

BACHELOR STYLE

ARCHITECTURE & INTERIORS

SALLY GRIFFITHS



1:5 ELEMENTAL ELEGANCE

It all began with a pressed-earth floor, a mysterious pool, a skylight and a crucible. Architect Patrizio Romano Paris's transformation of a former foundry in Rome is an ode to the four elements: 'I wanted to unite earth, water, air and fire in a single space,' he explains, as he leads the way down a long corridor into a large, light-filled room.

A mosaic-lined pool dominates the centre of the living area. 'This was inspired by the Impluvium, the Classical rainwater pool found in the atrium of Roman houses,' the 53-year-old Renaissance man explains. 'As you can see, I love to combine the traditional with the minimalist and the modern.' And all this in a disused foundry built in the 1920s.

For anyone wanting to live and work in the same district, let alone in the same building, it's practically impossible to find an attractive residence in Rome. Unless you're prepared to live at one end of the Eternal City and work at the other, that is... So when Patrizio chanced upon what was to become his new home, he didn't hesitate for a moment. 'I took only one look at the abandoned foundry next to the Botanical Garden, and I knew this was where I was going to live and work.' It took a year and a half to transform the run-down shell of an industrial building into a generously proportioned office on the one side and a unique, loft-like space on the other - incorporating industrial elements and designer furniture, the entire scheme guided by an unerring eye for the extraordinary.

Patrizio Romano Paris honours open space rather than rooms, which is why - apart from the 1600 sq ft living room - the enormous space has only a bedroom, a kitchen and two bathrooms. 'I want to breathe, not store it at walls,' he says with a smile. But before he could fill his lungs in the old foundry, it took 10 tonnes of iron to replace the dilapidated wooden roof with a modern construction supported by iron girders.

Patrizio had a marble inlaid floor laid directly onto the pressed earth. He had already had plenty of opportunity to work with wood, which he appreciates not only for its beauty but also for its practicality. 'I'm a water rot and have sailed in regattas for years - even in the World Cup in Flensburg,' he adds with a modest smile. 'And besides my work as an architect I have been building boats for ages.' However, the floor isn't entirely covered in wood. In one corner, which has been left uncovered, rare species of palms from the Amazon rainforest grow straight out of the floor.

Anyone visiting the place will immediately recognise that water is Patrizio's element. Very few other people would have a heated swimming pool - measuring 23ft by 13ft, and fully equipped with massage jets - in the centre of their living room. What used to be the foundry's cooling basin is now where Patrizio chills out and relaxes: a black-and-white-tiled oasis

of calm. The middle of the swimming pool is graced by a golden cube, and its shaded sides are represented in grey and dark green. This is a trompe l'oeil homage to minimalist artist Sol LeWitt, whose work Patrizio particularly admires.

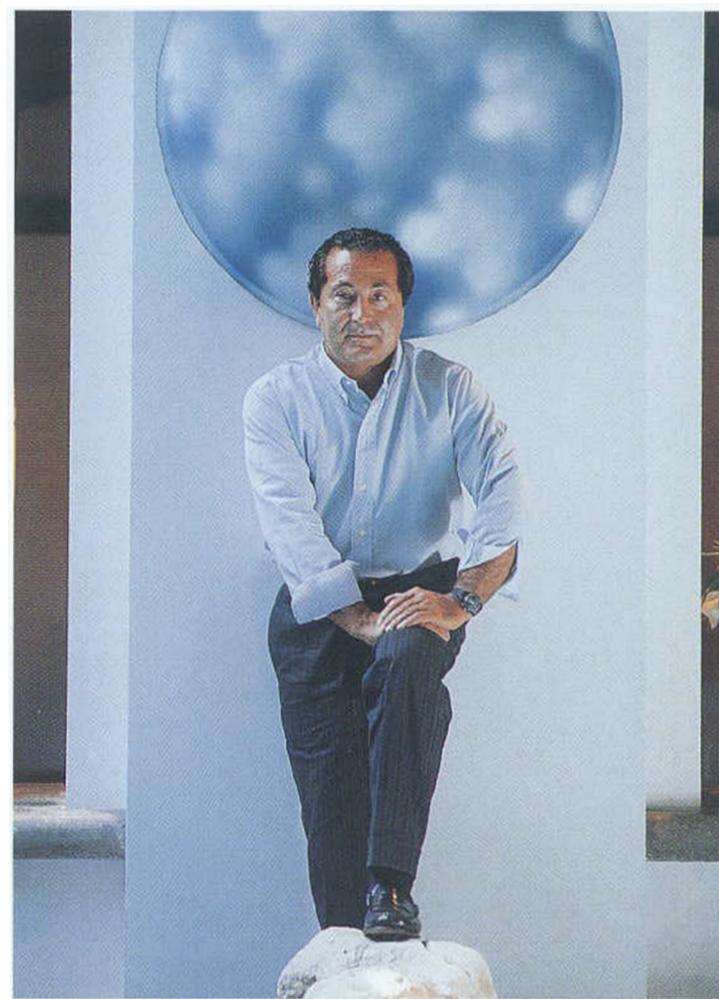
In the way that he builds and lives, 'less is more' is definitely Patrizio's motto. 'The more minimalist, the more convincing,' he explains. His love of graphically simple lines is also revealed in the striped mosaic-clad pillars, the square skylight and in the imposing fireplace, which is a perfect demonstration of his belief that building should be about keeping materials authentic. The fireplace was made from the former crucible of the foundry - out of iron, of course.

'In a former life I must have lived in Japan,' says the native of Rome with a wink. 'Where else could my obsession for simplicity come from? Me of all people, a Roman in Rome?' But it is precisely Patrizio's pared-down aesthetic that makes him a highly sought-after architect and designer in this city of monumental, writhing, Baroque excess. No wonder the apartments he restores are just as extraordinarily original as the offices and private houses that he builds elsewhere in Italy, Montecitorio or Greece.

Indeed, one of the most astonishing art works in Patrizio's loft is of Hellenic provenance. The candle sculpture on the glass table next to the pool is by the Greek artist Liane Vossolou. The pillars are decorated with works by Lucio Fontana, the neon letters TAGE were designed by Maurizio Pellegrin, and the extensive collection of beautiful glass vases and bowls displayed on all kinds of surfaces throughout the building dates from the years between 1910 and 1960.

In line with Patrizio's rigorous minimalist principles, the kitchen is in black and white. The work surfaces are in nero assoluto stone and the tabletop rests on the base of a 1930s cooker. Similarly, the simplicity of his bedroom is reminiscent of a monk's cell - an old cloister cell, it has to be said, and one with its own en-suite bathroom, complete with a barber's chair dating from 1910.

Apart from the unique swimming pool in the living room, this unusual house has two further surprises to offer: a charmingly romantic courtyard that nudges the venerable Botanical Garden, and an unexpectedly youthful motorbike, which leans casually against the wall in the hallway. 'I ride my Peugeot Geo into town like a horse, day after day. How would I get anywhere without it in this city?



ABOVE & OPPOSITE Patrizio Romano Paris loves to mix the traditional with the minimalist and modern. A Classical Roman torso adorns the corridor leading to the light-filled living area. The two conceptual paintings are by Louro Grisi.

