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VA-VA-VA VILLA!

Local rising-star designer Patrizio Fradiani ventures to his native Italy to nip/tuck a 300-year-old Tuscan farmhouse back to fab

BY MEGHAN MCEWEN | PHOTOGRAPHY BY GREGORY HOLM

Geography was something of consequence when Patrizio Fradiani fell in love with a Chicagoan 15 years ago. To follow his heart, he moved from his native Italy ("love always comes first," he says) after his semester exchange program at the Art Institute. These days—the relationship and Chicago design business are both flourishing—the rising-star owner of Studio F has gone head over heels once again. This time around, however, geography plays the role of muse.

The Tuscan farmhouse-cum-villa he recently bought and rebuilt sits high on a mountain, with breathtaking views of Tuscany and Umbria rolling out beneath like a patchwork quilt. "That area, it goes right to my heart. It immediately felt like home, even more than where I grew up," says Fradiani, an interior designer and architect who was raised in Rome. "Pieces of all three landscapes come together here. The lush, golden fields of Tuscany, the verdant hills of Umbria and the volcanic formations of Lazio with its lakes and Etruscan cities. It's a truly magical place." Fradiani and his partner came across the rundown 1700s farmhouse after looking at more than 20 properties. "He wasn't fond of it at first, but I loved it," Fradiani says. "When you know, you just know." You could say it was love at first sight.

The house had been abandoned since the early '50s, and it needed more than a mere touch-up. But instilled with an architect's appreciation for historical significance, Fradiani was fanatical about respecting the integrity of the original structure. Before tearing down the crumbling farmhouse—with its first floor a former stable for pigs and cows—he studied and photographed the way it was built and used the original materials to rebuild (100 percent of the stonework is recycled). He even applied traditional construction techniques, down to the joinery of the exposed wood beams in the traditional ceiling.

Fradiani also made use of local craftsman and resources when possible. In fact, almost everything used in the construction process hails from within a 10-mile radius. When he needed additional terra cotta tile for the floors and the roof, he bought them from a 400-year-old mill where the tiles are still crafted by hand. All the wood used in the house came from the chestnut trees across the valley, and the rocks from the river below. A beautiful slab of

Chicago designer and architect Patrizio Fradiani's 1700s Italian farmhouse features an infinity pool lined with resort-style lounge chairs overlooking the Tuscan landscape. The patio was created using rocks gathered from the sprawling grounds.

Travertine, used for the kitchen countertops, traveled the farthest: It hails from Florence, two hours away. "Everybody talks about being green. There is nothing greener than this house," Fradiani says. "If there were pieces missing, we went looking for them. We scoured the area for matching bricks."

Inside, doorway arches give way to spacious, minimalist-yet-cozy rooms, and the interior is a thoughtful reaction to the land. Oversized windows present magnificent vistas at every turn, showcasing undulating fields and hillside pastures marked by wild boar, herds of sheep and dense, deep forests.

Like an ode to the landscape, Fradiani knows when and how to refrain, allowing the home to be a neutral canvas for the bounty of its surroundings. His palette pulls from nature—an unassuming blend of terra cotta, cream and greens. Clean-lined sofas and chaises are topped with pillows the color of olives and bright lichen, and diaphanous curtains are reminiscent of the morning fog that hangs between the hills. Look closely and signature touches reveal themselves with punch and wit: a row of ceramic hands by Henry Allen, mosaic artwork ridiculing American excesses like Twinkies and Evian water. Uber-cool bar stools by Magis are twisted and sculptural, and a clutch of dangling nativity sheep hangs, tongue-in-cheek, from the hallway ceiling. In the spare, modernist kitchen, he created a Donald Judd-inspired art installation from boxes bought from a hardware store in Michigan.



Above: The living room's colors and patterns are reminiscent of the landscape. Chaises and side tables are by Desiree, and the floor lantern is by Fontana Arte. Bookshelves and rugs from IKEA. **Right:** The wooden dining room table was custom made from the scaffolding used during the house's construction. Vitra's Eifel chairs and a built-in bench seat 10-plus dinner guests for Italian feasts under lights by Fontana Arte.





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Wacky and thoughtful are the details that give the place serious design moxie. During the 15 months of renovation, Fradiani made nine trips back and forth from Chicago, doing everything from meeting contractors to cutting down trees and moving rocks. Each trip, he lugged suitcases filled to capacity with books and art. "It feels meaningful to be here," he says.

But Fradiani isn't selfish about sharing the spirited home he's created. When he and his partner aren't visiting, the farmhouse is rented out by the week. Striking the perfect balance between modern refinement and comfort, it's a dream getaway for design-minded travelers. Featuring wooden credenzas, sheep-wool shag rugs and interesting light fixtures, five bedrooms stylishly accommodate the boisterous groups of family and

friends that Fradiani likes to host. Bathrooms boast natural stone showers and clean lines, with one or two standout design elements, like a single chandelier hanging over the tub. "I like consistency, with variations on the theme," explains Fradiani, who brings Tuscan charm into the 21st century with accommodations that rival any five-star boutique hotel. Add an infinity pool and a big, foodie-friendly kitchen, with sleek cabinetry by Euromobil and spectacular views, and it's clear why most guests don't want to leave.

Nevermind that it's the perfect launch pad for exploring the small towns, wineries and natural attractions of Tuscany. Right on the premises, four and a half acres of land are dotted with berries, grapes, olive trees and herbs, all ready for picking and cooking. At night, when the sun sets over the small pond and trickling fountain, everyone gathers around the farmhouse table, flanked on either side by a stone fireplace and cushy portico furniture. The sky unfurls in purples and pinks, the spindly cypress trees bend gracefully in the mountain breeze, and it's easy to see why Fradiani says he can't keep this place all to himself. "I wanted it to be beautiful for everyone," he says. "I want everyone to love Italy." www.poderepalazzo.com

Opposite page: An antique chandelier rivals the spectacular view in the guest bathroom. Tub by Philippe Starck for Duravit. Above: The portico is protected without sacrificing the views. With talent for juxtaposing old and new, Fradiani surrounds a travertine-topped table with Vernor Panton chairs.