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Home and Work

## A Gypsy in Milan

Patrizia Tenti might be an architect by trade — but it's her nomadic spirit that infuses her talent for making collectible design look like it belongs anywhere.

BY DANA THOMAS PHOTOGRAPHS BY BEA DE GIACOMO

IN 2010, Patrizia Tenti, an architect who had spent 11 years working as a project manager for superstars in the field, on projects such as fashion stores in Tokyo and contemporary art spaces in Milan, decided it was time to branch out on her own as a gallery owner. Her ambition was to create a venue dedicated to showing and selling modern and contemporary design objects in an intimate setting. "In this age of white cubes," she explains, "I wanted to use an apartment as a gallery, to show you can live with artwork."

Tenti, a slim, 45-year-old Italian brunette with twinkling

eyes and a delightful laugh, does not, in fact, live in the Erastudio Apartment-Gallery, the showroom and offices of which are open to the public and housed in a traditional five-room apartment in Milan's historic Brera district. But she did camp out there for six months as she peeled off blood-red wallpaper to expose the concrete walls — graffitied with charcoal faces, apparently drawn by previous inhabitants. (She thinks one resembles her, and refers to it as "Patrizia.")

Tenti is interested not just in the juxtaposition of her

**SENSE OF CONTRAST**  
Patrizia Tenti in Erastudio, her gallery in Milan's Brera district, with a 1991 limited-edition chair designed by Lawrence Weiner (left) and "Barbarella," a 1965 artwork by Ettore Sottsass (right).





unique wares — her favorite eras are Florence's Radical Design movement of the 1970s and Milan's Memphis Group of the 1980s — but also in creating the right environment for every piece: The gallery's rough-hewn aspect, with raw walls and worn parquet floors, provides a striking backdrop for pieces like the Italian artisan Carlo Trucchi's oxidized metal *Apparecchiato* dining tables, which have silhouettes of place settings embedded in their resin tops. The gallery's doorways are painted a fluorescent orange — a thank you from the Milanese design doyenne Nanda Vigo for a recent show.

The stables across the courtyard, which Tenti acquired later for additional exhibition space, are barer still, with stripped walls, concrete floors and exposed beams. The downstairs former tack room and upstairs hayloft are installed with contemporary furnishings that coexist in perfect but unlikely harmony, such as the Indian designer Gunjan Gupta's 2013 Bori Sofa, a pile of soft cushions stacked on the floor like feed bags, around her 2014 Rock Origami stone coffee table. On an adjoining vine-covered terrace, laid out with the Italian designer Loredana Bonora's colorful resin-covered tables and chairs, Tenti serves her clients hearty Tuscan dinners of *ribollito* and *crostini neri* that she cooks in the fireplace.

TENTI, WHO WAS BORN and studied architecture in Arezzo, Tuscany, attributes her passion for collectible design and antiques to her childhood travels with her aunt Silvana, a nurse-turned-businesswoman who invested in real estate in far-flung countries. Together they spent years visiting the world's capitals, scouring flea markets for vintage clothing and jewelry. Tenti still has a nomadic spirit and even after she settled in Milan in 1999 to work with Rem Koolhaas on the Fondazione Prada contemporary art center, she chose to live in hotels, redecorating the rooms with her own furniture, bibelots and tableware. "I loved working here,"



**PURE FORMS** Clockwise from above: in Erastudio's second exhibition space, a former stable, a 2012 metal-sheet table designed by Anne Bianchet, with Afra and Tobia Scarpa 1974 chairs beneath an Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni lamp from 1960; Sottsass's "Minareto Totem," 1995; Marco Zanuso chairs from 1960 for entertaining clients on the terrace; the gallery's office, with Bianchet desks and a neon border by Nanda Vigo.



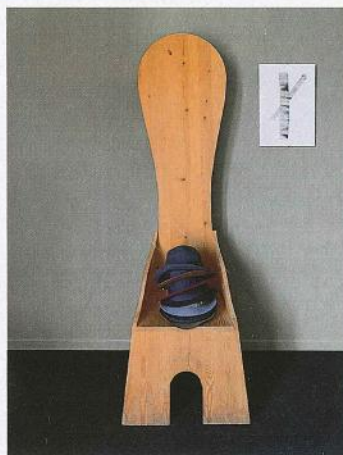




she explains, “but I wasn’t sure I wanted to live here.”

Indeed, it was only a year ago that Tenti finally accepted that she was a Milan resident, checked out of her hotel and moved into a 1930 two-bedroom apartment with strong European-bourgeois bones: soaring ceilings, a central foyer, formal public rooms with swirling deco moldings and parquet flooring. But rather than stripping the fourth-floor flat naked, as she did with her gallery spaces, she dressed it up, painting the walls a moss green so dark it almost looks gray and the moldings a pale yellow. Whereas the gallery is designed to draw attention to the finish of every piece Tenti is selling, the apartment, by contrast, is full of personal touches that together create a sense of warmth and fun: window boxes of scarlet geraniums, impeccable midcentury pieces from her parents’ Tuscan villa (low-slung bent-wood chairs in the dining room and a long teak buffet in the kitchen), a pair of Vigo’s faux-leopard-fur-covered coat-rack totems. Her dinner table, a metal Ovum Aureum by Trucchi, adjusts to three levels, so you can dine low and relaxed, like at Harry’s Bar in Venice, or sit at traditional height for a more formal meal. Either way, Tenti sets her table with a mix of 19th-century transferware, early 20th-century flatware and contemporary pieces like Tsé & Tsé’s platinum-glazed porcelain wine goblets — though when she entertains, she says, she usually just sits on a pillow on the floor.

Tenti’s bedroom is decorated with pieces from the early 1980s — a shrine to the Memphis Group. A nondescript



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second bedroom functions as a walk-in closet, heaving with stacks of white boxes of shoes, many of them Prada prototypes, and eight racks of clothes, mainly vintage. She’s particularly thrilled with a recent find: an early Prada shift made of clear rubber and faded yellow silk that echoes the trim of her living and dining rooms. “I want to stay here forever,” Tenti says, as she surveys the place.

Perhaps — and yet every other weekend, she escapes to her small farm in Tuscany, where she produces her own olive oil, and she spends long stretches on the road with her wares, sharing them in art fairs or with clients. When she travels, she prefers to stay in rental apartments, and, as a true itinerant who understands the power of objects, packs heavily: her dinnerware, pictures of her dog, bottles of her olive oil and other preferred Italian products so she can cook proper Tuscan meals for her staff, clients and friends. “You see,” she says with a bright smile. “I am a gypsy.” ■

#### CREATURE COMFORTS

Clockwise from top left: at the Art Deco apartment where Tenti lives in east Milan, midcentury Italian furniture from her family home in Tuscany and an adjustable table by Carlo Trucchi; the building’s well-preserved foyer; Tenti’s bedroom, with Nanda Vigo’s decorative dinosaur and floor lamp; a chair by Mario Ceroli from 1970, piled high with Tenti’s collection of Panama hats.