

Preservation society

This classic Italian manor house is a masterclass in retaining period features while, at the same time, offering a relaxed, modern living space

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Photography **HELENIO BARBETTA/LIVING INSIDE**





Living room The homeowners sit on a linen-upholstered sofa, made by a local artisan. In a nod to the agricultural roots of the region, old flour sacks have been stuffed to create comfy floor cushions.

Kitchen The stone basin is a 17th-century original and the tulipwood table was commissioned by architect Luca Zanaroli ▶



'We fell in love with this region for its history. Every village is like a rare jewel'



Reading room Intricately patterned flooring adds drama to this space, where homeowner Daniela (right) likes to relax with a book

Exterior The house is surrounded by high stone walls that enclose a courtyard. The homeowners intend to restore the entrance gate to its original, taller shape this year

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ntrepreneurs Daniela Bennati and Gianfranco Motter bought this 17th-century manor house in the quiet village of Patù, Salento, on Italy's south-eastern tip in 2011. By the following year, with the help of architect Luca Zanaroli, they had transformed it into a tranquil holiday home for themselves and their 11-year-old son Zoltan.

The couple live and work in Arezzo, Tuscany, but felt a connection to Salento when they first visited the area in 2008. 'We fell in love with this region for its history, its location at the meeting point of two seas – the Adriatic and the Ionian – and the olive trees that dot the countryside,' says Daniela. 'Each village is like a rare jewel.'

Patù and the property itself both retain a rich sense of the area's agricultural past: subterranean silos that were used to store wheat can be found in a nearby square, while the house is built on the site of an old underground olive mill. When the family first viewed it, the stables were still in their original state – complete with nails in the walls that would have been used to hang and preserve tomatoes.

Following a refurbishment, the stables are now a living area, adjoining an open-plan kitchen and dining space. 'It's our favourite room,' says Daniela. At the other end of the house is a second kitchen and dining room – the couple often entertain guests, and having two spaces for cooking and relaxing means that they have a private area to retire to if they need it. Also on the ground floor are a reading room, cloakroom and the main bedroom. Upstairs, Zoltan's bed has been specially designed by architect Zanaroli to fit perfectly into a cosy corner under the ceiling's swooping arches.

The house has enormous character, thanks largely to the couple's determination to preserve its wealth of architectural features. In the kitchen, the fireplaces date from the 1600s, while the main bedroom and reading room feature intricately patterned flooring with striking dashes of green, yellow and ochre. Natural light floods

in through the original windows that sit typically high up on the walls, giving the whole property a bright and airy feel.

To this traditional backdrop, Daniela and Gianfranco have added antiques and modern design pieces that are in keeping with the look and feel of the house. Metal lights by Artemide illuminate a mix of accessories, many of which are finds from local second-hand shops – everything from antique mirrors and ceramics to an old stone drinking trough that is now used as a bathroom washbasin.

Outside in the courtyard, the couple have created the ultimate al fresco entertaining space, with white concrete kitchen units and a large built-in barbecue. The modern addition perfectly complements the whitewashed external walls at the back of the house.

For Daniela and Gianfranco, their home represents an escape from the day-to-day pressures of modern living and a place where they can savour a slower pace of life. 'The house makes us feel relaxed – we enjoy its tranquillity,' says Daniela. 'We've been able to create our own paradise here.' lucazanaroli.com ►





Bedroom A tall four-poster bed sits perfectly in this high-ceilinged space. The bed linen belonged to homeowner Daniela's grandmother.

MY COUNTRYSIDE

The people in Salento are cheerful and warm. We adore the panoramas, the olive trees and the small, old villages.

We love walking in the Serra Vereto hills in the morning.

Afterwards, we eat underneath the tangerine tree in our garden.

The local market sells organic fruits and vegetables, which is ideal because we follow a macrobiotic diet. We also buy local specialities, such as dried tomatoes, olives and capers.

We enjoy going to the seaside and staying until sunset – it's a pleasure to be able to choose between the small bays of the Adriatic and the white sandy beaches on the Ionian coast.

We often have dinner at Rua de li Travaj, a small osteria in Patù's Piazza Indipendenza. Gino, the owner, still cooks traditional recipes handed down by the local women.

Sometimes, we see girls from the village performing a typical folk dance called 'La Pizzica' to the sound of a guitar. 

