

It is undeniable that Renzo Mongiardino belongs in the pantheon of great 20th-century interior designers. But connoisseurs of his work probably know that he was also a very talented set designer, who worked hand in hand with directors and choreographers such as Franco Zeffirelli and Rudolf Nureyev. Those experiences crucially informed the unmistakable, much sought-after “Mongiardino style.”

His design philosophy, explained and illustrated meticulously in his signature book, *Roomscapes: The Decorative Architecture of Renzo Mongiardino*, specifies both that the proportion of spaces must be perfectly balanced and that the pursuit of beauty is always subject to functionality—two simple principles, albeit far from straightforward to apply, which paved the way for one of the most exquisite decoration manners of all time.

Thanks to his knowledge, extreme passion for craftsmanship and ability to direct his teams of skilled artisans, the maestro was able to create spectacular spaces often using only humble materials. A masterly game of techniques such as trompe-l’oeil, fabric and boiserie were used to create masterpieces that conveyed grandeur and preciousness.

It goes without saying that boiserie, a decoration fashionable since the 17th century in noble and bourgeois French interiors, was a signature of Mongiardino’s aesthetic. But once again, the maestro eschewed a strictly classical method. Instead of wood panels painted in two shades or otherwise contrasting colors and adorned with gilded moldings—the *bronze doré*, so à la mode of the time—he developed a technique based on *papiers peints* and stencils which conveyed the perfect illusion of boiserie. As a theatre scenographer, Mongiardino was able to create the “idea” of precious materials, while actually making use of very accessible ones. He enhanced the craftsmen’s role to that of an alchemist, positioning himself as the invisible conductor of an orchestra of able hands.

While the input of artisans was always key to Mongiardino’s method, his boiserie reproductions led him to become a true philanthrope. In the 1990s, while working on projects for the founders of San Patrignano, a recovery community for drug addicts and other marginalized people, he began started teaching the technique to troubled youths residing

there, gifting them with not only a professional skill but also a true passion. Upon his death, it was no surprise to discover that the maestro had left his *papiers peints* archive to the community.

Today, over 20 years since his death, this rare boiserie know-how lives on through the work of San Patrignano residents, who are now recognized and sought after, even by the keenest experts of the trade, for the quality of their work. Recently, two world-leading interior designers, Paolo Moschino and Philip Vergeylen, chose to fulfil their clients’ exacting needs for handmade *papiers peints* directly from San Patrignano artisans.

On their very first visit in 2018, both designers fell under the spell of San Patrignano and the community’s ability to guarantee the conservation and the transmission of precious knowledge. Among the many guests—800 at any one time—who, after their five-year stay, emerge with a professional skillset, some choose to remain and work at community while also teaching newcomers. By now, the workshops at San Patrignano have grown to accommodate and nurture a wide array of crafts, all executed to the highest standard, as once did the great Arts & Crafts and Bauhaus movements.

As a London-based Italian, Paolo Moschino shares Mongiardino’s cultural background. And like the maestro, he felt an immediate empathy for the ethics and endeavors that bind San Patrignano. In Moschino’s words, “It was an immediate and profound connection that tied me to the mission of this group of recovering individuals, who turn adversity and misfortune into something beautiful and constructive.” Just months after their first visit, Moschino and Vergeylen headed back to San Patrignano and hand-selected a magnificent collection of nine wallpapers, based on Mongiardino’s archive, to stock exclusively for their brand, Nicholas Haslam Ltd.

Today, their line of boiserie-inspired wallpapers include some created personally by the two designers. They combine different types of “wood,” from birch to briar root, as a background and decorate the surface with various patterns, from geometrical to floral motifs, to satisfy any wish or need. So inspiring and adept are the artisans of San Patrignano, that Moschino and Vegeylen plan to soon expand their collaboration with them into other techniques which, as with the *papiers peints*, will no doubt play a part in the world’s most estimable interiors.

Crafting Genius

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