

Helenio Barbetta Kurt Stapelfeldt

Homes decorated by nature

PLANTS, ART AND MATERIAL

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8 Introduction

14 Plants and Flowers

18	Wrap-around sunroom
28	Compact, deliberate and vibrant
36	Wunderkammer
44	The old, the new and the view
56	Inner-city time capsule
66	Reinforcing the roots
74	An architect's home

84 Art and Decoration

88	Invasion of the flying lampshades
98	Lucky number 40
106	Escape to the country
118	The secret garden
128	Big, bold & beautiful
138	The return of the native
146	Sofia's choice
156	Conserving tradition

166 Materials and Textures

170	A surprising country home
182	Mid-century California style
194	The perfect second home
204	The stage is set
214	Lord of the manor
222	Urban oasis
232	Renovated farmhouse
240	Bohemian atmosphere
248	Brought back to life







INTRODUCTION

From the time our species first learned to walk upright, we have been in search of a safe place to lay our heads when the sun goes down or when we need to protect ourselves against the weather. Our home is our refuge. It is where our children sleep and where we nourish our bodies. It can be heaven and can also sometimes be hell, but we always return home. It can be a place of functionality and basic necessities, and your house can speak volumes about who you are. The choices you make in building or decorating your home are deeply personal and can reflect either who you are right now or who you aspire to be, and, most importantly, what your priorities are.



In this book is a collection of homes photographed over a long career by Helenio Barbeta. The pictures are a testament to the homeowners who made intentional decisions to create a personalised environment which is a reflection of themselves. When nature is important to you in everyday life, it will be ever-present in your home. Whether in the countryside of Liguria or in the city centre of Madrid, the homes shown here are an expression of our innate need to have nature close to us.

Whether in the form of potted plants, floral patterns or rough-hewn oak-wood flooring, bringing nature into our living spaces is a choice. As an interior designer, I have had the privilege of accompanying so many wonderful people on their journey to surround themselves with the objects they love, the items which best tell their story. When interacting with a space, we first allow nature in through the windows, the copious amount of natural light flooding in. It is sunlight which is the most important component of nature, and so every morning when we open the shutters or the blinds, it is sunlight which blesses our day, which feeds our plants and which, over time, will bleach your overexposed sofa! So, whether your own home is as studied as the ones in this book or is a college dorm room with an overwatered cactus, every home starts the day kissed by nature.

This collection of homes inspired by nature takes a broad view of how nature is expressed within the living space, and is divided into three chapters: 'Art and Decoration', 'Plants and Flowers' and, lastly, 'Materials and Texture'. They are groupings which best represent the approach of each homeowner to connect themselves with the aspects of nature they find most important. For some it is oversized prints of tropical leaves, while for others it is a picture window looking out over the Italian countryside, and for still others it is a ficus poking its branches out from behind a pillar. All of the living situations are different, as are the contexts in which they are found, but in this book there is a commonality between the homes: the love of nature and the need to bring it inside, giving it a new expression and enriching the lives of those who remain close to it.









Plants and Flowers





CHAPTER ONE **'To plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow.'**

– AUDREY HEPBURN

Gone are the days when you would go to smell your grandmother's flowers only to realise they were made of plastic and fabric. Today, we want to fill our homes with the real thing – living, breathing plants that can often complete a room as much as artworks on the wall. The houses in this chapter use indoor plants as a conduit to the nature outside. They are smaller, contained and manageable houseplants, perfect for those who do not have a garden but still want to add greenery. Being close to these plants somehow manages to soothe the soul and lighten the mood. They require quality sunlight, and in the act of providing that for the plants, we can benefit from that light too.

Wrap-around sunroom

HOMEOWNERS

Stefania Agostini and Luca Mostarda
(AMArchitecture)

Living and working with your spouse can be challenging, but it is not without its success stories – Charles and Ray Eames immediately come to mind. This is what Milaneese couple Stefania Agostini and Luca Mostarda undertook when they opened their studio AMArchitecture after both graduated from the Accademia di Architettura in Mendrisio, Switzerland, launching their practice in 2017. They focused their work mainly on renovations and the production of design products. While their business blossomed, so did their home life, with the births of three-year-old Agnese and one-year-old Matilde. To accommodate their growing family, the two architects began the renovation of a city apartment that had a former life as offices. The challenge was to break out from the long corridor layout, best suited to a workplace, to create a functional and contemporary family home.

To renovate the space, they made bold decisions that transformed it into a greenhouse, isolated from the noise and pollution of the city. Another challenge was being on the first floor of a busy street. To achieve the feeling of being in a greenhouse, they constructed a second row of windows, forming a sunroom that wraps around the living room and kitchen area. Within these spaces, a flowerbed nurtures perennial plants, such as *Ficus robusta*, *Ficus lyrata*, *Ficus elastica*, *Sansevieria*, *Palma areca*, *Philodendron selloum*, *Aglaonema crispum*, *Calathea makoyana*, *Aloe vera*, *Aechmea fasciata* and more, all of which absorb pollution. The greenery serves as a natural filter, purifying both incoming and outgoing air, while the dual sequence of windows creates a serene environment. ‘Our love for nature and understanding of the importance of sustainability,’ explain the architects, ‘are part of our generation, and now with us being parents of two girls, it has made us even more aware of these issues.’

A focal point of this indoor potted forest is the kitchen, slightly raised from the living room, making it prominent. As Stefania says, ‘It is very nice to cook while observing what is happening around you from above. We also covered it with bronzed mirrors to make it more luxurious: we love reflective surfaces because they create special lighting effects.’ With a portion of the floor space being used by the greenhouse, space-efficient solutions had to be found, like in the long dark corridor. It was removed where the girls’ room is, opening up large arches that create an indoor porch, adding light and enlarging the space. The couple has used natural materials like unfinished wood and marble and made use of a vibrant modern palette. This home is now a testament to the love that grows within it, just like the plants. Love is even in the name of the studio, AMArchitecture – *ama* is the third-person singular of ‘to love’ in Italian.







