

STAIRCASE

Colourful Indian prints and a lamp made from an antique vase decorate the area by the stairs. The steps are carved from stone quarried in the Italian town of Trani.

Similar lamp base, Etruscan alabaster urn, H39xW10cm, £732, Vaughan, 020 7349 4600, vaughandesigns.com. **Similar candlesticks**, Lismore candelabra, H28cm, £975 each, Waterford Crystal, 0800 039 0077, waterfordwedgwood.com.



ITALIAN *renaissance*

By blending 18th-century architecture with Eastern influences, Alice Forni and her family have created a breathtaking home in the Italian region of Puglia

ENTRANCE

Impressive stone columns and the family crest of the original owners, the Pisanellis, mark the entrance, which has had its beautiful pink plaster restored by the Fornis.

GUEST HOUSE

The original stables have been converted into a five-bedroomed guest house and, following a local custom, terracotta planters have been placed along the roofline and filled with cacti.

Similar terracotta urns, from £250 each, Argos, 01886 884665, argos.co.uk.

“Although it was a complete ruin, which had been abandoned for twenty years, my parents knew they could bring this jewel of a building back to life”



"My family and I have been coming to Puglia for over thirty years," says Alice Forni as she walks through the garden of the family's holiday home, Casina Pisanelli. "After a while my parents realised that they wanted to buy their own place, but it took them ten years to find something truly special." Special in this case meant an 18th-century hunting lodge, located not far from the town of Lecce. "Although it was a complete ruin and had been abandoned for twenty years, my parents knew they could bring this jewel of a building back to life," says Alice, above right, who helps run cookery holidays based at the casina with her friend Lorne Blyth, above left.

Alice's parents, Giorgio and Marina, who are from Bologna in the north of Italy, regularly visit the sunnier south, so buying a holiday home made perfect sense. "This square building is typical of the area, and is called a masseria," explains Alice. "While many of them were used as farmhouses, this particular one was a hunting lodge, or casina."

From the beginning, they decided to use a combination of reclaimed and local materials to restore the property. "For instance, some of the ground-floor rooms had to be completely repaved. Fortunately, the original quarries were still in operation," explains Alice. The result is that there is hardly any difference between the 18th-century stonework and the newer additions. "Add to this the fact that many of the local artisans today are probably direct descendants of the stone masons that worked on the original house, and you'll see how lucky we've been."

The decoration of the casina was very much a family affair. The





LIVING ROOM

Here, traditional plates by a local potter decorate the walls, while an over-sized pendant lamp, which was made locally, helps to emphasise the room's high ceiling.

Similar bespoke oversized lampshade. 01747 822818, lightingworks.co.uk. **Similar director's chairs.** £29 each, Green Fingers, 0845 345 0728, greenfingers.com.

KITCHEN

Colourful pottery fills the vintage rack and cupboard, which was painted a soft grey-blue to contrast with the yellow walls. The kitchen is a focal point for Alice and friend Lorne Blyth's business, flavoursholidays.co.uk.

Similar housekeeper's cupboard. H200xW109xD44cm, from £560, Grand Illusions Furniture, 020 8607 9446, grandillusions-furniture.co.uk. **Similar dish rack.** Gustavian plate rack, H100xW102xD12cm, £125, Country Cream, 020 8660 3527, countrycream.co.uk.



BATHROOM

Each of the seven bedrooms has an ensuite bathroom, which were added during the restoration work. Although new, the materials used are from local sources.

Similar stone tiles. Sorrento Marble, 60x30cm, £69.95sq m, Original Style, 01392 474058, originalstyle.com.

BEDROOM

One of two bedrooms located in the main house, this room opens directly on to a side courtyard. At the foot of the antique Tuscan bed sits a dowry chest from Kerala in India, while the black and red textile hanging is an antique baby carrier from China.

Similar wrought-iron bed. Artemis four-poster bed, from H206xW140 xL202.5cm, £883, Nights in Iron, 020 7636 6866, nightsiniron.com. **Similar textile hangings.** Joss Graham Oriental Textiles, 020 7730 4370.



design elements reflect not only the family's taste, but its interest in travel. "Whenever we went somewhere – Turkey, Morocco, India – we were always on the look-out for things to bring back to Casina Pisanelli," says Alice. Not all the furnishings, however, have such an adventurous history – pieces, such as the wrought-iron beds for the guest rooms were discovered at local antiques markets.

Two enclosed courtyards flank the house. One opens off the kitchen area and acts as a sort of alfresco dining room, with one corner given over to an outdoor kitchen. "Although this was a new addition, we wanted to make it feel as if it had been there forever," says Alice. Eighteenth-century glazed tiles from a Sicilian palace form a splashback to the sink and grill. The sink itself, made up from slabs of antique stone, is weathered with an ancient patina, while fig and other fruit trees provide shade for the large wooden picnic table in the centre.

One of the most dramatic changes was the restoration of the garden. The grounds had been abandoned for decades, although the geometrically laid out paths that mimicked the angles of the house were





still evident. "We tried to maintain this rigid layout, which is typical of an 18th-century casina," says Alice. "Whatever elements had survived we kept and that became the basis of the new garden." Several walkways bisected the area and these formed a grid, which they preserved. In fact, the main pathway continues right over the new pool via a stone footbridge that leads to the rear facade.

Century-old olive trees were bought from local farmers and replanted, their twisted shapes forming living sculptures around the gardens. "My parents are particularly passionate about gardening," says Alice, gesturing towards the fragrant clematis, jasmine and roses that scale the walls and pergolas. One of the lucky survivors from the original garden is a huge magnolia tree, which dominates the space. "In fact, our favourite part of the property is the upper terrace," says Alice. This outdoor living area is reached by an exterior staircase that leads to the roof of the old stables. A nightly ritual is to meet here for aperitifs. "It's the best view," says Alice. "Not only of our garden – which is magical at this time of evening – but the entire countryside as it goes to sleep." ■

POOL AND TERRACE

The bridge that now spans the pool follows the path of the original garden. Beside the pool stands the converted stables where an exterior staircase leads to the roof. Furnished with built-in stone benches, this is where the family likes to gather to admire the countryside and watch the sun set.



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