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APARTMENT LIVING

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Makers who think big
about tiny homes

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PRECIOUS VESSELS
Beautiful homewares
for small spaces



LA DOLCE VITA

A Milan apartment bows to its 1930's roots and to its interior designer's trademark idiosyncratic style.

WORDS ELANA CASTLE / PHOTOGRAPHY FILIPPO BAMBERGHI

“WE BOTH WANTED... TO CREATE A SENSE OF OPEN SPACE WHILE MAINTAINING AND RESPECTING THE HISTORICAL ASPECTS OF THE HOUSE.”



Previous pages. The 1930's apartment is on one of Milan's most bustling streets.

These pages. The apartment features impressive mouldings and ornate detailing.



AFTER A YEAR spent combing through properties on real-estate websites, Adriano Russo, a Milanese fashion photographer, and his wife Silvia, a photography agent, came across a classical 1930's apartment, located just off Corso Buenos Aires, one of Milan's busiest shopping streets. The photographer was drawn to the three-bedroom, 190m² property, tucked away on a quiet side street. So was his family. "As soon as I walked through the front door, I felt an aura, a personal connection to the apartment," says interior designer Pietro Russo, Adriano's brother, who was charged with overseeing the property's extensive refurbishment. The brothers were both attracted to the palimpsest of historical layering

inside, in particular the grand bay windows, heavily carved, ornate ceilings and the regal quality of the red Lombard-style brick exterior. They also perceived a number of sensitive design challenges. "The apartment was originally much larger but suffered from a kind of spatial manipulation as a result of unsympathetic modifications made in the 1970's, which had resulted in one long, dark corridor leading to the various rooms," explains Pietro. "We both wanted to draw in more light and create a sense of open space, while maintaining and respecting the historical aspects of the house, in particular the original stucco ceilings and rich wooden panelling." The designer first removed all traces of the 1970's amendments, paring the shell back to its original elegance.

Spaces



"I TRIED TO IMAGINE A 1930'S ENVIRONMENT, ALMOST LIKE A SCENE FROM A MOVIE... A SPACE THAT SPOKE TO THAT TIME..."



These pages.
The kitchen features a custom-made island/display case and a bespoke dining table.

He also created large, simple openings in each of the rooms, restoring the apartment's sense of scale and engendering communication between the various spaces. Then, drawing on his training in scenography and an innate passion for enhancing the historical traces of time, Pietro turned his attention to the overall design scheme.

"I tried to imagine a 1930's environment, almost like a scene from a movie," Pietro explains. "I wanted to create a space that spoke to that time and one that also honoured Adriano's desire for a Liberty-style interior with a modern touch."

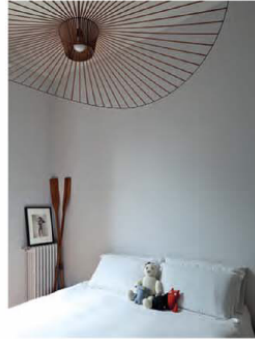
In doing so, the designer first addressed the kitchen. "I found this aspect of the design most challenging, as the original kitchen was very small and felt dislocated from the living area," Pietro explains. So, he sacrificed a small

part of the main bedroom to create enough space for an intimate breakfast nook and a fully functional kitchen defined by art deco-inspired wooden doors, brass edges, polished stone floors and the room's showpiece – a dual-function Cristalliera island unit made from bevelled glass and lit by interior LED lights. One side showcases crystal glasses and a tea service, while the other side is used as a drawer pantry.

It's not the only bespoke element in the apartment. Pietro has designed a number of fittings that collectively narrate his interpretation of the apartment's historical genre and his constant desire to create unified, made-to-measure environments.

"The relation between objects – the composition and equilibrium or contrast they make together – is important," Pietro explains. "A home is about

“A HOME IS ABOUT CONTRADICTIONS,
A CONTAINER OF MEANINGS,
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contradictions, a container of meanings, experiences and stories that come together to form a life, rather than being a fragmented collection of vogueish items.”

Pietro's distinctive, custom-made pieces – all of which he now sells as part of a collection – include a brass LED Otto Lamp composed of an octagonal brass ring frame that sheds light in three directions, and Metropolis, a minimalist suspension lamp which hangs from the moulded ceiling of the living room. The hidden light source is directed up and down, dramatically leaving part of the room in shadow. His diamond-trussed Romboidale bookshelf functions as a lightweight room divider as well as a decorative three-dimensional form in the living room. It sits alongside the designer's Piuma Table, an oval table with a maple feather-shaped inlay, tubular,

black-painted iron legs and brushed brass joints and feet. All of them are fashioned from natural finishes.

“I avoid resins and plastics, preferring materials like marble, stones, iron, brass, wood,” says Pietro. “Like people, they age well!”

The designer has also included a combination of found, commissioned and designer pieces into his brother's home. “Disrupting and de-contextualising objects has always been a passion of mine,” he explains. An example of his talent in this area is the unusual juxtaposition of an oversized parasol-like ceiling light by Constance Guisset in the intimate master bedroom, made cosier by Pietro's bold, sky-blue panelled feature wall. It's all part of Russo's exceptional skill for highlighting the richness of history while sharing his own unique view on things. ©

This page.
A hallway off the kitchen; the master bedroom; a bathroom.

Facing page.
The light fitting in the master bedroom is by Constance Guisset.

