

ELLE COUNTRY

DECORATION

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THE WORLD'S
MOST BEAUTIFUL
HOMES IN THE
COUNTRY

RURAL REBELLION
TOP CREATIVES
SHAKING UP
OUR GREEN &
PLEASANT LAND

PLUS MUST-BOOK
RESTAURANTS
WITH VIEWS YOU
WON'T FORGET





CALL OF THE



Inspired by folklore from his childhood, one former resident of this village in Switzerland was compelled to return and complete a unique barn conversion

Words and photography RAMONA ELENA BALABAN/LIVING INSIDE

MOUNTAINS





The small village of Ardez in the Swiss Alps appears almost frozen in time. Many of the typical Engadine farmhouses, with their painted façades, remain unchanged since the 17th century. This is a place where tradition means everything.

One of the region's oft-told stories is of the sparrows or *randulins* (in the local Romansch dialect) – young men from the village who, like the birds that visit every year, leave their mountain home for the big cities but always, without fail, return. Andri Mengiardi, who owns this unique property, is a modern-day sparrow. 'When I was 15 years old I left this house,' he says. 'Inspired by the *randulins*, I moved out and flew away.' But, just like his ancestors before him, he could not ignore Ardez's pull, returning with a vision for the 400-year-old barn on his family's land.

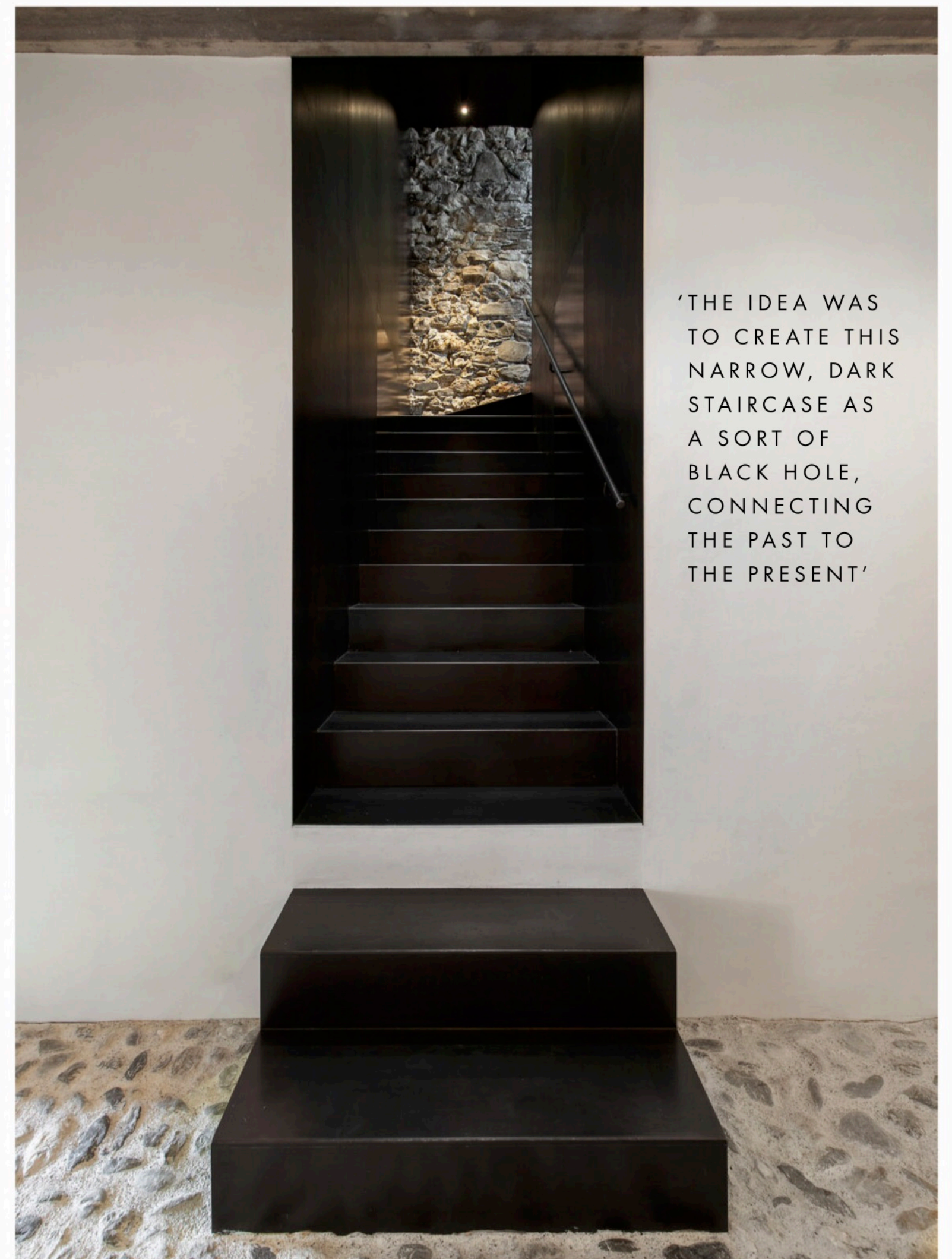
'I was meant to do this, it's in my genes,' says Andri, of the renovation he has completed with the help of architects Duri Vital and Adriana Stuppan. This building, like many others in the region, was protected by heritage laws, so the trio's plans had to be sympathetic to the original architecture. Using a tight edit of materials – stone, wood and steel – and local builders and artisans, they've accentuated the barn's beauty, while adding a touch of modern magic.

A rectangular steel box, containing storage and a guest bathroom, separates the living room and kitchen in the barn's open-plan upper floor. Placed beneath the wooden eaves, it's a purposeful juxtaposition of original features and contemporary design. Three bedrooms with ensuite bathrooms and a pine sauna – all with a distinctly more traditional feel – are situated on the floor below, accessed via a black steel staircase.

'The idea was to create this narrow, dark staircase as a sort of black hole, connecting the past to the present,' explains Andri, who continued his preoccupation with blending old and new when decorating this home. The wooden floors throughout were made using timber recovered from 300-year-old ceiling beams, and a stone pig feeder from the same era has been turned into a washbasin. Meanwhile, furniture and lighting by Louis Poulsen, Arne Jacobsen and Jean Prouvé brings an architectural quality.


'My parents supported our family of six from this small farm in the middle of the village, so I am very grateful to the place,' says Andri. His main aim for the barn's transformation, which took four years, was understandably personal and yet perfectly simple: 'To treat it with respect.' randulin.com





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