



**THIS PAGE** High vaulted ceilings and a Latin cross floor plan in this old tobacco factory in Puglia, Italy, prompted architect Raffaele Centonze to nickname the project 'La Grande Chiesa' or The Big Church. In the living area, Mesmeri wall sconces from Artemide. **OPPOSITE PAGE** Maritime pines frame the avenue that leads to the entrance of the building. *Details, last pages.*

# A new arch

Filled with *modern design* to match family life, a former tobacco factory has had another chapter added to its RICH HISTORY.

By Martina Hunglinger Photographed by Mads Mogensen







**THIS PAGE** in the 'transept' of the Latin cross floor plan, Up5\_6 armchair and Up7 foot, both by Gaetano Pesce for B&B Italia; Naviglio pendant lamps by Piero Lissoni for Boffi. **OPPOSITE PAGE** in the dining area, table by Marina Home Interiors; vintage Tulip chairs by Eero Saarinen and Verner Panton chairs; limestone bowl by Renzo Buttazzo; glass bowl by Massimo Maci; on the floor, Yang Touch lamp for Artemide.





In the living area, Tufty-Time sofas by Patricia Urquiola for B&B Italia; vintage Soriana chairs by Afra and Tobia Scarpa for Cassina; vintage Demetrio side tables by Vico Magistretti for Artemide.



The search for a small holiday home in Puglia, Italy, was scratched at the sight of a multifaceted former tobacco factory with Gothic-like interiors. Italian diplomat Giovanni Favilli and his Vietnamese wife, Giang, were looking for a modest retreat for their family of five when they got a tip-off from a friend. “I’d read about Salento — that you

could find charming and well-priced places compared to Tuscany,” says Giovanni. The couple felt the 400-square-metre property at Masseria Diso farm was too good an opportunity to miss.

A low-rise, rectangular stone building at the end of an avenue of tall Mediterranean pines, its front walls are sun-bleached peachy pink featuring faded signage that gives away its previous life. Originally built in the 1930s under the Mussolini administration, the tobacco factory once housed around 100 mostly female workers. It later became the temporary residence for Polish soldiers and Italian insurgents during World War II, before being used as an agricultural distribution warehouse in the 1960s.

The Favilli family’s home life has been almost as diverse: Giovanni’s diplomatic engagements have meant that he, Giang and their three children, Alessandro, 12, Lila, 10, and Anna, 8, have moved house every four to eight years.

For this particular move, a renovation was needed to make the place habitable for the family, though particular care was taken to retain its original character. “The idea was to keep as much as possible of the building’s industrial look,” says architect Raffaele Centonze, “combining it to create a relaxed, open plan with a design-imprinted interior.” To this end, the original shell of the building was retained but its timber doors and window frames were replaced with metal and glass to reference its industrial past (rather than its rural present).

Behind these oversized doors is an expansive white space, open but for a series of areas assigned by thick square columns connected by 36 star-shaped ribbed vaults and arches. Looking through it, the structure appears as a surreal white forest, echoing the real arching trees that lead to the front door, but the architecture most accurately

resembles a church. Indeed, architect Centonze christened the project ‘La Grande Chiesa’ or ‘The Big Church’. Even the floor plan has a cathedral’s traditional Latin cross shape, with naves, transept and apse, around which lie the six ensuite bathrooms. The scale of the place is amplified by a monastic interior of white paint and stone floors. “We wanted an open, light and uncluttered home, which is kept at its most simple,” says owner Giovanni, quoting Leonardo da Vinci: “Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication.”

White forest, big church — Masseria Diso is also compared to an Italian piazza by both the architect and the lady of the house. “And just like in a large piazza, the children are always tempted to run around it,” says Giang with a smile.

Centonze explains that the open space, with its arches and vaults, determines the public meeting point, while each room and suite that leads away from this hub promises privacy.

This idea that the building’s architecture graciously paves the way is echoed in one of the most notable structural changes; the opening of the back wall onto a newly built pool. Inspired by architect Renzo Piano and his use of axes, Centonze wanted to create an axis from the gated entrance, towards the front door, continuing in a direct line towards the pool at the end. “The rationale is that it adds a feeling of flow,” he explains, “and creates lines of light in the space.”

Filling the light-filled space is an eclectic mix of mid-20th-century furniture, family heirlooms and contemporary designs, along with Giovanni’s collection of vintage design pieces and miniature car models, what Giang calls “Dad’s untouchable toys”.

The vintage of their home is just as significant. There is something in this building’s quiet juxtapositions: its humble, rural exterior in contrast to the grander interior for instance.

“We wanted to keep the soul of the building,” says Giovanni. “We wanted to preserve its architectural imprint and add a contemporary feel to the tobacco factory without forgetting its past.” The result is bound to entice the Favillis to stay a little longer at this home. **VL** [raffaelecentonze.it](http://raffaelecentonze.it)



**THIS PAGE** in the kitchen, wooden **work bench** by a local carpenter; vintage **table and chairs**; black **bowl** made from burned Lecce stone by Renzo Buttazzo; **PH5 ceiling lamp** by Poul Henningsen for Louis Poulsen. **OPPOSITE PAGE** Giovanni and Giang Favilli with daughter Anna.







**THIS PAGE** Large metal-framed glass doors reflect the pine trees at the entrance; Ussari Bay lamps from Artplayfactory. **OPPOSITE PAGE** in the main bedroom, vintage bed and wardrobe; Tulip chair by Eero Saarinen; vintage Viscontea pendant lamp by Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni for Flos.



**THIS PAGE** in the ensuite bathroom, an electrical cable coming out from the ground floor and hidden within an industrial water pipe now functions as lighting for the bathtub. **OPPOSITE PAGE** in the children's bedroom, two large canopy beds; child's Eames RAR rocking chair; vintage Efebo stool by Stacy Duker for Artemide; sculpture by Renzo Buttazzo. *Details, last pages.*

