



As the architect for Prada's stores, Roberto Baciocchi created an elegant, clean-lined aesthetic. But at home in Tuscany, idiosyncrasy reigns.

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY SIMON WATSON

COLLATERAL

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MASTER OF THE HOUSE
In the entry, Gio Ponti chairs and chests from the 1950s. The abstract wall paintings throughout the house were done by an artist friend. The house is a series of 13th- to 16th-century buildings that Baciocchi combined. Opposite: the architect in one of his two guest houses, an eclectic mix of original 10th-century stone walls, reclaimed beams, a Siena marble armoire and a bark-covered stairwell.





BLURRED LINES New meets old in the upstairs parlor with its velvet-upholstered sofas and a sinuous chair by Terje Ekström, under an 18th-century ceiling fresco. Opposite, from left: a plastic egg chair in the dining room; a 1950s Kartell lamp by Joe Colombo contrasts with 15th-century beams in one of the bedrooms.

YOU MIGHT IMAGINE that the man responsible for the look of hundreds of Prada stores worldwide would dwell in an icy Milanese palazzo, the sort of place where modernity and minimalism meet to sip late afternoon double espressos from pristine demitasses. After all, Roberto Baciocchi has spent the past four decades helping Miuccia Prada and her husband, the Prada C.E.O. Patrizio Bertelli, create their empire of cerebral chic.

But those are just the sort of expectations that the architect, 70, finds joy in upending. “You are surprised I live somewhere like this?” he asks, after appearing through a hidden door cut into an upholstered emerald-green velvet wall of his house in Tuscany. His message is crisp, like the winter air: You are as far from the ordered beauty of the Milan fashion scene

as you can get and still be in Italy.

A small, prosperous city whose reputation is built on family-owned jewelry factories, Arezzo is Baciocchi’s hometown, a place to which he is staunchly attached. Indeed, despite a crushing international travel schedule (he’s also an architect for La Perla), he has spent the past few decades purchasing and

renovating historic structures throughout the area. Today, he owns three homes — a primary residence and two guest houses — which, he concedes, are in some ways as much art installations as they are places to live.

Free from the strictures of selling luxury goods, his imagination is unbound. Burnishing the original architecture with elaborate yet

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subtle finishes and bold colors, he has created three backdrops, each showcasing a different part of his personality. There are furnishings that span centuries, from carved eight-foot-tall, 18th-century Italian vitrines and a collection of 300-year-old Venetian goblets to chairs by Gio Ponti and Scandinavian armchairs from the 1980s made of twisted tubes of fabric. In the land of Prada, a clinical precision prevails; here, even the bathroom — a trippy 16-foot-high cube with walls and ceiling covered in salvaged vintage mirrors endlessly reflecting the Mod brown 1960s plumbing fixtures — is an opportunity for whimsy.

"The stores I make, they are what I do," he says, "but these rooms, they are me." Miuccia Prada, he says, "is Northern Italian. Do I need to say more? This means organized, and controlled; they want consistency. We are Tuscans, which means we are wild nonconformists who cannot be tamed."

BACIOCCHI'S HOUSE, where he lives with his wife of 40 years, Rossella, is sewn together from a medieval-era tower that adjoins a mid-Renaissance domicile. Instead of gutting

the spaces to create a loftlike flow, the main walls have been left intact. Some of the chambers in the older part of the house have domed ceilings with 16th-century plaster; others, like the sitting room where Rossella lounges by the fire with her dachshund, Nina, clearly charmed by her husband's enthusiasms, have a more human scale. Here, soft light floods through open shutters to cast shadows on a volume of Augustine's letters, left open, half-read, on a side table. Doors have textured

surfaces — translucent marble on one, a thin layer of intricately bound twigs on another. "I love entrances and door frames," Baciocchi says. "They're like paintings on the wall."

It's hard to tell what is original and what has been created, which is partly the point — Baciocchi doesn't care for historical renovation per se. He prefers to amplify the ancient while seamlessly juxtaposing it with the new and repurposed. The rough plaster walls and many of the built-in armoires are adorned

HIDDEN MEANING
This meeting room has a secret door that, when closed, appears to be part of the armoire. The velvet-covered sofas throughout the house echo the lush seating common to the Prada stores. Opposite: Baciocchi preserved the 16th-century stone walls in the kitchen. He also designed the knives, which are inspired by traditional Tuscan implements.



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with towering geometric shapes that recall Ellsworth Kelly; a stairwell is covered with bark painstakingly harvested from 300-year-old pine trees. He has embedded a tiny piece of cork in a centuries-old stone wall in case the glass door of a nearby china cabinet is opened too roughly.

“You see this?” he says, rubbing his hand against it lovingly. “Come feel. It is in the perfect place to protect the glass from shattering. This is what it is all about, the almost invisible touches.”

Another thing his homes are about: velvet. The fabric is one of the few elements that seem to reference the Prada stores, where he has often covered the sleek seating in a lime hue — a tangy burst of color against the polished black-and-white checkerboard marble floors. In Tuscany, amid Mod plastic rolling carts, ancient candle snuffers and midcentury pottery, there are down-filled sofas covered in salmon and citrine cloth. A thin railing for one of the many sets of steep stairs is upholstered in unexpectedly soft and squishy chocolate, and a huge Baroque-era table has been entirely swathed in lemon velvet, including its turned legs, as though behind one of the doors is a

STRANGE BEDFELLOWS
The moody guest room,
with fox-fur pillows and
coverlet. The pink metallic
stand with tiny black
catchall bowls is an Italian
design from the '60s.
Candle scones and a
swarm of Baciocchi's
beetle-shaped brooches
adorn the 1,000-year-old
stone walls, and the
ceramic 1960s fireplace
is by Joe D'Urso.





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liquid vat of the stuff in which it might have been dipped.

Baciocchi attributes his attraction to velvet, as well as to brooches — he wears one almost daily and has a collection that includes many by Buccellati — to his close relationship with his mother and his sister. The son of a father who renovated homes and a mother with exquisite taste, he believes that “women have

been given too little say in design. My wife is to be trusted, always. I think women have a greater appreciation of detail.”

But it is the 2,000-square-foot primary guest quarters — about five miles away from Arezzo in the tiny hamlet of Giovi — that is perhaps the embodiment of the architect's fever dreams. Fashioned from a long-abandoned 11th-century armament tower spectacularly cantilevered

300 feet above the Arno river, it now feels like a 1960s bachelor pad with medieval bones. There is a blackened steel hot tub on the terrace and a clamshell-shaped, fur-lined white plastic sofa as big as a VW minibus in the sitting room. The architect himself rarely visits, and there are few guests, but just knowing it is there — high-concept and perfect, and tended to by his housekeeper Olga — delights him. There is electricity but virtually no lighting other than the sun. In the living room, metal spits, long enough to roast game birds, are mounted above the gaping 800-year-old fireplace.

As darkness falls, Baciocchi retreats to the

guest house's small, exquisite kitchen to put the final touches on dinner — this is Tuscany, after all. A fanatical cook — an entire huge room back at the main house is dedicated to floor-to-ceiling shelves lined with cookbooks — he has planned a five-course meal, to be served by candelabra light. After shaving local white truffles on soft-boiled eggs, he slices a buttery steak and flambés chestnuts in rum at the table. Olga, laughing, ladles spoons of sugar into the pan, making the flames jump to the rafters. “More,” he prods her, “always more.”

After the fresh-baked panettone and chocolate, you ask if you might lie down, just

for a minute, in one of the two bedrooms at the top of the treacherous stairs. The rooms are mirror images, with round beds warmed by 1960s cherry-red free-standing fireplaces. Custom-made two-inch-long rhinestone insects stud the Byzantine walls — a wink to Baciocchi's obsession with jeweled brooches. Cicadas in this one, butterflies and beetles in the other.

You lie down on the lush fur coverlet and listen to the river roar, as it has since Justinian's day. Downstairs, there is the clinking of glasses and hushed, melodic Italian. And in an instant, as centuries and fashions rush by, you're gone. ▀



SHELF LIFE Baciocchi designed the cherry-wood credenza. The chairs are by Carl Jacobs from the 1950s. Opposite: the guest-house kitchen has custom-glass cabinetry. The walls are original to the 11th-century structure, and the sink and countertop were made from 16th-century stone slabs.