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ON A HIGHER LEVEL

Architect Achille Salvagni transforms the top floor of a storied palazzo in Rome into the perfect setting for a young family's treasured antiques and contemporary Italian designs

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In the living room of a young family apartment designed by Achille Salvagni in Rome's Palazzo Colonna, the sofa, upholstered in a velvet by Dedar, and cocktail table are custom designs, the 18th-century side table is Italian, and the custom-made rug is from Tibet. See Resources



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or richness of history and for grandeur, no Roman palace surpasses the Palazzo Colonna, at the foot of the Quirinal Hill. Not even the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles outdoes the pomp and splendor of its Sala Grande. The Bronzinos and the Tintoretts lining the walls of its renowned gallery attest to the Colonna family's enduring wealth and prestige. When the architect and designer Achille Salvagni received a commission to create an apartment on the top floor of the palace, the challenge, he says, was to honor the history of the building and yet "to work in a very light way." His clients were a young couple with two small daughters; he didn't want the past to weigh them down.

The large raw space, just under the palace's roof, had never been lived in. Even the servants' quarters were on a lower floor. The wife had grown up in a Venetian palazzo and had inherited several historical pieces, including a spectacular 18th-century mirror; Salvagni uses them as anchors, surrounding these antiques with furniture of his own design. (He is the creator of two collections: the Achille Salvagni line of carpets, lighting, and furniture; and, with his cousin Fabio Gnessi, the Aldus collection of objects.)

Among the most striking of his pieces is the seven-foot square brass-base cocktail table in the living room, its surface covered with a butter-yellow mantle of stingray skins. "I didn't want this table to overwhelm the space," Salvagni explains. "I wanted it to be very calm—a peaceful conversation center." The stately fireplace in the living room is clad mostly in Noir Saint Laurent, a French marble that was popular during the Baroque era and again in the Deco period. Its interior is peperino, a gray volcanic rock that was already being used by the Etruscans and that's often found in the hearths of Roman palaces—"So it's evident that we're not in Paris but in Rome."

The first thing that catches your eye in the dining room is that ornate Venetian mirror. Salvagni designed the huge oak table, with



A corridor linking the entrance hall to the living area features a pair of sconces by Atelier Sedap; the staircase beyond is lined with a runner of silk. **FACING PAGE, FROM TOP:** The living room's custom-made armchairs are upholstered in a Lelievre velvet, the custom-made chandelier and 1950s sconces are of brass, and the Venetian painting dates from 1795. The kitchen window is original to the palazzo and looks onto the courtyard and the Quirinal Hill beyond. See Resources.





bronze inlays and a bronze frame, to accompany it; he was thinking of the massive Neapolitan tables that found their way into grand Italian mansions in the 1930s, but he wanted something more contemporary and, as usual, lighter. The dining room doors are made of black-stained oak fitted with panels of glowing Fortuny silk, but what's most unusual about them are the vertical bronze belts down the centers, inspired by one of the intricate Roman mosaics in the celebrated gallery downstairs—"It's really insane," Salvagni says.

Because of the somewhat peculiar way the space is laid out, the bedrooms, which are at one end, had to be connected with the living and dining rooms at the other, via a corridor. Salvagni created a long gallery with a rounded vault and installed a breathing space at the center in the form of a small, square room with walls covered in velvet; the scarlet doors are velvet, too. They're not the only splash of color amid the apartment's predominant ivory and bronze. With a nod to the 20th-century French decorator Jean Royère, he designed egg-shaped rose chairs for either side of the fireplace. And a mysterious stairway is carpeted in sea-blue silk. It leads from the living room to a curtain and a bookshelf that covers an unused secondary entrance; trying to figure out what to do with this not very func-



ABOVE, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: The custom-made parchment-covered cabinet in the living room is topped with a pair of 1950s table lamps, and the custom-made screen has panels covered in a Zoffany wallpaper. Salvagni designed the brass light fixture in the kitchen; the 1780 Venetian portrait is of a family ancestor, the custom-made cabinetry is painted in Farrow & Ball's Elephant's Breath, and the walls are painted in Skimming Stone. An 18th-century Italian gilt mirror takes center stage in the dining room; the table is made of oak and bronze, and the chairs are slip-covered in Egyptian linen. **FACING PAGE:** The dining room doors are black-stained oak covered in Fortuny silk and adorned with bronze belts; the circa-1850 watercolor is Chinese. See Resources.





tional space, Salvagni thought of *The Leopard*, Luchino Visconti's sumptuous 1963 film, and its Sicilian palace with its "secret corners that have no function except to attract the eye," he says.

The designer didn't want to slice up the high vault of the master bedroom's ceiling, so he came up with a low wall that's more like a screen, of black-tinted oak and textured wallpaper, to divide the space into bedroom and dressing area. He wanted the bathroom to feel more like a powder room than a wet area, so he installed oak planks on the floor and a dark Ralph Lauren pinstripe fabric on the wall, hung a 1930s Venini chandelier, and placed a Baroque Venetian stool (another family heirloom) underneath it. "I really like the sense of calm and beauty," he says, "contrasting with the modernity of the tub." Equally sleek nickel-and-glass doors lead to a steam shower and bath.

Both he and the clients are pleased with the outcome. The projects he's worked on, Salvagni says, have always involved "something that had some history before me." When he first looked at the raw space at the top of the palace he saw enormous potential in the freedom it allowed, but he also wanted the apartment he created to pay homage to the splendid building that housed it. "I didn't want to impose a new life on that shell," he says. "I wanted the shell to transmit the history that the building breathes in every corner." ■

ABOVE: In the master bath, the tub fittings are by Lefroy Brooks, and the 1750 Italian stool is a family heirloom; the walls are lined with a wallcovering by Ralph Lauren Home, and the 1930s chandelier is by Venini. **LEFT:** The custom-made bed in the master bedroom is upholstered in a velvet by Kravet, the linens and bedcover are by Frette, and the walls are sheathed in a wallpaper by Zoffany and trimmed with slats of black-stained oak; the table lamps and sconces are by Porta Romana, the Tibetan rug is antique, the custom slipper chair is covered in a Lelievre fabric, and the flooring is oak. See Resources.