

SURFACE

Achille Salvagni's Poetic Fusion of Past and Present

Known for fanciful interiors that blend styles and eras, the Rome-based multi-hyphenate riffs on his deeply personal design process and the restorative power of his favorite artists. He brings us inside his own home, an early-1900s apartment in Quartiere Coppedè, which serves as a veritable showcase of his visions.

AS TOLD TO RYAN WADDOUPS

June 12, 2020



Achille Salvagni's apartment in Rome's Quartiere Coppedè. All photography by Paolo Petrignani

In designing a home, I always start by getting to know the owners, and then analyzing their personality and needs. I think of myself as a therapist, delving deep into their lives, habits, and

quirks, as their individual tastes and interests must always inform the outcome. Then, I paint a portrait of the client through the interiors—a deeply personal experience that calls for great introspection on their end. Only through understanding a client on this level do I feel comfortable making assertive decisions.

In the age of Instagram, many are designing for the now. They overlook the fact that homes require longevity, timelessness, practicality, and function. If you play the game of looking at trends, you often end up with spaces that date very quickly. I aim for a timeless aesthetic that draws inspiration from a multitude of sources, bringing diverse objects into harmony with each other through a balance of color, texture, materials, and craftsmanship. It's not necessary to have a "feature" piece that commands the spotlight, but rather a focal point from which to build out. I place as much importance on small objects as I do the main pieces. Details require even more emphasis, particularly when dealing with larger spaces, so they don't risk getting lost.



A side table and lamp of Salvagni's own design in the parlor



In the dining room, a one-of-a-kind painting by Jason Martin sits behind a chandelier of Salvagni's own design.

I strive to create spaces for people to dream and lose themselves within—personal sanctuaries that we create together. It's their home, so they should be able to relax, unwind, love, laugh, sleep, eat, live, interact, and engage. I don't want them to think that everything must be kept so pristine and untouchable. For me, that's very sad. I want to see evidence of people living—the sound of voices, the patter of steps, the human touch that brings it to life. Home is a reflection of yourself: a portrait of your personality and lifestyle. It's where you return again and again, an environment in which you feel safe and in control, a comfortable space after a weary day, and somewhere you can proudly invite friends and family. It should feel familiar and be filled with things you love and celebrate.

I've been fortunate to spend much of my life in Rome, which has the most beautiful natural light at sunset, when the city is bathed in a soft orange glow. Natural light is very important; a home should not be without it. It opens up a room, brings the outside in, and is essential for humans to thrive. It inspires us and injects us with purpose. Light can be a surreal and magical experience, lifting the spirits and energizing our thoughts. For this reason, homes should

maximize all possibilities to bring in natural light. Large windows, conservatories, roof lights, and light wells can help increase the amount of light, and thus harmony, in the home.



In the living room, a painting by Russian artists Ilya and Emilia Kabakov above a pair of Nino Zoncada armchairs from the 1950s.

Looking at floor plans will never compare to being on-site. Assessing the environment, light, textures, materials, habitat, and color must be done in person—they engage your senses. Only

once you understand its present state can you consider its potential, weighing physically impossible scenarios and imagining how they can be realized. To get the most out of property, you must push beyond reality before dialing back to what's achievable (though not so much that it feels like a compromise between dreaming and reality). Somewhere on that threshold of where the possible and impossible collide lies the perfect solution. If you dare to dream, fear will yield to confidence, and you'll find a way to make your dreams tangible, whether through new materials, technology, or a different approach. When you face a design challenge with an open mind, almost anything is possible.

A home can be an art piece, but it shouldn't feel conceited. A synthesis of history and future often makes a space immune to feeling outdated. I'm a strong believer that juxtaposition can work extremely well, as long as the objects are unified by an outstanding sense of material quality. For example, a historical artifact can look majestic on a contemporary sideboard or console so long as the craftsmanship of both pieces are unrivaled. Taking an ancient home with rich heritage and injecting it with contemporary objects, furniture, and lighting can have a magnificent and transformative effect, though this tends to work better than the other way around. Contemporary architecture is not usually kind to antique furniture.



Black and white marble defines the master bathroom.



Framed prints of performance art by the artist Zhang Huan preside over the master bedroom

Home isn't just about the space's physical components, but the people who inhabit it. In that respect, a home will never be "complete" because the people's needs, behaviors, and jobs will continue to change. As my family expands our art collection, as the children grow up, and as our needs change, everything impacts how we use our home. Having said that, I do need to prioritize my clients. My home takes a back seat, but I use it to experiment with ideas. Although it may never truly be complete, it can at the very least feel *right*.

My art collection is full of my favorites, including such mid-century masters as Carlo Mollino and Gio Ponti, whose approaches to design transcended formal boundaries. I admire Lucio Fontana for his continued explorations of the same subject matter, reinvigorating perceptions, and his relentless pursuit of harmony and continued quest for balance. I like Jannis Kounellis's work for its attitude towards Arte Povera and his use of found objects, Giuseppe Uncini for his raw, architectural approach, and Ettore Spalletti for his dream-like paintings that offer an immediate and restorative calm.



The living room pairs pop art with centuries-old furniture and Salvagni's own designs

Arte Povera was an important movement because it made the concept of creating art accessible to a wider public and focused artmaking towards concepts and ideas, rather than decoration. Arte Povera was a truthful, exciting, dynamic and engaging period, which broke down many barriers and radically changed perceptions of what art could be. Artists in my collection of Chinese photography, including Li Wei, Zuan Huang, the Gao Brothers and Huang Yan, have all pioneered new approaches to making art. Many have a performative aspect to their work, which furthers the narrative and makes clear the importance of process to the artist.

I'm very lucky to have my gallery in London, where I also freely experiment with ideas. In the past five years, we've turned the gallery into a Japanese tea room, a gentleman's study, a spacecraft, a Pompeian villa, and a cocktail lounge, so it's a place to try out ambitious concepts and to mix art and design until the right balance is struck. And through designing yacht interiors, I've become accustomed to marrying elegance with practical and functional requirements that must be considered at sea. I bring this same sensibility onto land, which lets me be uncompromising in my synthesis of function and design.