



# OUT WITH THE NEW

An Italian design couple have let a passion for vintage style direct the clever reinvention of their 19th-century apartment in Milan

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## cheat sheet

**Who lives here** Anna Carbone, founder and creative director of design studio The Chic Fish; Giovanni Gennari, the marketing and communications director at Fornasetti and co-founder of The Chic Fish; and their son, Tito.

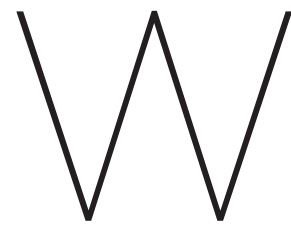
**Style of home** The 120-square-metre apartment is located in a 19th-century building in central Milan.

**🕒** The couple bought the apartment in May 2013 and spent six months planning; the renovation took 90 days.

**\$\$\$\$** Approximate cost was \$160,000 (including all the vintage pieces).



**LIVING AREA** New cement floor tiles bring a modicum of colour to the apartment. Vintage Chesterfield from England. **FAMILY PORTRAIT** Giovanni and Anna, pictured with son Tito, both wear two hats in a work sense. "I'm a graphic designer who mixes illustration with interior design to create even more interesting projects," says Anna, who now works from home.



Walk into Anna Carbone and Giovanni Gennari's Milan apartment and you might think the rooms have been left to crumble over the centuries. Their walls are rough, electrical wires are exposed and the decor harks to bygone eras. The

old-world look, however, did not occur by accident. The home, thoughtfully designed and curated by the creative couple, is an honest reflection of their shared love of vintage interiors and second-hand objects that hum with a connection to the past.

Anna and Giovanni run a multidisciplinary design studio called The Chic Fish. It kicked off as a blog in 2011, when readers were quick to jump on board with the couple's passion for 'contemporary vintage', a style direction that gives a new context to old things. When it came time for them to design their own home, they embraced their love of nostalgia and set out to create a space that brought the past into the present.

During their first inspection in 2013, Anna and Giovanni were drawn to the glimmers of beauty in the bones of the 19th-century building. They saw beyond the overpowering yellow and blue walls, damaged laminate timber flooring and tiny red kitchen. They loved its ornate doorways, the terrace that would offer them just enough outdoor entertaining space, and the fact that the building was located in a neighbourhood with a sense of *vecchia Milano*, meaning 'old Milan', full of small stores and friendly bars.

Completed in 90 days by builders and craftsmen, the renovation involved stripping back surfaces, gutting the kitchen and bathroom, and adding reclaimed materials that showed signs of old age. "The material sourcing phase was quite long and difficult because we went all over Italy, visiting every secondhand dealer we know," says Anna. "We only wanted original materials and it wasn't easy to find them." The tireless hunting paid off, as the play of aged texture has resulted in a creative home that feels layered and alive with stories of the past.

Some of the ceilings were removed and opened up to expose the beams, and the yellow and blue walls were taken back to reveal the original plaster. In the main bedroom, the decorated walls were stamped by hand with a motif Anna designed, resulting in a feminine pattern that's in pretty contrast to the industrial look of the cement, timber and iron in other parts of the home.

The cement tiles in the living room and office were sourced from a "secret secondhand dealer", Anna coyly offers, while the parquet flooring is made of timbers salvaged from a demolition site. The living space's iron and glass wall, installed by the couple



**HALL (this page and opposite bottom)**

Anna and Giovanni acquired the chairs from a private chapel via auction. Other vintage chairs, artworks and quirky accessories, such as the dartboard on the back of the door, are dotted throughout.

**KITCHEN** The benchtops are made from old pieces of rusted iron and the cupboard's iron doors were crafted by a blacksmith to match. Bespoke table illuminated by Studio Wieki Somers lights.

DINING CHAIRS: ROSSANA ORLANDI

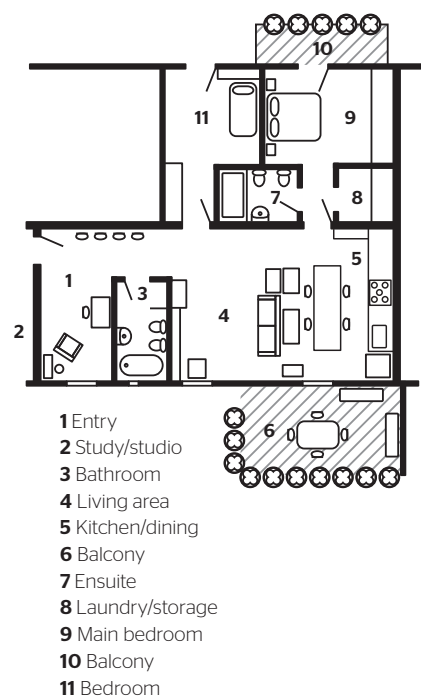


to separate the kitchen and living room, is the feature that drives home the industrial feel of the apartment. The impressive structure was pulled out of the Lingotto Fiat Factory in Turin, which was once an acknowledged icon of Italian industrialism and even had a race track on its roof. In this residential setting, the floor-to-ceiling wall opens up the kitchen to the rest of the home and helps delineate the space without sacrificing any light.

“The kitchen is probably our favourite room in the house,” says Anna. “We spend most of our time there. We cook, we chat, we design and so on.” The red kitchen was jammed into a corner on the other side of the room before the couple reconfigured the layout and spread the new one across the opposite wall, closer to the terrace door. To eat, everyone gathers around the bespoke dining table, which Anna calls “the protagonist” of the space. It’s made from a piece of cedar with raw edges, found by the couple at a sawmill, where they picked out the timber slab and later had a blacksmith make the legs.

Together, all the custom finishes and bespoke pieces create a fitting backdrop for the couple’s prized possessions and collections. The home is a shining example of a ‘new vintage’ space done well, but it means so much more to the family, which now includes son Tito. Anna muses on the idea: “I think what we love most about our home is the fact that we have been able to represent ourselves with this house: it perfectly reflects our personalities, our history, our travels and our style.”

*The Chic Fish Studio; thechicfishstudio.com*



**DINING AREA** Looking from the main bedroom through the dining area and out to the terrace takes in the stunning 19th-century door frame, the only remaining original element. **ROOM DIVIDER** Lightly separating the dining space from the book-piled sitting room is a metal structure that once featured in the 1923 Fiat Lingotto car factory.

“THE MAIN CONCEPT BEHIND THE INTERIOR DESIGN WAS REMOVING LAYERS RATHER THAN ADDING NEW ONES, A ‘SUBTRACTION’ THAT ALLOWED US TO EMPHASISE RAW MATERIALS AND EXPOSE ELEMENTS SUCH AS IRON, CEMENT AND WOOD”

ANNA CARBONE, HOMEOWNER



OLD LAMP SHADE PENDANT LIGHT (OPPOSITE), PIET HEIN EEK



**LIVING ROOM** An old anatomical print reinforces the pared-back feel. The radiator is secondhand and the floor is reclaimed timber, found on a demolition site and arranged in a parquetry pattern.  
**STUDIO/OFFICE** This space was created next to the front door. It has an internal window, allowing light to pass through and brighten the entrance. Farrow & Ball 'Bumble Bee' wallpaper, Ascraft + Decortex.



**BATHROOM** The timber floorboards continue in here, where modern convenience is camouflaged by industrial metal accessories. Bath from Cargo Milano and pedestal basin by Simas.  
**MAIN BEDROOM** The walls were hand-stamped by Gouache, a local wall-art company, using a motif Anna designed. Bed cover by Draga & Aurel.

**GREAT FINDS**

**contemporary vintage**

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**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT** Kirby bookshelf, \$129, Officeworks. Oriel Lighting 'Plato' pendant light, \$127, The Lighting Lounge. Real Good copper chair, \$629, Blu Dot. Wooden chest of drawers #9, \$1760, Society Inc. Vintage leather Chesterfield sofa, \$3399, Interiors Online.

ADDITIONAL PRODUCT SOURCING: NATALIE JOHNSON