

La dolce casa

One step up from buying a Fendi coat or a Bentley car is buying an apartment that comes with the same seal of approval. Branded property is big business worldwide – and getting bigger – but there's only one architect, with the tattoos of a rock star and the soul of a philosopher, who brings the house down...

By Zoe DARE HALL Portrait by Francesco PIZZO

Standing beside a glimmering swimming pool in Sicily on a hot summer's day, with a simple stone villa behind him, the Italian architect and designer Andrea Boschetti is posing, shirt off, revealing an array of tattoos. In one arm he is cradling his baby daughter, Mira; in the other he is swigging from a bottle of beer (Corona, ironically, but this photo was taken the year before that word meant anything sinister). Alongside this Instagram shot, Boschetti has written, 'How has this little angel arrived? Sex, drug [sic] and rock 'n' roll.'

As statements of personal branding go, it's a powerful one – if tongue in cheek. But that's to be expected of Boschetti, the designer whom international property developers turn to when they want to get a luxury fashion, car or other elite brand on board. In essence, he is the man to help them convey a label's DNA through bricks, mortar and soft furnishings.

The rock 'n' roll element is one side of Boschetti, a flame-haired, youthful-looking 51-year-old who loves his fast bikes (he used to race them semi-professionally) and body art. 'I like only my tattoos,' he clarifies. 'I don't like people who have a tattoo because other people have it. When you create a tattoo, it's only for you.'

He also loves design, of course. He's the founder of the award-winning architecture practice Metrogramma, whose projects include major regeneration schemes in Milan, where he lives, and he did part of his PhD in urban planning at New York's prestigious Columbia University.

The tattoos, as it turns out, have great design significance too. On his right arm is MOCKBA (Moscow), he

inked in the distinctive lettering of the Russian Revolution-era constructivist movement. 'All the design in the world started from this period in Russia. We owe that all to them,' says Boschetti, who recently lived in the Russian capital for several years. 'A lot of amazing buildings from this period have been destroyed. We need to redesign, not destroy.'

Running down his left arm are graphic designs that take their inspiration from the Russian avant-garde artist Kazimir Malevich. But the most important tattoo, he says, is the one that stretches across his collarbone: the word Mira. 'She's a princess already. She's my best project,' he grins. She's a joint venture, it should be added, with his glamorous wife, Olya, a Russian TV casting director whom he met at a launch party when he lived in Moscow.

The Sicilian shot depicting Boschetti as a rock-star new father was surely artfully staged rather than casually snapped. With his other professional hat on, as head designer at The One Atelier – a Milan-based company (with offices in London and Shanghai) that specialises in developing branded real estate – Boschetti has masterminded projects with Bentley Home and Fendi Casa. Currently on sale is Epic Marbella, Fendi Casa's first branded real-estate project in Spain, with 56 villas, priced from €2.5 million to €7 million (£2.2 million-£6.1 million), furnished by the fashion brand. This year looks busy too, with Boschetti start-ing work on schemes in London, Europe, Mexico, the USA and China, and while most are mired in NDAs, he

RIGHT Andrea Boschetti at his home in Milan



mentions that Karl Lagerfeld and Bugatti are among his new clients.

Despite the global pandemic, the branded-residence sector is booming. In the past year alone, 100 new projects have launched, taking the worldwide total to 590, according to the property agency Savills, with a further 400 expected to launch in the next five years – everywhere from Iceland to Nigeria. These properties are pandemic-proof partly because they are luxury, discretionary purchases by those who can. ‘These are second, third or fourth homes for globally mobile buyers,’ says Savills’ Riyan Itani. ‘Branded residences allow the buyer to enjoy to-the-door services and leisure activities from the privacy of their own building – a factor that is ever more valuable in these times.’

Typically, these collaborations are between developers and luxury hotels. Take the world’s first Dorchester Collection residences, which have just reached completion on London’s Park Lane. But fashion labels, premium car marques, culinary brands and celebrities are increasingly joining the fray, whether it’s Porsche in Miami, or Nobu and Pharrell Williams, who have both homed in on Toronto to launch residential projects this year.

Boschetti’s rock-star image may seem at odds with luxury brands – particularly such long-established fashion houses, which can have a haughty air of exclusivity about them. But the branded relationship is one based on trust; these are companies who have spent decades, sometimes centuries, honing and guarding their global image and reputation. Branded residences bring them



FROM TOP Boschetti with his daughter Mira, in 2019. An outdoor armchair at a villa in Epic Marbella



Given its southern Spanish setting, with views over the Mediterranean and the Sierra Blanca mountains behind, he found inspiration in the contrasting bold colours used in recent Fendi collections. ‘Fendi has gone for a much more contemporary, fresh [style]. They use a lot of strong colour, so we used the colours of the landscape, the greens, blues and sand colours (to reflect the proximity to the deserts of North Africa), and strong light. The buildings had already been designed when we came on board, but we gave them a new look, like tailor-made fashion. We found a perfect fit.’

So what’s in it for the developer when they hook up with a luxury brand? ‘To elevate the level of quality and reach international recognition,’ says Carlos Rodríguez from Sierra Blanca Estates, which is used to building super-prime Spanish residences, but this is its first venture with a designer brand.

Such brands are always ‘demanding,’ says Rodríguez, but Boschetti’s long-standing relationship with Fendi Casa meant he was the natural choice of architect. ‘He understood what Marbella was missing.’

For buyers, branding comes with a premium price tag – an average of 31 per cent above equivalent non-branded properties, according to Savills. But it also brings reassurance, thinks Boschetti. ‘When you choose a brand you choose three things: the value it will bring; the recognition of the materials, textures, everything you

FROM TOP Among the branded residential projects developed by Boschetti’s The One Atelier are Epic Marbella (with Fendi Casa); Szervita Square in Budapest (Bentley Home); and Büyükyalı in Istanbul (Fendi Casa)



He’s speaking via video call from his house in Milan’s historic Porta Romana district, where he is quarantining for two weeks after a trip to Moscow to visit Olya’s parents. ‘I hope all this disaster will end soon,’ he says of the pandemic. ‘But this year for me was a chance to stay much more with my family.’

His Zoom background reveals little about his home’s interior design beyond an atom-like ceiling light – the Mendelev lamp he created for Vistosi, inspired by the eponymous Russian scientist – and some foliage. But Boschetti describes it as ‘a scene of experimentation, a patchwork of what I like and who I have respect for.’

He is often asked by buyers to interior design their apartments head-to-toe in the brand involved in the scheme, but his home ‘is not a showroom,’ he says. ‘I don’t want everything to be one brand.’ Instead, there are iconic pieces by the Campana brothers, Jacopo Foggini, Fendi Casa and Patricia Urquiola, ‘as well as my own personal creations. You’ll also find my personal library hidden behind a mirrored door. I belong to a club where we chat about philosophy.’

Philosophy and design were dual passions of Boschetti’s while growing up in Bolzano with his parents and his older brother, who, he says, ‘is the complete opposite of me: he doesn’t like travelling, doesn’t like leaving Bologna where he lives, but I always ask his advice when I write anything.’

Boschetti describes himself as ‘a really simple guy. This is connected to my origins. All my family is super-simple. My papa is also an architect. My family wasn’t rich, so my father worked in the day and studied architecture at night when I was born. I decided to follow this passion too.’

A turning point came at Venice university, where he was studying the history and literature of architecture. ‘But I wanted to create my own images and visions.’

One of his professors was the architectural historian Manfredo Tafuri. ‘One day we went to Rome to draw

St Peter’s Basilica in the Vatican. We had to study it in detail, then return home to draw exactly what we saw. But I didn’t remember anything. I decided to create an entirely new project, and Tafuri said to me, “Andrea, you are a very good guy, but you need to go and follow your passion: architecture.”’

He took Tafuri’s advice, and spent a couple of years in the early 1990s living in Barcelona, when the city was in the throes of its Olympic transformation – ‘It showed people how to change the soul and shape of a city’ – and in Rotterdam, where he worked with the Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas.

Upon returning to Milan, he set up Metrogramma, in 1996; then five years ago he co-founded The One Atelier with Michele Galli. The latter is a lawyer and develop-

ment consultant, mainly on aid projects in Africa, but he also ‘spent 20 years in Russia gaining experience in the world of construction, especially with luxury private clients,’ Boschetti explains.

Whether it’s a glamorous scheme of multimillion-pound residences in Marbella, or a social-housing project in Milan, ‘a common thread’ runs through his work, Boschetti says. ‘I put the people at the centre of my creativity. I want to grow and improve the lives of the people who live there. I like to ask more questions than I give answers, so I hear the people in the middle.’ This approach has stood him in good stead for branded residential projects, perhaps, where he is the man in the middle. Often, he suggests which brand the developer should choose.

Car companies pose a particular challenge, he says. ‘It’s much harder to translate the elements of an automotive brand. It’s not enough to just look at the latest

model and base it on that. You need to study the history and the evolution of the brand.’

One project was to design the residences furnished by Bentley Home at Szervita Square in Budapest, a new building in the historic city centre. ‘The key element was that the beauty isn’t too showy – it’s more about what remains in the mind. It’s soft and subtle, not aggressive and ultra-modern. Sometimes luxury is immediately obvious – super-rich luxury – but the Bentley Home project was an anachronistic interpretation of “luxury”.’

Epic Marbella near Puerto Banús, due for completion in 2022, with the longest lagoon-style swimming pool in Europe, was in some senses easier. ‘With fashion brands, you have much more to go on because every year there is a new collection,’ he says.

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a new audience, but they place their reputation in the hands of the developers and designers behind the properties that will bear their name. And Boschetti has become the man they trust.

‘Not a lot of architects can work with brands,’ he says. ‘It’s not like working for a “normal” property developer. It’s much more about understanding the soul of the brand.’ The process can take up to seven years per project, and his role spans everything from talking to mayors and politicians to secure the initial permits, to furnishing the show homes once all is built, and being the whipping boy if anything goes wrong.

‘Maybe it’s because the developer wants to spend less – because these are expensive schemes – and then the brand goes to check the quality, they don’t like something and they come to me. It’s my problem. It’s the design team who didn’t check,’ Boschetti says, with a nervous laugh.



see when you buy an object by the brand in a shop; and reassurance that this is something different and special.’

For now, like most of us, he is stuck working mainly from home, which he finds hugely frustrating. ‘It’s not so easy to work virtually for me. As an architect and designer, I need to touch to be able to draw.’

He employs a lot of young designers – ‘They bring energy, power and creativity’ – and fears for this generation. ‘I worry about how people will relate to each other, and how we will stop ourselves from losing our culture. I think of myself 30 years ago and don’t know how I would have managed this period.’

Now, though, he has all he needs at home, in the shape of a two-year-old princess. ‘It has been a year of being able to watch her grow,’ Boschetti says, smiling – this is a man who wears his intellect and passions on his sleeve. One wonders what will be the next source of inspiration to make it on to his arm. ●