

Palazzo Monti

This grand, three-storey home in northern Italy is repeatedly refashioned by its roster of live-in artists.



"This is a house that transforms into something new every month," says Edoardo Monti, founder and patron of Palazzo Monti, an art residence in Brescia, northern Italy. Completed in the 13th century, with a monumental stone entrance and finely restored Baroque-era frescoes on the ceilings, the palazzo might appear too grandiose a building to be so mutable, yet 29-year-old Monti has managed to refashion it with the help of a changing cast of creatives. "It's the artists and the art that create the space and the mood here, so the palazzo is in permanent flux," he says.

Spread over three storeys, the residence has six bedrooms for artists and staff, two top-floor work studios and a pair of gallery rooms. One of these is beneath a 1750 fresco of Apollo and the nine muses, while the other has flower-patterned mint green walls from 1600 that were discovered during the most recent renovation.

Monti's grandfather, a lawyer, purchased the palazzo in 1950 and set up his home and offices here. Today it has been spruced up with contemporary design pieces – Flos lights, Paola Navone-designed couches, a Bitossi vase by Ettore Sottsass – alongside antiques that include a mushroom vitrine from a flea market and a velvet couch from the Ritz Paris, bought at auction. The free-wheeling interior decoration of this centuries-old space helps to create the

sense of liberty that Monti provides for the artists chosen for the one-month residencies; creatives frequently delve into previously unexplored techniques during their stay.

As the residence marks its fourth anniversary this spring, it is stepping up its activities by welcoming its first honorary board, comprising celebrated members such as gallerist Massimo Minini; Katy Hessel, founder of The Great Women Artists; MSGM founder and designer Massimo Giorgetti; collector Umberta Gnutti Beretta; and designer Sabine Marcelis. All will also mentor, as well as assisting in selecting artists from all over the world according to their diverse fields of knowledge. "I didn't want a project that was limited to my own taste in art," says Monti. "This isn't about me. It's about creating culture."

Currently booked up until February 2022, Palazzo Monti receives between 80 and 100 applications a month and selects up to three artists to stay at a time. The residency is free, and sometimes even includes financial and practical contributions towards the production of works, asking only for a piece of the artist's choosing to be left behind. "Psychologically speaking, the payback is a thousand times what I put in," says Monti, who began collecting art with meagre funds aged 14. "It justifies the investment." Having worked in communications at Stella

(x) Umberta Gnutti Beretta, art collector and Palazzo Monti honorary board member (2) Umbrella artwork by Oren Pinhassi; library by Davide Ronco (3) Room divider by Ilaria Bianchi (4) Artist Barbara Prenka (5) Edoardo Monti beneath an artwork by Andrea Bocca (6) Painter Alicia Adamerovich



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McCartney in New York until 2018, he saved up to invest in the project, and now often works as an art consultant and curator, putting a portion of his earnings towards the philanthropic residence. Donations from private benefactors and cultural grants from the government contribute to the budget, as do profits from on-location shoots by fashion and design brands that rent the palazzo.

"I've never worked anywhere like this," says painter Alicia Adamerovich, whose Brooklyn studio at home doesn't quite match the space or the majesty of Palazzo Monti. "I'm spending my residency producing a series of canvases for two upcoming gallery shows in France," she says, sitting at the large iron dining table designed by Monti. "It feels easy to be creative here."

"Living here is like having guests every day of the year and it makes me connect with people," says Monti, who inhabits the smallest room of the palazzo. Dressed in a technicolour turtleneck that matches his energy, he loads the dishwasher, fixes the faulty electricity and walks his equally energetic dog, Beatrice, in the courtyard as he talks. His vivacity surely helps to keep the old palazzo and this project going. "Artists are often introverts and I'm an extrovert," he says. "It comes naturally to me to take care of them and make them feel at home."



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As Monti shows MONOCLE some of the pieces on display in the rooms, he tells us that "the philosophy here is that nothing is ever in storage". The artists' creations also often end up exhibited in a network of galleries and institutions, including the Gamec museum in Bergamo, The Flag Art Foundation in New York and the Etage Projects gallery in Copenhagen, which brought its stable of artists to the palazzo to create collectable design pieces with local artisans. Brescia, an orderly and affluent city just a stone's throw from Milan, offers artists easy access to museums, a well-restored Roman forum and a wealth of craft talent to partner with. Artists often return to the city independently to carry on their collaborations.

"Everyone should have this opportunity, not just artists," says Barbara Prenka, a Venice-based painter who's experimenting with quilting during her residence at Palazzo Monti. "It gives you a burst of newness and adrenaline. You can work without constraints and let yourself be inspired by a new place and new people." Monti agrees. "Staying in a palazzo with all this history and beauty around has an effect on artists," he says. "They need to travel and to work. Travel isn't just a caprice for them – it's fundamental for new inspiration." — LR
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