



SWELL INTEGRATED

With the Mediterranean mere metres away, this house on the Greek island of Kastellorizo doesn't look like it could get much closer to the sea – until you step inside, that is. Architect Annarita Aversa has laid turquoise glass underfoot downstairs, lending the impression that the occupants are walking on water. They're not the only things that appear to float in this radical intervention. Taking a dip inside, Timothy Brittain-Catlin is buoyed by the attention to detail. Photography: Ricardo Labougale

Opposite: architect Annarita Aversa selected shades of blue that would help Nicoletta Fiorucci's house on Kastellorizo harmonise with its surroundings. This page: the view southeast from the water's edge takes in the island's Medieval castle and, at the foot of the hill, the dome and minaret of an 18th-century mosque, built during the Ottoman occupation – and a reminder that Turkey is only three kilometres or so from here





The glassy sitting-room floor stretches out towards the water and appears to merge with it, giving guests a sense of being at one with the sea. The divan sofa is an Architetti Artigiani Anonimi design – the house inspired the practice's 'Mediterraneo' collection shown in Milan



Top: Annarita's deftness is seen to full effect on the west wall of the ground floor. She designed fittings that only lightly touch the walls, which gives the interior an ethereal character and emphasises the beauty of the masonry. Above left: like the palette, the rustic timber and rope furniture throughout – bought from a local market – serves to highlight the elemental qualities of the old building. The tiny kitchen is glimpsed at the back of the room. Above right: here fitted cupboards maximise space. The door to the right leads to a small rear garden.



Top: upstairs, the shower room is separated from the sleeping area by panels of glass and horizontally ribbed panels – a subtle nod to shutter louvres and to the laths that were used in traditional construction techniques. Above left: facing southeast, the balcony off Nicoletta's bedroom has views over the harbour to Kastellorizo village, the only one on the island – it also catches the morning and midday sun. Above right: articulated, exposed pipes are used for water and electricity throughout the house – as well as for hanging clothes



THE DESIGNERS

of the Arts and Crafts movement are having a bit of a moment just now, and when one comes across a place like this, it is easy to understand their perennial appeal. For this small detached house on the tiny Greek island of Kastellorizo, scarcely three kilometres from the southern coast of Anatolia, has 'pavements like the sea', to borrow the immortal words of WR Lethaby, the great guru of late-Victorian designers. The phrase comes from a book called *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth* (1892), which described the architectural legends of antiquity, in this case the palace of Solomon and that of the City of Brass in the *Arabian Nights*, and of great churches from Canterbury Cathedral to St Mark's in Venice and Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. These were buildings in which the floor seemed to be made of water, so that those who stepped on to it felt themselves at one with the fundamental elements from which the earth is made and at the mercy of the powers of creation.

That is how it seems when one is cradled by the sea and the heavens. This waterside home on the western side of the bay at Kastellorizo has a ground floor paved with glass. Thus, says the architect Annarita Aversa, when you are within you feel united with the waters of the harbour, or even floating on them. Taking her cue from the work of Peter Zumthor, a kind of Swiss magician when it comes to working on and with old buildings, she resisted any temptation to restore the 19th-century house and instead added something new that grew naturally from it. The houses on the island are, by and large, unchanged since they were built. And so the structure dominates, uncluttered by partitions and fittings (there were some in there from the 1980s, in fact, when the project began, and she swept them away). This glassy floor is part of what she sees as an installation rather than a conversion.

For this reason all the necessary incursions required by modern life are detached somewhat from the old fabric, and form networks or boxes within the space. The new steel staircase, for example, has been designed so that it is sited away from the wall, and it rises unencumbered rather in the way of a simple ladder placed in some of the oldest stone houses. That cabinet under the stairs is also designed so that it sits lightly in its place rather than

looking too much like a piece of built-in furniture. All the electrical wiring is housed in brass conduits that sit over the walls instead of being cut into them; and the upstairs shower room with all accoutrements takes the form of a delicate box. Some of this is walled-in glass, but not everyone wants to see their friends doing the necessary things that go on in there, so there are screens, some movable, with horizontal slats derived from an authentic vernacular type of partition wall. These too float away from their junctions with the stone walls, and they stop well short of the open roof. Thus the whole of the rest of the floor is given over to a generous bedroom space that faces directly over the bay.

There are no houses behind this one on the mountainside, and the precise shade of blue that Annarita has chosen for all the painted objects was selected in order to make a delicate contrast with the red and the yellow of its neighbours either side, so one can really experience a feeling of being in a state of delicate balance with one's surroundings. There is nothing left to chance here. If the ground floor is the sea, the upper one is an ethereal meeting place between the ground and the heavens.

Annarita grew up on the Amalfi coast in Italy, and she works both from a studio there and from her practice in Milan. She established her office in 2013, with the Lethabean, or Zumthoresque, name of Architetti Artigiani Anonimi (that is, Architects Artisans Anonymous). The idea is to emphasise the collaborative nature of their work, which, whatever the scale or the medium, Annarita sees as being architecture rather than interior or product design. That applies too to some of the furniture that she and her 'anonymous' team has designed for it, in true Arts and Crafts fashion. As with her approach to the house itself, these pieces, which inspired her 'Mediterraneo' collection shown in Milan, were derived from historical models rather than being copied from them. They have a modest anonymity that enhances the space around them, another of the delicate balancing acts which characterise this house. It is Annarita's extraordinary respect for the old fabric of the buildings that she works on, and the primacy that she gives it, that mark her out as a modern designer.

The house at Kastellorizo was designed for Nicoletta Fiorucci, a London-based art collector and philanthropist, as a holiday home, especially for the autumn when the climate is at its most lovely, and it forms a backdrop for family gatherings. She met her architect through shared friends, and they hit it off immediately: Annarita has also completed a flat for her in Monte Carlo, and they are about to start work on a third project.

Annarita's great strength, says Nicoletta, is that she feels so strong a connection with the natural world, from the mountains to the sea, the sun to the moon: somehow her architecture manages to channel all of these. Annarita herself describes her work as 'interpretation' – that is, you see the old house itself as if it has been enhanced through her installations, not altered or modernised. We really are back in the ferment of the late 19th century here, seeing the world through the eyes of some of the most learned and sensitive architects the world has ever known ■

To contact Architetti Artigiani Anonimi, ring 00 39 02 3660 1256, or visit architettiiartigianianonimi.com

Top: across from the owner's bed, rustic seats of different sizes are arranged as if for an imminent visit by Goldilocks and the three bears. To the right, a glass panel has been set in the floor over the stairs. Opposite: continuing the aqueous theme, reverse-painted-glass tiles of many shades of iridescent blue line the shower enclosure. Designed by Architetti Artigiani Anonimi, they were handmade in Rome by Studio Silice

