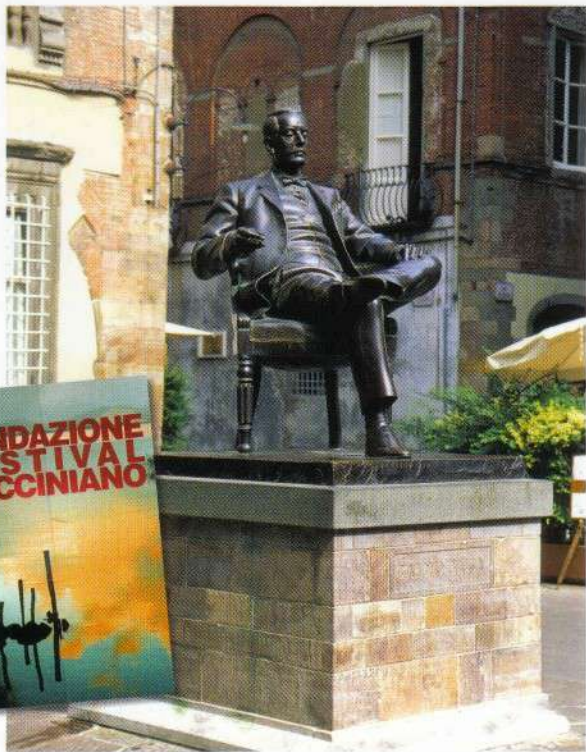


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CIVIL ENGINEER Fulvio di Rosa confesses that he has never been 'engineer-minded' and a shiver still runs down his back when somebody calls him *ingegnere*. He always wanted to be an architect, but at the time he was deciding upon a career in the late 1960s architects were considered to be second class professionals.

In the mid-70s Fulvio graduated in civil engineering from the Turin Polytechnic Institute. Immediately after graduating he went to work on a project with the renowned Brazilian Architect, Oscar Niemeyer, creating the European Group headquarters for the FAIA group at Pianezza in Turin. Soon after



he finished, he was appointed manager of a company in Brazil dealing with the design and sale of a large urban site and he remained there for eight years. It was a tough experience but once back in Italy he realised that after that no project would seem impossible

and since then Fulvio has always been thrilled by challenges and new ideas.

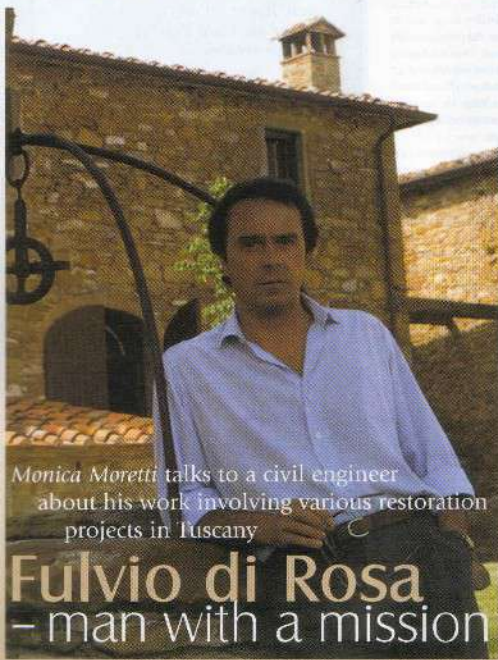
TURIN TO TUSCANY

Although originally from Turin, Fulvio found Tuscany was to become a natural site for his 'visions'. He was, in the 1980s, probably one of the first to think that people would like to share an original, medieval hamlet for their second home. And he was right. Since then he has restored many of them during his 20 year career: Senaiolo, a cluster of rural buildings dating from the 18th century, Sogna, a 13th-century village, Carbonaia - a building dating back to the 10th century that was originally a convent, Palazzo Benzi-Ulivelli, an elegant 15th-century building in the heart of Montepulciano and finally Borgo di Vagli - a 14th-century village. He says that his work on these projects was for 'a bunch of dreamers', like him, from all over the world. They are now all good friends of his and his family - his wife Aurora and 13-year-old son Edoardo.

The hardest part of his work, Fulvio says, is actually related to what needs to be done before the project is started, such as finding the right place. This, of course, is followed by the stress of purchasing it and the endless procedures and bureaucracy can become a real nightmare even for somebody like him, who should be accustomed to it all by now. He admits that he finds it hard to be patient despite his best efforts!

RESTORING THE PAST

Taking Borgo di Vagli, a Club Residence, as an example, Fulvio believes that to achieve a high standard of finish in a country house, it is necessary to go back in time to get into the mind and hands of the farmer, the builder and the craftsman who, centuries ago, created these places of homogeneity and practicality. There is no need to invent anything new, only to 'copy'. 'Naturally' says Fulvio, 'to copy it is necessary to understand how things were done or, as often happens, how the original would have looked'.



Monica Moretti talks to a civil engineer about his work involving various restoration projects in Tuscany

Fulvio di Rosa
- man with a mission



BURYING THE BOBCAT

Once Fulvio had solved the problem of dividing the properties up into living units he had to try to find an acceptable compromise between modern requirements of occupants and safeguarding the important architectural features. Thus, on the one hand he had this almost maniacal search for 'how it was' and on the other the use of elements (furniture and so on) as distinctive and unique as possible, avoiding repetition so that each house was totally individual.

There are also many reasons why certain areas have remained unaltered – such as the doors and windows – because it means that the amount of light entering the rooms is the same as it once was. Fulvio took this decision because he appreciates the need to preserve the 'Tuscan light' which filters through these small apertures, spreading across the walls. 'There are never deep shadows' explains Fulvio 'yet always a subtle brightness that changes during the day, following the movement of the sun.'

There have been a few obstacles in the way of creating the stunning and peaceful location Vagli has become today. As Fulvio explains 'At the beginning of the restoration, on a Friday afternoon, I was checking, with my workers, the foundation of a part of the hamlet where we were starting work the following week. A little Bobcat mini-digger was clearing the area of mud, rubble and debris. We left it there over a particularly rainy and windy weekend. On Monday, when we arrived on site, the post digger was under tons of bricks and stones as the three-storey wall had collapsed due to the heavy rain. It took several days to remove the material by hand but eventually we got to the machine, still with its key in the panel. Believe it or not, we turned the key, pushed the button and with a little hesitation, it started up again!'

Fulvio has many passions outside his work – he has always been fascinated by art, and has a notable collection of both ancient and contemporary art, he also loves music (several

years ago he established the Atopos Foundation (www.atoposmusic.com) for the study and promotion of contemporary music) and he says that he quite simply has an appreciation of beauty in all its forms, which is why he has toiled over every last detail of his projects.

VISITORS ARE SMITTEN

Frances Mayes, author of *Under a Tuscan Sun*, said of her friend Fulvio and his work 'He asks himself at every decision point, how would the original owners have solved this problem? By that deceptively simple guiding principle he stays true to the spirit of place that one feels so strongly in the village. I've watched and learned from the restoration at every stage. His is the best work I have seen. Recently I spent an afternoon photographing architectural details: carvings over doors, stone roofs, deftly placed steps, and corners of buildings against the sky. Fulvio di Rossa has an artist's eye so the deep pleasure that draws me over and over to Vagli continues to come from its beauty and harmony with the land.'

Aurota, Fulvio's wife, is said to jokingly question whether she married a normal man or just a 'crazy, visionary guy'. However, there is no doubt that anyone who meets him will find that he is 'a compelling person' as she also often describes him. **EMM**

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