



By Nick Haramis
Photographs by Danilo Scarpati

Two homes — city and
country — of one singular designer.

THIS AND THAT



In the living room of the stylist and interior designer Paola Moretti's home in Brescia, Italy, which was formerly a rectory attached to a Romanesque church, filikli blankets from Altai and Rachtian Gallery on custom-designed sofas, shelves made of wood salvaged during the church's restoration, linen cushions by Society Limonta, a Tuareg mat from Altai, a chair by Tom Dixon for Cappellini, a Bonacina armchair by Franco Albini and a vintage ceiling lamp by the Castiglioni brothers for Flos. Opposite: in the kitchen, a 17th-century fireplace, raw linen curtains, an antique silver pitcher with garden peonies and a tea set by KPM Berlin on an oak table.



In the living room of Moretti's country home, less than an hour's drive from Brescia in the mountains surrounding Lake Iseo, a pendant lamp by Maximilian Marchesani from Nilufar gallery, a custom-designed wooden sofa with sheepskin and hemp cushions, a Berber rug from Altai, a handcrafted English leather donkey from Omersa, a 17th-century stone fireplace with a metal spark curtain, a rocking chair by Hans J. Wegner and an antique linen chest salvaged from a convent. Opposite, from left: in the hall leading to the garden in Brescia, Moretti's golden retriever, Bel Ami, rests on a Zakatala rug from Altai near a hanging chair by Giovanni Travasa for Bonacina; in the bedroom, frescoed walls, coffered ceilings, a 1960s mother-of-pearl chandelier by Verner Pantoni, Society Limonta linen sheets, a filikli blanket and a vintage floor lamp by Tobia Scarpa for Flos.

ON AN APRIL afternoon, as dark clouds roll into the Italian city of Brescia, about 50 miles east of Milan, the stylist and interior designer Paola Moretti struggles to even out the floor-length curtains that cover the pantry of her rustic kitchen, concealing her collections of wooden spoons, pistol-grip knives and other “little manias,” as she calls them. Her frustrated sighs, which can be heard from almost anywhere in the house on account of its scale and her volume, suggest that this may not be the first time these panels of coarse white linen, each tied with small bows to an iron rod, have gotten snagged. Moretti, 68, whose family is from the region, and her son Orso, 23, use words like “impractical” and “unconventional” to describe their one-bedroom apartment, a repurposed 11th-century rectory attached to a Romanesque church on a dead-end street and accessible only by a steep stone staircase. And yet they love it. “I keep going away — walking here, moving there,” Moretti says over the hourly call of a cuckoo clock. “But I always come back.”

In 1997, Moretti, who also has a seaside cottage in Tuscany, came across the 1,700-square-foot

building while searching for a church to convert into a home. The disused rectory — “a cave,” Moretti says — had been empty for some time when she arrived, requiring what she calls a “conservative restoration.” She poured new limestone floors; hand-brushed plaster onto the walls where there weren’t already frescoes; and replaced windows and doors along the back wall of the house, bringing light into the bedroom, kitchen and living room (likely a loggia at one point) and improving views onto a garden of peonies, hydrangeas and camellias.

Two years later, when the renovations were nearly finished, she met Giorgio Cappabianca, a pilot, and a year after that, the couple moved in. They traveled frequently for work but based themselves in Telluride, Colo., where Cappabianca operated an independent tour guide business, and Brescia.

“My style is a mixture of vintage, my own designs and pieces from many different countries. And lots of furry stuff,” she says, adding, “Everything is personal.” Her career has been every bit as digressive as her aesthetic. In her 30s, Moretti, who has a law degree, became acquainted with the fashion

designers Romeo Gigli, for whom she did various jobs, and Jean Paul Gaultier. By the late 1980s, she’d hired Gaultier to design costumes for the experimental English director Peter Greenaway’s “The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover” (1989) and took pictures on set to generate excitement for the film. She ended up selling those photos to Vogue Italia, to which she would eventually become a contributor.

During that period, Casa Vogue, a sister publication focused on interiors, sent Moretti and the German photographer Christoph Kicherer to Kenya to document homes there. Kicherer — with help from his partner, and Moretti’s close friend, Yves Marbrier, a French design consultant, and the London-based architectural designer John Pawson — later restored a 17th-century courtyard house in the medina of Tunis. Moretti contributed, too, overseeing stone work in the bathrooms and sourcing textiles from souks in southern Tunisia, and spent many holidays there with the group. “I’m *gâtée*,” she says (“spoiled” in French). “I know I’ve seen most things.”

In her own home, cultures, eras and even rooms collide. In the bedroom, which faces southeast, she installed a 1970s Verner Pantoni



In the dining area of her mountain house, a simple bulb lamp fashioned by Moretti over an antique table and chairs from the French countryside, a vase by Ernst Gamperl, THPG light switches and a custom-designed steel candle sconce. Opposite, from left: in Moretti's son Orso's bedroom, a free-standing stone bathtub by Moretti, a custom floor-mounted spout from Rubinetteria Stella and a filikli blanket; in the guest quarters, Anatolian blankets and linen curtains from C&C Milano.



chandelier made from hundreds of mother-of-pearl disks over a free-standing stone bathtub of her own design; the slightest breeze sets off a symphony of clacking. Above the bed, which is flanked by vintage Anglepoise lamps, original ceiling panels depict scenes from the Christian tale of St. George and the Dragon; to the left, a former tunnel to the sacristy is now a walk-in closet. In the living room, a Pinocchio doll and bookends by the Italian artist and designer Piero Fornasetti (whose son and successor, Barnaba, is a collaborator and friend of hers) sit on shelves fashioned out of a reclaimed confessional booth. And in the kitchen, next to the counter and two large sinks, all created by Moretti from a single block of carved Botticino marble, there's a medieval-style fireplace and some molded-plywood chairs by the midcentury Danish architect Arne Jacobsen.

Although Moretti hasn't changed the house much since her initial intervention, its function is ever evolving. After Cappabianca died in 2008, the part-time residence became a place for Moretti to raise Orso. (As a teenager, he was given the bedroom; Moretti now sleeps on a small bed in the foyer.) Over time, it has become a makeshift office. And these days, it's also a showroom for her design signatures — exposed lightbulbs suspended from iron chains, mirrored candlestick sconces, those curtains covering the pantry — as well as a kind of scrapbook featuring Turkish rugs, Soviet-era porcelain figurines and other curiosities she's

picked up on her travels. “In every project,” she says, “it's always the same idea: getting to the soul of the place.”

THAT SAME WEEKEND, Moretti is at her country home near Lake Iseo, less than an hour's drive north from Brescia into the mountains. If her place in the city can sometimes feel cramped or chaotic, here, on the 12-acre property she inherited 20 years ago from her father, Cesare Moretti, there's nothing but time and space. “I cook, I sleep,” she says. “I lie down on the ground.” When she decided five years ago to renovate the main residence, which used to be a grange, it needed a new roof and didn't have water or electricity; “after a while, you hate candles,” she says. The construction involved installing two Norwegian wood stoves, treating the walls with plaster and turning the old kitchen into another bedroom — “a disaster,” according to Moretti, that took about three years to complete because of pandemic-related delays, the remoteness of the house and the disrepair of the only road there.

“It's still my style,” Moretti says about the space's design. “The other one is a deeply personal old stone house. This is where we come, sometimes 12 at a time, to eat and dance.” The country house, which sits some 3,000 feet up a hill, is organized around a

To watch Paola Moretti give a video tour of her homes, visit [tmagazine.com](https://www.thermalmagazine.com).

central living area and open kitchen, with two bedrooms, hers and Orso's, on one side and a guest room, formerly a chapel with frescoes of Roman columns, on the other. The décor may be even cozier here — every room has a Berber rug or sheepskin throw — but it's no less strange. Upon entering the house, one encounters an imposing chandelier that the Italian German designer Maximilian Marchesani made by running LED wires through hollowed beechwood branches and decorating the ends with tufts of animal fur and his mother's hair. In a corner of that open living area, she's arranged her basket collection and an assortment of mountain sticks with animal-shaped handles; elsewhere, there are her trademark stone sinks, another bedroom bathtub, an Omersa leather donkey and decorative Indian ghungroo bells. Below, in a private ground-floor apartment — “for lovers,” she says — she keeps a pitchfork made from a single piece of wood by “a crazy guy who now lives in Menorca.”

As the sun descends across the valley, Moretti picks at some dried apricots and leftover prosciutto while clearing the table after lunch. During the summer, she enjoys spending long nights here cooking for friends and collaborators. “It's all for my guests,” she says. “Or I can spend days without talking to anyone, taking advantage of the lonely life.” At that moment, Orso arrives to finish a few chores. As he tends to their donkeys, Isolde, an older jenny, keeps a watchful eye on the rest of the herd. “This is the mother,” Moretti says. “To me, she's the most beautiful.” ■