

On a Georgian bookcase in Nur Al Habash's bordeaux-hued living room is a shelf that is lined with early editions of Marcel Proust's works. "It's the heart of this home," says Al Habash, as she unfolds a handwritten letter from Proust to a lover that she keeps hidden in one of the books. "He has always been my greatest obsession," says Al Habash's husband, Marco Scotto Pasanisi dei Foscarini, whose old-fashioned walrus moustache recalls that of the novelist.

The couple, from Rome, moved into what they describe as a "totally destroyed" flat in Milan five years ago and transformed it into an impeccable salon that appears ready to receive the literary cliques of belle époque Paris. Tucked away among the side streets of the Brera neighbourhood, the apartment is a sophisticated and playful homage to the past.

With her long, red hair, Al Habash looks as though she has emerged from a Romantic-era novel, especially when she kicks back on a custom-made velvet sofa, a Knole settee modelled on a British 17th-century design. "I have always loved the process of transformation," she says.

Though every detail of the flat has the appearance of being lovingly maintained and restored, it is in fact a recreation of the past, full of furniture and details that have been sourced from all around Europe and assembled by its owners. While it's located in a 1920s building whose stone-carved entrance is still wreathed by its original gargoyles and flowers, the interior that the duo inherited when they purchased the property contained nothing original other than a few patches of mosaic-wood parquet.

From the embossed Anaglypta wallpaper from England to the *graniglia* tiles hand-made by the Tuscan artisans of Aganippe using moulds from the early 1900s, every detail reflects the couple's love of elaborate detail. "We feel more at ease when we're surrounded by this antique atmosphere, even if we still appreciate the modern world," says Al Habash.

Throughout this home, sumptuous details mask the conventional trappings of modern living: the stereo hides in an early 20th-century Japanese cupboard adorned with delicately carved mother-of-pearl

Photographer — Elisabetta Claudio

# MODERN ANTIQUITIES

Nur Al Habash and Marco Scotto Pasanisi dei Foscarini have brought a passion for all things old and original to their beautiful Milan flat, gracefully combining beloved antique finds with contemporary sensibilities.

Writer — Laura Rysman



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bas-reliefs of birds and flowers. A neo-gothic church candelabra stands nearby with light bulbs replacing its flames; its lampshade, designed by Scotto and Al Habash, is made from an 18th-century piece of Japanese jacquard-loomed silk and the antique fringe of a priest's cassock.

Each piece harbours a story too. The pair have spent their days tracking down antiques and textiles from little-known artisans or flea markets and online sales. A heavy brocade curtain in the foyer, which hangs resplendently from some 19th-century brass hooks, was fished out from a muddy pile at the Marché aux Puces in Paris. (The couple admit to beating it clean out of their hotel window and showering the empty street below with dust.) "With antiques, you see the life an object has lived," says Scotto. "It's such a rush to find these unique pieces that you think don't exist any more."

He's not alone in this passion, "Collecting antiques is a family trait," he says, sitting on a narrow, carved-wood guest bed made in Tuscany in 1820 that he slept on when he was a child. It's one of many old artefacts from his parents' home. "Marco has passed on his fixation to me and now we're both obsessed," says Al Habash with a smile. Above their bed hangs a map of Palestine, where Al Habash's father comes from, printed in 1783 in Venice, where Scotto's family has its roots. "It's the antiques that unite both of us," she says.

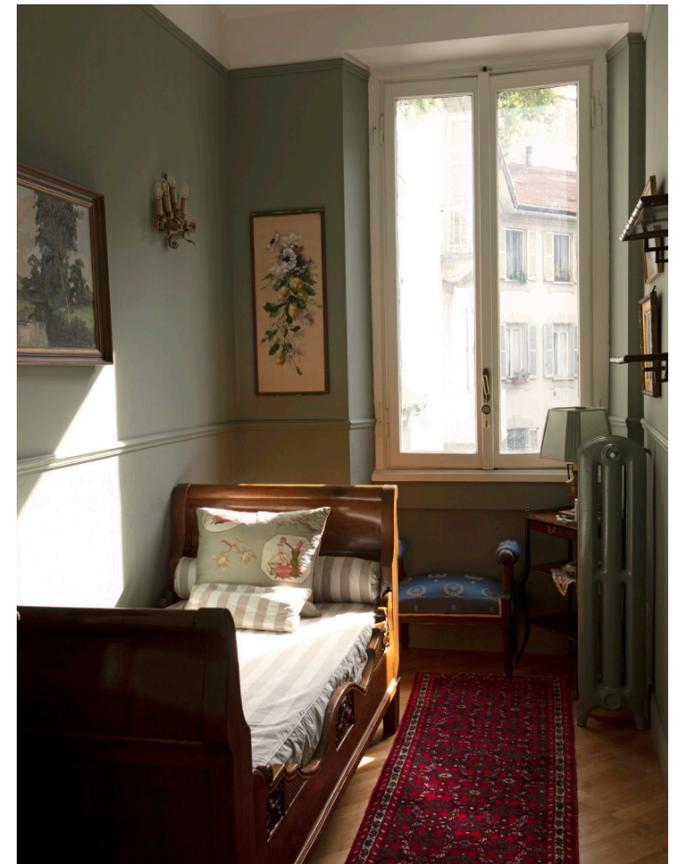
Al Habash, a former editor of the Italian music magazine *Rockit*, is now heading up the Italia Music Lab, a new foundation aimed at supporting Italian artists and music professionals in their career, both in Italy and abroad. "It seemed ridiculous to me that Italian music wasn't being listened to beyond our borders," she says. "And I've seen that the project works: today people in the know can name new Italian musicians. It's not just Pavarotti any more."

Al Habash devotes some of her free time to Equally, an international programme to support women and counter discrimination in the music industry. "I try to address gender inequalities in every part of my work to make a difference in the Italian music-business panorama," she says of her overall aims.

The husband-and-wife team designed a leather-upholstered wooden booth, crafted by a contemporary Tuscan artisan, that gives their kitchen table the look of an old tavern and functions as a home office for Al Habash, who sets up a mixer and microphones on the table to record her radio shows there. (She also DJs on an online show called *Disco Simsim* with curator Livia Satriano.)

Scotto works for Gucci but yearned for another interiors venture – so much so that he asked Al Habash if they could move from their flat just to have a reason to decorate a new home. Instead, they settled on purchasing an Arts and Crafts-style villa on Lake Como for weekends. After long mornings on the hunt for treasures in dusty flea markets, auctions and antiques shops, they recently finished the project. The birth of their daughter nine months ago has brought about challenges (and considerable joy) as the couple integrate modern parenting into their artfully created homes. "Como is even crazier than Milan," Al Habash says as she shows us to the door. "There are so many stories to tell." We don't doubt that. Or that the pair's urge to refurbish, collect and create will ever be extinguished. — K

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*Previous spread*  
1. Al Habash and Scotto at their custom-built booth table  
2. Timeless style

*This spread*  
1. Sunlit bedroom  
2. Matching colours  
3. Good as gold  
4. A cut above  
5. 19th-century divan  
6. Every detail was carefully selected



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