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Under the Tuscan sky

Reached by passing through dense chestnut woodlands, this hilltop 18th-century farmhouse is a homage to its magical surroundings

WORDS EMMA J PAGE **PHOTOGRAPHY** MONICA SPEZIA/LIVING INSIDE



LOGGIA

This newly reworked space links to the living area, with tilt-and-turn windows allowing full opening to the outdoors.

Wall lights, Visual Comfort & Co. Custom side tables topped in brushed brass (foreground); Calacatta Oro marble (background), Stoneone. Daybed, Every-Day. Lemon Tree cushions, Morris & Co



SITTING ROOM

Contemporary and classic merge seamlessly in this space, which is anchored by a colourful lacquer coffee table.

Bespoke sofa, Every-Day; covered in Sahara fabric, Mariaflora. Daisy cushions, Morris & Co. Custom coffee table and leather pouffes, Every-Day.

Alabaster chandelier, Possoni Illuminazione.

Artwork by Susie Muise



Picture Chianti in Tuscany and your mind's eye will most likely conjure rolling cypress-studded hills in a patchwork of greens, amber or burnt ochre, winding roads and groves of vines. It's a vista captured by countless artists through the centuries, including Italy's precursor to the Impressionists, the Macchiaioli. It's little wonder then, that artist Susie Muise turned to her paintbrushes when it came to adding the finishing touches to the farmhouse in Gaiole that she shares with her husband John, an endodontist.

Their kitchen became her canvas for a scene of vines, flowers, dry stone walls and hilltop medieval villages. But the wall mural is also a clever way of expanding the room's compact proportions. 'I actually replicated the landscape exactly as it is outside, as if there were no walls,' says Susie, who was inspired by the colourful hand-painted murals in Ginori's flagship store in Florence. 'So you'll find it's true to life – including the pool and vineyard above our kitchen door – which is what you'd see from there if you weren't inside.'

It's a creative approach typical of this thoughtful renovation, underpinned by the efforts of architects and life partners Giuseppe Aresu and Giuseppe Argiolas of Studio G+ Architetti. Enlisted by Susie and John to preserve the essence of the house, which dates to the 18th century, their aim was to pay homage to the surrounding landscape while gently contemporising the interiors. 'From our very first visit in 2023, we recognised the charm of the place,' recalls Giuseppe Aresu. 'The house is reached by passing through dense chestnut woods, until, arriving at the top of a hill, you experience an extraordinary 360-degree view. The surrounding land was historically divided into farmsteads, including this one, which formed part of a widespread productive system that shaped the Chianti landscape for centuries. Our vision was to strengthen that deep connection between the house and its rural setting.'

Throughout, the building's modest farmhouse origins are sensitively expressed. 'At its heart, this is a

three-bedroom home, with sloping ceilings, compact windows and classic terracotta floors,' says Susie. 'We had no wish to try and dress that up; instead we wanted to celebrate its unique features.' Nonetheless, the couple undertook painstaking work to make good and enhance this ancient building, from taking up every floor and updating utilities before carefully replacing it, to swapping out timber window frames with narrower steel profiles, the better to enlarge the view. 'We enjoy cosy rooms much more than huge spaces,' says Susie, who, with John, divides her time between their Tuscan farmhouse and a home in Idaho's Sun Valley. 'The intimate scale of the rooms is magic to my sensibility.'

Though there are American-inspired touches here – a farmhouse table was replaced by a marble, brass and oak island, for example – the couple leant into the local vernacular as the renovation unfolded. 'We did inevitably get slowed down by local bureaucracy,' says Susie, 'but we took that as a positive, because an Italian approach to design eventually seeped into our blood.' The results are clear: there are curves aplenty, from the arched inset bar in the living room to the delicate shape of the iron handrail, while the stove features a rustic tiled splashback and walls have been left uneven.

Perhaps the biggest feather in this farmhouse's cap is the reworked loggia, which now connects seamlessly to the living room. Running across the first floor of the building, the space was originally exposed to the elements and could only be accessed from outside. 'Incorporating it and introducing glazing created both space and light, plus the opportunity to enjoy the landscape across the seasons,' says Giuseppe. 'That most challenging aspect was also the most rewarding.'

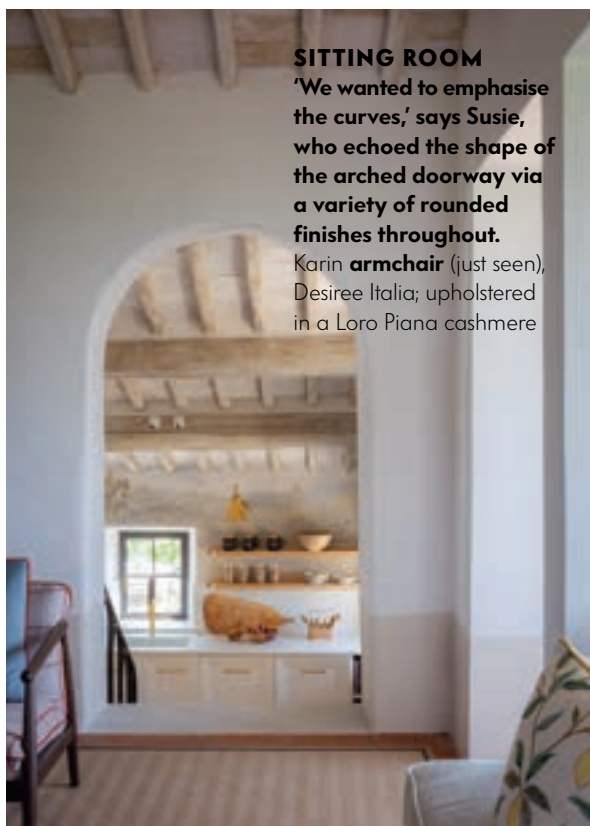
The couple spend their summers with the doors and windows open, living between inside and out. John, a keen baker, spends time in the kitchen, while Susie tackles the garden. 'Our joy comes from the connection we've made to the land,' she reflects. 'You only have to cast your eye across the horizon to feel more alive.'

■ gstudio-architetti.it

"I love pattern and John prefers plains – colour-wise, I am spring, he is autumn, but we've found a way for both to sit side by side"



POOL
Located at the highest point of the grounds, this overlooks the majestic landscape of Chianti. Pool edge and surrounding walkway paved in hammered Trieste stone slabs, Stoneone



SITTING ROOM
'We wanted to emphasise the curves,' says Susie, who echoed the shape of the arched doorway via a variety of rounded finishes throughout. Karin armchair (just seen), Desiree Italia; upholstered in a Loro Piana cashmere

4 rules for a **GENTLE MODERNISATION**

The home's architects reveal key considerations during a renovation of a historic home

1. Start with a careful observation of the place: consider the natural light at different times of day, the existing materials and the original proportions of the spaces. The aim is not to erase but to interpret.
2. Create fluid connections between spaces. We look to overcome the rigidity of traditional layouts by encouraging a sense of movement throughout the space, through new openings, custom-designed furniture, or the consistent use of materials and finishes.
3. Design with wellbeing in mind. Comfort is not only an aesthetic matter but a sensory one. Consider light, acoustics, ventilation and materials that promote a conscious quality of living.
4. Introduce visual emphasis. We bring something in to strengthen the historic character of each room, whether a custom-designed piece of furniture, an artwork, a textured wall or an architectural detail.

KITCHEN

A mural painted by Susie adds an ethereal feel.

The couple added the island finished with a marble worktop because John is a keen baker.

Island with Calacatta Michelangelo marble top, Studio G+ Architeti.

Lighting and cabinetry handles, Il Bronzetto. Stools, Maison Louis Drucker





STAIRCASE

The sandstone staircase treads were reworked by covering them with marble and adding an elegant stair rail.

Handcrafted **railing** with solid brass inserts, designed by Studio G+ Architetti; made by bronzesmith Alessandro Bernardeschi

BEDROOM

'It was important to us that each room featured direct access to the garden,' says Susie.

Bleached and brushed oak **vanity** with Breccia Capraia marble top, designed by Studio G+ Architetti; legs and mirror by Florentine bronze artisan, Tommaso Ugolini. Melange **wall lights**, Visual Comfort & Co

MAIN BEDROOM

'I wasn't sure John would go for a floral but it complements the neutral textures he favours,' says Susie of the headboard.

Headboard in Secret Garden, Raoul Textiles. Linen **canopy**, Blooming.

Cushions in Carnival, Christopher Farr Cloth; Ottoman Spot, Liberty. Custom **bed** with bleached and brushed oak **base**, PNG Arredamenti su misura. **Bench in** Dehors Eze White, Loro Piana