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▲ Check pop-up laundry hamper; £14, johnlewis.com



▼ Portrait check storage basket; £54, torimurphy.com

▲ AM,PM Felicia jute laundry basket; £42.25, laredoute.co.uk



► Rope-handled carrying basket; £75, cotswoldco.com



◀ Moss laundry basket; £42, made.com

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The Italian job — in Stoke Newington

One couple made sure their home had all the elements for la dolce vita — including a Venetian-style walk-in pantry. By Hugh Graham

You can take the girl out of Italy, but you can't take Italy out of the girl. Just ask Martina Casonato. The graphic designer, 33, may have lived in London for more than ten years, but when she and her English partner, Joe Stephenson, bought and renovated their first home in Stoke Newington, north London, she wanted to bring a touch of la dolce vita to their traditional Victorian terrace.

She asked their architecture firm, Bradley Van Der Straeten, for a rustic aesthetic reminiscent of the old country: stone walls, battered marble worktops, exposed wood beams and, most of all, a Venetian pantry.

"Even before we began looking for a house I started a mood board for the kitchen," says Casonato, who grew up in a medieval village an hour from Venice but had been renting a flat in Shoreditch for a decade. "I wanted a mix between an old Italian grandma's house and one of the cool restaurants we love in east London. But the pantry was my dream. Give me a walk-in pantry any day over a walk-in wardrobe. I'm that kind of girl."

To make room for her dream pantry the pair expanded their galley kitchen's width by 4ft 6in, filling in the side return, and added a 10ft-long dining area. So what's so Italian about it?

For one thing the terrazzo floors and wood-and-glass doors remind her of pantries from her childhood. Then there are the ingredients within: various tomato sauces (her favourite brands are Mutti and Le Conserve della Nonna), Garofalo dried pasta, Bibanesi breadsticks and Pan di Stelle biscuits, all of which she can buy from Ocado; hanging bulbs of purple garlic from Sicily; and jars of her mum's foodstuffs, homemade with produce from the family orchard (peach and lavender jam and Tropea onion chutney).

For easy access the pantry is located



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just behind the kitchen island, which she and Joe, who is also a graphic designer, have nicknamed their "private tapas bar". The island has wooden legs, just like in an Italian nonna's house, so it feels like a piece of furniture. The off-white marble worktop was a daring choice for someone who is constantly cooking.

"A lot of people warn you: marble will stain or chip. So they go for quartz. And they're right, it does stain. At the beginning Joe was, like, 'Be careful.' But I just figured an Italian nonna wouldn't mind. They got their marble stained, they chopped pasta on it — whatever. I love the patina [that develops] over time. It has a story to tell."

Other Italian features: when the builders were stripping the walls she fell in love with the exposed plaster in a corner of the kitchen. "It has green and pink hues, which immediately reminded me of walls you see walking around in Venice. Crumbling down, with layers and layers. It made me



Martina Casonato's pantry features a terrazzo floor and reeded glass doors. The kitchen is filled with antiques, including a 100-year-old reclaimed dining table, and handmade crockery from local London potters



feel at home, so I was adamant we had to keep it."

Many walls were painted in lime paint from Bauwerk Colour. "The texture reminds me of an Italian material, marmorino, which is like pulverised marble dust they apply with a spatula. You can see the movement and irregularity."

In the principal suite in the converted loft (they now have four bedrooms), there's a marble shower seat in the bath. "My parents' home has a similar seat — that's where the idea came from. I wouldn't trade it for the world. I love sitting there in the morning, with the hot stream of water on my face. You sit there and slowly wake up."

Her true happy place will always be the pantry, though. It is not just a nostalgia kick — it helps her to produce content for her side hustle: posting recipes on her stylishly curated Instagram account @thevenetianpantry, which has more than 18,000 followers. Her favourite recipes include her "deconstructed parmigiana — I bake the aubergine rather than deep-fry it, the tomato sauce is from cherry tomatoes, and I use burrata instead of mozzarella. My current obsession is caponata, a Sicilian side dish. You use aubergine, celery, capers, green olives and white onion, and it's served cold with a bit of vinegar and sugar. So yummy!"

For homeowners thinking of putting in a pantry she recommends a U-shaped space, divided into sections. "You immediately know where things are when you need them. On the left I have all my spices and tins and my mum's jams. The carb section is in the middle: pulses, rice and pasta and breadsticks. There's also some nuts. To the right I've got the teas, seeds and loose herbs. I make my own tea — fennel and mint and dandelion is one. I also have loose rose petals. I love to make lattes with rose petals. You parboil oat milk with a handful of rose petals, add cardamom and other spices and honey. It's a lovely winter warmer."

One of her key tips for homeowners is not to extend underfloor heating into the pantry; food must be kept cool. She put doors on the pantry so that she could close them for a cleaner look when appropriate. The reeded glass on the doors also creates an atmospheric vibe at night. "There are concealed LEDs under the shelves, which give a soft light. At night, when you close the doors, the pantry acts as a glowing lightbox."

So what jars can the queen of pantries recommend? "In terms of functionality, I like good old Ikea jars for tall pasta and nuts. They are really easy to open and pour from. Mostly I recycle glass jars from my mum's jams or leftovers from the supermarket. It contributes to this rustic, not too precious aesthetic."

The house is not an Italian theme park, though. "It's subtle. There are English influences too." Hence the Farrow & Ball paint — Skimming Stone on wood trim and Strong White on some walls — and the antiques from Home Barn in Little Marlow, Buckinghamshire: old café chairs, milking stools and a 100-year-old reclaimed dining table. Her collection of handmade crockery, displayed on open kitchen shelves, is from local London potters. "Some of them are actually Italians in London... I couldn't help but be influenced by my upbringing and the materials I kept seeing growing up. It came naturally to me. It's part of who I am."

“Marble does stain. But I love the patina that develops over time. It has a story to tell”