

DESIGN INSPIRATION  
**PRETTY  
IN PUGLIA**

MARIANA PICCOLO TAKES US THROUGH THIS  
ITALIAN HOME IN THE HISTORIC CITY OF LECCE





Italy is home to some of the world's most stunning architecture. Whichever city you choose to visit, each one has its charm, with interiors and design that leave you in a daze. This 500-year-old home in the Puglia region of coastal Southern Italy was chosen for its prestigious location near tourist attractions such as Basilica di Santa Croce which boasts Baroque architecture. The area comes alive at night too, with a festive, friendly vibe and bustle from the cafés and street stands all over.

When Mariana Piccolo, CEO & Founder of Mypickone Studio Design (based in Dubai Design District) first saw the apartment, it had fallen into a state of disrepair. "Its walls and mineral decorative flooring were severely damaged in several areas. Like most traditional houses in Lecce, this also comprised of numerous small rooms, giving the interiors a very dingy appearance," says Mariana. The owner however knew that he stumbled upon a gem that, with a bit of sensible renovation, could be converted into a cosy private residence. The two-storied house with terrace is around 400 square metres and was transformed to a modern home, retaining and restoring as much of its traditional elements as possible. He was also keen to incorporate vintage pieces of furniture, lighting and accessories, with accents of contemporary décor and art.

The living room of this home connects to the dining and piano space. Traditional terrazzo flooring runs

seamlessly across the rooms, bonding them visually. Overall, the décor is minimal and includes vintage armchairs, hand knitted pouf Ottomans, a Moros carpet, vintage floor lamp, an inset bookshelf which holds the owner's favourite reads and collectibles and a traditional fireplace that lends a nostalgic warmth to the space. The kitchen sink, doors and stain glass windows are original and retained with

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repairs. The owner's father personally repaired and painted all the doors. "He also wanted to install a floor heating system that would be discreet so we had to completely redo it. We opted for a traditional terrazzo flooring to keep the look as authentic as possible," she says. Italian marble, mosaics and classic fittings were sourced from the local market, while the staircase was redone by skilled masons in Pietra Leccese, with a kind of limestone found only in the Salento region in the Southeast of Italy. The owner wanted to reflect as much of the local elements

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of the region as possible, which is now visible in everything from the choice of finish, material and décor, down to the miniature plants in the terrace: fig, cactus and prickly pear.

“We wanted to transform the interiors into a space that was light, airy and inviting. To achieve this, we had to do away with the small rooms and knock down practically all of the curtain walls to create connected living spaces. We also punctured the weight bearing walls with archways,” Mariana says. The palette was kept as neutral as possible, with pops of colour from the eclectic mix of vintage and contemporary furniture, furnishings and

art pieces. The furniture, chandeliers and sconces were sourced from local flea markets. Candelabras that came from the church – a generous donation – while contemporary pieces were picked up from the Italian store Novembre Arredamenti. This includes for instance the signature Him and Her chair designed by Fabio Novembre for Casamania, which proudly sits in the dining area.

The tableware, cloth and home linen are all Marimekko, a Finnish brand known for its bold patterns and organic designs. Art plays a significant role in this home too, adding to the character and personality of the space. The sparing

but striking art pieces were picked up from the studio of New Zealand artist Vittoria Kolless, who is now also based in Italy.

Back in the days, even right up to the 70s, the women of Southern Italy gave birth at home. The owner himself was born at home; his mother delivered him on a dining table. He attaches a lot of sentimental value to this piece and so asked his grandmother to give it to him so he could refurbish it for this residence. The dining table now sits in the private dining room on the rooftop. In a region with so much history and culture, reflecting it in your home is naturally a must.