

edible LA

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THE DESIGN ISSUE

WITH CAMILLA MARCUS AND FRIENDS

MEMBER OF EDIBLE COMMUNITIES

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FOOD + DESIGN = ?

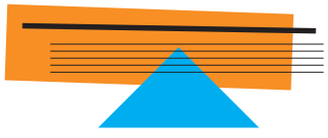
I'M A BIT of a design nut. My nightly ritual is losing myself in design magazines before bed. My photos are full of screenshots of artists, ceramicists, lighting designers, that groovy color combination. A perfectly balanced room hits me like a perfectly balanced cocktail, a synchronous sensual experience that gives me a deep sense of pleasure, though I've never exactly known why. So that was the impetus for this "Food Meets Design" issue: Why does putting one object next to another create this *thing*, this *thrill*? What *is* that?



First stop was Camilla Marcus. Camilla is one of those people who attracts other artists and is surrounded by a strong creative community (which we do well here in LA). Camilla also sees chefs as the great connectors, which I think is true.

Next we went to some of our favorite voices in the design world: Ome Dezin, the design studio that seems to be all over the place lately, renovating historic houses in the city while transforming them with their aesthetic; Block Shop Textiles, the joyful sister collaboration that's deeply rooted in our LA food community; and Randi Brookman Harris, a prop stylist who's passionate about objects and the seductive collections they form.

> JOY ISN'T HARD TO FIND AT ALL. IN FACT, IT'S ALL AROUND US.
>
> —INGRID FETELL LEE.



It was Randi who introduced me to *Joyful: The Surprising Power of Ordinary Things to Create Extraordinary Happiness*, a book circling exactly around my question. So much of what author Ingrid Fetell Lee says about objects and their innate irresistibility speaks beautifully to the theme "Food Meets Design."

Rose Wilde also talked to Valerie Gordon, who's been quietly collaborating with studios like Commune Design for years and just finished designing a mind-blowing tasting experience for the new AI art museum, Dataland.

To wrap it all up, Ken Concepcion gives us another stellar seasonal cookbook roundup, and our *Edible* Explorer heads to La Fiermontina, an *albergo diffuso* or peculiarly Italian collection of rooms spread out over three spectacular properties in Lecce, Puglia. It's a hotel with a love story that is—guess what?—told through design.

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The Magic of La Fiermontina Puglia

AN ART-LOVING FAMILY'S PALAZZO IN PUGLIA

BY LISA ALEXANDER



I VISITED LECCE IN SALENTO in early May, when crowds of tourists hadn't yet colonized the place. The temperature hovered in the mid-70s, dipping at night. Though the coast is a draw, I loved enjoying a city break, wandering the town at night with just the cats for company. Lecce's 16th-century buildings are sandblasted to peachy perfection, its Baroque churches full of whipped cream (panna!) flourishes, its gelato studded with pistachios. Come dusk, the starlings shoot from eave to eave, snacking on gnats.

My home base was La Fiermontina's Palazzo Bozzi Corso, a gloriously baroque 17th-century palace filled with mid-century furniture, spectacular art, and all the sculptural grandeur and wit of a certain kind of Italian design.

Mine was the blue room (singularly blue—it took three months to get the color right) which included not only the original parquet floor and soaring ceiling but a sauna. Right outside in a series of drawing rooms, a Fernand Léger painting was tucked in a corner, along with a Degas, striking classic furniture, and even a giant photo of Yoko Ono, holding hands with Antonia Fiermonte, founder and visionary behind La Fiermontina.



The Blue Room at Palazzo Bozzi Corso.



Sculptures of Antonia Fiermonte inhabit the spaces across all three properties.

It's complicated, her story, and tinged with just enough scandal to be a spicy creation myth for the Palazzo Bozzi Corso, La Fiermontina Luxury Home and the FIERMONTE Museum, all properties close by in town. In the 1940s, Antonia met René LeTourneur and Jacques Zwobada, two artists living in a compound outside Paris. Antonia first married René, had their daughter, and then weathered over a thousand love letters from Jacques before she moved from one artist's house to the other within the compound.

"There's a letter where we understand that she was really passionate about Jacques," says Antonia Yasmina-Filali who, with her brother Fouad Giacomo, have made it their mission to keep their grandmother's story alive. "She was also Catholic, and her daughter, my mother, was only 8 years old. Even though the relationship was passionate, it was not easy at that time to be bohemian."

After five years, when Antonia finally broke up with René, Jacques begged her to explore her art. "That's when Antonia started to really paint," says Yasmina-Filali. The four of them became even more entwined when Jacques formally adopted René's daughter, while René was still very much alive. After Antonia's early passing at 42, both artists went on to express their profound grief through their work and—in what may be the most surprising part of the story—also became close friends.

FIERMONTE Museum is a few streets away from the Palazzo (you can also stay at the museum) and erotic sculptures of Antonia are sprinkled throughout the properties, from the 400-year-old olive grove, to the rooms and halls. Listening to her story, Antonia herself remained mysterious, and I couldn't help wondering what she thought about all this. Did they relate to her as a woman or a muse? I

can imagine both artists were thrilled with her patronage, and then with her vision to display their work. The experience at La Fiermontina is soaked in their love story. It teleports you into a world that feels close to that in the film *Call Me by Your Name,* quietly extravagant with a slow-as-syrup sense of time.

At the Palazzo, I fell hard for two green lacquer cabinets in the drawing room, the many tables set up with chess and backgammon boards, a scrolled Murano mirror next to an Art Deco bar. A sputnik chandelier hung from a frescoed ceiling. The Degas was by a Mid-Century columnar Italian floor lamp. The high ceilings, the moldings, even the rooftop felt invigorated by Italian textiles and the futuristic vibe of the furniture.

Every morning I had breakfast—mounds of Italian pastries and strong coffee—served in its leafy garden. During the day I walked through Lecce's historic center, wandering into the Basilica di Santa Croce and the Duomo, and antique shops (Society Limonta, a beautiful table textile and bedding brand, has its only Southern Italian flagship store in Lecce). I also got somewhat addicted to *caffè leccese*, its perfect afternoon iciness with a view of the Anfiteatro Romano, a Roman amphitheater beautifully preserved in the middle of town.

At night I tried several of the neigh-



The Main Entrance of Palazzo Bozzi Corso.

TRUE LUXURY IS SIMPLICITY, ACCORDING TO CHEF ANTONIO DE CARLO, A MESSAGE BEAUTIFULLY CONVEYED THROUGH HIS FOOD.



The olive garden around the pool at Fiermontina Luxury Home.

borhood restaurants—Blu Notte stands out—but my favorite was Zéphyr, the simple, almost monastic white-tablecloth restaurant at La Fiermontina's Luxury Home.

Chef Antonio de Carlo is one of the few chefs I've met who genuinely embraces the local *cucina povera* mindset, though with sophisticated techniques. For him, it's all about local ingredients, and Mediterranean cuisine with a contemporary flair. He often uses just three or four ingredients to compose plates which intensify the singular qualities of each. I had a beef fillet with wild chicory and an intensely lemony sauce that amplified the meat's succulent beefiness. For dessert, a vanilla panna cotta was subtly flavored with lavender and thyme-fermented honey and crowned with a lacy flower toile. True luxury is simplicity, according to Chef de Carlo, a message beautifully conveyed through his food.

Besides Palazzo Bozzi Corso and La Fiermontina Luxury Home in Lecce, the La Fiermontina Family Collection also includes a spectacular pied-à-terre in Paris' Place Vendôme, and La Fiermontina Ocean in Larache (Tangier). I left feeling that it's rare to find a hotel that so exquisitely tells a story through art, passion, and design.

