INTERIOR DESIGN®

JULY
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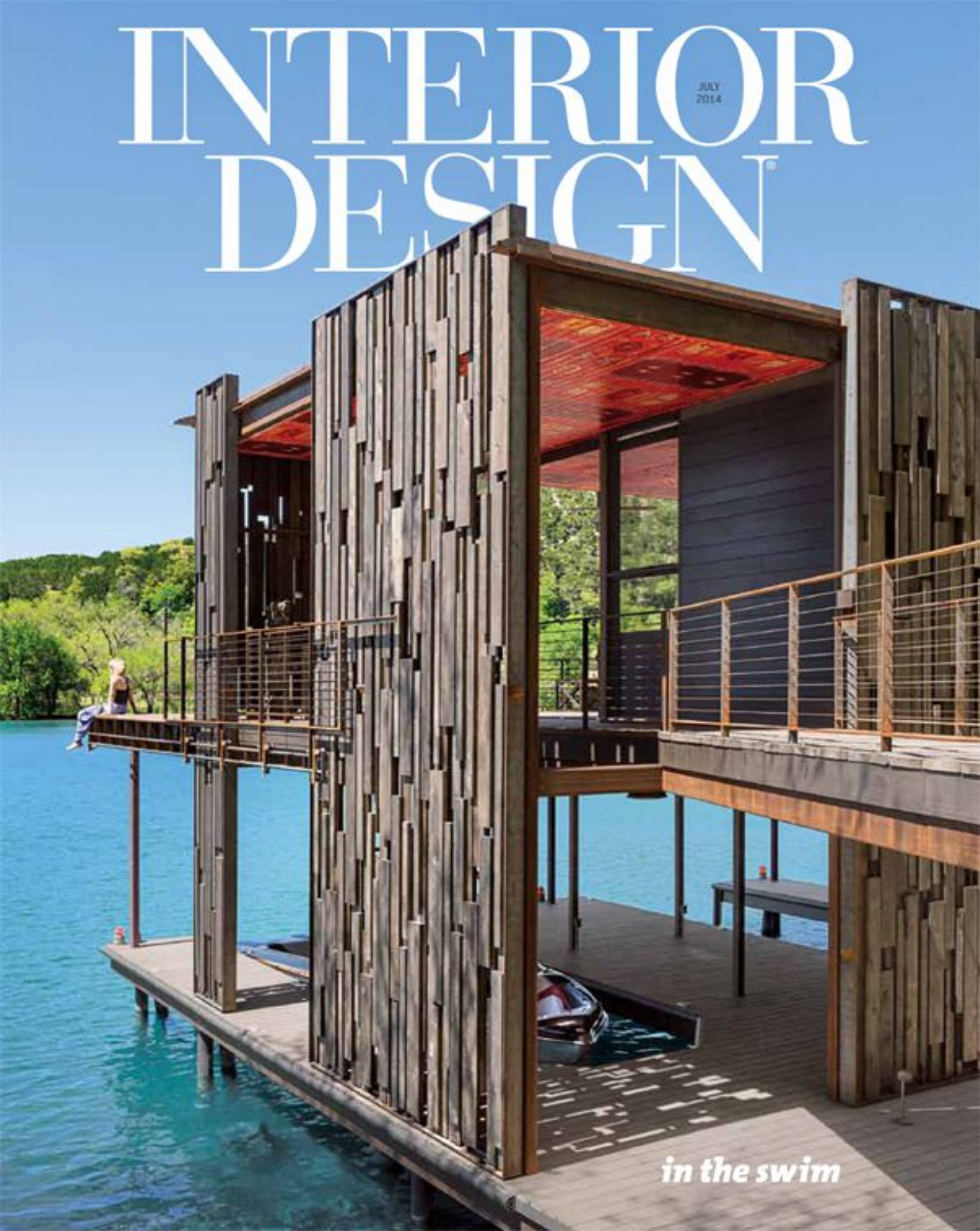


in the swim

Rome Wasn't Built in a Day

And Achille Salvagni's apartment will always be a work in progress

text: ***ian phillips***
photography: ***eric laignel***

A constant state of flux is the best way to describe the status of architect Achille Salvagni's Rome apartment. "I'm my own worst client," he asserts. "I'm never satisfied with what I do. I always think I can make improvements and am perpetually fine-tuning. My wife complains that I change something daily." For example, two faceted Emerald side tables in polished fiberglass—part of his collection of limited-edition furniture and lighting for New York's Maison Gerard—have just landed in the living room.

"Achille's pieces feel extremely relevant in a contemporary interior," Maison Gerard managing partner Benoist Drut says. "But they're often created using the techniques of artisans of another period." Such noble materials as bronze, marble, alabaster, and onyx predominate, as befits Achille Salvagni Architetti's other work. The team of 11 specializes in luxury yachts and residences in Europe and the U.S.

A native Roman, Salvagni previously lived with his wife in an apartment right in the city center, near the Spanish Steps. Once two children came along, the couple searched for two years for somewhere bigger, to no avail. Then a former rental apartment, belonging to his wife's family, became available in an 1898 building in a district named after the architect Gino Coppedè, who built dozens of art nouveau apartment houses there. "He is thought of as the Italian Gaudí. His buildings are quite eclectic—and got crazier and crazier over time," Salvagni notes. By contrast, the apartment's front windows take in the neoclassical grandeur of the teahouse of the Villa Albani, built for the cardinal who hired Johann Joachim Winckelmann, the father of art history, to build a peerless collection of ancient sculpture. "The only Parthenon fragment outside the British Museum is there," Salvagni adds.

His apartment, though certainly capacious at 2,600 square feet, had consisted of lots of small rooms painted a yellowish

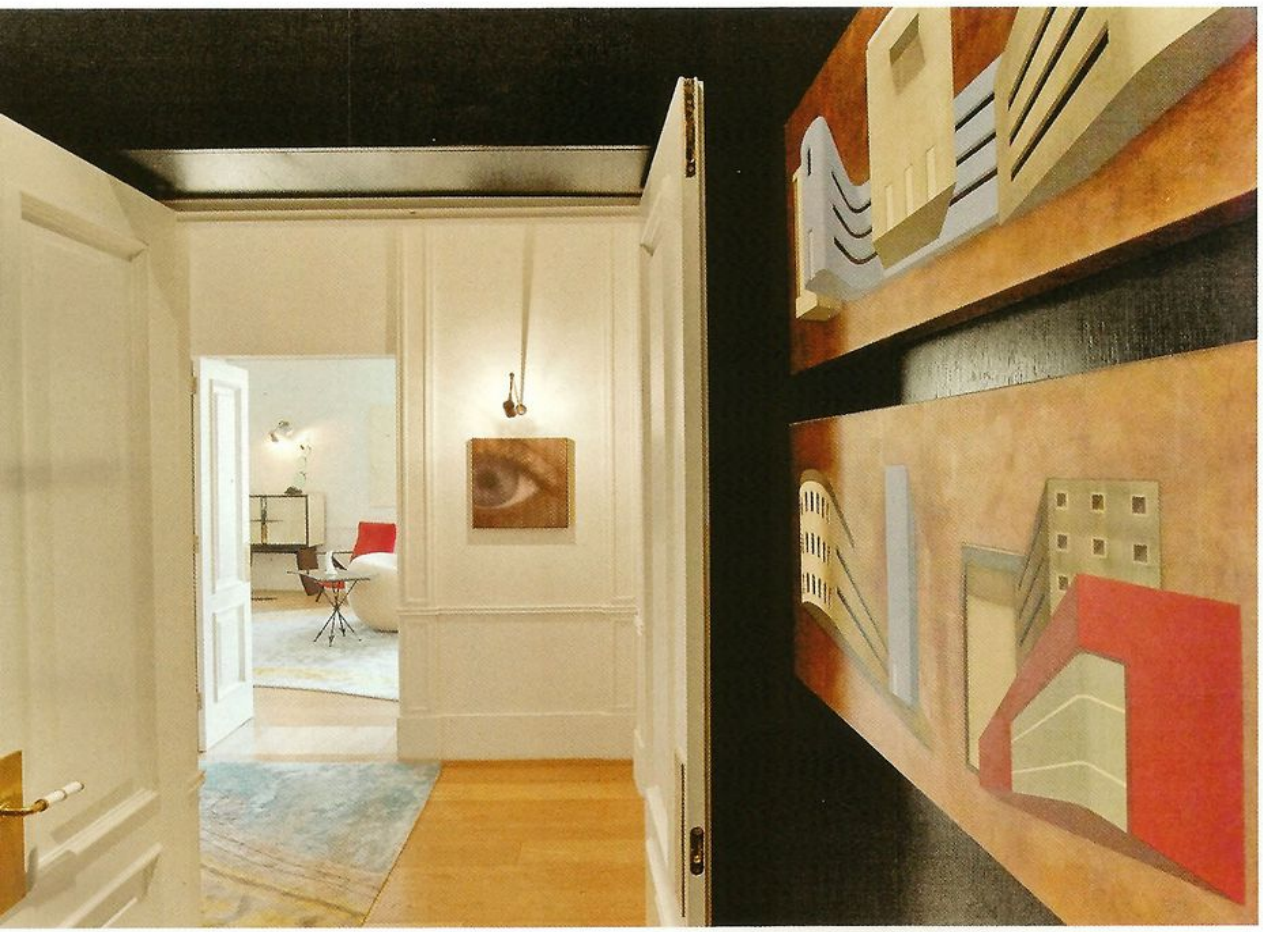
Previous spread: *Achille Salvagni Architetti's namesake principal renovated his family's Rome apartment, where alternating strips of Carrara and Belgian marble define the kitchen. The 19th-century oil on canvas is a portrait of a family member.*

Opposite left, from top: *An Etruscan urn and Italian vintage glass vases occupy the built-in vitrine that separates the living room from the winter garden. In the dining room, Achille Salvagni's limited-edition chandelier is installed above the custom tabletop in bronze-edged glass.* ***Opposite right:*** *A photograph by Matteo Basilé dominates the entry.*

Below: *Armchairs with their original 1920's fabric face the living room's windows.*

Below: *Oil paintings on panels, commissioned from Paolo Fiorentino, stand out against the paneling in a corridor.*

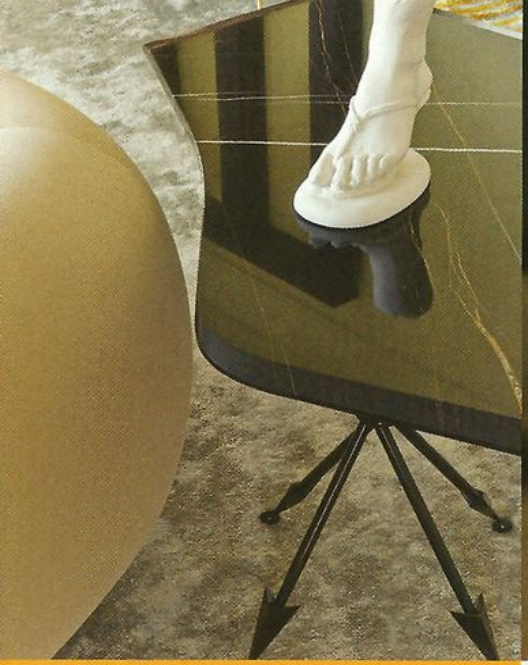
Opposite left, from top: *The living room's custom side table in marble and bronze. A Paolo Buffa cabinet supporting a 1930's Murano glass sculpture. The entry's custom hand-knotted silk rug, a map of San Felice Circeo, Italy, the location of a family beach house.* ***Opposite center, from top:*** *A corridor's custom cabinet in painted oak and Carrara marble. Jean Prouvé–inspired custom doors, with inset mirrors, between the dining room and the kitchen. The winter garden's plaster bust, circa 1830, with swimming goggles.* ***Opposite right, from top:*** *Nino Zoncada's armchairs, designed for an ocean liner, beneath Ilya & Emilia Kabakov's oil on canvas in the living room. The winter garden's Salvagni sconce. A West African 1850's mask on the Tibetan antique door that now tops the living area's cocktail table.*

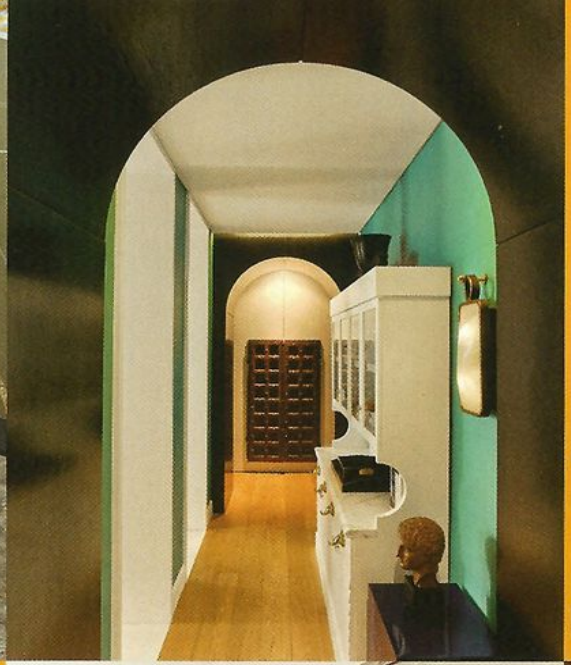


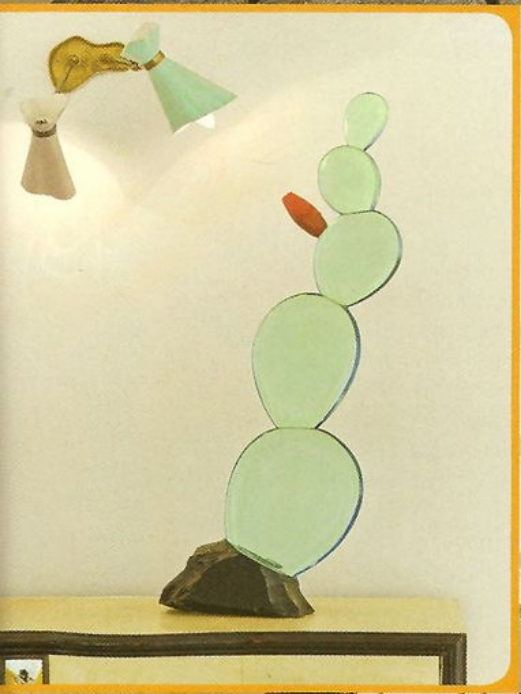
ivory. "I couldn't have walls that reminded me of butter," he quips. So pure white paint went almost everywhere. "During sunsets in Rome, everything turns orange," he explains. "If you have colored walls, they become really psychedelic." Because the central corridor, connecting the public spaces to the bedrooms, is windowless, he was able to cover the walls in a blue-green silk.

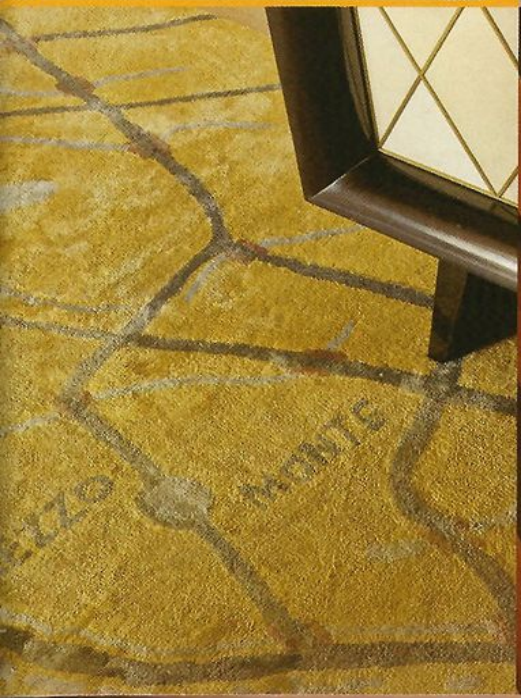
Numerous walls elsewhere came down, leaving him with a dilemma, as each original room had a different marble floor. "I ended up with a patchwork," he says. "But, out of respect for the past, I didn't dismantle it." Instead, he laid oak planks on top of most of the marble. He did rip it out in the kitchen and the master bathroom, then laid new marble in alternating black and white stripes.

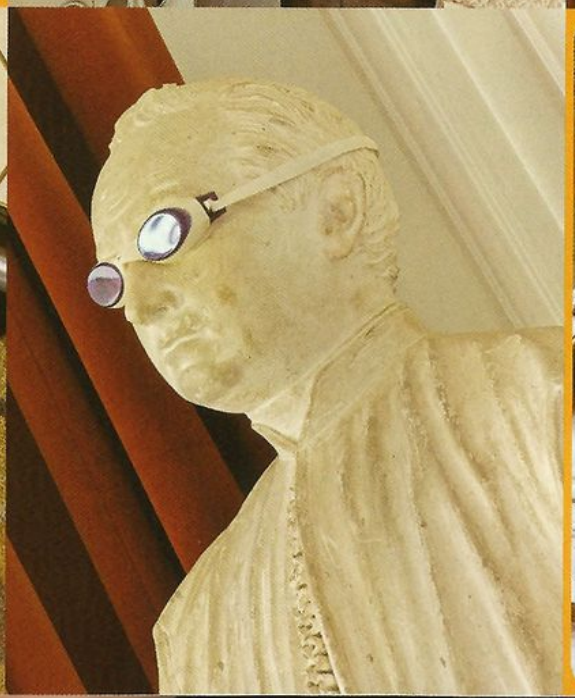
Ask Salvagni about his design heroes, and the first names he'll mention are Gio Ponti and Paolo Buffa. The work of both is present: Ponti's lacquered ash chair and set of glass vases, Buffa's parchment-covered cabinet and leather-topped game table. But Italian 20th-century masters are only one element of the boldly eclectic furnishings. "I don't think things necessarily have to match in terms of style and era," Salvagni says. "If a piece is beautifully proportioned, it automatically looks good with another object of beauty." So his wife's grandmother's Louis XV console in marble and gold leaf can stand next to a pair of 1950's yellow armchairs, designed for an ocean liner, and the aforementioned Emerald side tables. His own limited-editions also include the Spider chandelier in the dining room and the Earring sconces in the central hallway.

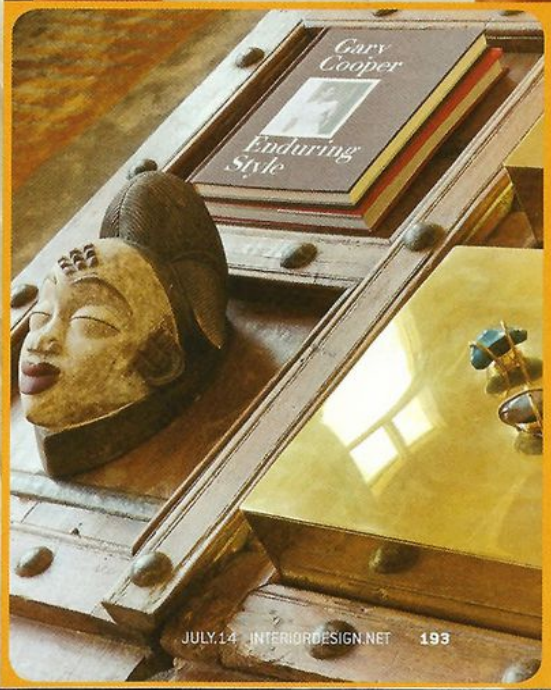








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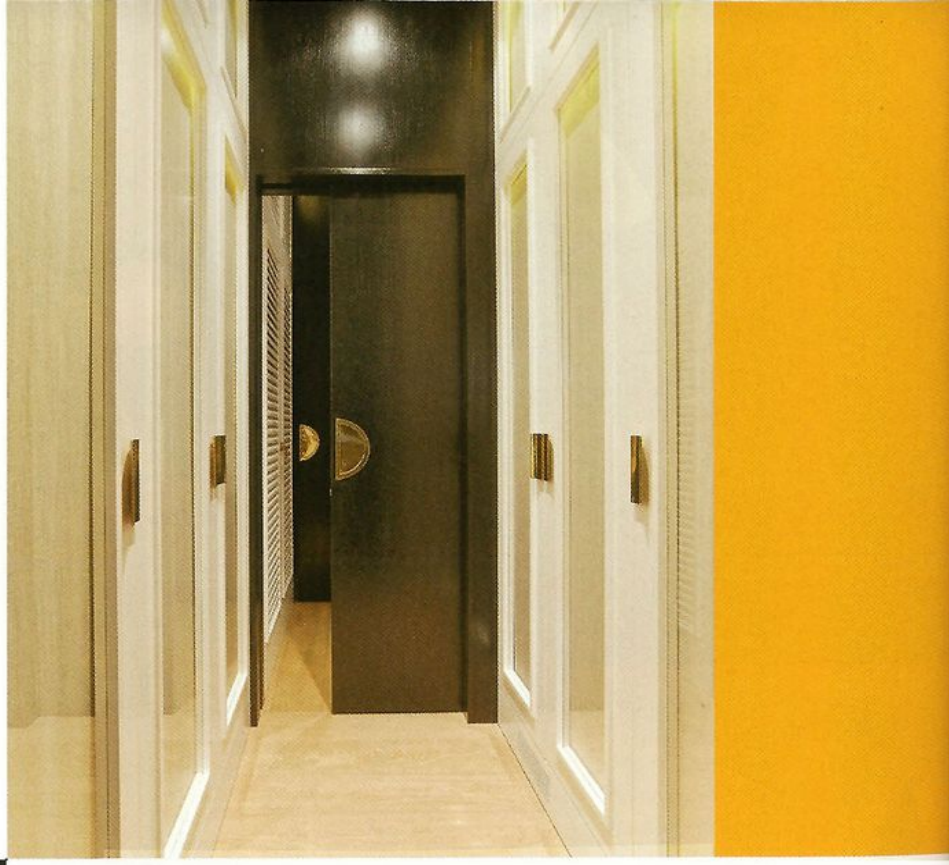
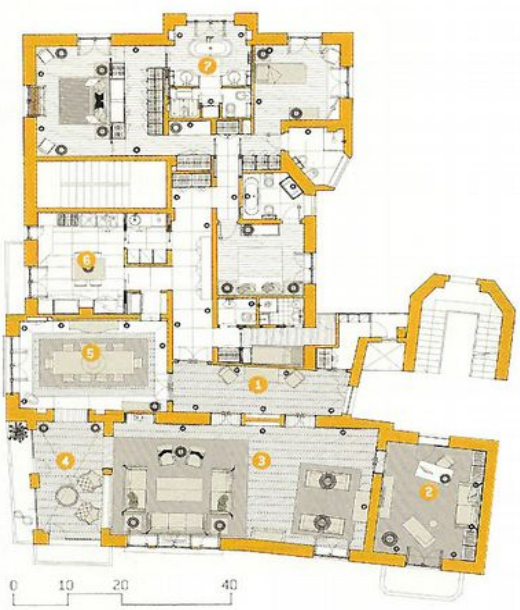


Artwork likewise ranges from pieces with family links to blue-chip modern and contemporary names. The stern-looking man in the 19th-century portrait in the kitchen is an ancestor of his wife. "He used to be in the powder room, but I thought that was a little too much for him," Salvagni says, laughing. In the winter garden off the living room is a plaster bust of a former owner of a medieval palazzo that now belongs to Salvagni's family. "I just retrieved it from the warehouse—I've had him since I was at university," he continues. Today, the bust sports a pair of swimming goggles. Artwork gets more "serious" in the living room, home to a large surreal composition by Ilya & Emilia Kabakov and even a small self-portrait by Giorgio de Chirico, the latter a gift from Salvagni's father.

Intended as a present from Salvagni to his own 4-year-old son, meanwhile, is the model of a yacht that sits in front of the dining room's window. "He didn't like it in his bedroom, so I put it here," Salvagni says. Who knows for how long? Odds are, it could be the next thing to change.



1. ENTRY
2. LIBRARY
3. LIVING ROOM
4. WINTER GARDEN
5. DINING ROOM
6. KITCHEN
7. MASTER SUITE

Opposite left, from top: *Cotton upholsters the custom bench in the library. An Alvar Aalto stool accompanies the Foster + Partners tub in the master bathroom.* ***Opposite right:*** *Custom brass handles open the sliding doors of the dressing room.*

Below: *The master bedroom's photographs by Zhang Huan show an ancient fountain depicting the Roman god Oceanus.*

PRODUCT SOURCES

FROM FRONT **POGGENPOHL:** CABINETRY (KITCHEN). **MIELE:** OVENS, COOKTOP. **LEFROY BROOKS:** SINK FITTINGS (KITCHEN), SINK, SINK FITTINGS, TUB FITTINGS, TOWEL RACK (BATHROOM). **DEDAR:** WHITE, YELLOW CHAIR FABRIC (LIVING ROOM), CHAIR FABRIC (WINTER GARDEN, DINING ROOM), CURTAIN FABRIC (ENTRY, LIBRARY). **MAISON GERARD:** CHANDELIER (DINING ROOM), WHITE LAMP, FACETED TABLES (LIVING ROOM), SCONCES (HALL, WINTER GARDEN). **FONTANAARTE:** SCONCE (ENTRY), GLASS LAMP, ROUND SIDE TABLE (LIVING ROOM). **LORO PIANA:** SOFA FABRIC (LIVING ROOM), CURTAIN FABRIC (WINTER GARDEN, BATHROOM). **RUBELLI:** BENCH FABRIC (LIBRARY), WALL COVERING (BEDROOM). **DURAVIT:** TUB (BATHROOM). **ARTEK:** STOOL. **THROUGHOUT** **DAMIANI MARMI:** STONE SUPPLIER. **FARROW & BALL:** PAINT.