

ESTATE *planning*

For Italian architect Roberto Falconi, the conversion of one wing of his childhood home in the Lombardy countryside reflects the synthesis of his aesthetic passions with his family history

TEXT PAOLO MORETTI | PHOTOGRAPHS CHIARA CAEDDU

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Any architect would surely relish the opportunity to work on their own house, with no need to mediate between their vision and the demands of a client. For the Italian architect Roberto Falconi, this sense of pleasure is still evident 30 years after completing work on his home in Franciacorta, a stretch of countryside north of Milan that is well known for its wine production. With a sort of paternal benevolence towards his younger self, Roberto fondly remembers the bold and eccentric project of his youth. His affection for the place is also rooted in the fact that it is where he grew up.

Roberto's family home was the main house on a large estate and has parts that date back to the fifteenth century. Over the following few hundred years, it was expanded, finally settling into a U-shape in the eighteenth century. When the house was left to Roberto and his brother Bernardo [def just 2 brothers? later caption says 3], they decided to divide the house between them, with each taking a wing. Roberto's wing, the left side of the 'U', comprised some of the more functional aspects of country living, including the estate's corn-drying kiln, the stables and the carriage house. But he was still able to give it distinguished air – not only by virtue of his glamorous housemate, an Afghan hound named Kabul [does he have children living here too? or have they moved out?].

The gently rounded arches of the long stable now form what is a loose enfilade of rooms rather than a gaping open-plan space, with divisions between a large entrance hall, a

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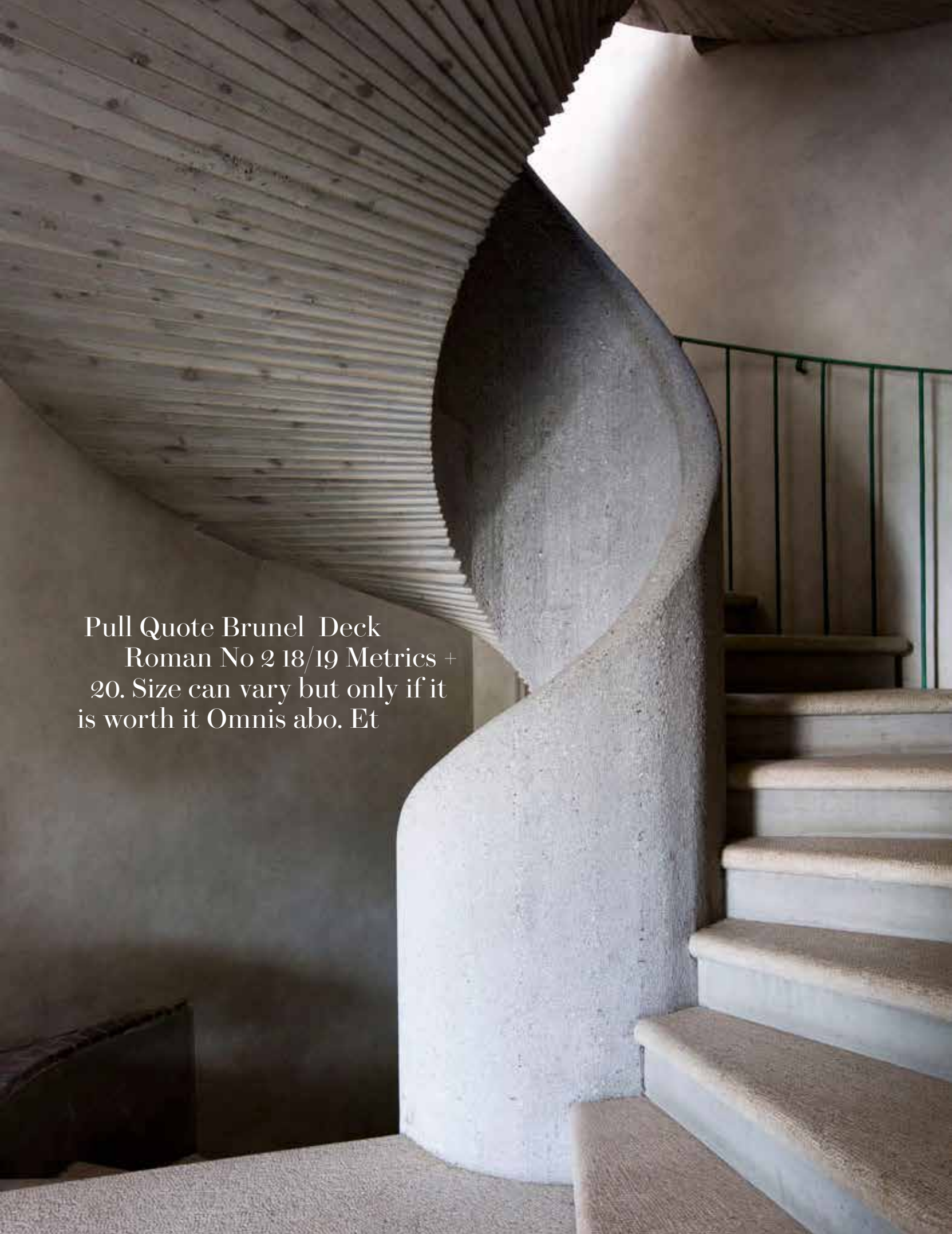
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seating area and a dining room created by strategically placed pieces of art and a set of free-standing shelves laden with collections of [?????]. The walls of these rooms are decorated with neutral stuccos, while grey Borricino [Botticino?] stone floors give the space a modern, architectural feel. Careful not to overwhelm the space with modernity, however, Roberto left the ceiling beams [where? all throughout the house?] unsullied by modern light fittings and installed wire strips of spotlights in between them instead [Castiglioni for Fontana Arte?]. These are nearly invisible during the day, but by night create the effect of a starry sky.

This interplay between [juxtaposition of?] the ancient and the modern can be seen throughout the house, as can Roberto's disparate interest in both twentieth-century European design and African tribal art. The chimneypiece in the sitting room is a commanding fifteenth-century piece, but it sits alongside a comparatively discreet Seventies marble bookshelf [is this a Mangiarotti design for Skipper?]. The latter is used to display Ethiopian and Somali headrests that he has collected over many years.

The sitting room is visually divided from the kitchen and dining space by a large, double-sided abstract painting that seems to float mid-air. It is, in fact, held in place by a burnished metal pole that extends from the floor, between the two canvas faces, and to the ceiling. The kitchen and dining area celebrates one of Roberto's overriding passions – the work of Angelo Mangiarotti, considered one of Italy's twentieth-century masters of architecture and furniture design. Here is Mangiarotti's elegant marble 'Eros' dining table, as

A photograph of a spiral staircase. The staircase has a wooden deck with a radial pattern of planks. The wall is made of light-colored concrete with a textured finish. The stairs are carpeted in a light beige color. A green metal railing is visible on the right side of the stairs. The lighting is soft, creating a warm atmosphere.

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well as [which sits alongside?] bronzes and teak cabinetry [are these also by Mangiarotti? or should we explain these contrast with the Mangiarotti marble]. Elsewhere [where? sitting room?], there are sofas and shelving units [by Mangiarotti? sofa table looks like M's Eros]. 'I believe I must be his biggest collector,' Roberto says, proudly.

Running parallel to this long living space is what was once the estate's carriage house. This has been connected to the former stables and converted into what is now known as the music room [does he play music in here?]. It has far more elaborate double-vaulted ceilings and is a naturally dark space, with just a porthole window for light. Alluringly, Roberto had this fitted with frosted glass, which gives the feel of a full moon in a night sky. Perpendicular to the music room [in front of the music room, adjoining the hall?], a similarly double-vaulted former terrace has been glazed and converted into an elegant winter garden, filled with cacti planted in characterful studio ceramics, and furnished with louche Seventies leather armchairs.

Adjoining these two rooms is a double helix concrete staircase – a sculpture in itself – that leads down to a cellar and up to more rooms. The first floor includes an enormous central hall, used as a gallery space to display some of Roberto's contemporary art. Three large bedrooms lead off from here. [Include any of this?: the main bedroom has an eighteenth-century alcove with faux marble decoration, in stark contrast with the austerity of the minimalist decoration?] Another floor up is Roberto's studio, which he shares with his son Gabriele, who is also an architect. 'It's the tra-



