

THE HOUSE OF YES



A Renzo Mongiardino masterpiece in Milan has a
BEAUTIFUL SECRET all its own.

By Mario Calvo-Platero Photographs by Oberto Gili



Every surface inside this Milanese home, designed by the late architect Renzo Mongiardino—the wooden trompe l'oeil coffered ceiling here, the floral wallpaper behind the Renaissance cabinet opposite—is the work of artisans from the rehabilitation community San Patrignano.

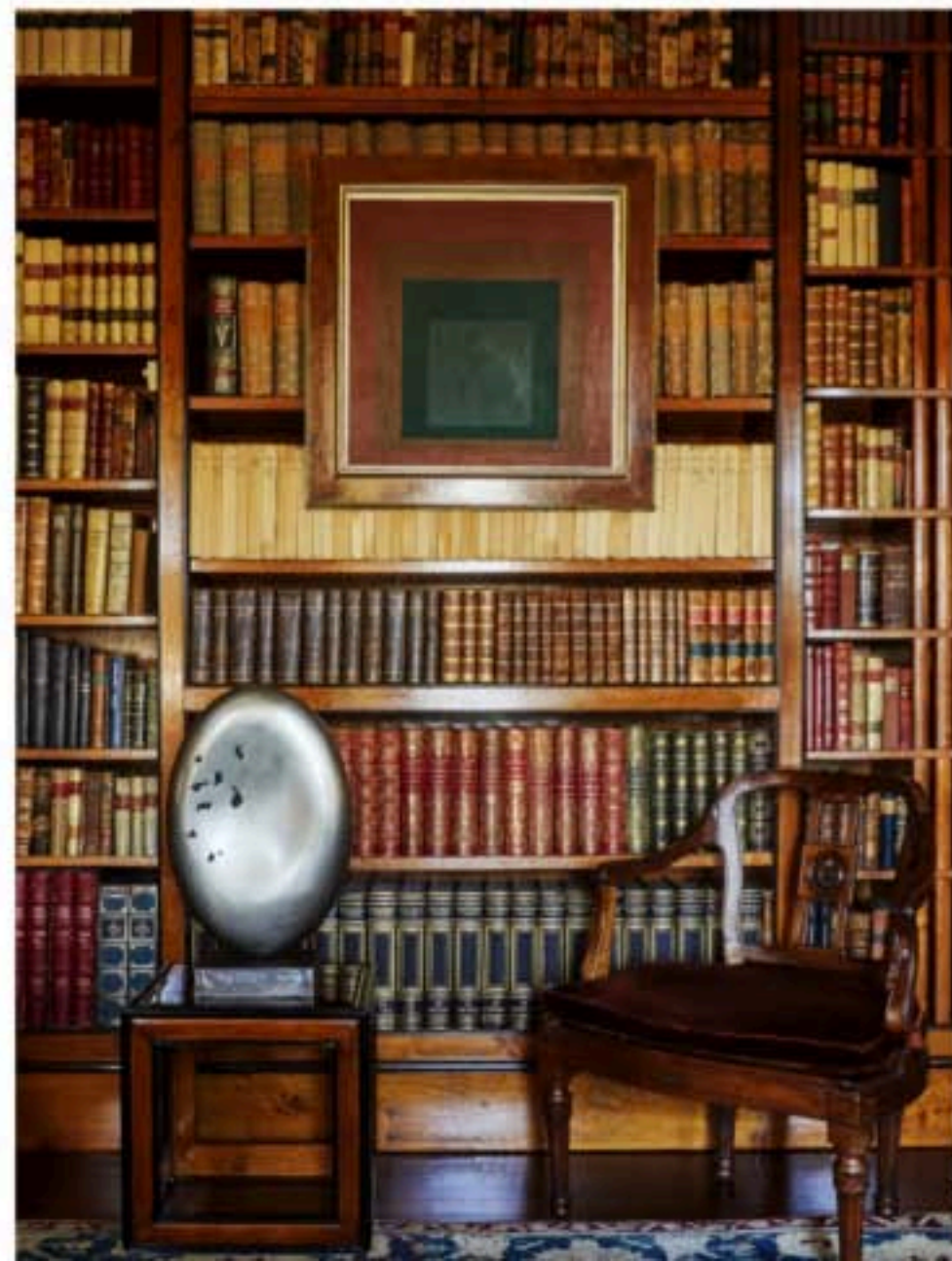
Tucked away in the commercial heart of Milan, not too far from the Duomo, is an oasis conceived by the late architect Renzo Mongiardino. The homes he designed in Italy have been thoroughly documented, but this one is a well-kept secret, its interiors glimpsed only by power brokers and potentates, nobles and heads of state. For years they have stepped inside its rooms trimmed with carved walnut and lined with 17th-century Venetian canvases and found a monument to wisdom and class: bookshelves overflowing with first editions and worn volumes of the *Divine Comedy*, rooms wallpapered with dazzling trompe d'oeil Cordoba leather and faux green marble, a cabinet from the Renaissance inlaid with tortoiseshell and hand-painted with scenes from antiquity. Former New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg visited the place once, and he tells *T&C*: "I never imagined I would set foot in a home that felt straight out of a Hollywood movie."

His admiration is not only for the exceptional silence and beauty of these rooms but also for their owner, a woman who has come to be regarded as Italian politics' answer to Bloomberg himself: the former mayor of Milan, Letizia Moratti. Though she served for only five years, the former entrepreneur and government minister brought a shrewd business mind to public policy and is widely credited with transforming a city that had been seen as a cultural backwater into a cosmopolitan destination by winning the competition to host the World Expo in 2015.

And, as with Bloomberg, there are those who wish she would



Letizia Moratti persuaded her friends to commission San Patrignano's craftspeople, who executed designs like the cube end table below left.



return to politics. But Moratti, who today chairs the powerful financial institution UBI Banca, is too focused on her impact as a private citizen, and on an organization she has championed for nearly 40 years. San Patrignano is a groundbreaking drug rehabilitation center where young addicts are taught to fight substance abuse by learning a trade and seeking a vocation. "Everybody in the community, as in any family, has to contribute what they can," Moratti says.

She has not only raised millions of dollars for San Patrignano, she has brought her network of high-powered friends aboard as supporters and mentors: Anna Zegna, through the Fondazione Zegna, advises on textiles, and Diego Della Valle's and Ferruccio Ferragamo's artisans coach San Patrignano's residents in the design and manufacture of leather goods. Mongiardino was one of the first to train the center's members, teaching them how to work on wallpaper, print carpets, and develop trompe l'oeil; then he would give them professional commissions. In all, more than 50 disciplines are offered at the center, from welding to coding to cultivating flowers, and the approach seems remarkably effective. A recent study by the University of Bologna found the success rate of recovery to be more than 70 percent.

The work of these artisans is sought by some of the world's best-known architects and designers, including Peter Marino, Michael Smith, and the artist Jeff Koons, who made use of their expertise to decorate a suite of rooms in his Upper East Side townhouse. But the best expression of San Patrignano's talent is in Moratti's own residence—in the woodwork throughout the residence, in the ornate wallpaper, which seduces the eye, and in the cube end tables Mongiardino designed and scattered throughout the property.

Moratti and her late husband Gian Marco met San Patrignano's founder, the late entrepreneur and philanthropist Vincenzo →



The foyer offers a taste of the sumptuous library beyond, where Mongiardino, a master of illusion, tricks the eye with an overload of pattern.



Muccioli, in 1978, just as Muccioli was starting a modest recovery center on his country estate near Rimini to deal with Italy's then spiraling heroin crisis. "I knew my life from then on would not be the same," Moratti recalls. Letizia and Gian Marco were married in 1973. He was the scion of an oil fortune; she started an insurance brokerage firm at the age of 25. (Later she served in Silvio Berlusconi's cabinet as minister of education.) They both supported San Patrignano from the get-go. "I feel pride every day walking around my apartment, because Gian Marco and I were able to build it with works of art made by young men and women who got themselves back on their feet, inspired by a maestro," she says.

Over time the couple devoted much of their personal wealth to cultivating a safe haven that would be free of charge, and they passed along their business acumen so that the center could eventually become self-sufficient. Marcello Chianese, who came to San Patrignano 33 years ago and decided to stay on as a managing director, says 70 percent of the organization's upkeep—housing for the 1,300 residents, salaries for the 225 full-time staffers, including doctors and social workers—is covered by the sale of its artisans' wares and services. In supporting a nonprofit social enterprise for those in need, the Morattis pioneered a mode of

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—MICHAEL BLOOMBERG

giving that is rare in Europe, where serious philanthropy remains the exception instead of the rule.

"Letizia is a beacon for all of us," says Chiara Ferragamo, wife of Massimo, chairman of Ferragamo USA. "She has that quiet, strong leadership that has helped change tens of thousands of lives for the better. She is a force for good."

Last November, Milan's upper crust—the espresso magnate Giuseppe Lavazza, healthcare and pharmaceutical giants Diana Bracco and Sergio Dompé, entrepreneurs Daniele Bodini, Carlo

Clavarino and Laura Colnaghi Calvoni, and hundreds more—braved inclement weather in their finery and convened at Milan's Teatro Vetra to raise money for San Patrignano and to honor Moratti, whose husband had died the previous February. This was the first fundraiser for the organization in 20 years without Gian Marco's presence, and it became the most successful event of its kind in Italy. That evening Letizia appeared melancholy but resilient, showing the strength she tries to impart to the residents of San Patrignano.

"Success means that when they go back into the working world, they are ready. They will not say, 'I was a drug addict.' They will say, 'This is what I can do,'" she tells me, beaming. "They fought their demons and won." «



The decorative excess of the home gives way to a minimalist rooftop and spa overlooking the basilica of San Carlo al Corso and the rest of Milan.



For Moratti, the former mayor of Milan, the flourishes of her home—the relief decorations in the dining room, the floral fabric in the bedroom (*below*)—are reminders of her late husband, Gian Marco, and of the family and charity they nurtured together.

