



# EXTRA MURAL

*Text by Lorenza Bianda Pasquinelli*

ONCE AN EMPTIED-OUT LOFT, INTERIOR DESIGNER AND MURALIST IDARICA GAZZONI'S APARTMENT IS NOW A WARM AND EXOTIC DELIGHT. WITH WALLS REPLACED AND PAINTED BY IDARICA AND ROOMS GLOWING WITH JEWEL-LIKE INDIAN COLOURS, IT OFFERS A WELCOME RETREAT FROM THE BUSTLE OF CENTRAL MILAN. PHOTOGRAPHY: SIMON UPTON



*The 'tented' sitting room* (PREVIOUS PAGES) WAS INSPIRED BY AN 18TH-CENTURY SKETCH BY ANTONIO BASOLI FOR A FRESCO OF A NAPOLEONIC CONQUEST. THE BRASS ANGLO-INDIAN CAMPAIGN BED IS HUNG WITH SARI FABRIC. THE MATCHING VELVET-TOPPED TABLES ARE FROM ECLECTICA IN MILAN, THIS PAGE: A 19TH-CENTURY FRENCH CHAIR IN THE SITTING ROOM



*A view of the sitting room showing* TWO 'OTTOMAN' CHAIRS FROM GEORGE SMITH, COVERED IN A FABRIC BY BERNARD THORPE. THE CUSHIONS ARE MADE FROM INDIAN FABRIC. IDARICA HAD THE CURTAINS MADE IN MILAN, BASING THEIR SHAPE ON THE TROMPE L'ŒIL FOLDS IN HER TENT MURAL. THE RUG IS TURKISH



Tucked away in a quiet part of Milan, far from the noise of the city centre and its classical residential areas, is the home of painter and interior decorator Idarica Gazzoni. Her apartment block stands in an area rich in popular history. Nearby are Via Circo – home of the ancient Roman games – and the site of a medieval mint. All around, in a maze of cobbled streets, are antique shops and craftsmen’s studios, the houses of young artists and the lodgings which were home to the city’s working class in the last century. Idarica moved here a few years ago with her husband, Piero Prinetti, and sons Carlo and Giuseppe.

‘The place attracted me because it is so quiet and precisely because it isn’t in a fashionable residential area’, she says. ‘The Roman foundations and the structure of the building, which date from the 16th century, reminded me of Bologna, where I was born, and Florence, the home of my ancestors.’ An air of mystery permeates the 19th-century courtyard: it was on this site that the Incappuciati (a Catholic sect of hooded brethren), used to meet in centuries past.

Idarica set out to recreate the original appearance of her *piano nobile* flat, paving the floors with antique terracotta tiles. She kept the irregular ceilings, adding

simple cornices and stucco scrolls at the corners. ‘During the Seventies, the apartment was literally gutted by the previous owner, who wanted to create an open, loft-style space, but this didn’t suit the surrounding architecture,’ explains Idarica. She returned the rooms to their original proportions, making them small and cosy for the Prinettis’ many guests during the long Lombard winters. The rooms are laid out in a seemingly unconnected succession of shapes and colours, but the whole is successfully held together by Idarica’s very personal style.

The little balconies which are typical of Milanese houses, and originally provided access to the building, make it seem much bigger, as does the generous terrace overlooking the rooftops of Milan, comfortably furnished with chaises longues and wrought-iron tables. Idarica’s taste becomes apparent from the moment you open the front door: a balancing act between classical 18th-century Lombard furniture and references to the Orient. For example, a pair of Empire candelabra converted into lamps is displayed on an antique kilim draped over a table. The pleated lampshades are made of vivid Indian sari fabric, cachepots are wrapped in fragments of Indonesian



*Idarica and her husband Piero's bedroom*, which Idarica wanted to imbue with the atmosphere of a room in a French chateau. ‘Ballon de Gonesse’ Toile de Jouy covers nearly every surface, including the bed canopy which Idarica made. The chair is a flea market find, the white table 19th-century

*The corridor which looks onto the inner courtyard* (above left) runs the length of the apartment. The lanterns, which Idarica painted white, are 19th-century French. Above right: the corridor viewed from the front entrance. The white chair is 19th-century French and its seat is covered in raw silk



batik. 'The furniture, paintings and *objets d'art* suited the 19th-century feel of the place perfectly,' explains the owner, 'but to avoid the risk of gloomy formality, a touch of extravagance was needed.'

The dining room is an ode to Idarica's abiding passion: mural painting. She painted the walls with borders inspired by Turkish and Indian carpets, the stylised designs enlarged and painted directly onto the raw plaster. Idarica recently opened a studio on Via Corridoni in Milan, where she has steered well clear of the usual clichés of mural painting. There are no bloom-covered pergolas or views of the Tuscan countryside. Idarica is inspired by historical research, fragments of ancient textiles or images from her travels.

Designing a mural for the drawing room proved difficult until Idarica found, in the historical archives of Bologna, a sketch by the 18th-century artist, Antonio Basoli, for a fresco of Napoleon's invasion of northern Italy in 1790. Idarica adapted Basoli's idea of a campaign tent, using neo-classical elements such as Roman fasces on all four sides of the room. The drawing room has thus become a veritable campaign tent, set against a background of cannons and Napoleonic soldiers in battle formation.



'Because the painting is the iconographic representation of an outdoor scene, I thought I would furnish the room like a military camp, with an Anglo-Indian bed which we use as a sofa.' Classic and ethnic, masculine and feminine elements combine to create a harmonious whole. 'After a while,' she adds, 'an overly ethnic decorative scheme tends to stale. The secret is to experiment with unusual objects, always based on the classical.' The Turkish feel of the dining room, for example, is tempered by the restful sky-blue toile de Jouy fabric used in the main bedroom, which in turn contrasts with another oriental caprice – a bathroom divided by stucco arches in the Indian style.

'The work of a decorator,' in Idarica's view, 'should be an expression of personal experience. Travel, well-loved objects or cultural origins should all be incorporated in a decorative scheme. The overall effect should be in perfect harmony with the spirit of the person who designed it. The success of a decorative scheme depends on attention to detail.'

Palette in hand, she copies a blade of grass from the background of a 16th-century master, a detail of a medieval spire, the arch of an eastern minaret... ■  
Contact Idarica Gazzoni's studio on 00 39 2 58 11 34 95

*The library was painted by Idarica* IN COLOURS BASED ON AN OLD FRENCH CHEMISTS' SHOP (ABOVE LEFT). THE

SOFA IS COVERED IN PERCHERON'S 'CHENILLIETTE'; THE PAINTING ABOVE IT IS 16TH-CENTURY ITALIAN. THE KILIM IS TURKISH. ABOVE RIGHT: IDARICA PAINTED STYLISED PATTERNS INSPIRED BY TURKISH AND INDIAN CARPETS ONTO THE DINING ROOM WALLS



*Idarica chose the exotic colours of the guest* ROOM TO ACCENTUATE ITS SMALL, COSY SPACE. THE RAISED

PLATFORM IS BASED ON A TEDDY MILLINGTON DRAKE DESIGN. THE PAINTING ABOVE THE VIVID SILK CUSHIONS IS 17TH-CENTURY ITALIAN. THE STRIPED COTTON WAS BOUGHT IN MILAN. THE IVORY-EFFECT TABLE LAMP IS BY ROMAN DESIGNER ILARIA MIANI