

8. Renaissance room

Florence

In a city where the past is lionised, Numeroventi is helping artists and musicians look to the future.

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Creativity is the lifeblood of cities but in Florence, where its Renaissance past looms large enough to overwhelm the present, contemporary culture needs some champions. This is why the art residency and hotel Numeroventi is fostering a community of artists, designers and musicians from around the world – the city’s historically creative spirit revived in the 16th-century Palazzo Galli Tassi.

Numeroventi was established by Martino di Napoli Rampolla, who transformed this noble residence into a design destination in 2016. Gradually clearing out the accumulated detritus and remodelling each floor, he filled the centuries-old rooms with icons of modern design and new works by residents, transposing influences of Scandinavian and Japanese interiors to this grand Florentine palazzo.

“Making another Airbnb out of this place would have killed me,” says Rampolla. The time he spent living abroad after university, in Barcelona, Ghent and Tokyo, showed him how vibrant, artistic cities could give a “feeling of participating in something bigger than my own small life”. “I had the need for a sense of belonging and I wanted to create that for others,” he says.



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Numeroventi is buzzing with preparations for a new exhibition when MONOCLE stops by. Recent collaborators have produced a series of works still on display in the ground-floor gallery rooms, with a bullfighting ring and hand-carved wooden spectator seats crafted by South Korean designer Minjae Kim and fantastical paintings by Samuel Guerrero from Mexico City. In the palazzo's arch-lined courtyard, facing a 1659 marble statue of Hercules and Iole, New York-based artist Gala Prudent has built a twisting ziggurat from local clay bricks. Meanwhile in Numeroventi's lounge, the young team, which includes a full-time chef, rushes about lighting pillar candles and sticks of palo santo, arranging wine glasses and silverware to prepare for the day's brunch and inauguration party.

Artist Kasia Fudakowski eyes one of her bulbous glass sculptures as it is wired up to hang mid-air, floating above a long table arrayed with the other works she has produced during her residency. Based in Berlin, Fudakowski has used her time in Florence to imagine these shapes but also to make them with the artisans of a glass-blowing workshop in nearby Colle di Val d'Elsa.

Numeroventi funded and oversaw the production of Fudakowski's glass pieces. "My relationship with my gallery isn't like that," she says. Connecting artists with Tuscan artisan workshops has become increasingly central to the residency's model. The vicinity abounds in craft for those looking to create in collaboration with artisans, including metal casters, woodworkers, mosaic makers, Carrara's marble quarries, Volterra's onyx and alabaster carvers and Impruneta's ceramics experts. Residencies, with candidates arriving via applications and invitations, are financed by Numeroventi's hotel operations, with support from the Castello dei Rampolla winery run by Martino's family in Chianti, which also sponsored the palazzo's refurbishments.

"The focus here is on experimenting," says Arianna Iandelli, Numeroventi's gallery manager, who previously worked in a commercial gallery. "We're involved from the beginning, getting artists and designers to go beyond what they've done in the past. And the space itself helps. It's not a white-cube exhibition room or a blank, white studio to work in – it's Numeroventi."

The galleries offer a platform for the fruits of the residencies and open up the palazzo to



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1. One of the lofts where guests and artists stay
2. Kasia Fudakowski (on left) and curator Arianna Iandelli preparing a show

This spread


1. Chef Michela Iodice
2. Music equipment
3. Guests at brunch
4. Numeroventi founder Martino di Napoli Rampolla
5. In conversation

the Florentine public which, after the brunch for special guests, crowded into the palazzo to see the latest works on view. "This team guides you to greater depths in your practice," says Maya Dikstein, a Brazilian artist who in her own previous residency at Numeroventi turned deconstructed pianos into tapestries of colourful threads that were played by dancers. "It's like travelling. If you have the right local guides, you're able to go deeper than a tourist who can only scratch the surface."

Numeroventi is a favourite getaway for international songwriters such as Dev Hynes (aka Blood Orange), Benjamin Clementine, Lewis Ofman and Christophe Chassol, who have also performed intimate concerts for locals. Today the music residency is taking a more constructive form, offering sought-after tools to work on pieces in a new collaboration with the Vintage Audio Institute, which holds one of the world's premier collections of rare Italian synthesizers from the 1970s and 1980s.

On the day of the opening, a slew of the machines are set up in the top-floor loft, a soaring room whose 17th-century floral-painted walls were only revealed in a recent renovation. "Each machine has a unique

character that you'll never get from digital instruments," says Pontus Berghe, a musician and founder of the Vintage Audio Institute.

The residency for artists, designers and musicians was, says Rampolla, "conceived as a space to explore your imagination far from career demands". He is plotting more ways to grow, with a tract of seaside land in Brazil for a Numeroventi outpost abroad, and plans for a natural wine bar in-house in Florence. "This city caters to what we already have, to tourists – not to the youth and the contemporary scene," he says. "But can the future be based on the past?" It's a rhetorical question. With Numeroventi, it no longer has to be. Find a creative corner. Surrounding yourself with like-minded individuals and a nurturing environment will do wonders for your own imagination. — 

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Monocle comment: Find a creative corner. Surrounding yourself with like-minded individuals and a nurturing environment will do wonders for your own imagination.



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