



MONTERONI D'ARBIA (SIENA): THE EXTRAORDINARY RESTORATION OF PODERE PANICO

ENCHANTMENT IN THE CRETE SENESI

A rebirth that we're proud to reveal. The man behind it is architect Fulvio Di Rosa.
An exceptional professional. We've known him for twelve years. To us, he's a master.
The work says it loud and clear: it's a restoration in the truest, most profound and precise sense of the word.
The project has extended from the landscape down to the smallest details of the decor.
Here, tradition and contemporary style enter into a dialogue in serene, thoughtful equilibrium

by **Antonio Bianchi** - photographs by **Marco Grillo**
and **Fulvio Di Rosa**





*Podere Panico is located in Monteroni d'Arbia (Siena). It takes its name from a characteristic grain similar to millet. The farm was part of a large estate called San Fabiano. The structure, now converted into a single-family holiday home, opened in March (its website is [poderepanico.com](http://www.poderepanico.com)). The works - commissioned by the Canadian **Luxus Group** (www.luxusgroup.com) – took two years to complete. This wide-*

ranging restoration was entirely curated by architect Fulvio Di Rosa (www.fulviودیrosa.com) and extends to the landscape. “When we examined old aerial maps, we discovered that the forest, which had grown up spontaneously after the houses were abandoned, concealed a beautiful olive grove,” he tells us. “We reinforced the terraces holding the grove and replanted the missing olive trees.”

There’s also an impressive swimming pool: in this area, pools must be quadrangular and no bigger than 100 m2. Altering the landscape with a non-uniform pool would have negative repercussions on the entire landscape. “In the Crete Senesi, this is a cherished concept. The spaces are vast, and everything can be seen from kilometres away”.

We’re proud to present this true restoration. For many reasons. Firstly, because it is the gift of one of the most talented and influential specialists in architectural restoration that CasAntica has met: architect Fulvio Di Rosa. An exceptional figure. We met him in 2005 while visiting Borgo di Vagli (see CasAntica no. 6, and, in a later appearance, no. 9). We’re sure that many of our fond readers will recall the hamlet near Cortona (Arezzo), which was so well restored that it won international acclaim and the approval of Frances Mayes, author of the famed novel *Under the Tuscan Sun*. At the time, CasAntica had just made its debut, and meeting Fulvio Di Rosa served as a milestone for us, bringing us luck in a way. It’s been more than twelve years. We’ve wanted to write about one of





On these pages: the entrance hall of the main building, which dates to the 1600s and was expanded through the early 1900s. Here there were two stables, bordered by a wall that hid a marvellous weight-bearing arch. The arch has been brought back into view.

And now the hall gives an exclusive view of the spectacular staircase and all the adjoining spaces. A curious detail: on the table is a display of containers from the Far East. Works of African art – one of Di Rosa's passions – appear in other spaces.

his new projects for some time now. The right opportunity came up while we were working on this issue of *CasAntica*. Di Rosa phoned us again and told us about his most recent project, completed for a Canadian group: *Podere Panico*, in Monteroni d'Arbia, in the Crete Senesi. We were absolutely amazed: a profoundly faithful and fascinating restoration that increases its appeal with each new glimpse. To be frank, there are homes that capture one's attention because they're photogenic or easily seduce the viewer. And there are homes that are cloaked in an allure that unfolds slowly and grows each time. Like the one we present to you on these pages. We explored it and examined it closely over several visits. And each time, it seemed more beautiful to us, more enchanting, refined, thoughtful, cultivated, elegant, visionary...

This consideration has a specific *raison d'être*. In recent years, the world of restoration has shattered in a hundred different directions. "Shabby chic", industrial structural elements, materials associated with a past that appears increasingly recent, and the most playful of

vintage styles have thrown wide the doors to free-spirited creativity that's cheap and cheerful and fits the properties now being restored. Because the most sought-after old buildings (due to their large size, aesthetic potential, location in the landscape...), even in rural areas, are increasingly rare and have given way to buildings with a less impressive history, where an arbitrarily subjective, creative approach is permissible. Certainly, these methods have brought a breezy informality into our field, but they've dissolved our perception of the borders between restoration and renovation.

The home we present to you here hasn't overlooked the criteria underpinning a true conservative restoration. And it revisits them based on a contemporary approach in which the aesthetic aspect is never disconnected from function, and is always well considered (because there is such a thing as a "fake" aesthetic aspect, one that is two-dimensional, picturesque, and interchangeable). *"Podere Panico was part of a vast estate that extended for thousands of hectares south of*







Siena, called San Fabiano,” Fulvio Di Rosa tells us. “Each farm was home to one or more families who devoted their lives to working the surrounding land. After the Second World War, as a consequence of the new laws on agricultural property that followed the end of sharecropping, agricultural estates were gradually abandoned because they were no longer economically sustainable. With that abandonment and the subsequent lack of maintenance, the various farmhouses deteriorated further and further until some of the structures partially or entirely collapsed”.

This wide-ranging project offered the chance to make use of all the wisdom gained over years and years of work: Di Rosa took charge of finding the derelict building, purchasing the property, and restoring of the furniture, the interiors, and the decor, without neglecting the recovery and reclamation of the landscape.

The project was commissioned by **Luxus Group** (www.luxusgroup.com), in Edmonton, the capital of Alberta, Canada. Di Rosa interfaced with **Stephen Petasky**, President of the Canadian group, and **Jon Lawrence**, project supervisor from the Canada office. Today, Podere Panico is a single-family holiday home managed by Luxus Group.

“When faced with a task of such breadth and responsibility, it is important to set some binding principles, some concepts to work by which the client shares,” Di Rosa tells us. “In this particular case, the Canadian group had known me for years, and, above all, they shared my ‘creed’ and my passion for defending and upholding the values of true restoration. On a project level, I consider the total conservation of the property’s structure to be fundamental, both on a physical level – not altering the whole of the load-bearing walls, for instance – and in terms of layout. That includes maintaining the arrangement and size of the doors and windows. Increases in size and additions should be avoided. On a construction level, I consider it fundamental to use old or handmade materials that can be entirely traced back to the originals. It’s also very important to adopt the construction methods and techniques used by the masons of the time”.

These considerations are essential to our field, and yet, they are increasingly infrequent. And there are those who tend to associate the concept of “restoration” with an outdated approach, frozen in a past that is entirely disconnected from contemporary life. Actually, it’s just the opposite. As a rule, restoration introduces and experiments with the most advanced technologies, though they are kept under control, often strategically kept hidden and strictly

The kitchen/dining room area also once held stables, even with partitions for cattle. This area features three appropriately restored arches, one of which is 8 cm lower, and was repaired and re-raised with the help of jacks. The table with a clear, raised top piqued our curiosity. The oak wood was warped, and upon the client’s request, Di Rosa opted for a strategic glass tabletop which is functional and aesthetically very respectful (“When you sit around the table, you really get the feeling you’re setting your silverware down on wood”).









The impressive, entirely cantilevered staircase, might be called a feat of engineering. Fulvio Di Rosa told us about the steel beam hidden by the plastered wall, the three rolled bars supporting each step, about anchoring them to the floor, and about the pilasters that enabled

the depth of the wall to be increased by 15 cm in addition to the 30 cm available. The materials used are glass, steel, and handmade terracotta. When descending the stairs, only the terracotta surfaces are visible. The result a marvellous lightness and flair.

Below and on the following page: views of the two bedroom-suites on the first floor. The unusual arrangement of the furniture was inspired by the structure of the roof with its diagonal beams. The bed faces the same direction with the help of a headboard structure.

The extraordinary bathrooms feature striking sinks hewn from pietra serena and glass panels enclosing the showers. "They're by Guido Giordano," Di Rosa tells us, "an architect and sculptor, highly skilled. He works primarily in brass, bronze, and glass. An old friend of mine.

I involve him in all my important projects".







The silent, geometric world of Marco

The man behind the dazzling images decorating these pages is **Marco Grillo**, who specializes in real estate, interior, and commercial photography. We wanted to meet him, to pay him our compliments, thank him, and hear more about him. Having read through the notes on his website, www.marcogrillo.com, we knew that Marco was born in Paris and moved to Nice while very young. It was in Nice, when he was sixteen, that he fell in love with photography, mastering the language in a school of cinematography techniques and specializing in lighting. We didn't stop at the bio on his website. We asked Marco to give us an even more detailed sketch of himself for readers of CasAntica, revisiting the thrills experienced at Podere Panico. And Marco sent us a wonderfully sincere, fascinating account. Here it is:

I come from film, and I've always taken amateur photographs, out of love and the need to draw something out, more than out of passion. I'd venture to say that I'm obsessed with photography and I'm a compulsive photographer. Not that I take too many photos – in this digital age – but my curiosity knows few bounds! I moved to Tuscany thirteen years ago, and

a real estate agent happened to ask if I wanted to try photographing a house. That day, I discovered a silent, geometric world that fit my personality perfectly. A home is one of the most intimate things there is. Crossing its threshold is like discovering its owner's personality (as well as that of the architect), a bit like seeing them without the social mask they wear every day when they come out of their lair. I work for real estate agents, surveyors, architects, private clients, therefore, people with very different products. But whether it's a house for sale with the boxes ready to move or a work of art, where everything is neat and tidy, I always approach it with the same respect and the desire to "draw out" things that perhaps not even the owner has ever seen.

The work I did in this farmhouse took several months. There are thousands of photos, from the derelict building to the finished product... I was lucky to have worked with **Fulvio Di Rosa** for the Podere Panico project.

Every day I spent working beside him was worth a month in the classroom. Watching him work opened my eyes about many aspects that I didn't grasp before. Even my relationship with the group that owns the



house was particularly stimulating and invigorating. The clients always listened to my ideas. And they trusted me from start to finish.



The ground floor suite. These spaces, filled with light from spectacular arches, were originally used as a stable (now the living area) and storage for carts and farming equipment (currently the bedroom and bathroom). Now it's become a splendid independent residence with a study, parlour, fireplace, bedroom, and bathroom.

ormulated to serve the older elements. The same is true for Podere Panico, whether it's the construction methods, the highly technological materials, comfort, energy performance, or safety. Suffice to say that in terms of energy efficiency Podere Panico now falls under Class A. "The structural and anti-seismic part was handled by the engineering firm Bracciali-Biagini; the plumbing by the engineer Mario Bianchi; and the electrical system by the engineer Pietro Pelucchini, all from Arezzo", Di Rosa emphasizes. "I think that a restoration project is successful when the people living there get the distinct feeling that

they are experiencing something unique: living in the past, with its proportions, its colours, its shades, its atmospheres, its emotions..." Fulvio Di Rosa tells us. "Tuscan country architecture is simple and minimal, as are the furnishings. The interiors only had a few pieces. The most 'sophisticated' of them were in the bedrooms: wooden or cast-iron beds, wardrobes, chests, drawers... And, of course, there was no bathroom". In this project we took this simplicity and minimalism to heart, pairing traditional furniture and contemporary pieces. "The latest design, especially in Italy, is characterized by the same simple style, by a taste for the line, for proportions, and precision in finishings".



What's striking is the impressive way the ingredients are balanced: at Podere Panico, tradition and contemporary style enter into a dialogue in serene, thoughtful equilibrium. And note that the same thoughtful harmony characterizes the combination of furnishings with structural elements: the old terracotta floors, the plastered walls (*"Always using lime-based tones that draw on the original colours, later patinated to achieve the desired antiqued effect"*), the splendid exposed-beam ceilings, the local stone materials such as pietra serena (used to create the sinks)... There is a wealth of refined touches that are disarmingly believable yet entirely innovative (it would seem to be a contradiction

in terms, but that's the sensation one gets in the most selective architectural restorations), that we literally fell in love with: for instance, the travertine revisited with parallel grooves (a subtle and unusually refine device used to identify the elements that were not part of the original buildings), the brilliant glass panels – produced by **Guido Giordano**, an extraordinary architect and artist – that enclose the showers, the bronze-effect brass used for the large windows and doorways on the ground floor (*"Note the slimness of the fixtures and the strategic way we've moved the window a few centimetres away from the brick wall so as not to interfere with it"*), the LED lights in Cor-ten shades (each individual element was personally

This hall stands in a building that dates to the late 1800s-early 1900s. The buildings were in good conditions, except for a lower building that now holds the keeper's lodgings. "We had to demolish this structure and rebuild it with the original materials, which were so plentiful that they could be used for all the other areas".





On these pages: the bedroom and bathroom of the suite. The bedroom features a handsome four-poster bed. "It was missing its footrest," Fulvio Di Rosa reveals. "A very skilled smith recreated it". The bathroom, with its

Jacuzzi, boasts amazing "etched" glass panels by Guido Giordano and the sink hewn from pietra serena, set against a glass doorway ("The ventilated walls shield all these spaces, including those which appear the most exposed,

from indiscreet eyes. In other words, one can contemplate the landscape without being spied on. From this suite, in particular, you can take in the landscape almost to Siena").

On the following pages: some external and internal views of the annex, which dates to the 1800s. Originally, it was entirely used as a hay-barn, with a double-height ceiling. Now it is structured in two levels, with a brand-new loft created using I-beams.

A standout detail: note the travertine walls with parallel grooves (creating a vibrant "textile" effect), used to identify the elements that were not part of the original building.









The ground floor of the former hay-barn is home to a living area, a bathroom, a small gym, and a corner sauna. Two bedrooms were created on the upper level, equipped with their respective - and impressive - bathrooms. These spaces are characterized by the unusual appeal of the brickwork in the windows which forms shapes against the light. In the bathrooms we again find sinks made of pietra serena, resting on and/or hewn from continuous surfaces in an oval shape ("The shape is no accident, but is inspired by the old mangers, the troughs for the pigs"). The light sources were designed by Di Rosa himself, both in the interiors and the exteriors.

designed by Fulvio Di Rosa), the steel and the glass of the interior staircase (conceptually reminiscent of the staircases that once connected the sleeping level to the attics) and the wood of the utility furnishings, which is pressed, texturized, and varnished to distinguish the elements that were not a part of the original environment without disrupting the colour scheme of the enclosure... These are strikingly refined touches

to our most informed and experienced readers. To those who are simply aficionados, they're an excellent demonstration of what it means to honour the older elements when designing. In the world of true architectural restoration, the hand of the best planners is only barely perceptible. Except when it is understood, subtly and increasingly, with each new glimpse.

