

A LOW-MAINTENANCE HOLIDAY VILLA

CASCINA COSTERA · ROSIGNANO MONFERRATO · ITALY



In northern Italy, one garden designer creates a bucolic resort landscape that is both ethereal and self-sustaining.



Located in the heart of Rosignano Monferrato, in northern Italy's Piedmont area, Cristina Mazzucchelli has created an idyllic Italian holiday retreat. Mazzucchelli, a garden designer and the owner of the property, took on the renovation project of transforming a farmhouse into a modern vacation rental property with a nod towards the site's—and the area's—ancient past.

The farmhouse is located among rolling hills covered with soft grasses that belie the hard clay soil underneath. One of the main challenges of tailoring the majestic landscape was to overcome the density of the clay soil, to soften the edges of the landscape, and to make the garden largely self-sustaining. As it is a holiday rental property, a low-maintenance approach was required. "The project choices came from both functional and aesthetic needs: green spaces capable of self-sustaining for prolonged periods, privacy to agritourists, water saving, reuse of materials coming from renovation, as well as beauty and pleasantness for most of the year," Mazzucchelli explains.



Above, left: Bricks from the renovation of the interior were used to create curbs for the garden beds, supporting the garden's sustainability efforts.



Above, right: Spindly cypress trees poke out from low-maintenance perennial grasses that sway in the breeze to create an "ethereal atmosphere."



Opposite: Gravel and Luserna stone were used to create pathways around the garden leading toward the solarium.

Mazzucchelli made use of the renovation materials to help plan and construct the landscape. Beams, bricks, and tiles were repurposed from the interior build-out to create curbs, pergolas, and pavings in the landscape. Gravel and Luserna stone were used to create the solarium, and a swimming pool surrounded by fragrant roses was positioned on the furthest terrace to create a tranquil escape in the heat of the Mediterranean summers.

Mazzucchelli also installed a "chessboard" of flower beds in the front of the house as a statement garden that includes *Nassella tenuissima*, *Perovskia atriplicifolia* 'Blue Spires,' *Echinacea purpurea*, *Agastache* 'Blue Fortune,' *Liatris spicata* 'Alba,' and *Erigeron karvinskianus*. "It overflows with soft perennials and herbaceous plants with white, pink, and blue flowers, giving the feeling of a flowery meadow in continuity with the surrounding space, creating a light scenery, gently vibrating to the rhythm of the breeze," she shares.

She enhanced the effect of the breeze by adding small and medium-sized plants to keep the fields open and maintain a view of the countryside. She added *Lippia nodiflora* in lieu of a lawn. This "green carpet," as she calls it, sways in the breeze and becomes dotted with small white flowers when in season. Several cypress trees and a handful of productive fruit trees dot the otherwise low, rolling landscape. "The vegetation exuberance softens the contours, creating a suspended and ethereal atmosphere," she explains.

When thinking through her aesthetic approach, Mazzucchelli wanted the vacation space to feel secluded and enveloping—a world unto itself. "A strong point is an uninterrupted dialogue between inside and outside," she explains. "The garden is visible from all the farmhouse windows, and accompanies the gaze from one room to another, reconnecting to the surrounding landscape. It is populated by innumerable fluffy plants, organized in a sequence of flower beds with geometric shapes, easy to maintain."

The easy maintenance of the property comes from her plant selection choices, which were in part dictated by the soil type. Without an irrigation system, Mazzucchelli selected low-maintenance plants like perennial grasses, herbaceous plants, and low shrubs that all could withstand drought in the summer and the harshness of winter with minimal intervention. When considering the needs of your own low-maintenance garden, look to native plants that are best suited to your location and that will thrive in your local area. Note the soil type where you plan to plant to ensure that your plant selections are the best fit for the territory. When you make use of native plants that have self-adapted over centuries to flourish in the specific contours of your hardiness zone and geographic location, there's very little contribution that you'll need to make. Let nature take care of the rest.



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GARDEN TYPOLOGY

Low-maintenance country garden

SIZE

32,000 sq. ft. (3,000 m²)

CLIMATE

Temperate

HARDINESS ZONE

USDA zone 8B

ORIENTATION

South

SUNLIGHT EXPOSURE

Full sun

DESIGN BUDGET

\$145,000 (€130,000)

MAINTENANCE BUDGET

\$5,500 (€5,000) per year

MAINTENANCE TIME

4 hours per week

1

A chessboard of square flower beds overflows with soft grasses and herbaceous plants blooming in pink, blue, and white.

2

A wooden pergola constructed from reclaimed beams is overgrown with roses and American grapes, which create a canopy for the large dining table below.

3

Rich scents waft from the low-maintenance kitchen garden, which is abundant with rosemary, sage, and thyme, as well as less common herbs like *Micromeria thymifolia*.

4

The social space around the barbecue is shaded by hazelnut trees.

5

The swimming pool was deliberately positioned away from the house to create the sense of a refreshing, rural retreat.

6

Two flowerbeds of *Lippia nodiflora*—known for their small, button-like flowers—flank a long path that connects the house with the pool.

