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# Mountain high

Claudio Saverino and Tiziano Vudaferi, of Milan- and Shanghai-based design practice Vudaferi-Saverino Partners, talked to **identity** about the importance of storytelling in the creation of Mountain Stone House, a unique restoration project in the centre of the 16th-century rural settlement of Crana, Italy.

TEXT: JENNIFER COPLEY

PHOTOGRAPHY: PAOLO VALENTINI

**H**ow do you transform a traditional semi-abandoned stone house dating back to the 1500s into a contemporary holiday home? Through the concept of storytelling, according to Claudio Saverino and Tiziano Vudaferi. The Italian design duo believes every one of their projects tells a story. "According to the kind of project, we seek inspiration in the place, its pre-existences and memories," they explain. "The inhabitant is the main subject and their empathy with the place is the most important part of every project." Their design process involves building relationships to identify and realise the client's needs, they explain: "Through architecture and interior design we create and cultivate relationships between people. The project must therefore be story-telling; but starting with story-listening."

Saverino and Vudaferi were invited to restore a dilapidated traditional stone building in the small mountain village of Crana. The village sits in northern Italy's Val Bregaglia, a valley that follows the river Mera from the Maloja Pass to Lake Como. The architects explain: "Most of the territory of the valley is located in Switzerland and only the last part is Italian; in this part there is a small rural settlement, the village of Crana, which like many other similar places in the mountain valleys is in a state of semi-neglect." The first site purchased by the client contained a semi-collapsed rural home alongside a barn and stable. Once work had been completed on the first project, the client acquired the adjacent building.









Tiziano Vudafieri + Claudio Saverino

“The inhabitant is the main subject and their empathy with the place is the most important part of every project.”

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TIZIANO VUDAFIERI + CLAUDIO SAVERINO

“First of all, there was a strong thought on the meaning of traditional architecture and how it should be recovered, and then a thought on the inner and more intimate spaces. But the concept behind our residential projects is always the same: creating spaces for those who live there,” state the architects. The Mountain Stone House project embodies a design challenge: that of both respectfully restoring and preserving the integrity and aesthetics of a historical structure, while at the same time meeting the requirements of a contemporary holiday home. The building’s position had significant issues concerning ground stability. To combat this, the sloping site was excavated and secured with reinforced concrete structures. Saverino and Vudafieri summarise the intention behind the project: “The objective was to be less impacting and very respectful of the location – preserving the traces, history and past of these two buildings, which were then connected to become a new one.” While the external dry stone walls preserve the original historical architecture of the site, the interior has been lined with thermal insulation and covered with a new wooden ‘skin’.



A commitment to the preservation of tradition and to the sympathetic restoration is embodied in the way in which materials have been chosen and used throughout the space. The architects elaborate: "The external structure is strictly in stone. In the interior, the floors, walls and ceilings are all in wood, alternating between oak, birch plywood and larch. The chestnut of the original floor, dating back 200-300 years, was preserved and restored. It was a 'small laboratory', where we experimented with combinations of different woods, each with its own different nature." A wood and glass aerial bridge connects the two original buildings, creating a single living space. Large windows frame alpine vistas and welcome natural sunlight. A complex design challenge has been distilled into a formal simplicity that centres on variations of timber, light and the surrounding mountain landscape.

The juxtaposition of the traditional exterior with the contemporary functionality of the building's interior configuration tells a captivating architectural story. As Saverino and Vudafieri succinctly summarise, "We worked on the 'container' and the 'content' in a completely different way: if on the first we pursued a conservative attitude, on the second we created an interior that you do not expect, which surprises you as soon as you cross the entrance into the space; there is openness and brightness. Here we have reached, in our opinion, an excellence that interests us more than luxury." <sup>10</sup>

