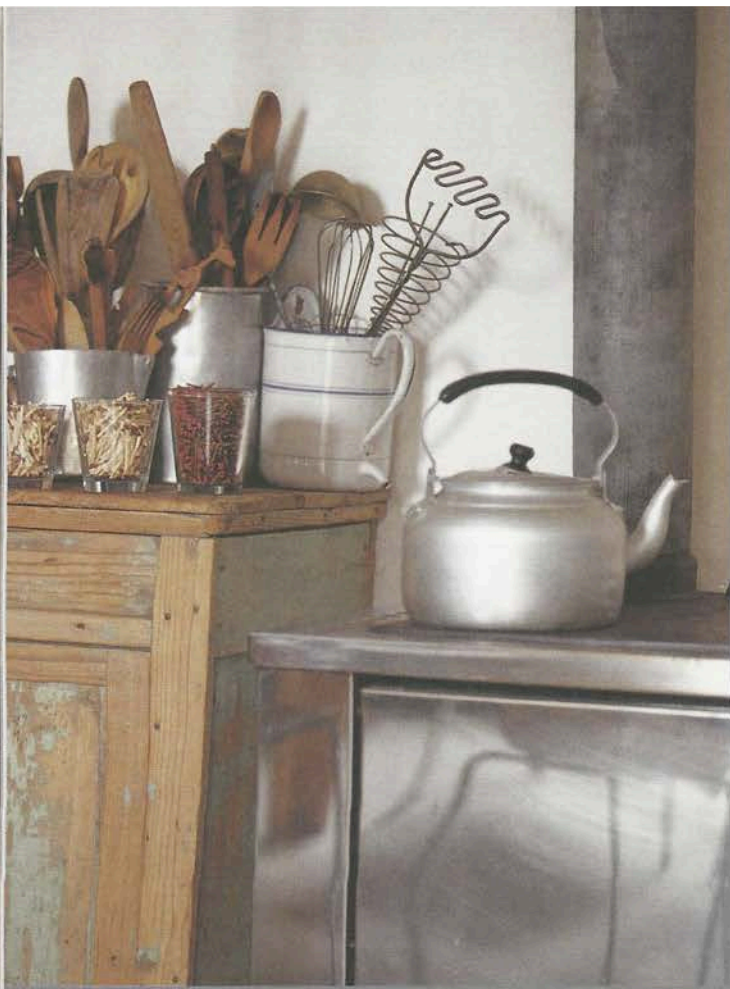
The image shows a classic Italian interior. A staircase with light-colored stone steps leads up from the right. To the left, a wooden cabinet with a diamond-patterned lattice front holds a lamp with a cream-colored shade, a stack of books, and a small arched mirror. In the foreground, a white armchair is draped with a light-colored shawl. The walls are a soft, muted green, and the floor is made of large, light-colored stone tiles. The overall atmosphere is elegant and timeless.

La Vita è Bella

The elegant art of living
in the Italian style

Jill Foulston



The Old Mill

What could be more idyllic than to swim or row across the river for your morning espresso? That's exactly what furniture designer Katrin Arens has done ever since she bought her idyllic farmhouse near Lake Como in the far north of Italy. Katrin came to the area from Düsseldorf, Germany, after winning a scholarship at the Academy of Arts in Bergamo, and the furniture business that she started then is still going strong.

ABOVE AND ABOVE RIGHT Open shelving highlights the simplicity of the utensils: an aluminium teapot, Moka coffee-makers and wooden spoons. Each of the nine compartments in an upright pallet contains colourful pottery held in place with bent nails.

RIGHT Katrin's kitchen shows the transforming powers of her design aesthetic: reuse, recycle, re-love. Cupboard doors were made from old shutters and the original cement floor was left bare and complemented by a cement work surface.

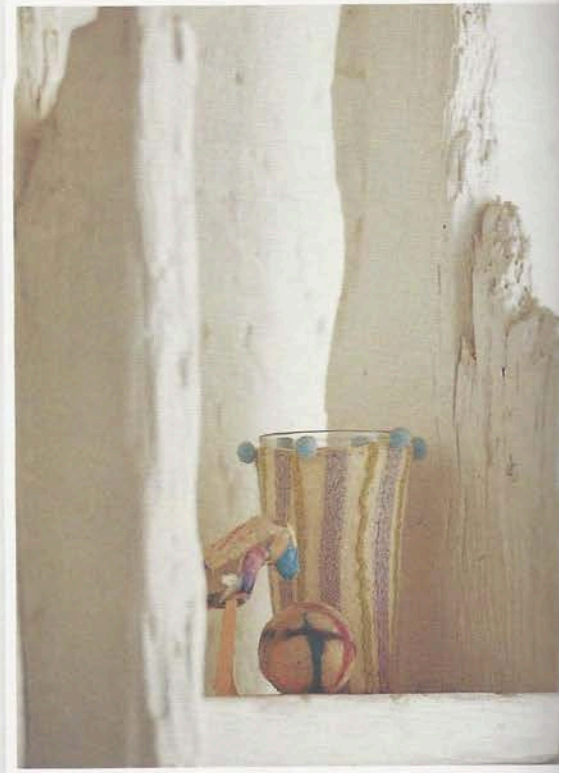






THIS PAGE Upstairs are two tall, narrow bookcases with graduated tops that look almost sculptural. They blend in with the white walls of what was formerly a monastery and mill house. The only colour comes from an evocative oil painting next to them by Hella Arens, Katrin's mother, and blown-glass objects in cheerful pastels.

OPPOSITE A teak and rattan chaise-longue from Sri Lanka is strategically placed next to the wood-burning stove. Rather than installing central heating in the house, Katrin instead burns castoffs and scraps from her furniture production to warm the interior. The graceful arched window provides ample light for reading.



When she discovered the house, Katrin was pregnant. She and her boyfriend had been searching for a place that would accommodate life and work, and they found it in the village of Pontida on the river Adda. This former monastery and mill was the right size for both a family and a business.

The house had been empty for nearly ten years and was without electricity, heating or hot water. Katrin set up her furniture business on the ground floor while the couple lived on the first floor and started renovating the building, which was in very poor condition. Some windows had been bricked up, while others were open to the sky, allowing the

swallows the freedom of the house. 'We left one window open until the end of that summer, when the last birds in the nest had learned to fly outside.' The one nest they preserved in the ceiling beams can still be seen there today.

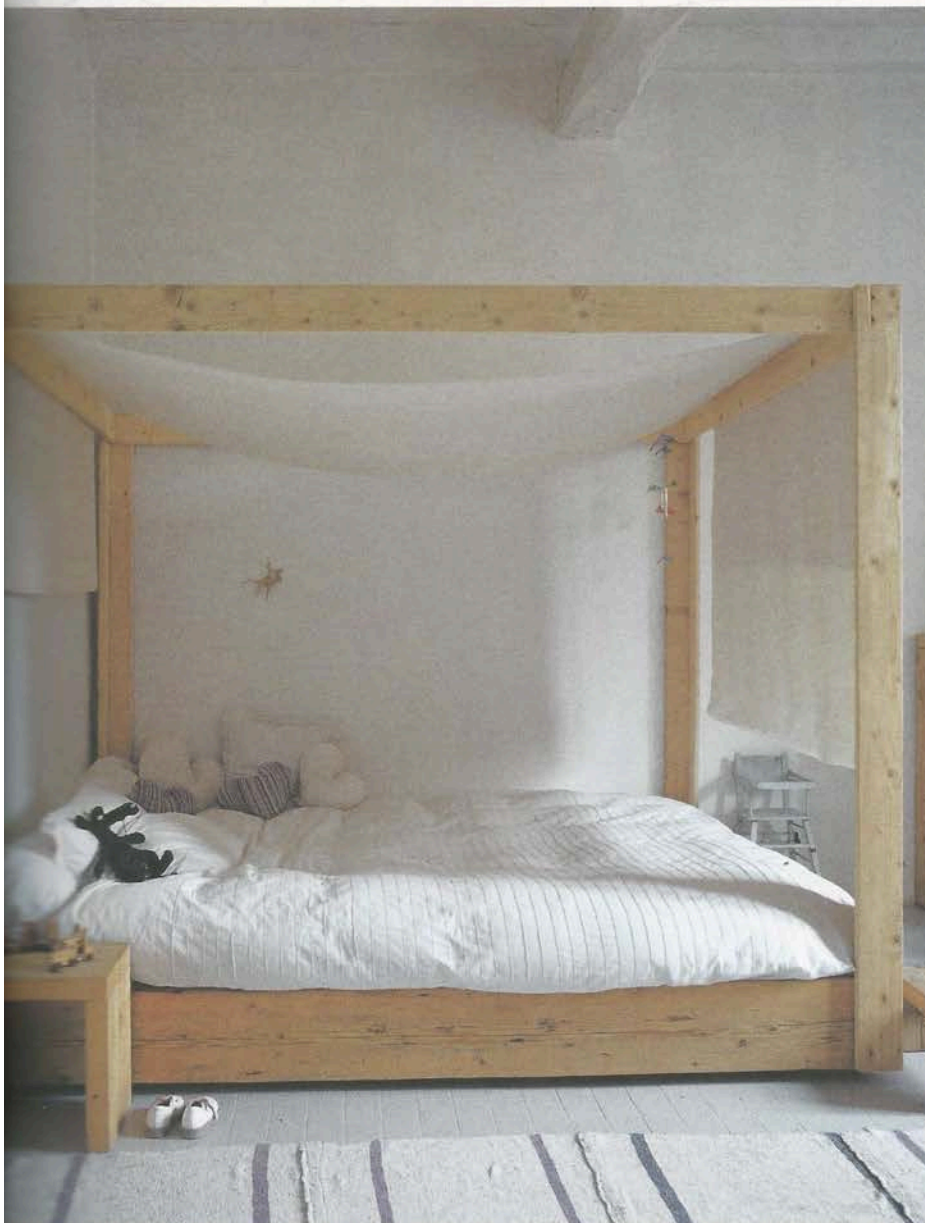
Walls and ceilings that were dark brown and green before renovation were painted pure white. The original cement floors were preserved in some rooms, and others were painted. Katrin made new doors from old shutters and created a kitchen with a cement work surface. That kitchen is where they now gather, Katrin to cook and her children, Laura, 15, and Sofia, 8, to do their homework.



THIS PAGE Katrin's interiors are simple and elegant, accented only by pieces she collects when travelling and her own furniture designs. In the bedrooms, the doors are of unpainted wood with unusual, geometric wooden latches. Beds are covered in natural cotton and linen in neutral colours. The simplicity of the interiors recalls the building's monastic past.



THIS PAGE A small square nightstand echoes the straight, uncomplicated lines of the monumental four-poster bed beside it. Natural linen provides the drapery over the bed. In the kitchen, an old rake makes the perfect towel rack. Every piece in this house tells a story, and Katrin loves giving fresh significance to previously unloved materials by turning them into something new and useful.



None of the original monastic simplicity has been lost. There is still no central heating. Instead, wood pellets heat part of the house and wooden offcuts from the furniture production are burned in the kitchen stove. The family keep fit lugging wood up to the first floor every day.

Since the beginning, Katrin's goal has been to realize simple yet elegant functional objects. It's a formula that works. Throughout the airy spaces of this eco-haven, old furniture mingles with pieces designed and built by Katrin from reclaimed wood. Katrin loves travelling and often brings inspiration home, whether in the form of local flea market finds or larger items from the countries she visits. Asia and South America are especially rewarding hunting grounds. In recent years, Katrin has specialized in

designing kitchens with cement or wood work surfaces accented with wooden or iron doors. Her own home breathes light and texture, with gilt mirrors and oil paintings by her mother, Hella Arens, opening up the white spaces still further.

The mill's stunning position, between the river Adda on one side and the mountains on the other, has not been without drawbacks. 'The first few years, the river flooded twice a year, so we had to put everything up high, including the machinery used to make the furniture.' When the river was in full spate, they could only get out of the house by boat. An old spinning mill has since come to the rescue, and production and showroom are now high and dry only minutes away, in the village of Villa d'Adda.