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M O D E R N



An apartment in CA' BRUTTA, a *Milanese masterpiece* designed by the Italian architect Giovanni Muzio, is rediscovered by NATALIA BIANCHI, who restores her predecessor's original IMPRINT while tailoring the home to *her taste*.

By AMIR CAPOGROSSI BADREDDINE *Photographed by* SIMON WATSON
Styled by SARAH DE BEAUMONT

G R E A T S

This page Natalia Bianchi in the library of her home in Milan; artwork by Jason Martin (right). *Opposite page* in the entrance hall, sculpture by Tony Cragg. *Details, last pages.*





These pages in the living room, sofas in Le Manach fabric from Pierre Frey; Nobody's Perfect chair by Gaetano Pesce; armchair attributed to Giuseppe Pagano; console by Osanna Visconti; artwork by Yan Pei-Ming; artwork by Anish Kapoor; sculpture by Antony Gormley.



There are places across Milan that surprise you all of a sudden, appearing without warning. Glimpsed from beyond the window of a taxi speeding towards Piazza Cavour they look remarkable, and for a brief moment everything seems to stop, even the halting bumps of one's vehicle upon the uneven cobblestones of Via Filippo Turati.

One such site is the curious building in travertine, cement and vicenza stucco that in 1923 "stirred the waters and opened new horizons" of architectural practice. The Ca' Brutta — so-called for its early nickname, 'Ugly House' — is a masterpiece by Giovanni Muzio, one of the most enlightened interpreters of the Novecento style. The building remains one of the most distinguished examples of the transcription into a project of the painter Carlo Carrà's metaphysical aesthetic, which eludes classical harmony, coining a primitivism of pure forms and solid volumes. A building that perhaps attracted Italian architect Natalia Bianchi to the point of offering her, at the end of 2021, the possibility of becoming one of its custodians.

The apartment is the flowering epitome of Bianchi's life and practice, marked by formal reinterpretations and revivals, scholarly reconstruction and a spirit of gentleness. "When I first saw the apartment there was very little that was authentic about it. The previous owners had distorted its structure," she says. "I wanted to restore Muzio's original imprint. He used decoration to emphasise its form, and I could not help but recognise myself in his approach. He was a rebel, his style was completely innovative, artistic, at times pictorial."

From the master's work remains the evocative marble surfaces of the gallery, where onyx wall sconces warm the cold steel pilasters, inspired by Josef Hoffmann sketches. "From the very first moment, I was struck by the proportions of the entrance, however I found it very old-fashioned. I wanted to create a contrast with this ancient breach, working with a material that respected Muzio's design, but at the same time defining a contemporary contrast," Bianchi says.

While restoring the rational volumes of the past, Bianchi has devised cultured material antitheses, blending reminiscences of Jugendstil refinement with the rigour of the Wiener Werkstätte (Vienna Workshop). Here, every surface becomes a territory in which to experiment with empathic transpositions of memory, as in the wood panelling in the cinema room, whose composition recalls a screen from 1927 by the Swiss painter and sculptor Jean Dunand, or the diamond-patterned walls in the dining room painted in watercolours by French artist Sonia Delaunay. Art permeates the frame, blending into the spaces and among the furnishings, and then doubling itself in the mirrored frames of the gallery. No place is truly without it.

In the study, the striking red of a canvas by the painter Amoako Boafo dominates a 1950s desk by Nanna Ditzel. In the living room, a sculpture by Antony Gormley suspends the sharp contrast between a Nobody's Perfect chair by Gaetano Pesce and an Art Deco armchair attributed to Italian architect Giuseppe Pagano. Silent spectators of these compelling conversations between 20th-century design and masterpieces are the stuccos, faithful reconstructions of the originals designed by Muzio, like the sun, which bursts in from above, in the main bedroom. This unique dwelling hides a fascinating secret. There are no dead ends.

Each room opens into the next and then converges at the monumental entrance. "The heart of the home does not exist." Every space is lived in in equal measure. A flow of colour emanates from the many bold patterns and the deconstructed figurativism that crowds the walls — it becomes the common thread leading through this maze of symbols and images that takes us back, even if only by synaesthesia, to the ambitious Arts and Crafts applications and to the early Bauhaus, when the arts were free to flourish. ■ nataliabianchi.it

Opposite page in the study, **desk** by Nanna Ditzel; **artwork** by Amoako Boafo.







This page in another view of the entrance hall, original **pilasters** by Giovanni Muzio; **table** by Franco Albini; **vases** by Ettore Sottsass for Bitossi; **artwork** by Vera Lutter. *Opposite page* in the main bathroom, **bath** and **walls** in yellow onyx; **stool** by Pierre Chareau; Scandinavian **pendant lights**.

These pages in another view of the library; **wall panels** in pear wood designed by Studio Natalia Bianchi; **Kyoto console** by Gianfranco Frattini for Poltrona Frau; custom **sofa** by Francesco Crippa upholstered in Pierre Frey fabric; Spanish **chair** by Børge Mogensen for Fredericia, enquiries to Cult; Senator **floor lamp** by Lisa Johansson Pape; gold **sculpture** by Lucio Fontana; **artwork** by Oscar Murillo. *Details, last pages.*



