



ROMAN REVELATION

THIS SUBSTANTIAL APARTMENT IN ROME OFFERS SPACE BOTH FOR FAMILY LIFE AND ITS OWNERS' ART COLLECTION, INCLUDING CAST-BRONZE FURNITURE BY GIACOMETTI





BOTH PICTURES The dining room includes chairs and lamps designed by Giacometti, many collected by Luiz's parents. The console tables are by Christian Llalgre. Black-and-white photographs include works by Lee Miller, Hiroshi Sugimoto and Elisabetta Catalano



Rome is usually associated with baroque excess. Highly wrought plasterwork, grand staircases and acres of frescoes adorn the interiors of *palazzi* in this ancient city. 'I wanted none of that,' declares contemporary-art gallery owner Valentina Moncada, as we sit in her streamlined sitting room overlooking one of Rome's major streets. 'For me, the most important thing is space,' she says. 'Space for my family, of course, but also space in which to display paintings and sculpture.'

Until last year, Valentina had been living just one street away with her Brazilian husband, Luiz Fontes Williams, in a rooftop apartment with panoramic views. 'We loved the apartment: it had magnificent terraces – but in the end, it was too much terrace and not enough living space.' This became more of a problem with the arrival of their three children.

Although Valentina's family has always lived in Rome, she didn't go the usual Roman route – of contacting friends – when

looking for a new home. Instead, she picked up the weekly properties listings at the local newsagent and was lucky straightaway. 'I couldn't believe that there was a 380 square-metre apartment available only a street away from where we were already living.'

Valentina went to see it immediately, taking along her good friend, architect Enrico Carlo Saraceni. 'It was in a dreadful state when we first saw it,' she recalls. 'Two old women had been living here, and the space was divided into two separate apartments.'

Nevertheless, Valentina and Carlo both realized its potential. 'As soon as we were out of earshot of the agents, I said, "Buy it,"' remembers Carlo. 'There was no doubt in my mind that it would be ideal for Valentina's family and her art collection.'

A year-and-a-half later, Carlo was proved right. 'Although it was totally without charm, the apartment did have large, regularly shaped rooms, which we used to our advantage,' he says. To add architectural distinction to the space, Carlo designed a series of recessed ceilings with concealed

The sitting room is dominated by a large work on paper – *Roman Notes* of 1970 – by Cy Twombly, its neutral colours in keeping with the room's pale palette (main picture). Hanging between the windows is a photograph by Jeanloup Sieff (above right). Architect Enrico Carlo Saraceni remodelled the apartment internally; beyond simple square columns (below right) is the dining room. Pieces by Giacometti include the pair of standard lamps and the high-backed side chair in the dining room



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP In the library, one wall is lined with books; linen-covered sofas surround a low table by Giacometti; the four colour photographs are by Nan Goldin. In the kitchen, extra-long, slim metal handles, Perspex chairs and three 'Campbell's Soup' screenprints by Andy Warhol contribute to a sleek, modern look. Above an Alessandro Twombly sculpture, a large poppy painting by José Maria Sicilia injects a shock of colour into the dining room





The corridors are simply decorated: here (above left) a work by Michelangelo Pistoletto hangs above a modern console table. The main bedroom is lined with cherry-wood panelling, arranged in a chequerboard of squares – a warm backdrop for a red Warhol 'Marilyn' of 1967 (main picture) and photographs of water by Ileana Florescu (below left)



lighting, which evoke an impression of restrained, modern grandeur; in the square sitting and dining rooms the subtle lighting creates the illusion of shallow domes or blind lanterns – a discreet, yet dramatic architectural effect.

'I asked Carlo to work on this apartment because we get on well,' says Valentina. 'We have similar backgrounds.' Both architect and client grew up in the capital, and each has an American mother, who came to Rome as an established model in the Fifties. While working here – Valentina's mother represented Emilio Pucci – both women, by chance, fell in love, got married and never left. 'While Carlo and I both grew up in this history-laden city, neither of us was ever overwhelmed by it. So when I wanted to create something that wasn't typically Roman, I knew Carlo would understand what I meant.'

The design of the apartment is understated and the palette restrained: the stars in these interiors are artworks. The sitting room is dominated

by a work on paper by American artist Cy Twombly. This is one of Valentina's most treasured pieces and remains put: other works, by younger artists, change frequently. 'You will always be surprised when you come,' says Valentina. The day I was there, work by Italian artist Pizzi Cannella hung in the sitting room, while a large red poppy, by Spanish artist José Maria Sicilia, presided over the dining room.

The theme that connects one room to the next is the extensive collection of cast-bronze furniture by Giacometti. 'Luiz's parents were great friends of the artist and bought most of these pieces in Paris in the Sixties and Seventies,' says Valentina. The base for the table in the breakfast room was designed by Giacometti as a chandelier for the Picasso Museum. The artist flipped it upside down and it became a pedestal for a table. Valentina and Luiz continue to collect works by Giacometti, such as the standard lamp in the sitting room.

In the main bedroom, floor-to-ceiling cherry-wood panelling is a foil to Andy Warhol's fluorescent Marilyn and a Damien Hirst polka-dot canvas. 'I love the work of Jean-Michel Frank, and the bedroom walls recall the bedroom he designed for the Vicomte Charles de Noailles in Paris in 1936,' says Valentina.

That the apartment was originally two separate spaces has proved to be a bonus. The new arrangement has enabled the three children to have their own area, and they all have a bedroom and study of their own.

When Luiz first heard that Valentina had found an apartment in the midst of high-street shops, he was discouraging. 'And when I told him that we were giving up the terrace, he was really upset.' Today, of course, he loves the new apartment. 'It's true, we don't have a terrace,' says Valentina. 'But this tranquil, modern oasis of calm in the centre of baroque Rome is nice, too, don't you think?' □

Enrico Carlo Saraceni (tel: 00-39-06 808 3109)



