

# real **living**

How to maximise apartment living P120

Our *stylish*  
guide to buying  
& serving  
*Australian gin*

A city staycation  
by designer  
Sarah Ellison

IN THE  
DETAILS  
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*plus sophisticated*  
ways to layer texture

## COSY SPACES

Homes with *warm white* interiors & *visual calm*

**Italian alchemy** The partnership between a family-run terracotta company and its visionary art director Cristina Celestino is turning humble materials into extraordinary designs. Turn for a look inside the historic Fornace Brioni headquarters and to learn more about this collaboration. →

TALENT / SPACES / STYLE

# LIVING



# PAVING THE WAY

One of the world's most compelling creative directors, Cristina Celestino, is turning a centuries-old tile-making tradition into a contemporary artform

photography valentina sommariva production alice ida salemi words lindyl crabb

**The alchemist** “To me, there is nothing more homely, traditional and reassuring than a floor made with cotto tiles,” says architect and designer Cristina Celestino (pictured opposite). On both pages, samples from her collections with Fornace Brioni are displayed in the company’s historic renovated headquarters. The Italian company is based in Gonzaga, a small town rich in renaissance culture near Mantua. The area is known for producing the finest clays and manufacturing cotto or ‘cooked’ terracotta. Done by hand, the tradition is passed down from generation to generation.



HOW DO YOU MODERNISE a traditional material like terracotta? Well, if you ask the brothers behind Italian terracotta manufacturer Fornace Brioni, you start by hiring Cristina Celestino. An architect and creative polymath, Cristina has a prodigious talent for taking ideas, techniques and practices from the past and turning them into paradigm-shifting contemporary designs. It’s a gift she puts down to rigorous study and a sense of curiosity. “Research is fundamental,” Cristina says. “In order to consciously create with a contemporary vision, designers should have a wealth of knowledge of the history of architecture and design.”

Before Cristina was approached to direct the Fornace Brioni design department and reinvigorate an industry thousands of years old, she was an ambitious architecture graduate from the University of Venice. After cutting her teeth at design studios, Cristina moved to Milan where the creative atmosphere, she says, “deepened design as a personal passion”. In 2012 she presented her own products under the brand name Attico Design at the Salone del Mobile Satellite event for young designers and a year later, she founded Cristina Celestino Studio.

From tables in the shape of cufflinks to fringed consoles and furniture that looks like French pastries, Cristina’s Attico Design creations are the result of extensive research, plays on traditional forms and the expertise of Italian craftspeople. Cristina’s respect for time-honoured skills and her innovative twists on classical references was the vision that Alessio and Alberto Brioni needed for their family company, now in its fourth generation. In 2016, the brothers hired Cristina to collaborate on new →





**Grand designs** In the Fornace Brioni showroom, Cristina's floor and wall coverings are displayed like works of art. Her first collection, Giardino all'Italiana, was inspired by "rows of trees, meadows, lakes and sculptures". Featuring a combination of matte and shiny glazed finishes, curves, straight lines and alternating colours, the tiles can be used in numerous combinations. **Family business** The Brioni brothers (pictured opposite) are planning the future of their cotto company with Cristina's support. "I hold a relationship of mutual respect and friendship with Alberto and Alessio," she says. **Test of time** An early 900 building (opposite) is home to the Fornace Brioni headquarters. →





**Rock formations** Tiles from the dramatic Scenografica collection and the 2018 Giardino delle Delizie collection are displayed here. Cristina says Giardino delle Delizie was inspired by grottos in Renaissance gardens. The decoration of these grottos imitated natural rockforms with seashells, which Cristina brings to life in her geometric designs. ->

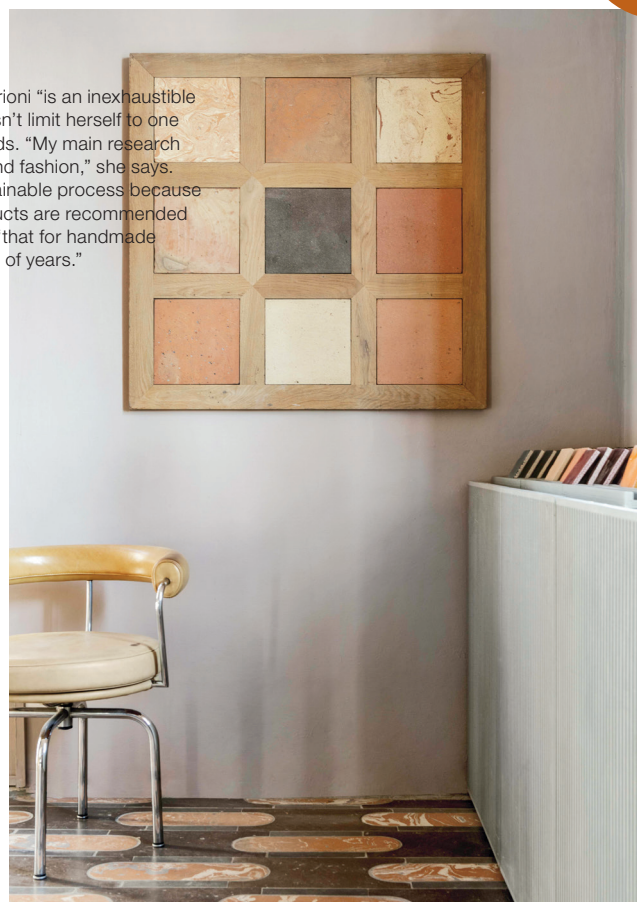






**Source of inspiration** Cristina (pictured below) says her role at Fornace Brioni “is an inexhaustible source of enrichment and growth”. When researching new designs, she doesn’t limit herself to one time or reference, but prefers to delve into a diverse range of fields and periods. “My main research areas are the history of architecture and architecture in general, nature, art and fashion,” she says.

**Down to earth** As Cristina explains, manufacturing cotto by hand is a sustainable process because the terracotta products don’t contain any toxic substances. In fact, the products are recommended for bio-architecture projects. “It should also be remembered,” Cristina says, “that for handmade terracotta floors, the durability, market life and physical life can last hundreds of years.”



collections. “The objective was to play with the fundamental values of the material – its Italian workmanship, quality, durability – and give it a bold appearance without altering its composition.” For this reason, she says, “I kept the genuine material and elaborated on the traditional shapes and patterns. The result is totally innovative yet still reassuring, balanced between nostalgia and cutting-edge trends”. Asked how she gets the balance right, Cristina says that her work isn’t based on being fashionable or overly abstract. “We always start from signs and shapes rooted in the history of architecture and in the common imagination.”

Scenografica, her latest collection with Fornace Brioni, is informed by set designers of the Italian Baroque, who were known for their theatrical works of architecture. The collection’s graphic symbols and variegated colour palette were inspired by Baroque buildings, including a theatre in Mantua, the historic home of Fornace Brioni.

Comprised of flooring, wall facings and partitions, Scenografica is an avant-garde interpretation of a dramatic and evocative period. But as Cristina explains, there’s more to designing a collection than meets the eye. “The process, in addition to being very artisanal, is alchemical and not totally controllable,” she says. “Terracotta and ceramic are easy-to-work-with materials... but unexpected reactions can occur and only the experience of the Brioni brothers is able to foresee how the material might react.” It’s clear that Cristina relishes the chance to work with a company and product she respects. “Fornace Brioni cotto tiles are handmade, starting from a mixture of only water and clay cooked over an open flame. Terracotta products do not release harmful substances and no waste is generated because terracotta can always be reused,” she explains. She’s also inspired by the way these products are reinterpreted in projects by other architects. “I think we are walking the right path – trying to enhance the material without corrupting its nature,” she says of her vision for Fornace Brioni. “We’re also working on a collection of terracotta vases, but the core business will remain floors and walls. In the future, the idea is to open small showrooms around the world. The goal is to make this material known for its durability, sustainability and naturalness, combined in our projects with strong design and contemporaneity.”

