

Chicago Tribune

NOVEMBER 15, 2009 | SECTION 6

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Stylemaker's 1880s home
is thoroughly modern

Family

Table for one — at
the holidays



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Making History

modern

For Patrizio Fradiani, a love of the past translates into a look that speaks of the here and now — at work and at home

By Lisa Cregan

SPECIAL TO TRIBUNE NEWSPAPERS

Nobody does reverence for history like the Italians. What else would you expect from the people who've hosted the Vatican for the last two thousand years? And Chicago-based interior designer Patrizio Fradiani is Roman born, raised and educated. He graduated from Sapienza-Universita di Roma (founded in 1303) with a degree in architecture, and though he's an ardent modernist, Fradiani is no exception to the Italian rule. To him, even our century or two of local history is worthy of respect and safekeeping.

Take the house where Fradiani and his psychotherapist partner have lived for nine years — an 1883 clapboard beauty on an oversize lot in the heart of Ravenswood. "A lot of people would have torn this down and built a bigger house," says the 40-year-old Fradiani. Far from finding the place disposable, Fradiani lovingly restored it — but restored it on his own terms. "I didn't fill it with reproductions and antiques," he says, "To me, restoring this house meant leaving the structure, the moldings, the footprint, the stairway and fireplace — and then filling it with the new."

The result is a rarity, an 1880s home with original detail that also is a showcase for modern luxury — like Miesian silk spun inside a Victorian cocoon. It's a style that has created a healthy demand for the services of Fradiani's 5-year-old design firm, Studio F Design, while captivating an array of local and national shelter magazines.

"Chicago is thirsty for good modern design. I'm the witness of that, my success proves it," Fradiani says in his soft Italian accent, "Sometimes I feel like the flagholder, the spokesperson, for this kind of modernism — respecting history but living in the present."

He's especially dismayed by what he considers an overenthusiasm for historical accuracy: "Chicago is the city of Mies (van der Rohe), but in the '80s and '90s everyone was going back to cozy traditionalism. Historical restoration? That's just plagiarizing, that's not good design." Spoken like a man who prefers his Coliseum as is.

The view from Fradiani's living room is the perfect illustration of what he's talking about. You look past walls outlined in their intricate original moldings to a startling new 12-foot-high wall of kitchen windows. Untrammelled shafts of sunlight bounce off the steel, glass and lacquer Poliform kitchen



The backyard of Patrizio Fradiani's 1883 home, above, is framed by a dramatic, modern wall of windows. The designer, left, is known for fearless combinations of new and old.

(Fradiani is a great cook when he's not being an interiors master) and sculptural light fixtures are everywhere you look. "I think the light fixtures are more important than the furniture," Fradiani says.

The living room is peppered with chairs from B&B Italia that complement a sofa by Arper, and the dining room features a no-frills table, that actually is a sturdy desk, sitting beneath an elegant modern chandelier from Flos. "I'm always trying to convince clients that the dining room should not be a formal room," Fradiani sighs. "I encourage people to use their dining rooms. In Italy we have all our meals in the dining room."

Given the vehemence of his convictions, it's no surprise that Fradiani installed Studio F's offices in another vintage building — the 1912 Deagan Building, an old xylophone and marimba factory that's just a short bike ride away from his home.

"I really want to get a Vespa (scooter) to zip back and forth," he laughs referring to the Italian commute of choice, "but my partner thinks it would be too dangerous. I told him, please, a Vespa is much more dangerous in Rome!"

Although the Deagan Building is a straight-talking product of its industrial past, Studio F's digs speak fluent Fradiani. He says the first thing he did was to spray it all white, "White to me is a little touch of heaven, here and at home. Benjamin Moore White Dove and Swiss Coffee are my favorites. I do lighter trim and just a bit darker walls."

Then, Fradiani says, his next step is always about layering in metal finishes — polished chrome, black steel and aluminum — then wood tones and shades of gray. Finally, he adds bold shots of color: At Studio F a green wall and acid yellow desk divider provide the same kind of pop that throw pillows do in Fradiani's living room. "It fools you, it looks like a lot of color, but it isn't," he explains.

"It's interesting, the word 'modern,'" the designer muses when asked if that's the word he'd use to describe his work. "I'll have people come to me and say they like modern, but then they show me pictures and I think to myself, 'that's not modern.' The people I like the best never say the word. They just say they want things fresh and light. They're the ones who are open to my kind of modern."

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At home, above, and at work, left, Fradiani juxtaposed historic details with his favorite modern furnishings. Crisp white leavened with shots of citrusy color complete the Fradiani signature look in both places.

Fradiani's faves:

Patrizio Fradiani picks the things that make his stylish world go 'round

■ **Flos and their entire collection of light fixtures:** "They embody the best of lighting design with an eye to innovation. Fun, timeless designs at prices many can afford."



■ **B&B Italia & Porro:** "Both of these furniture companies create instant classics that are quintessentially Italian yet 'travel the world.' They're at ease in an American home as well as a European one."

■ **Fabrics by Kvadrat (carried in the U.S. by Maharam):** "Wonderful upholstery fabrics that are minimal yet elegant, with great color palettes."

■ **Natural materials such as stone, wood, glass, wool:** "They all contribute to creating a livable and serene environment that is organic and able to bridge the beauty of nature with the art of interior design."

■ **Handel and Mozart music:** "Goes right through my heart and inspires my work in a very subtle and gentle way."

■ **Francesco Borromini:** "A Baroque Roman architect who defied convention and whose churches and buildings are at once experimental and beautiful."



■ **John Pawson:** "His architecture is monastic and rich at the same time. He's taught me that less is not only more but it is a way of life."

■ **Cats:** "I love their sweetness and mysterious ways. By observing them I constantly reteach myself how to enjoy life."