



A WARM WELCOME

Once run-down with floors that were not linked from the inside, smart design has transformed this 400-year-old building into a modern and comfortable home that's perfectly cosy at Christmas

Architects: Forward Architects
Photographs: Alan Carville
Styling: Enrika Pizzuto, Eclecticist, Forward Architects
Words: Rachel Loos
Special thanks: Butlers, camilleriparismode, Eclecticist



Above, living room: upstairs, the living room is a relaxed space. A feature wall rendered in micro-cement and with a real wood-burning fireplace holds the room. The flooring is parquet. A young Araucaria tree is simply decorated for a subtle festive touch. Ferm Living table decorations, vase and carpet, Eclecticist. Table runner, camilleriparismode

Left, courtyard: the central courtyard features natural stone flooring and the original external staircase. An olive tree brings in a statuesque element as well as a natural one and gives shade as well as a warmer feel. 'We spent many months looking for the perfect tree,' says the homeowner. 'It had to be tall and thin rather than squat'. Lights strung from the tree are decorative all year round

The challenge of making this 400-year-old property in Gharghur a modern home was finding a way to link the rooms so living in it did not mean a constant switching from inside to out. 'When we bought it none of the rooms were connected,' says the homeowner. 'To reach the upstairs you had to cross the central courtyard and take the external stairs. Our brief to the architect was to make the house more ergonomic, to give it flow, and not have to go out in the rain to reach the bedroom!'

The building, which the homeowners believe housed the first bakery in the village, was dark, humid and in a dilapidated state, with a bathroom built in the central courtyard. 'When we saw it, the property was a complete disaster but we could see that it had so much potential with many beautiful features such as the arabesque lines of the courtyard, and the original birthing room with its two arches and the niche in the ►



wall for the statue of a saint,' says the homeowner. 'While we wanted the house to be modern, and whiter and brighter, we were clear that we wanted to keep the traditional elements.'

The task of transforming the rundown building was given to Forward Architects. 'A lot of thought went into each detail,' says architect Daine Pranaityte Micallef. 'We were limited in what we could do because of regulations but we were still able to create an internal spiral inside, making it possible to use all the areas without going outside. We also added a master bedroom at the back of the property, a cosy living space overlooking the central courtyard, and a roof study. We also eliminated odd structures in the courtyard, and reinstated its original shape. All this was done in a subtle way, so the new additions would complement and blend in.'

The old rubble walls at ground level were treated for humidity and plastered and then painted white. 'We wanted a clean look, however we left some stone details exposed, for example the stone arch in the kitchen, to highlight the nice texture of the original walls,' says Daine. ▶

Above, dining area: on the ground floor, one entrance to the home is into the dining area. The soft grey of the concrete floor gives a modern feel, and is warmed by the wooden tables and fabric chairs. A wood burning stove makes it snug, especially in winter. Here, too, a small pine tree is decorated and along with a wall wreath decorates the room for the season. Dining chairs, log basket, Christmas socks, small table accessories, Eclecticist. Anglepoise lamp, table runner, camilleriparismode. Christmas accessories, Butlers

Adjacent page, bathroom: emerald green walls are complemented by the Moroccan-style tiles and brass fittings

Adjacent page, staircase: at one end of the dining space, the spiral staircase, made of steel with a gypsum plaster railing, links the ground floor with the first floor and above, the roof area





Above, kitchen: off the dining area, the kitchen is a clean, white space with cabinets that have been kept low-level. 'As the room is quite narrow and long, we decided to have only low units on both sides,' says Daine. 'Tall units housing ovens, a fridge, more storage and a coffee/tea counter are located at the end corridor space which works as the extension to the kitchen. The corridor space is a connection between the TV room and small back courtyard.'

Right, home-made Christmas touches: Dried orange slices and candles wrapped with evergreen sprigs and coloured string are simple to do but make pretty Christmas decorations



Also retained were the many little niches throughout the house which ensure its history and identity are evident.

In the kitchen, however, the architects installed a double lining - creating a false wall within the room, leaving a space in between the two walls for the air to circulate. 'The state of the walls was very bad - they were uneven and with soil in between so plastering them would have used a lot of plaster and it would have been too thick. A double lining gave us the perfect wall,' says Daine.

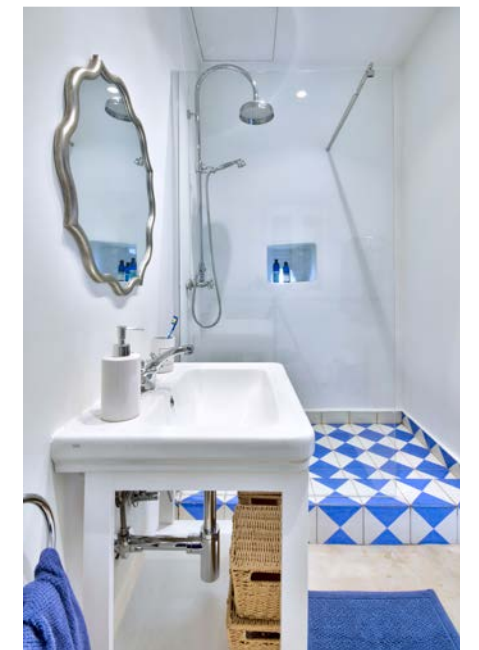
The spiral stairs that connects the downstairs living space to the level above is a head-turner, snaking its way between the floors. 'It's a take on the garigor staircase but instead is constructed of steel in a raw lacquered finish with a gypsum plaster railing,' says Daine.

Upstairs, the architects created two new rooms, one a stylish but comfortable living room, the other a master bedroom and bathroom. ▶

Left, guest bedroom: the original birthing room is now a guest bedroom, with ensuite bathroom, and retains all the original features including the flagstone flooring. It is reached via the central courtyard. Bed linen camilleriparismode. Furry pillow, butlers

Below left, child's bedroom: neutral colours and good storage create a room that feels calming and restful. Fern living cushions and toys in teepee, Eclecticist. Small Christmas tree, Butlers

Below, guest ensuite: otherwise decorated in all-white, the blue and white tiles in the shower area give this small bathroom character





A careful palette of materials has been used throughout, the choice complementing the age of the house but at the same time, ensuring a contemporary feel and a real sense of comfort.

The homeowners' work takes them overseas for months at a time. 'But when we return it feels like home,' they say. 'We have put a lot of our heart into it.' [HW](#)

Top, master bedroom: this room is a new extension to the house and includes a dedicated wardrobe/dressing area, with a small French balcony at the back and en-suite bathroom. It is connected to the old part of the house via a glazed bridge which gives plenty of indirect light to the room. Natural linen bed linen set and bed throw, camileriparismode

Above, bathroom: micro-cement walls give texture and a homogeneous look to the bathroom