

# NATURAL WONDER

A home reconnects with its surroundings—  
and is brought back to life in the process.



► A mix of native roses and grapes charter a meandering course along the cypress wood pergola. In time, the plants will completely blanket the roof for a lush, natural awning.

► The storied exterior features tuff, a type of rock formed from volcanic ash. Ancient Romans developed a means of cutting it into rectangular stones and laid them in the pattern known as opus reticulatum, shown here.





► The kitchen is one of the many areas featuring the color blue. Here, it makes an appearance by way of made-in-Italy vitrified tiles (a ceramic variety with very low porosity).

► Metal garden chairs and a floral-flecked tablecloth connect the breakfast table (used in place of a kitchen island) to the kitchen garden just outside. The closed-off fireplace is now a colorful focal point thanks to chalk paint.

If home is where the heart is, then Cristina Mazzucchelli's is firmly planted in the soil of her Italian farmstead. Located in Monferrato, the circa-1800 house and grounds were in shambles before she took a chance on them. A professional garden designer, she saw potential in the sparse terrain and abandoned three-story home. "This is one of the naturally beautiful parts of the world," she says. "But the farmland had been stripped of all of that." Bringing back that beauty became a one-woman mission for Mazzucchelli, who devised three successive terraces following the course of the land that allow for natural irrigation. She then reintroduced native plants and flowers, careful to avoid arrangements that felt too formal.

Inside, the house took just as much work. Mazzucchelli enlisted architect Carlo Maria Calire to reinstate the structure's ancient elegance. Calire developed a design plan that introduced an expanded kitchen, added much-needed bathrooms upstairs and removed swath

of drywall, bringing the interior tuff blocks back into plain sight.

The biggest architectural feat? Generating cohesion among the small, fragmented rooms. Mazzucchelli worked with Calire to add large parallel openings between each of the main living spaces on the lower level so the rooms now follow one another seamlessly and feel larger with the expanded sight line.

The home's color scheme provided a way to connect the indoors and out. The light blue of the sky, the cream of the flowers and the green of the foliage reoccur from room to room. Blue is a particularly important element, with many of the plaster walls painted



Homeowner and garden designer Cristina Mazzucchelli restored the ancient home and surrounding grounds with a combination of local tradition and modern-day best practices.





Proving anything can work when you love it, the living room contains some of Mazzucchelli's favorite, and most diverse, items—from a series of framed bird studies to a Chinese urn and a Rococo mirror.

The salvaged marble mantle gives the new gas fireplace heaps of old-fashioned charm. The masonry artifact (found at a local stone yard) also provides a perch for candle-lit lamps, bringing even more ambience when used in the evenings.

the powdery shade. "White walls are the standard-bearer in Tuscan homes, yes," says Mazzucchelli. "But I love the fresh twist, especially against the ancient stones and tiles."

A lifelong collector, Mazzucchelli brought the home to life with her vast assortment of furnishings and teatime. "Every room recalls sweet memories: antique furniture discovered in local markets with my mother, beloved objects belonging to my childhood—I love them all!" she says.

Mazzucchelli smartly employed certain items to remedy design dilemmas—namely, the lack of windows on the back of the home. (The house was built facing south to maximize sunlight in a time before central heating. By contrast, the northern portion of the home was conceived with almost no windows to preserve warmth.) In the dining room, for example, a large crystal chandelier and a wall full of Italian ceramic plates make the most of the limited natural light.

With the home now well-appointed and the grounds flourishing, Mazzucchelli has one bit of business left at her hard-earned Italian homestead—taking a moment to stop and enjoy the view.



Mazzucchelli sought out an extra-wide table to maximize seating capacity in the dining room. When all she could find was a less-than-attractive folding table, she concealed it with a pretty linen bedsheet for an easy fix.

A second cypress pergola houses Mazzucchelli's favorite addition to the house—a juniper wood tank fed by a natural hot spring, which provides year-round relaxation.



Modernizing the house required an overhaul of the bathrooms. Mazzucchelli selected simple travertine tiles for an affordable material that connects the renovated spaces with the historic elements of the house.

The rustic architecture of the home didn't deter Mazzucchelli from using fine antiques in certain spaces. The gilded bed in the master suite was created by adjoining two twin headboards.

Al fresco napping, anyone? On the south-facing portion of the house, where this guest bedroom is located, Mazzucchelli replaced several of the ground-floor windows with glass doors for breezy indoor-outdoor living.





1 Mazzurchelli positioned the swimming pool on the farthest terrace from the house to give the space more of a tucked-away, natural swimming pond feel. 2 Miscellaneous cast-off stones found on the property were used to construct an outdoor kitchen and dining room, which features a wood-burning pizza oven. A terra-cotta roof protects from the elements.

