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Count Benedikt Bolza and his wife Nencia at Reschio, their 3,750-acre family seat, on which nestle a five-star fairytale hotel and private villas.



A photograph of a stone villa in Umbria, Italy, with a stone chimney and a garden of green flowers. The villa is a two-story stone building with a small tower on the roof. The garden is filled with green foliage and yellow flowers. The text is overlaid on the image.

Once Upon

a Time in

Umbria...

...there was a beautiful estate dotted with secluded villas cherished by Hollywood royalty. The caretakers were a noble family living out a fairy tale of rustic extravagance in their own private Eden. Turn the page and follow along.

BY JASON HOROWITZ PHOTOGRAPHS BY CYRILL MATTER

In a former tobacco factory cluttered with bespoke furniture, floor plans, fabric samples, and paint swatches, Count Benedikt Bolza, the architect and designer behind the Umbrian luxury getaway Castello di Reschio, pores over blueprints of his sprawling estate's graveyards.

"I need to restore the cemeteries," says Bolza, who is dressed in a Scottish tweed checked jacket, a knotted scarf, and an open white dress shirt. "You know, we think about everything."

Meticulous, even eccentric, consideration to every last earthly detail has defined the Bolza family approach since Benedikt, 49, accompanied his father four decades ago to scout locations on what he calls a "boys' trip out to Italy to hunt for a holiday house." His father, Count Antonio, 79, bought a deconsecrated church ("a speck of an island on the estate," Bolza calls it) and then in 1994 bought the whole 3,750-acre shebang. Over the past 30 years the Bolza family has transformed nearly 30 ruined farmhouses into stone pleasure palaces, which they designed and sold, all with frictionless turn-key service. The first buyers of the multimillion-dollar homes were bankers, but now there's "a little bit of Hollywood here and there," says Bolza, who, despite Gwyneth Paltrow's having published a picture of her feet at the edge of the Castello pool (she called it "one of my favorite places on earth"), offers only a coyly grateful "indeed, indeed" that the Umbrian hills lack slopes steep enough for skiing.

In May 2021 the family opened a hotel, and just as jetsetters started landing in nearby Perugia to stay in Reschio's luxuriously appointed castle, Bolza, who, like a smooth-skinned Dorian Gray, fills his office and home with 19th-century portraits, got to work on a more personal project: bringing his brood of children, their summering friends, and dozens of cousins under one soaring roof.

"My barn," Bolza says, as he and his wife Nencia, a princess from Florence's noble Corsini family, greet me with three of their five children and one of their dogs in front of the airy wood and glass sanctuary he completed just a year ago. "As soon as we are a group, we're in here."

Built on the site of an old washhouse and tobacco drying tower, the barn has a tall steel-frame pine roof slitted with skylights. Sliding glass doors brighten the warm charcoal-colored walls, which looked, before Nencia suggested more black paint, like "purple yogurt," as Bolza puts it. Daybeds upholstered in stripes or houndstooth or floral patterns sit below busts and cherished Poggibonsi lamps from Bolza's furniture line, B.B. for Reschio. A ring of artichoke plants and pink sundowns borders the barn. There are dried yellow yarrow flowers in amber apothecary jars over here, a portrait of Nencia as a teenager and later with child over there. And behind this door a steam room and an indoor/outdoor pool that looks like a liquid corridor shimmering in the day's fading light.

"I want it to be more jungle," Bolza says, explaining that he intends to add more plants for the summer, when he will open the glass wall, which will allow birds to fly in and bathers to swim out onto the property.

The Bolza children, four girls and a boy, and cousins from the couple's large families, including the six children of Nencia's twin sister in Florence ("She has twins," Nencia notes. "Cheat."), rehearse Reschio's annual mystery musical review here. "Probably a cardinal will get murdered," quips Vita, 19. Guest entertainers bang out show-stoppers on the barn's black piano, and friends, the girls say, come over to dance flamenco and tango and rock 'n' roll.

"What happened here, darling?" asks Bolza, who wears a brimmed



hat adorned with quills, about a toppled plant in the barn studio. "The pot is too small, darling," says Nencia, who also wears a brimmed hat adorned with quills.

The girls imbue the space with gregarious, *Little Women in Umbria* banter, absentmindedly unscrewing their father's lamps and teasing him for building a pool only after they moved out ("Everything he does," says Olimpia, 16, "is for himself"). Bolza teases them back, saying that the door he put under a portrait of Clement XII, the Corsini pope who was his wife's ancestor, is meant to give easy access to a lawn filled with tents "for the weddings." Time passes and the ribbing subsides and Giorgiana, 21, looks around and says, "I can't remember



In the barn's main room a salvaged wood stove from northern Italy overlooks an antique daybed and a Fratelli Reguitti campaign chair. The custom sofa is flanked by velvet Poggibonsi floor lamps from Benedikt's line, B.B. for Reschio.

how we used to live before we had this?”

Me either, Giorgiana. Coming back from the Bolzas' new barn to their former home in the castle, where they lived for 11 years, underlines their comprehensive approach to the good life. After designing so many houses for others, Bolza says the hotel restoration posed the challenge of “designing for myself,” because he “wanted it to be sort of as if we had never left. As if it's still our house.”

It's a nice place they got here. The 36 unique rooms and suites (including six suites in a former vestry across a courtyard) form an opulent oasis in the rustic Umbrian countryside. They drip with Bolza's maximalist Old World, Grand Hotel, steampunk brass-meets-wood

style and are so rich in cozy details that we puzzled over what indulgence lay hidden in two cloth bags in the bathroom. My wife sniffed them for lavender; I bounced them on my shoulders—they held rolled up tub mats. Nencia has decorated the rooms and nooks and everything else with an Eden of foraged flowers that she and the staff hang to dry in the old boot room. In what the hotel calls her “witch's brew house,” she mixes natural pigments for the hotel's subdued and textured walls. She also procures the fabrics and designs the staff uniform of *Into the Woods*-esque caps and cloaks. (“It would give us great pleasure to wash your car,” one of Bolza's Merry Men said to my wife and me as we handed over the keys of our hooptic.) In a lounge ➤➤➤



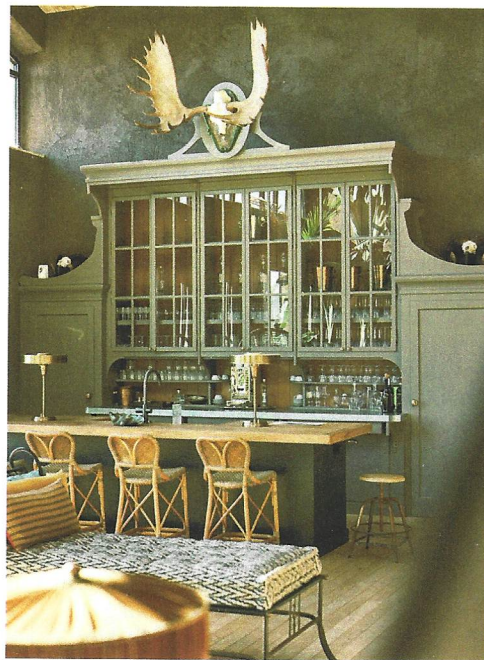
Nencia takes in a parterre garden that she and Benedikt designed. It brims with boxwood he planted almost a decade ago.



Clockwise from above: Nencia at 16, in a portrait by British artist Richard Foster; Nencia paints too, in a studio on the mezzanine; in the main room antique barstools face a glazed cabinet adorned with moose antlers from Canada that was custom-made for the space by local artisans.

lush with kentia and elephant ear leaves, hanging lamps reflect off the atrium roof as a jazz pianist plays standards. We heard Texas oil men talking business and Turkish jetsetters talking Turkey. Two young British lovers got engaged.

Outside, the immaculate grounds are spotted with hidden fortresses of extravagance. There are hunting blinds and lakes the Bolza family swam in during the summers before the barn pool. In the riding theater, two of the estate's 30 Spanish purebred horses, Principe and Casanova (the latter a favorite dressage horse of Count Antonio's), pranced without so much as a bit in their mouths. "When we started, 20 years ago," Antonello Radicchi, the director of stables, says from the saddle, "it was science fiction." From the castle's ramparts I look down at the outdoor infinity pool, the one Pal-trow saw over her toes. It reflects the umbrella pines like a round Art



Deco mirror. "There's a bit of a deck," Bolza says, "for the displayers."

All of this is amply documented in the family's clever, silent movie-style Instagram videos, which, spliced between all the horseback riding, basket weaving, fine wine pouring, and artisanal farm-to-table close-ups, have built a following since the hotel opened its doors in the midst of the Covid pandemic.

"Instagram saved us," Bolza says. Then again, his family has a knack for survival. Count Antonio Bolza is a descendant of a noble Italian family with a coat of arms still found around Lake Como. He grew up in Hungary, fled to Austria to escape communism at the age of five on the shoulders of his father, and still keeps the pocket watch he brought with him; it used to have a gold chain, but his father sold it to buy a pig. Antonio made a career in the hotel guidebook business, became



the owner of a publishing house, and "always had this urge to have land again," Benedikt tells me, "to try and rebuild something that was lost."

They got to work at Reschio. In 1997 Nencia came back from apartment hopping on New York's Upper East Side to paint a fresco on the first house the Bolzas sold, and fell for Benedikt, who fooled her into thinking he spoke Italian with a perfectly accented "*passami l'acqua.*" "So sexy," she says. Three years later they moved into a castle with enough electricity for the oven but not

for a hair dryer as well. The family grew over the next decade, as did the number of buckets needed to catch the leaks. When a ceiling caved in, and their patch of Umbria, near the Tuscan border, had matured as a prime luxury destination, Bolza decided the time had come to convert the castle into a five-star fairy tale.

"It was very brave," Count Antonio says over breakfast. He is hard to miss, with his Visconti-film posture and a tweed jacket nearly identical to his son's. He speaks German with his wife, who designed the first two houses, and with his daughter's family, all of them dressed in riding gear. I ask him whether now, at long last, he feels restored.

"When I bought the estate, I was very worried about the castle. I thought, Oh my god, the roof is coming down slowly but surely," he says, pleased as he takes in the baroquely rectified surroundings. "The result is extraordinary, thanks to my son." Before he goes for a ride I bring up the barn, and I perceive a slight relax-

ing of his bearing. All those grandchildren are about to enter "this party age," he says. "Just imagine what is going to happen there." to

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