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Rustic Redefined



By Rachel Chiari | JULY 10, 2015

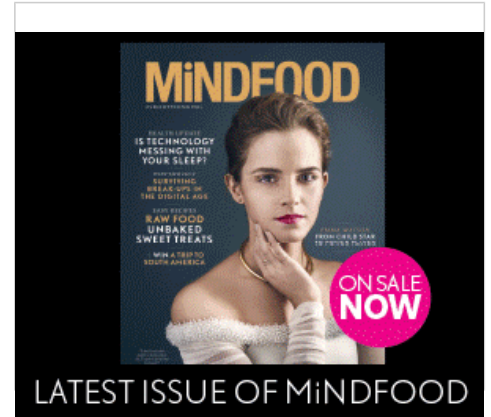


A modern take on the rural aesthetic

“Each site and building has a history, ours is the language of continuity,” reads *Ilaria Miani’s* web page.

Miani, an interior designer based in Rome, is known for her skill in adapting ancient buildings to modern living. A singular approach to renovation that has seen Miani, over the last twenty years, bring abandoned farmhouses and palazzos back to life. Miani has created a different aesthetic than what was in vogue for country interiors when she started.

“I didn’t want to give up the elements that I loved about rustic design,” explains Miani. “The feeling of handcrafted objects, using local materials crafted in the same workshops that had been operating for centuries. This is what I wanted, but couldn’t find.”





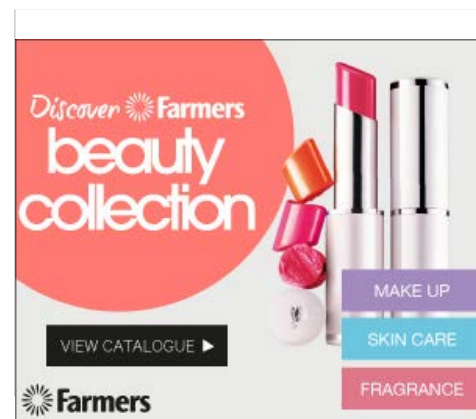
Miani's passion for Italian rustic architecture proved the perfect match for Michael Cioffi, an American lawyer and law professor with a deep love for all things Renaissance.

Cioffi had, for some time, been exploring off the beaten tracks of Tuscany and Umbria when he first visited Castiglioncello del Trinoro. Somewhere between Rome and Florence he came across a medieval village high on a hilltop.



Looking out over the Val d'Orcia, now a UNESCO World heritage site, Cioffi saw a landscape virtually unchanged since its depiction by Renaissance artists. "This was the place where people would bring a bottle of wine and a picnic to take in the views; it's a quiet, special place," says Cioffi.

Cioffi bought a dilapidated building in need of repairs. A place to pass the summers with his family. But it didn't stop there, with so many buildings in the village needing urgent attention Cioffi was inspired to continue the process of restoration. He wanted to create a place for people to come and recharge the mind, body and soul. He imagined this village experiencing a contemporary renaissance.





Cioffi proceeded with caution. The existing 20 residents of the village were hesitant about the changes that would take place. “They’ve lived in this village for generations and didn’t want to see it become a resort,” explains Cioffi.

Cioffi joined forces with Architect Ernesto Bartolini of *DA Studio* and Miani to create a hotel, accompanied by 3 private villas, a (just opened) *spa*, a *restaurant* incorporating a *Cooking Academy*, an *enoteca* (traditional wine tasting bar), a library, an *Artist and Scholar in residence* programme, a *contemporary art gallery* and a formidable calendar of concerts that range from Opera to Jazz.



To further support the arts and humanities, each year, distinguished practitioners from the world of the performing and visual arts, culinary arts, literature, philosophy and science are invited to reside at Monteverdi where they share their passions and knowledge via master classes and seminars.

“The entire concept was not to build a hotel in Castiglioncello, but to become part of the village – you can still walk through the village and it feels like it did one hundred years ago,” adds Cioffi.



All these different spaces reflect the history of the village's inhabitants and their dwellings through their design. Monteverdi Tuscany is named for the green mountains surrounding the village and after Claudio Monteverdi, a renowned composer, musician and Catholic priest of the 16th century.

Miani is clearly inspired by a rustic canvas and abandoned space, visualising new life into it "I can only see what I recognise and this comes from my interest and curiosity in learning," says Miani. "For example I read the aesthetics of a wall texture preserved over the centuries."



In the case of working with buildings of rustic and humble origins Miani says, "Showing the beauty of the Italian peasant house is of great importance to me." Her vision remains true to the traditional Tuscan farmhouse interior. "The rooms are without much embellishment or decoration. They remain modest, empty and spare; there is a timeless feeling you get from the space."

The contemporary aspect is introduced by way of comfort. Not resorting to hi-tech materials, Miani works solely with natural materials and those found on site. Original wooden beams, worn stone

floors and old bricks. “These are the elements that speak to me, that reveal the soul of the building,” she explains.



When it comes to knowing which objects can be recycled and which are to be thrown away, there's no one size fits all. “There is no rule, most of the time I prefer objects and furniture which produce emotions, with minimal forms.”

Collaborating with skilled artisans, sculptors, builders and weavers Miani produces her own contemporary furniture and lighting pieces for the space. “My design sticks to the terroir, as you would say for wine and food. This meaning if the project takes place in Italy it develops differently than if in France, England or Spain. If in Venice not similarly to Rome or Florence. Inspiration often comes from the location itself, the local culture, an art piece, nature.”



Miani's philosophy is visible throughout this ongoing, evolutionary project. The hotel opened in 2012 with seven rooms and today offers twelve. The design and decor of each room and bathroom, like an art installation, is site specific. The exquisite bed and bath linens are all custom made to Miani's exacting standards by C&C Milano.

"Their fabrics are made in Italy with a special feeling for texture and Mediterranean colours," says Miani. The interior designer doesn't have a favourite colour, she's always in love with the colour of the project she's working on at the time. "It is always the colour of the project itself."

This purist truth is evident throughout the village. Each building has its own ambience, yet connects to the whole by a seemingly effortless, casual and sophisticated approach.

A rustic redefined by Miani's deft touch.

To enquire about C&C Milano custom made bed linens and textiles for your renovation project contact Atelier Textiles in Auckland. 0800 ATELIER or enquiries@atelier.co.nz

To enquire about Ilaria Miani furniture and lighting design or visit the shop when you are next in Rome visit Via di Monserrato, 35.



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