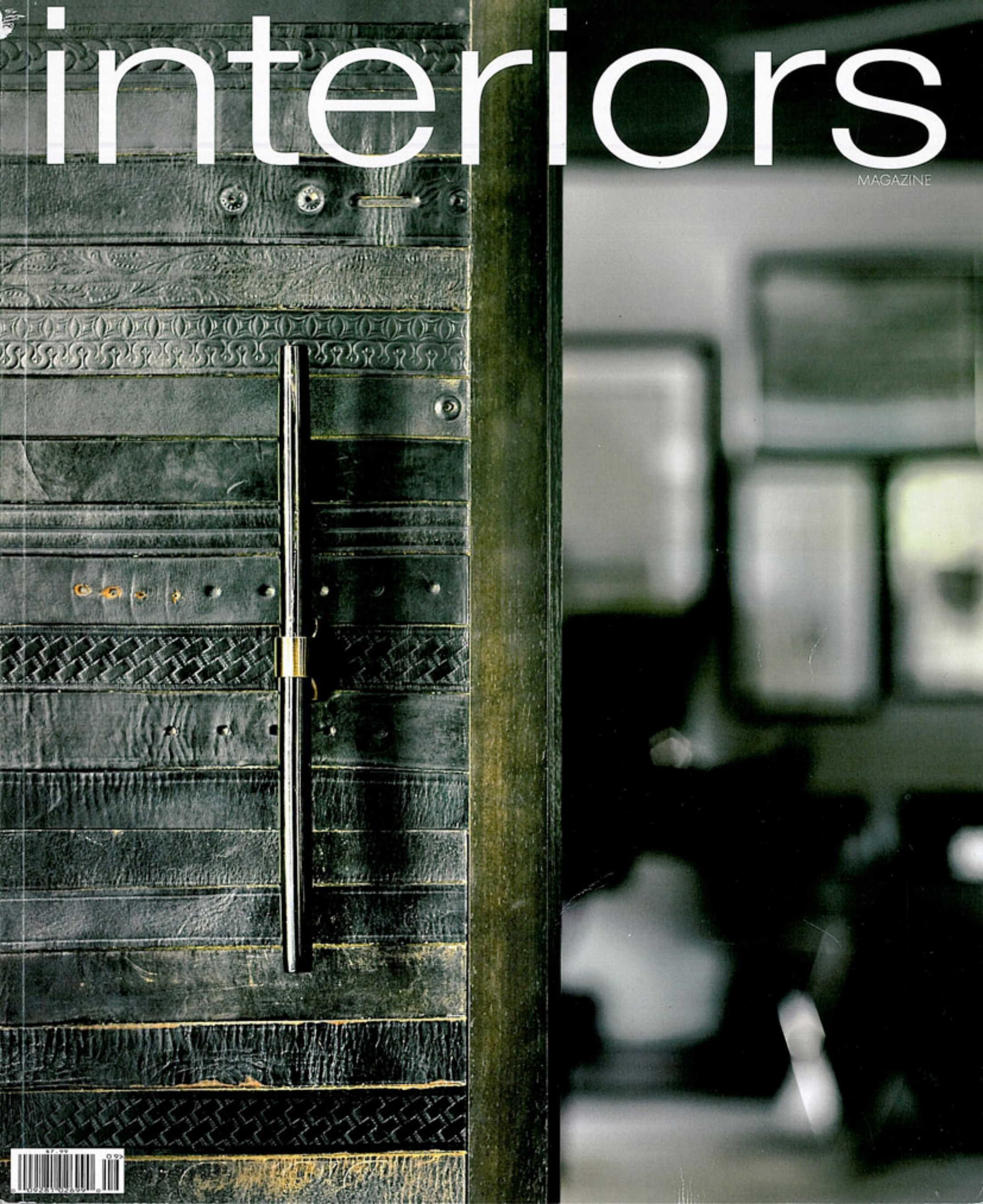
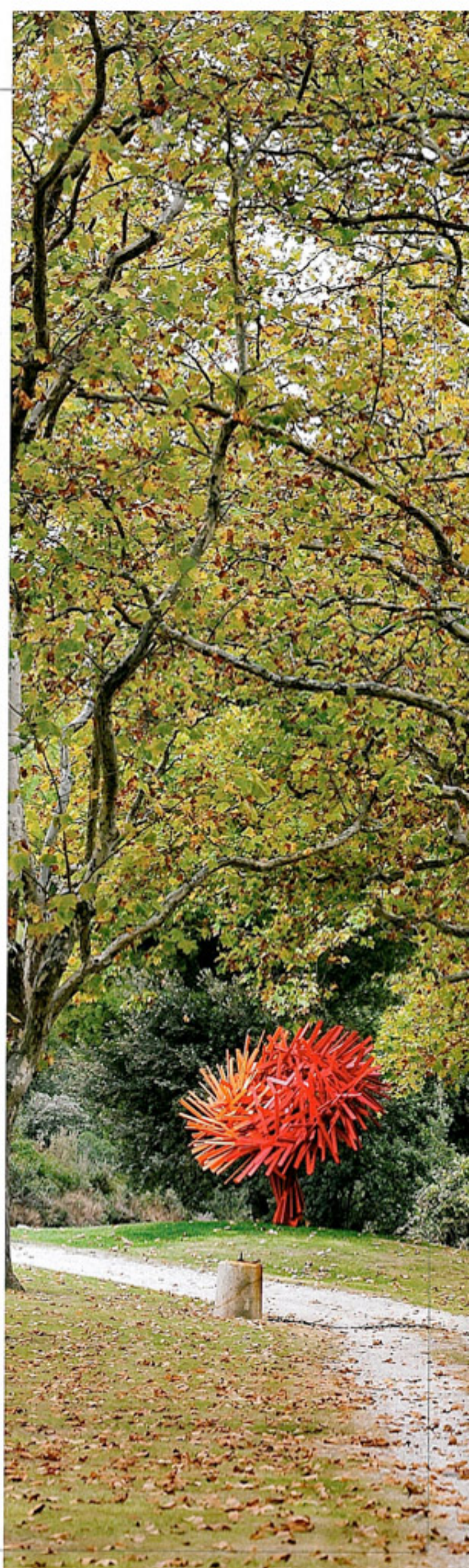


interiors

MAGAZINE





PROVENCEPATINA

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Over the centuries, many of the medieval abbeys scattered among the ancient villages of Provence have been transformed into fine country homes. The estate known as Pierredon, a former Cistercian abbey founded in 1205, is just one such example of adaptation and survival.

Today the well-preserved chapel is nearly all that remains of the original Abbaye Sainte-Marie de Pierredon, although the eight-bedroom house was constructed on early foundations in about 1602. This magical preserve of 1,600 acres of forest, vineyards, goat pastures and beehives is hidden in a secret valley. After a two-mile drive along a dusty country road that passes through fields of lavender, one sees the top of a bell tower and comes to an allée of majestic old plane trees that leads to the chapel walls.

"For us, this project was quite an achievement," says the Italian owner, Lorenzo Pellicoli. He and his wife, Mariarosa, had vacationed in the region for years and decided that their dream retreat would be a vineyard near the sea. "The idea was to plan ahead for retirement, allowing time for the vines and an organic farm to mature," he says. "We didn't find anything we liked at the coast, so we decided to look inland. We saw Chateau Miraval, which was later bought by Brad Pitt, but then we came to Pierredon. Although it was miles from the sea, Mariarosa said to me, 'This is it.' Two days later, we made an offer."







116 august/september 2012

















An initial challenge was to move the unimpressive entrance route from the south of the property to the north, thereby utilizing the natural drama of the landscape. The new route also provided perfect sites for two sculptures from the owners' collection: a red flower piece by Miguel Chevallier and a twisted bench-like work by Marc Nucera.

In the 1950s the artist Jean Martin-Roch, a friend of Picasso and Ernest Hemingway, had done considerable repair work on Pierredon, but the house still had no large primary living spaces, just a series of small rooms typical of old farmhouses. Walls were removed to create a large living room and an adjacent vaulted dining room. A focal point was created in the living room by installing a Lafourcade-designed stone fireplace surround, while warm-toned Vico Magistretti velvet sofas, Giorgetti tables and a rug from De Padova establish a symmetrical seating area. One wall is defined by metal bookshelves from Vitsoe. In the dining room, slipcovered chairs from De Padova complement a classic French linen tablecloth; the crystal chandelier and candelabra are circa 1820.



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"We wanted an absolutely genuine Provençal manor house, but we're not 'old chateau' people," says Lorenzo. "We like a mix of Italian and Scandinavian design, clean and uncluttered." Throughout the house, floors, windows, shutters and doors were either repaired or replaced using traditional materials. In the kitchen, the oldest part of the house, Arne Jacobsen copper pendant lights lend a midcentury touch to the venerable space. The architects converted Jean Martin-Roch's art studio into the master bedroom and oak-floored bath, choosing a 1960s Marta Maas-Fjetterstrom rug for the bedroom floor and contemporary Catellani & Smith wall lights for the bath. They also carved out space for another four baths and a sizeable office. "We incorporated modern technology for modern living," says Alexandre Lafourcade. "It's perfectly accessible, but completely hidden."

There remains something otherworldly about Pierredon. Nature is always close at hand, and the air is scented with herbs. The silence, broken only by the gentle trickle of water in the courtyard fountains, allows for contemplation. "We've lived all over Europe and the United States," says Lorenzo Pellicoli, "but there is nowhere quite like this." ■ architecture-lafourcade.com



In a secluded valley in the Alpilles region of Provence, a bench sculpture by Marc Nucera overlooks an orchard on a vineyard estate renovated by Alexandre and Bruno Lafourcade