketch showed a former landlord in a crusader’s hat, riding an ostrich,’ says Patrizio, clearly amused.

When it came to modernising the interior, he took inspiration from the well-preserved yellow- and blue-tinted glass walls that mark the entrance to the original bathroom. You can see their influence in new divisions and additions throughout the property, from the sunny glass headboard in the main bedroom to the acid-bright shower screen in one of the two new bathrooms. ‘I like to keep the shell of a house neutral and add colour at the very end – with the presence of an armchair, a carpet or a cushion,’ explains Patrizio, whose contemporary choices add a playfulness to the period details on display.

Renovations now complete, Patrizio and Mark choose to spend their days here relaxing and taking strolls through the surrounding olive groves. On the way back to the palazzo, wandering through the town’s cobbled streets, they often come across the local women, who take their dining chairs outside to sit in the shade of the alleyways, mingling and chatting. The sight takes Patrizio back to his youth. ‘If my grandmother were still alive,’ he says, ‘she would probably be out there doing the same.’ *The apartment is available to rent through Luci Stays for parts of the year; lucistays.com*









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