



From Abandoned Farmhouse  
to Idyllic Retreat



A 19th-century stone farmhouse reborn: geometric beds, soft perennials, and preserved agricultural relics honor the property's utilitarian past through thoughtful reinterpretation.



In Monferrato, where ancient villages preside over vineyards, and the landscape unfolds in soft curves, garden designer Cristina Mazzucchelli has conjured an intimate oasis from the unforgiving clay soil of Piedmont. This is a garden born of restraint and wisdom, where every element has earned its place—a secret retreat that embraces the challenge of its landscape with confidence.

A decade ago, Mazzucchelli—better known for her chic urban interventions on Milanese balconies and rooftops—discovered a 19th-century stone farmhouse abandoned to the elements. Working with architect Carlo Alberto Maria Caire, she embarked upon a transformation that would honor the property's agricultural heritage. Where other designers may have swept away every trace of the site's utilitarian past, she chose reinterpretation.

Indeed, the results immediately reveal her instincts. While a concrete apron once sprawled the length of the house's exterior, Mazzucchelli replaced it with a graveled forecourt punctuated by geometric beds of perennial planting. Nearby, neatly clipped cypresses stand beside mulberry trees pruned into elegant parasol forms, creating a composition of relaxed formality appropriate to this pastoral setting.

Throughout, Mazzucchelli has exercised remarkable discipline in her plant selections. Rather than succumbing to fashionable novelties, she has populated her borders with species such as *Echinacea purpurea* and billowing *Stipa tenuissima* that can weather Piedmont's hot summers. This garden thus thrives without irrigation, relying instead upon tenacious plants that have made peace with the challenging clay beneath.

Gravel paths and reclaimed Luserna stone meander throughout, leading from the house through established fruit trees to a swimming pool. Ancient beams form the risers of shallow steps that descend toward this secluded retreat, where a pergola draped in wisteria shelters a hot tub, and a smoke tree of the "Royal Purple" variety anchors plantings of feathery grasses.

What makes this garden remarkable is its defiance of contemporary garden-making conventions. In an age of high-maintenance spectacle, Mazzucchelli has created something far more enduring: a landscape that asks little yet offers much, where the essence of rural Piedmont breathes through every carefully preserved fruit tree and repurposed agricultural relic. The garden is designed for living—a place of harmony and tranquility that serves its purpose as an agrotourism retreat while remaining authentically itself every season.



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