

MANSION



A consecrated cabinet was used to bless the workers.



Lasers cleaned grime off the exterior.



Frescoes are everywhere—even in a bathroom.

A Palace In Palermo

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life's work to maintain the artistic and architectural integrity of the Palazzo Alliata di Pietratagliata, as it is known, while ensuring it also flourishes as a multi-generational family home. Over those years, she says, consistency has been her by-word. "To have a historical house is like having a baby that never grows up," says the 67-year-old. "You have to be attentive."

A former banker herself, the princess inherited the property from her father, Pier Luigi Alliata, the duke of Pietratagliata. Her family has been presiding over the palace's four stories, its roughly 23,000 square feet and its imposing medieval tower since the middle of the 18th century. That is when her direct ancestors, the Marassi family, who then held the dukedom of Pietratagliata, bought it from the Termines, the Sicilian noble family with Catalan roots who built the palace in a Gothic-Catalan style.

Coincidentally, Mr. Licata di Baucina, a 75-year-old hereditary prince, is a descendant of the Termines, and the couple's 1976 marriage gave the pal-

ace what could be called millennial closure.

She and her husband, who is now retired, have pride of place in the *piano nobile*, the grand upper level of Italian palaces typically located on the second floor. The 6,500-square foot apartment, reached by a large courtyard staircase, is marked by two enormous rooms, each with 30-foot ceilings and variable uses. The 1,300-square-foot grand salon is furnished with centuries-old family portraits, a painted family tree, a French grand piano and spare bits of ancestral armor. It is also where the princess likes to stage Easter-egg hunts for her grandchildren.

Meanwhile, the ballroom, decorated with a landmark frescoed ceiling, has become the default dining room. (It's closer to the kitchen, explains the princess, than the formal dining room.)

A second, smaller sitting room, which the family calls the red salon, includes an ornate cabinet that has been consecrated as a private chapel. The princess installs her family's Neapolitan-style crèches here each Christmas. During the facade ren-



ovation, she had a priest use it to bless the crew laboring on scaffolding.

On the lower level, the princess's son, London-based event planner Antonio Licata di Baucina, and his wife, Alessandra Agnello, have their Palermo base. Her daughter, Amalia Licata di Baucina, has an apartment that she shares with her young son.

Ms. Licata di Baucina, 41, a trained lawyer, has gotten into the family business of rescuing Sicily's heritage. She is converting a once-derelict historic garden belonging to her father—called the Giardino Duca di Seradifalco, about a mile from the palace—into a new restaurant and event space.

A fourth apartment, located upstairs, is reserved for the princess's elderly aunt, and, as is typical of Palermo palaces, there are commercial tenants on the

The red salon, top left; the newly cleaned 15th-century Gothic facade, above left; portraits of ancestors decorate the entryway, top right; a frescoed bathroom, above right. Below, a bust of a Bourbon viceroy, the princess's maternal relation and a restored stairway.



A lime wash revived the stairwell.

ground floor. The building is located not far from Kalsa, the Palermo district where Sicilian nobles traditionally built their palaces as urban counterparts to sprawling agricultural estates inland.

Two historical periods dominate the look of the piano nobile. In the mid-18th century, the pal-

ace was largely made over in a Rococo style, marked by the series of frescoes by Vito D'Anna (1718-1769), Sicily's revered Rococo painter. In the early 20th century, when Palermo had become an international watering hole at the end of the Belle Époque, the princess's grandfather, the duke of Pietratagliata,

embarked on a major renovation of the grand salon into a neo-Gothic showpiece, with an extravagant painted-wood ceiling and raised, fresco-like wall decorations. The masterminds behind the work in the 1910s and '20s were Francesco Paolo Palazzotto, the Palermo architect who helped modernize the city's Arab-Norman cathedral, and Ernesto Basile, who worked on the local opera house, the Teatro Massimo, and oversaw the redesign of unified Italy's new parliament in Rome.

The mastermind of the most recent renovation was Palermo architect Angela Persico, a relative of the princess, who has helped to restore several of the island's monuments, including the ancient Greek temple at Agrigento in southwest Sicily. Ms. Persico says her cousin's palace is one of a dozen or so that remains a true family home.

John A. Davis, emeritus professor of Italian Studies at the University of Connecticut and longtime editor of the Journal of Modern Italian Studies, says Palermo's noble families

STEFANO TRUPOLI FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL (6); JASON LEE (MAP)

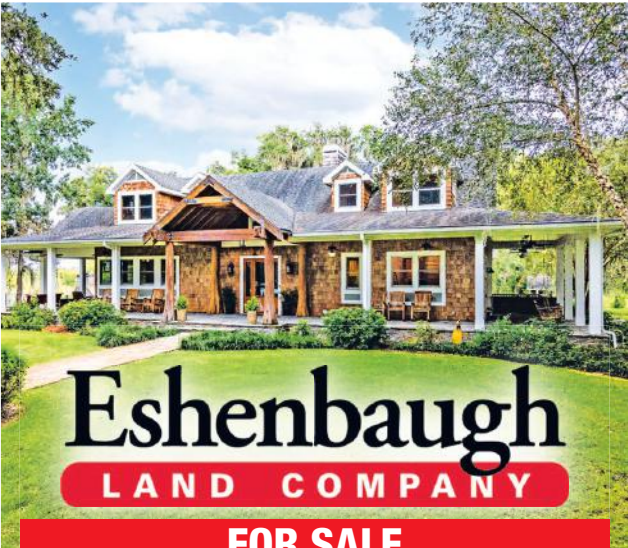
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