

DESIGN

The Italian count who became an artisan

Count Benedikt Bolza transformed his estate, Reschio, into one of Italy's most beautiful boutique hotels and a meeting point for Umbria's thriving local makers



Count Benedikt Bolza with his wife, Nencia

Lisa Johnson | Tuesday December 26 2023, 12.01 am, The Times

Everywhere you go at the Hotel Castello di Reschio, an exquisitely restored 10th-century castle in the wooded hills of Umbria, the light adds a dusting of magic. Flames dance in front of the old stone walls, a fire blazes in a room full of cut flowers and as you take your seat in the restaurant, solemn faces gaze out of oil portraits bathed in the glow of 1930s-inspired, brass-plated table lamps with faux vellum shades.



Castello di Reschio

PHILIP VILE

The lamps are all Baby Poggibonsi, part of a range named after the Sieneese town where the galvanic plating takes place and conceived by Count Benedikt Bolza in 2012. By this point the count's parents had bought the 1,500-hectare estate on which they had previously owned a holiday home, and embarked on selling and restoring the other 49 farmhouses. After studying architecture in London, the count returned to Reschio to help them, setting up home in the then castle ruins with his Tuscan wife, Nencia Corsini.

Initially the count focused on restoration, but in 2011 he moved into interiors and furniture as well. "The owner of the house I was doing said he'd like to have some beautiful things made, and he gave me carte blanche," he explains. "That was a

dream for me, because I was able to design pieces for that specific interior.” He came up with three lamps (including the beautiful Claw table lamp with double silk rectangular shade), two beds, the Timeless coffee table, the Modernist lamp table and the Etruscan window seat.” The BB for Reschio collection was born.



The bootroom at Castello di Reschio

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Foraging on the estate

The count is telling me this at the tabaccaia, a converted tobacco factory turned creative hub where Reschio's 30-strong design team works among the eclectic antiques of the "Dealership", all bought by the count and Donna Nencia from the Parma Antique Fair or online and offered for sale. The hotel features a similar whimsical mix, with pieces from the BB for Reschio collection — now 31 furniture items, 12 lamps and 10 accessories — providing a unifying thread. The count's design pieces also populate some of the 30 restored private houses, which range in style from contemporary to industrial and 1950s Italian, and can be made to order, either through Artemest and 1st Dibs or directly through BB for Reschio.

While the influences behind the pieces vary, what they have in common is the quality of materials (lots of brass-plated steel and patinated bronze) and level of craftsmanship. Like everything at Reschio, the collection is rooted in the area — it is made by artisans mostly within a 50km radius, in what has very much been a two-way process. "I didn't study furniture or interior design, but it was easier to start because of these artisans," the count says. "It's very normal in Italy to have something made from scratch."



The tabaccaia, a converted tobacco factory turned creative hub

PHILIP VILE

Chief among Reschio's collaborators are the self-taught blacksmiths Gianluca and Luca, who run a team of seven in an unassuming workshop near Lake Trasimeno, developing the count's drawings with AutoCAD, programming big machines to shape diminutive bed finials, and hand-cutting bronze sheets for items such as the Timeless coffee table, which the count patinates himself. Across the road from the blacksmiths are husband-and-wife upholsterers who made the green leather seats for the chairs at Reschio's glamorous Bar Centrale and the periwinkle taffeta cushions for the Etruscan window seat. Then there are stonemasons who do all the marble, a fifth-generation carpenter, a Panicale-based embroiderer who hand-embellishes Reschio's cotton sheets, and two women in Florence who create the pleated lampshades for the velvet Poggibonsi lamps, in decadent belle époque hues from burnt orange to green.

Donna Nencia is an artisan herself: she and her twin sister studied decorative painting at the Van Der Kelen school in Brussels, and she met the count at Reschio when she painted the walls of one of the early houses. She also did the frescoes in the family chapel, as well as adding the purple flowers to the portrait of the curious gentleman who greets hotel guests when they arrive for dinner.



A Poggibonsi velvet table lamp

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Today Donna Nencia is in charge of everything to do with colour and graphic design, as well as singing in the Reschio choir and overseeing a programme of workshops,

from embroidery to Florentine paper marbling and dyeing fabrics with natural plants – “household habits”, as she calls them. The Alchemist’s Garden that she created provides some of these plants, while others find their way into infusions in the Bathhouse and salads in the restaurants. The grounds of one of these double as an exhibition space for sculptures by Nic Fiddian-Green and Calyxte Campe, and every summer, the Bolzas’ five children and other family and friends stage a musical theatre performance for charity, which last summer raised €41,000 for the Alsama Project.



A BB for Reschio writing desk

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BB for Reschio Bar chairs

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“My concept is that Reschio should be beautiful behind the scenes as well as on stage,” says Donna Nencia, who is equally passionate about the estate’s three-tiered composting system. One suspects that even that is beautifully constructed.



A BB for Reschio dressing table

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Lisa Johnson was a guest of the Hotel Castello di Reschio. Made-to-order BB for Reschio lighting costs from €1,750 and furniture from €2,270. B&B suites at the hotel start at €870; private house from €26,400 a week, [reschio.com](https://www.reschio.com)