

Clockwise from right: Nicoletta Fiorucci with architect Annarita Aversa in the three-storey La Casa Degli Artisti, with 'Urihi Theri II – (El Lugar de la Selva)', 2020, by Sheroanawe Hakihwiwe on the wall; the 17th-century manor house; 'Rest (Apple peel 5)', 2021, by Judith Hopf

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At Nicoletta Fiorucci's newest artist residence in Provence, nature sits centre frame. The Italian art collector and patron, along with her husband, hotelier Giovanni Russo De Li Galli, acquired the verdant 7-hectare estate – with its 17th-century manor and terraced gardens tumbling down the hillside – in 2020, seeing its potential as a place where she could invite artists to explore their relationship with the environment.

The Nicoletta Fiorucci Foundation, a not-for-profit organisation originally founded in 2010, runs a programme of exhibitions, residencies and workshops across an archipelago of homes and spaces. Properties in Venice, London, Turin, Kastellorizo, Stromboli (where she ran the aptly titled Volcano Extravaganza annual summer festival) and Li Galli – a series of islands off the Amalfi Coast that the couple acquired about 30 years ago from the Rudolf Nureyev Foundation – were already in their collection. But when Fiorucci was travelling to visit her mother in Monaco, she noticed a property for sale near Grasse. The small stream flowing through its grounds was the clincher for a new addition.

"You see this stream from almost every angle on the property," says

Fiorucci. "That view is so relaxing, so inspiring and just so grounding."

Now the couple spends three to four months of the year here, staying in the 17th-century manor house. With a cream stucco exterior and rustic shutters, the bastide-style home has been largely left as it was for its previous owner (British press baron David Robert Stevens, who had the home for 25 years).

But it was not the main home, or family holidays, that really excited Fiorucci. With Italian architect Annarita Aversa she has renovated a second cream-coloured, three-storey building to become a guest house for artists. Now named La Casa Degli Artisti, artists will live and work here for between two and four weeks at a time. Anthea Hamilton, Eduardo Navarro and Maria Loboda have been among the first to visit.

Born and raised in Rome, Fiorucci first started collecting in her mid-teens. Later, her tastes veered towards Old Masters. But a pair of Giorgio Morandi watercolours – an abstracted still life and a landscape gifted by her parents for her 30th birthday – was a turning-point, marking a shift towards more modern works. Today her focus is on the contemporary – and a newfound passion for the themes of nature, ecology and inclusivity has powered this latest residency project. She wanted to create



Splendour in the Grasse

Renovation | A distilled essence of the Provençal landscape permeates collector Nicoletta Fiorucci's

newest artists' residence, writes *Alice Cavanagh*. Photographs by *Wolfgang Stahr*

'I wanted there to be something neutral, sacred, that leaves space for art and personal experiences'

a retreat where artists could be inspired by the nature around them.

Once a mixture of more formal planting and olive groves, the gardens presented Fiorucci with an opportunity to welcome wilder nature back in. "I let everything go," she says. She enlisted Italian landscape architect Paolo Pejrone, whose credits include the Royal Gardens of Venice, and who is known for balancing structure with a romantic abundance. He had also worked on Fiorucci's first garden in Rome almost 30 years ago.

Drystone walls were repaired, and a series of paths connecting to the original plane-tree-lined avenue restored before they tackled the planting. High-maintenance elements such as topiary were removed, while areas for wildlife to thrive – especially along the banks of

the stream – are being cultivated. They also planted cypress, mimosa, olive and citrus trees – from which they produce olive oil and limoncello – along with a small kitchen garden.

Several artworks have been introduced into the landscape too – pieces that Pejrone describes as "romantic choices rooted in memory and tradition" that will be changed over time to create "a living landscape of new arrivals". Among them is Judith Hopf's "Blade of Grass" – a single steel grass stem standing 2.5 metres high. There are also works from those first artist residents. Lithuanian sculptor Augustas Strepinas spent a week on the estate installing "House for Potatoes and Chamomile" (2025), a structure built from the salvaged beams of a rural Lithuanian house, repurposed as





planters, and between which the title ingredients are planted.

The attention lavished on the outdoors has made its way into the residence itself. "The idea was to bring the beauty of the Provençal garden into the house," says Aversa, whose studio Architetti Artigiani Anonimi, with bases in Amalfi and Milan, is known for its modern interpretations of historic architecture. Here the aim was "reinforcing a sense of continuity between inside and out, and allowing the landscape to permeate the building".

That sensibility is expressed through materials and colour choices: lime-based coccoposto-style flooring and off-white clay paint adds warmth and texture, while bespoke birch furniture is stained in water-based pale green, yellow and soft blue finishes. Pastel tones and soft fabrics lend the bedrooms in particular a romance. "This is a distilled essence of the region – a gentle abstraction of its colours and atmosphere," says Fiorucci. Although not historic, with its pitched roof and wooden shutters, the building has the charm of a local bastide.



Aversa has opened up the series of small rooms with low ceilings to create a more free-flowing layout containing two studios and an apartment. The centrepiece of the project is the library. Here, a bespoke bookshelf designed by Aversa's studio extends around the entire room – framing objects and artworks from Fiorucci's collection, among them ceramic and glass vases by Ettore Sottsass and a fluorescent-green cast-bronze mussel shell by Katharina Fritsch.

Outside, on the sun-soaked first-floor terrace, sits a sculptural green tubular table and matching chairs from Gae Aulenti's 1967 *Locus Solus* series. Inside, the walls are hung with vivid oils by the Japanese artist Yu Nishimura and a lush oil-on-wood painting by Celia Hempton.

There are striking details, but overall it does not feel crowded. The aim was that it would not be overwhelming for visiting artists, says Aversa. "I wanted there to be something neutral, sacred, something closer to a shell that leaves space for objects and art but also personal experiences," adds Fiorucci.

It was also hugely important to the pair that there was space for the guests' new creations, ones made in situ. Most recently: a series of drawings by Navarro on the kitchen shelf; an oil-

clockwise from main: the landscape is brought indoors through the use of colour and materials; pastel tones and soft fabrics create romance in a bedroom; the library's bespoke bookcase wraps around the room; gardens have been replanted by Paolo Pejrone and are dotted with artworks such as 'Moon Gate' (2022) by Ignoto; the stream running through the property that seduced Fiorucci



on-linen cherry tree by Nino Kapanadze in hazy pastel tones; and a colourful site-specific wall mural by Loboda in the kitchen.

The artists who come here are friends of Fiorucci, or friends of friends. "It's not a proper residency in the formal sense," she says, of the absence of any official programme or application process. "My homes have always been a place where artists and friends gather and exchange ideas."

Next on the guest list is the Berlin-based, Australian artist Gabriella Hirst, who will install her ongoing (and ever-growing) 2024 work *Body Garden*, a living sculpture of plants.

Grasse has become a place of respite for Fiorucci – somewhere to recharge between London, where the foundation is based, and Venice, where she lives and recently opened another exhibition space in a 15th-century palazzo in the Dorsoduro district.

"I love this small bedroom best," she says on the top floor of La Casa Degli Artisti, looking out over a small overgrown garden and apple tree she has yet to tame. "When we were doing all the work on this house, my husband and I kept saying – maybe we should just move in here ourselves."

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