



Warm terracotta and sandy yellow facades, punctuated by forest green shutters, are typical of Portofino



# SUNNY SIDE UP

In sun-drenched Portofino, an apartment in a fisherman's house has been turned into an idyllic bolthole perfect for la dolce vita

WORDS EMMA J PAGE

PHOTOGRAPHY HELENIO BARBETTA/LIVING INSIDE



## LIVING AREA

'The painted ceiling takes its cue from the colours typical of this stretch of coast,' says Tommaso. You can hear the sound of the sea from the balcony.

1970s safari **armchairs**, LTWID Auction House. **Coffee table**, Tine K Home. 1980s red ceramic **lamp**, Marcello Cuneo. Orange **side table**, HKliving. Bouclé **sofa**, La Redoute. **Artworks** by Andrea Gallotti. Portello **rug**, Terrazze collection by Elena Caponi for Mohebban





This is essentially a fisherman's house,' says designer Tommaso Calini of the Ligurian apartment that he renovated with his partner in life and work, Alessandra Cervia. That's an understated appraisal that belies a host of innovative touches and vibrant design motifs – although at its heart, this home is all about going back to basics and enjoying la dolce vita in its purest form. The three-bedroom flat, tucked away in the centre of fabled Italian harbour town Portofino, eschews the trend for what Tommaso calls 'over-designed, over-priced interiors' in the area, returning instead to the values of simplicity and colourful minimalism. 'It's a relatively compact layout, designed for friends to come together with their families and kick off their shoes for the summer,' he says. The space honours local craftsmanship and draws inspiration from the town's centuries-old paintbox of vibrant greens, warm terracottas, sandy yellows and lobster pinks.

Bought as a bolthole by a young couple with two small children, the apartment, built in the early 1900s, had plenty going for it, including original curved cornered ceilings and colourful seminato (terrazzo) flooring. The snag was that it comprised just four main rooms and a bathroom. 'The pair are close friends of ours, who also live in Milan,' says Tommaso. 'They wanted to be able to escape the city – sometimes with us and our two young children – for long weekends and lazy summers. The challenge was to make it work for eight or nine people at a time, allowing both for privacy and a sense of relaxed interaction.'

That dilemma was solved by turning the original large kitchen into a main bedroom, which cleverly conceals a shower room within a semi-circular fluted panel. The sitting room was then reworked to house a kitchen corner, while a guest bedroom and a kids' room were created out of the remaining principal spaces, and the bathroom was reconfigured to incorporate both shower and bath. 'We were attracted to a sense of easy living,' says the owner. 'At the same time, we needed a space that was practical, so that meant finding room for an additional bathroom, adding a home-working space to each bedroom and not going for open-plan so as not to disturb any sleeping guests in the mornings.'

Thus the resulting interiors are perfectly poised between serenity and energy, reflecting the apartment's setting: a stone's throw from the town's cobbled piazzetta. Ceilings have been treated to pops of vibrant Ligurian red or sky blue, inspired in part by the tones of the original marble and crushed stone floors. Wallpaper by Fornasetti playfully reflects the coastal setting, while artwork by Andrea Gallotti adds a contemporary Italian twist.

Textural elements appear throughout, most compellingly in the ceilings and cupboard fronts, which have been inlaid with Vienna straw in homage to the iconic Chiavari chair, invented in the region and prized for its straw components and lightweight

nature. 'Virtually every fisherman in the area drags that chair out to the beach, sitting on it to unravel nets,' says Tommaso. 'We referenced that by commissioning dining chairs from Paolo and Gabriele Levaggi, whose family have been immersed in Liguria's chair-making tradition for three generations.'

Those slow-paced, heat-infused days are perfectly captured in this space. Above all, it's a home designed for relaxed living. 'It's about friendship, family, a simple setting and good food,' says Tommaso. 'After all, that's the backbone of a good Italian life.'

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**Husband-and-wife design team  
Tommaso Calini and  
Alessandra Cervia  
of Aptitude Studio**





## the download

### THE DESIGNERS

Tommaso Calini and Alessandra Cervia of Milan's Aptitude Studio renovated this apartment for a family of four. The owners both work in finance and their children, a boy and a girl, are nine and six.

### THE PROPERTY

A second-floor apartment in central Portofino, built in the early 1900s. It has a kitchen/living area, main bedroom with shower room, two further bedrooms and a bathroom.





## KITCHEN

'We complemented the original tiled floor with a richly veined marble worktop and splashback to add plenty of texture,' says Tommaso. 'A brass kickstand and tapware add understated luxe.'

Custom blue lacquered **kitchen** with brass plinth and handles, Aptitude Studio

## DINING AREA

Even the lighting has a crafted look, adding to the charm.

Ceramic **pendant lights**, Serax. Chiavari **chair** in wood and wicker, Fratelli Levaggi. Wood and rattan **bench**, HKliving. Ceramic **vase** and **bowl**, Tine K Home





## MAIN BEDROOM

'We wanted a study area in every bedroom to facilitate homework for the kids and working from home for the adults,' says the owner. To let the original flooring pop, decoration was kept minimal.

Photographic **artwork** by Maurizio Galimberti. Pink velvet **chair**, La Redoute. Similar small **writing desk**, Abigail Ahern. **Headboard**, Kave Home. **Bedsread** in Monterey fabric, Jim Thompson. Petal **pendant light**, Georges







## EN SUITE

'The curved shower room is defined by fluted slats,' says Tommaso. 'We added powder pink hexagonal tiles to contrast with the olive paintwork.'

Pink concrete **basin**, Elle and James Concrete. Bronze **taps**, Neve Rubinetterie. **Wall light**, Zangra





WE DON'T LIKE TO OVER-CORRECT A SPACE - WE OPT TO EMBRACE IMPERFECTIONS, WHETHER THAT'S MARKS ON AN ORIGINAL FLOOR OR A LACK OF STRAIGHT LINES

## BEDROOM

'The largest bedroom is reserved for guests,' says the owner. 'It means that it can accommodate a double bed, plus a sofa bed for two.' The painted wardrobe and the raffia and rattan pendant light were vintage finds.

Straw **baskets**, Tine K Home. **Artwork** by Andrea Gallotti. Chiavari **chair** in wood and wicker, Fratelli Levaggi. Eames Hang-it-all **coat rack**, Vitra

## MAIN BATHROOM

'Our one requirement was to fit a shower space in the main bedroom and a proper bath for the kids in the main bathroom,' says the owner. Alessandra and Tommaso opted for a warm, off-white scheme, adding a porthole in the wall to channel light into the fluted shower cabin next door.

**Pendant light**, HKliving. **Stool**, La Redoute. **Towel**, Tine K Home. Bronze **taps**, Neve Rubinetterie. Similar **sanitaryware**, Duravit

