

THIS IS HOME

NATALIE WALTON

THE ART OF SIMPLE LIVING



HOW TO MAKE A HOME

1. DEVELOP A SENSE OF STYLE
2. FOCUS ON STORY
3. MANAGE PRIORITIES
4. ELEVATE FUNCTION
5. CREATE TRUE BEAUTY
6. APPEAL TO THE SENSES
7. CONNECT TO THE SURROUNDING SPACES
8. STAY FOCUSED
9. BE ADAPTABLE
10. NURTURE YOURSELF



Katrin Arens

BERGAMO, ITALY

'My house at the river is my home; it represents our lives – simple and sophisticated. It's a great luxury having all this space without anybody living close by. We have freedom to do whatever we want – throw parties, listen to loud music – without disturbing anybody around. This house gives me the feeling of home – protection and freedom. And feeling at home is where my family stays, where we spend time together, which is wonderful in the old mill at the river.'

AN IMPERFECT HOUSE GIVES the gift of freedom, says furniture designer Katrin Arens. '*La casa mi dà una grande libertà*,' she says. 'Free to create and free to be.' It's an idea that Katrin's been able to play out in her home in a former fifteenth-century monastery – which later became a mill house – near Bergamo, in the Lombardy region of Italy.

She found the abandoned building on the banks of the river Adda about twenty years ago when she was looking for a place where she could set up an atelier and home. At the time she was also pregnant with her eldest daughter, Laura, who is now eighteen. Her younger daughter, Sofia, is eleven.

While Katrin studied economics and graphic design in Germany, where she was born and raised, she moved to Italy after winning a scholarship at the Academy of Arts in Bergamo. In 1996 Katrin started designing furniture from recycled materials, with a focus on pieces that were perceived to have no value, such as wood used for scaffolding. Her business continues to make furniture and has expanded to include kitchen designs, which are sent all over the world.

While the atelier started on the ground floor of the house, it has since been relocated to a nearby village. And the building, which was used as a mill house until 1960, is no longer the family's

primary home. Instead they are based in town during the week to be close to school, friends and sports commitments. However, they return on weekends and school holidays. It still functions as their main home in many ways. It's where Katrin enjoys cooking and entertaining, and the girls can enjoy each other's company. 'We spend a lot of time in the kitchen,' she says. 'It's our living room.'

From the kitchen window the mountain Resegone is visible in the distance, and below is the River Adda. 'The position of the house is perfect,' Katrin says. It was one of the attractions of the building, as well as the light and the big rooms.

However, the site had been abandoned for about ten years before they moved in. There was no electricity, hot water or heating. Windows were broken and swallows had built nests in the ceiling. While they cleaned out the residence and installed basic necessities, Katrin wanted to keep the place as close to its origins as possible. 'No strange materials or big changes,' she says.

Since the initial improvements, the building has stayed mostly the same over the past twenty years. Most of the furniture is Katrin's design. And there are a few other pieces that the family has collected on their travels. The main changes have been to accommodate the needs of the girls, who have grown up in the house. Katrin is happiest when they are all together.





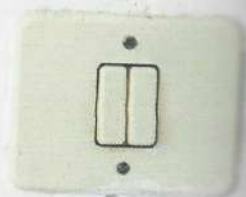






Katrin maintained the existing structure of her home but freshened it up with paint. Furniture has been kept to a minimum and includes heirloom pieces, such as the wardrobe in her bedroom.











When and why did you move here?

We moved into the house in 1998. Laura was born here. I was looking for a place where I could live and work, so I had my furniture production in the rooms below.

What changes did you make?

The house was abandoned for about ten years before we moved in. There were no basic amenities and birds flying in and out.

What didn't you want to change?

I wanted to keep its original condition authentic, but with just a bit more comfort, like hot water, electricity and heating.

What objects hold a special meaning for you?

We love travelling to different countries and we are fascinated about other cultures so we always bring some objects back with us to the house.

How do you choose which items enter your home?

They have to be authentic and they have to respect my philosophy. They have to tell a story or mean something to me, such as remembering a voyage.

How often do you edit your home and its collections?

I only changed and rearranged the house when it was necessary with my kids. Most of the house remains the way it is. I only add some objects after coming back from a voyage, sometimes only a few things such as a plate or little stool.

How has your style evolved over the years?

My furniture production is the same since 1996, the only evolution is that from the production of single pieces, now we mostly do interior projects, especially kitchens. But the style is the same, always working with simple and 'poor' materials, keeping its originality – seeing where it comes from. My home in Germany where I grew up was filled with antique furniture, mostly Biedermeier and Jugendstil. My mom was a fan of this period mixed with modern pieces. I started to be interested in 'old' furniture when I was a kid in the 1970s when people threw away a lot of old furniture. In Germany they used to have

Spermuell once a month – people put everything out on the streets in front of their house and big trash-vans came early in the morning picking up everything to throw it away. At night, people were looking with a torch collecting things, such as chairs, etc. I remember I was so fascinated by what other people threw away – sometimes incredible beautiful things.

Which materials are important to you?

Natural wood and anything that keeps the house in its original state.

What gets priority in your home?

I like to have natural colours and white in the house – and allow objects to introduce colour. I need to feel relaxed at home.

When are you happy at home?

When we are together with all the family and friends at home. We celebrate a lot of parties with our friends at home or simply have lunch or dinner with our friends in summer in the garden. The rest of the year in our big kitchen. We always celebrate Christmas in the house with a big tree at the end of the long entrance. In summer we all go swimming in the river.

What do you think makes a welcoming home?

An open house where all of our beloved family and friends are always welcome, especially when they come unexpectedly.

We have a special white linen tablecloth which is ten metres long that we use for our special dinners and anniversaries and we stitch all the dates and names in this tablecloth and I share it with my friend Doris Zehr who lives in a beautiful renaissance castle in Germany.

For the tableware I use my white tableware that I produce in Puglia, because food brings the colour, mixed with different old glasses from my family or flea markets. Also, I give the house to artists when I'm on vacation, so they work there and as an exchange they leave a piece of their work.





N U R T U R E

So much of the dialogue about homes relates to their beginning. But that's only part of the journey. ——— Homes provide the foundations for our lives and the backdrop for events that will one day become our memories. We need to create flexible spaces that can adapt to the continual shifts and changes – the unexpected house guests and big-number birthday parties we host from time to time. It helps if we are not overly precious about our spaces too. When we let go of perfection and other restrictive ways of thinking, we give ourselves the freedom to play and learn, and reduce our stress levels. And when we give, we get back more. When we open the doors to our home and break bread we can establish deep connections with family and friends. We can become part of a community too. ——— But there are other times when we need to engage in restorative practices – creating healthy and nourishing meals, carving out a space to exercise, meditate or contemplate, enjoying the benefits of a long bath and giving our bodies the sleep they need. Love, too. Our homes should always be open to love.

'One's destination is never a place but rather a new way of looking at things.'

Henry Miller