



Stefano Aluffi-Pentini's apartment in Rome consists of a single enfilade of rooms. The library, which doubles as a dining room (main picture), adjoins the salon (right), in which wall-hung eighteenth-century Japanese painted-paper screens add drama and vibrancy



INTRAMURAL STUDIES

FROM HIS ART-FILLED APARTMENT INSIDE THE WALLS OF IMPERIAL ROME, A BOOKISH ITALIAN PREPARES BESPOKE CULTURAL ITINERARIES THROUGH ITALY FOR TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY GRAND TOURISTS



In the eighteenth century, any Englishman with pretensions to a rounded education undertook a grand tour of the Continent. Letters of introduction in hand, he would be received in the palaces and salons of Europe, viewing private antiquities, leafing through sheaves of drawings and prints, bringing home with him an inestimable trove of experience – not to mention treasures. ‘What I try to re-create is the experience of the grand tour,’ says Stefano Aluffi-Pentini, as we sit in the salon of his apartment in Rome, a stone’s throw from the Forum.

Trained as an art historian, Stefano is founder and director of A Private View of Italy, and creates magical itineraries for a select set of clients that includes the board of trustees of the World Monuments Fund and the American friends of Sir John Soane’s Museum. He founded his agency eight years ago, moving into his home, which is also the company’s headquarters, at the same time. ‘The apartment itself was in a sorry state, a real ruin,’ says Stefano, who turned to architect Raimondo Penta for help in restructuring it.

A false ceiling was removed, revealing four-metre-high ceilings. Divisions between the rooms were also reworked and all the corridors were eliminated. Raimondo Penta opened a series of doorways that form an enfilade running the length of the 100-square-metre apartment, making the whole space – from bedroom at one end to breakfast room at the other – immediately visible.

‘What really persuaded me to move here was that I could have my office in the same building – on the ground floor,’ says Stefano. Yet boundaries between office and home are loose: A Private View of Italy’s staff spends as much time in Stefano’s home upstairs as in the office.

Both office space and home are furnished with pieces Stefano inherited from his uncle, a well-known Roman scholar Fabrizio Appolonj Ghetti. ‘The collection of furnishings, paintings, books and prints was quite large,’ says Stefano. ‘Raimondo was a great help in editing the pieces so that the space was livable, not just an overcrowded museum.’ One of the most fortunate placements was the *Deposition of Christ*, by nineteenth-century artist Filippo Balbi. The four-and-a-half-metre-wide work had been removed from a wall in the family’s villa outside Rome when the house was sold. The space above Stefano’s desk seems tailor-made for this unwieldy work that fitted nowhere else and had spent years in storage.

A major part of the collection Stefano inherited was some 18,000 books, several dating back to the sixteenth century. A fraction now fill floor-to-ceiling bookcases in the dining room/library. ‘I work more



OPPOSITE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT In the breakfast room, an eighteenth-century Neapolitan desk serves as a table. Simple, white-painted bookshelves line the library; beyond is Stefano's bedroom, in which a Fifties Scuola Romana cartoon hangs above the bed. Decorative objects in the salon include an obelisk, amphora, a clock made in Rome, Oriental ceramics and hardstone carvings. THIS PAGE In the salon, lime-washed beams, pale walls and painted shutters provide a foil for a collection of small oils – several depicting classical ruins – a Japanese screen and Louis XVI desk



ABOVE Behind Stefano Aluffi-Pentini in his office on the ground floor hangs a nineteenth-century *Deposition of Christ* by Balbi. OPPOSITE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Stefano inherited from his uncle a collection of antique maps, which provide inspiration for tours. The office area is handsomely vaulted. Stefano also inherited pieces of architectural salvage, which are displayed in the internal courtyard. The kitchen, though diminutive, is serviceable



than I entertain, so the idea of combining two functions in one room – a library and dining room – was perfect for me.’ And indeed the table is just as likely to be strewn with laptop, mobile phones and guidebooks as laid for a formal meal. ‘My uncle’s books are a great source of inspiration for planning tours,’ says Stefano. ‘But we also use the room as a sort of in-house cafeteria for my office, where we all have lunch.’

Stefano’s apartment is near the Colosseum. Inside the walls of Imperial Rome, this quiet, historic area retains its feeling of a small village. Two nearby parks and the Forum provide a sense of *rus in urbe*. ‘I hear the church bells ring every evening at 9 o’clock, as they have for centuries, from nearby Santa Maria Maggiore,’ says Stefano.

With the Colosseum on one side and the Forum on the other, inspiration for creating tours is never lacking. Of further help is the large collection of maps that Stefano inherited. But it is frequently his clients who inspire the most unusual trips.

Like Stefano, his clients usually already know Italy, but want to explore a particular subject or period. ‘It’s a wonderful collaboration,’ he explains. ‘I am able to learn and discover new things all the time.’ For instance, the Sir John Soane’s Museum Foundation wanted to follow the same route the architect took when he visited Italy in the late eighteenth century. Stefano arranged for the group to enter Palermo by boat and attend a concert in a private palace.

While Stefano dedicates most of his professional time to the stately homes of Italy, his own home is no less full of history, albeit on a smaller and more personal scale. Many of the objects, including the screens in the sitting room, were acquired by his uncle on a diplomatic mission in Japan. The portraits mostly depict the Ghetti family – ancestors of his mother’s family, which originated in Florence in the fourteenth century. His father’s family, Aluffi-Pentini, belongs to the Roman nobility.

Our visit comes to an end as Stefano pulls out several ancient guidebooks, thick with etchings of ancient monuments. He lays them carefully on the dining table, waiting for a client who is coming to plan an itinerary in the Veneto. Just as his home easily transforms itself into an extension of his office, so he views all of Italy as one open classroom: ‘I see no reason not to combine business with culture. Breaking through boundaries is always a learning experience, whether it is gaining access to a private palace or seeing something from a new point of view. That’s what keeps things intriguing, don’t you think?’ □

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