

ALESSIA *in* WONDERLAND

IN THE ITALIAN SKI RESORT OF CORTINA D'AMPEZZO, A MILANESE HOMEOWNER TAPS HER ARCHITECT SISTER TO BUILD AN ALPINE CHALET WITH FANTASTICAL FLAIR.

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The dining room of a vacation house in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy, designed by Natalia Bianchi for her sister, Alessia Bianchi Bormioli, and her husband, Francesco. Custom dining table; 18th-century Italian painted armoire; sconces by Paola Napoleone. For details, see Resources.

Unlike many ski destinations around the world where resort towns were purpose-built, Italy's Cortina d'Ampezzo is a small village with a centuries-old history tucked between the confines of the Venetian and Holy Roman Empires. Though still in the Veneto region, its capital, Venice, is a two-hour drive down winding mountain roads, while the German-speaking South Tyrol feels much closer; even Austria is just under an hour's drive over the valley pass. The town—which hosted the Winter Olympics in 1956 and will co-host the next edition with Milan in 2026—has long been a favorite destination for the international jet set, lured by both its world-class ski runs and its appearances in the 1963 *Pink Panther* and the James Bond classic *For Your Eyes Only*.

Despite those star turns, Cortina retains a traditional flavor with its alpine architecture and mix of locals and vacation homeowners from across Italy. The town has always had an allure for a couple from Milan, Alessia Bianchi Bormioli and Francesco Bormioli, who spent holidays here as a child when he was growing up in Parma. It was Francesco, a business executive and entrepreneur, who found a property in the town's Chiave district and was

captivated by its mountain views. Alessia, on the other hand, was initially crestfallen. The existing structure had originally been a semidetached farmhouse that had burned down in the 1940s and been rebuilt as a ho-hum inn.

It wasn't until she saw a photo of the house from before the fire that Alessia got excited. She told her husband that he could proceed with the purchase on the condition that she could "start from zero." She then called her sister, the acclaimed Milanese architect Natalia Bianchi, to see if she would help her tackle this ambitious build. She agreed at once. "In a way, her hands are my hands," Natalia says. "She has a strong aesthetic sensibility, and I found ways to create the space for her to decorate."

A big draw for the sisters is that the region is still home to many artisans. "The local know-how is very high," Natalia observes. For this project, almost everything was made or restored within 15 miles of the house—from iron door handles to pine beds and wood-burning stoves. This level of craftsmanship allowed them to explore various mountain styles within the context of the local vernacular. Throughout the house, they played with a rough grain render often used in the area as an exterior wall treatment. The textured finish, a mixture of cement and limewash, was a perfect base for layers of painted decoration. This technique is used to its full effect in the entry, where, without moldings or corners, the room feels as though it was excavated from the hillside. Painted rosettes, inspired by St. Basil's Cathedral in Moscow, envelop the room, while ebonized wood paving blocks line the floor.

This striking space leads into the living room and its adjoining *piól*, a traditional balcony made from a salvaged flat-sawn balustrade, with views of the surrounding mountains. Natalia insisted that both the entry and all the social rooms of the house—the living and dining rooms and the *stube*, a Tyrolean wood-paneled room—would occupy this story, the center floor of the four-story house.

A curved staircase links this entertaining level to the rooms upstairs and the floor below, which accommodates more bedrooms and a light-flooded kitchen that opens onto a wide deck where the family gathers for lunch in warm weather. Further downstairs, the family has recently added a spa and gym. "My rule is that you cannot leave dead space in a house," Natalia says. "Every room needs to have a use."

This winter, when the Bormiolis and their three children are joined by Natalia and her family, long days on the slopes will culminate in nights of entertaining. There will be drinks and dinner with friends and late-night campfires ablaze in the iron cauldron kept by the side of the house. "Our goal was to create a house with spirit, made on a human scale and imbued with local craftsmanship," Natalia says. "And," Alessia adds, looking around the imaginative rooms they have together designed, "plenty of beauty." ■



Bianchi found salvaged elements of a former *stube*—a Tyrolean wood-paneled room—and rebuilt it on-site as a study. A high shelf holds a collection of Czech glass.

OPPOSITE: The walls in the kitchen are coated in whitewashed render, a textured finish of cement and limestone, and the door is of reclaimed pine with hand-forged iron hardware.



ABOVE: The walls of the entry were sheathed in render and hand-painted with decorations inspired by those at St. Basil's Cathedral in Moscow. Dresser by Flamant.

OPPOSITE, TOP LEFT: The daughter's bathroom has walls lined in salvaged wood and an English claw-foot tub, and the curtains are of a lace found in Parma, Italy.

OPPOSITE, TOP RIGHT: For a son's room, Alessia commissioned built-in beds with play lofts inspired by a design she spotted in an old photograph. Custom chair in an Andrew Martin fabric.

OPPOSITE, BOTTOM LEFT: The hand-painted decoration in the primary bedroom was based on the embroidery on a vintage Russian blouse. Custom headboard and ottoman in Andrew Martin fabrics.

OPPOSITE, BOTTOM RIGHT: The daughter's bathroom has a sink by Devon & Devon and tiles by Riccardo Barthel.

