

Robb Report
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LUXURY RESIDENCES AND FINE DESIGN

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MODERN MASTERS

Artful interiors from Europe's leading designers



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Working the Rooms

An exclusive community's design mastermind lives in his own artfully rendered world.

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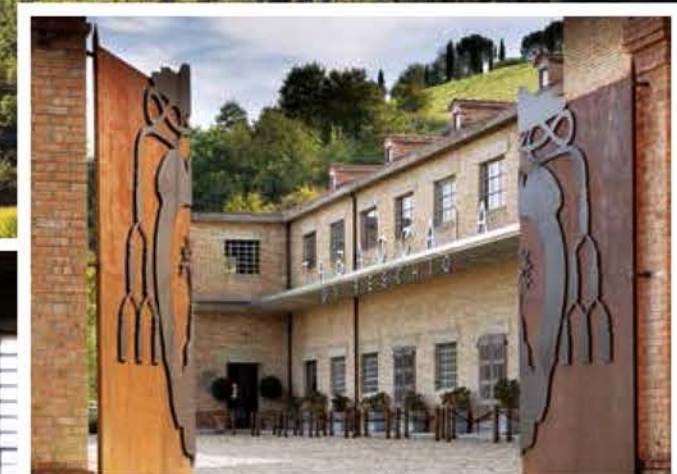
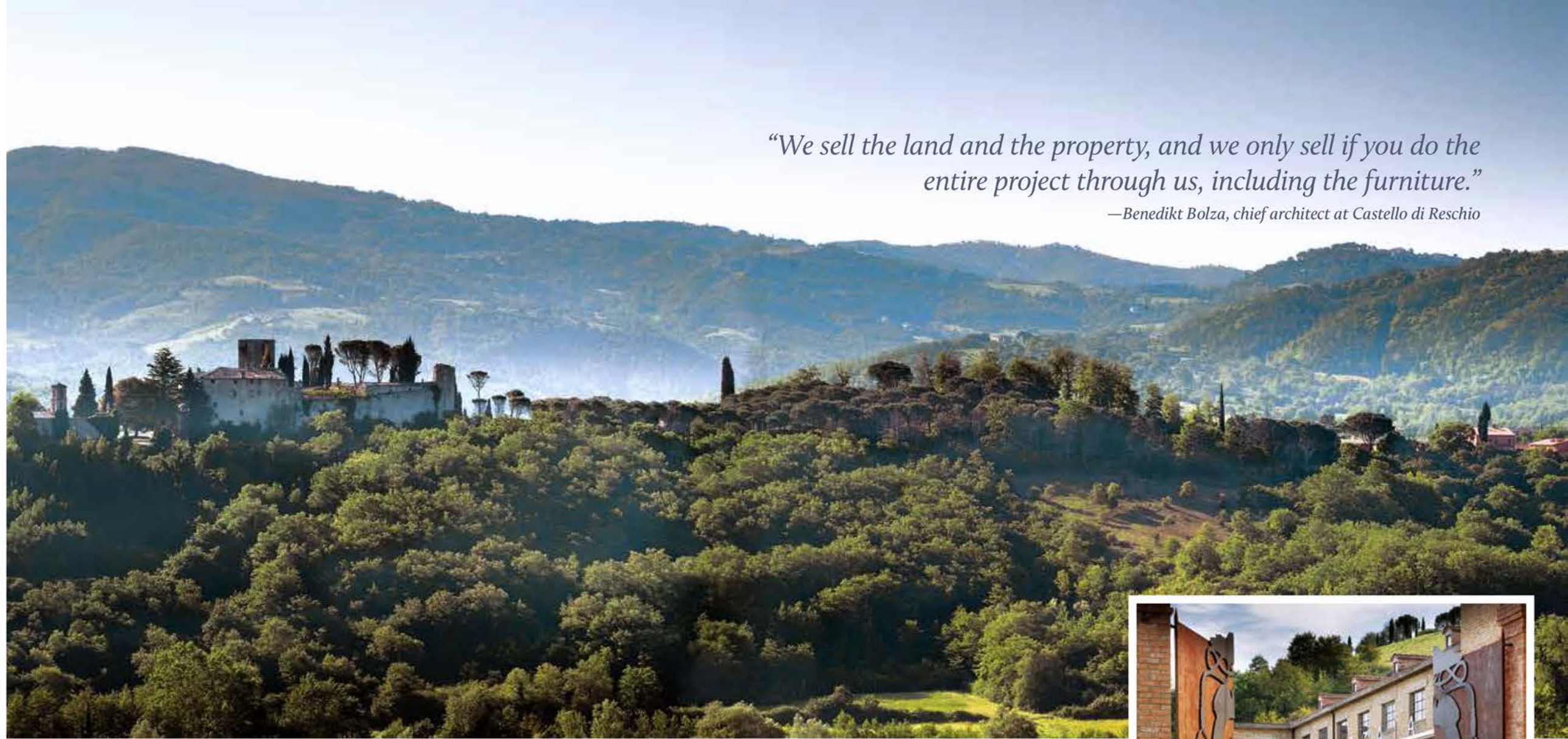
LE CORBUSIER, the 20th-century architect and trailblazer of modernism, famously said, “A house is a machine for living in.” Castello di Reschio, a 3,000-acre private community in the central Italian region of Umbria, has given Benedikt Bolza an education Le Corbusier never enjoyed. Since 1999, Bolza, who earned his degree in architecture from the University of Westminster, London, has been restoring Castello di Reschio’s centuries-old farmhouses (many of them ruins) and responding to their owners’ needs after he has transformed the dwellings into machines for living in. Unlike most architects, who rarely revisit their creations, the 40-year-old Bolza sees more than 20 of his, week after week, year after year, while residing on the estate in a home of his own making. “I live with all the projects we’ve done every day,” he says. “It gives real insight into how the clients use the designs.”

Those who purchase a home at Castello di Reschio also purchase the services of Bolza and a team of 120 who turn historic remnants into structures gorgeously livable. (To start, there were 50 ruins on the grounds; about half have been restored to date.) The estate’s management staff handles housekeeping matters and similar tasks, such as arranging to rent homes when their owners are away (see “Life at Castello di Reschio,” page 62). “It’s not a club. There are no club fees, and there’s no fractional ownership,” Bolza says. “We sell the land and the property, and we only sell if you do the entire project through us, including the furniture.”

Those furnishings are Bolza’s brainchildren too. Crafting the decor for his own home on-site, from 2009 to 2011, helped lead him to another venture, the recently launched B.B. for Reschio line of furniture and lighting designs. Items in the series include a campaign bed based on those favored by British army officials of old

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—Benedikt Bolza, chief architect at Castello di Reschio



Benedikt Bolza, managing director and chief architect at Castello di Reschio, recently finished the Tabaccaia (above, bottom, and previous spread), a 10,000-square-foot former tobacco-processing facility turned creative center. Bolza updated the space by adding a mezzanine and a set of stairs to his father’s office. Bolza’s white 1956 Fiat 600, another of his restoration projects, parks in the building. The 3,000-acre Umbrian estate (top), named for its castle, features 50 ancient farmhouses. About half have been restored and designed by Bolza and his team.



who accepted posts in India and Africa, and the Corsini recliner, modeled after an abandoned 1920s-era piece found in the palazzo of Bolza's parents-in-law. Many of the B.B. designs are based on bespoke items he has created for Castello di Reschio homes and clients, a sideline that ramped up after he designed his home. "I haven't changed them," he says of the pieces, several of which were custom-built for rooms and spaces on the estate. Bolza imagines that the more idiosyncratic confections might have trouble finding a wider catalog audience, and he is at peace with this possibility. "Some will be too quirky, and some will be too niche," he says. "But some will be successful."

BOLZA'S SUCCESS is a story that begins with his parents, Count Antonio and his wife, Countess Angelika, in 1984, when they bought their first property in Umbria. Benedikt was 10 at the time, and he recalls that only a few eccentric Brits shared the area with him and his family. "In the 1980s, Umbria was not really on the map," Bolza says. "It was a great surprise to them [his parents] how untouched and beautiful it was." As a boy, the Hungarian-born Antonio fled his country in the wake of World War II, and years later, he and his Austrian-born wife sought a place where they and their five children (Benedikt is the middle child



Farmhouse ruins (far left at top) at Castello di Reschio range in age from 500 to 1,000 years old. Often they are entirely rebuilt, as was Spinaltermine (center, top and bottom), a four-bedroom, 4,800-square-foot home completed in 2009. The chimney (in the top photo) "wasn't there, but it looks very authentic," says Bolza, explaining how he draws inspiration from local architecture. He was less involved with Belvedere (above, top and bottom), a six-bedroom, 7,100-square-foot home from 1997, but it is dear to him nonetheless—he met his mural-painter wife on the project.



and second son) could put down roots. “They came purely because they wanted a holiday house,” he says. His parents’ bolder move came later, in 1994, when Benedikt was studying in England. They purchased Castello di Reschio, seated on 2,200 Umbrian acres (a subsequent acquisition increased the parcel to its current size). “My parents never saw buying the estate as a cold investment. They wanted to re-create a family center. They wanted to have land again.”

Though he spent his teenage years at the estate, Bolza says he is unsure whether residing there influenced his interest in architecture. He does, however, cite an architectural bent in his family, pointing to a talented uncle and his mother (“She never finished training. She’s a natural architect”) and musing, “I’m sure there’s some influence, but it’s difficult to measure.”

Measuring Bolza’s skill is easy. His work at Reschio shows he has mastered walking the fine line between authenticity and functionality. “Our houses are famous for being lighter and less rustic,” he says. “They’re a bit more mixed.” Even so, he does like to draw on precedent. One of his favorite touches is so old it seems fresh—putting the bathtub in the bedroom, next to the fireplace. “I think you have the best conversations in the bath,” Bolza says, noting that historically people often washed in the room where they slept. He deems his configuration “the best of the best. You get out of the bath and feel [the heat of the] open fire next to your cold, wet skin. It’s the icing on the cake.” Taking the tub out of the bathroom technically makes it no longer a bathroom, but it frees up space that Bolza punctuates with the sun’s rays. “We spend a huge amount of time in the bathroom, much more than we admit to,” he says, laughing. “I think it’s absurd not to have a huge (text continued on page 58)

The living room of Bolza’s Castello di Reschio home contains pieces of his making. Before a portrait of his wife sits his Etruscan window seat, one of the pieces in his new furniture line.

Working the Rooms

amount of natural light when you're looking after yourself."

Another Bolza hallmark, not to mention a frequent request from his clients, is the polished concrete flooring that he first installed in his own house and that his mural-painter wife, Nencia, discovered would take oil pigments well. "They sink into the floor," Bolza says of the paints. "It's like staining [the floors] forever."

Bolza also has made his mark at the estate's Tabaccaia, a former tobacco-processing facility from the 1940s (tobacco was a regional cash crop in the 20th century) that he finished renovating in June of last year. Unlike the other antique buildings at Castello di Reschio, which were constructed of stone, it was fashioned from brick, concrete, and glass. Bolza chose to keep it that way. Dubbed the Creative Centre, it contains an exhibition space, offices, an architecture and design studio, and workshops where he and his artisans execute his furniture designs. (Bolza created the Tabaccaia's office furniture and lighting as well.)

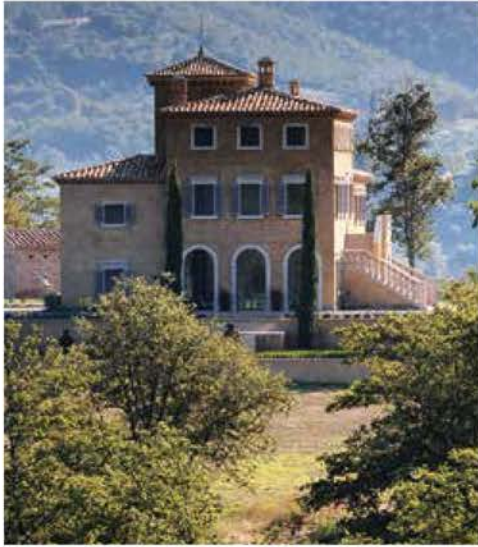
The Creative Centre's exhibition space came about after the Bolzas observed the sculptor Nic Fiddian-Green (see "Horse Power," page 144) in action at Castello di Reschio; the family had invited the Englishman to observe the estate's horses and turn them into art. That event compelled the Bolzas to launch Art@Reschio, a program of ever-changing art exhibitions that raises money for local causes. The exhibit space has hosted a show of drawings and paintings by Lindy Guinness, aka Lady Dufferin, and another exhibit by the sculptor-painter Calyxte Campe. A show devoted to Fiddian-Green's equestrian works will appear there next year.

"It was so refreshing to do the Tabaccaia,"

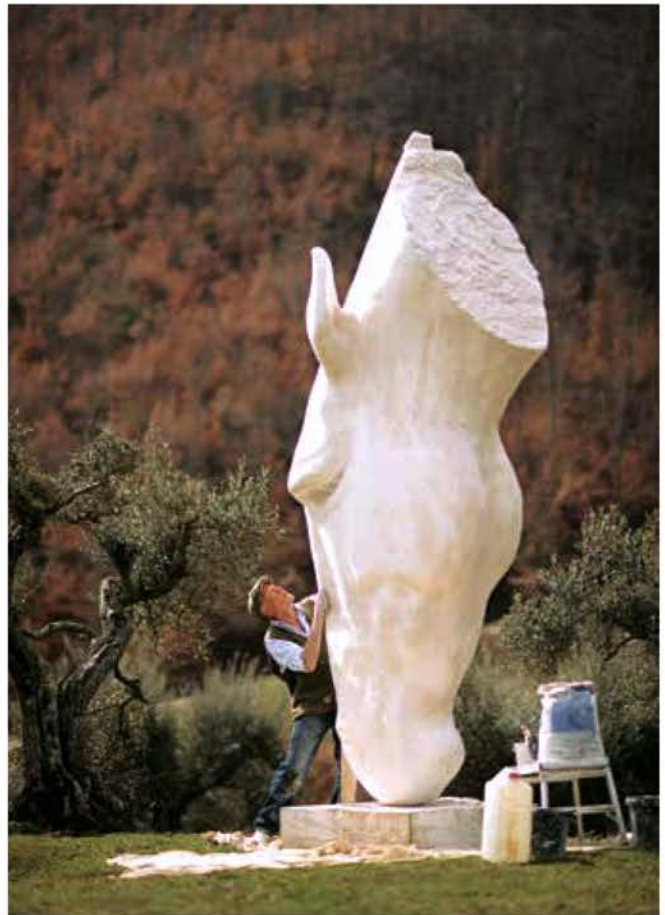
The redesign of the Palazzo home (also shown on page 56) incorporates a sitting room (top) with custom-painted silver leaf wallpaper from de Gournay, and a dining room (right) that showcases Bolza's elegant tables with cast bronze tops.



Working the Rooms



Bolza had considerable freedom to shape the five-bedroom, 7,900-square-foot Palazzo (above and below) because little was known of it beyond its name, which was handed down from history, and its footprint. He gave it three stories and a sleek lounge area (below). The home, like Bolza's other reinventions, hold their own against the breathtaking landscape, which inspired the sculptor Nic Fiddian-Green (right) to new heights.





Bolza says. “It’s more modern, and more recent architecture. It’s a big difference from a farmhouse, which is a total job. [The Tabaccaia] is a structure in perfect condition. We only had to waterproof the roof. It made sense to reuse it.” His well-honed talent for reusing materials is evident in the metal spheres that hang from the Tabaccaia’s ceiling. The steel rings were recovered from oversize wine barrels found in the castle’s cellar. “They’re purely decorative,” Bolza says. “Originally I wanted to make lights out of them, but I thought that would be overdoing it. I’m not really a fan of chandeliers.”

LIGHTING THE ROAD ahead at Castello di Reschio is one last large renovation project: the castle itself. Bolza envisions “making a guesthouse, like a private hotel, with 25 suites only,” which would likely have a health-and-wellness aspect; the spa that was initially planned for the Tabaccaia

Bolza’s furniture line includes (counterclockwise from top) lamps made from reclaimed heaters (\$4,000), the Etruscan window seat (\$7,600), the Corsini recliner (\$3,000), and the campaign bed (\$7,500). Everything is made at the estate, in artisanal workshops within the Tabaccaia (left).

Noci, a three-bedroom, 4,200-square-foot home that Bolza finished in 2002, has a pool with a glorious view of the castle across the valley.



Life at Castello di Reschio

SETTING: A 3,000-acre private community in rural Umbria, Italy, near Tuscany. The estate's grounds feature olive groves, vineyards, gardens, and stables for purebred Andalusian horses trained in dressage.

HOMES: A total of 15 farmhouses in ruins remain available for purchase and renovation; the process generally takes between 16 and 22 months. Of the 24 finished residences, eight are for rent. They range in size from a two-person *villetta* to a home that sleeps 14.

PRICING: Purchasing and renovating currently averages €8.5 million (\$11.5 million) but can cost more, depending on what is requested. Rentals range from €6,035 weekly (about \$8,200) for the *villetta* in low season to €29,140 weekly (about \$39,400) for the 14-person home in high season (June to September).

INQUIRIES: Castello di Reschio, +39.075.844.362, www.reschio.com

may instead go into the castle's wine cellar. He does not expect to tackle the castle for three years or so, but when the time comes, he will be ready. He is well educated in the castle's quirks; he, his wife, and their five children lived in the ancient four-floor, 32,300-square-foot structure from 2001 to 2011. "We were on the first floor. There was no insulation, and the

roof was very, very old," he says. "We had 50 buckets in the attic collecting rainwater. The roof was last done in the 1920s, and there was no waterproofing at all. At the end it got ridiculous." As for how to baby-proof the ramparts of an 11th-century castle, Bolza says, "You don't. If they grow up in an area where there's danger, they learn [to avoid it]."

Bolza says he and his wife almost envy the childhood that their four daughters and their son enjoy at the estate. The kids play amid vineyards and olive groves. They ride their grandfather's purebred Andalusian horses. The landscape brims with secrets and maybe even buried treasure: In the same year that Bolza's parents bought the place, an Etruscan bronze figurine was found on the grounds. When the children pretend to be princes and princesses, they have a real castle to enhance their make-believe. "I can't imagine a better childhood than a place like this," he says, reflecting on the property he has profoundly shaped. "We see the contrast when we invite city children to visit. They fall over all the time. They're much more cautious. They don't have that freedom in exploration. That's when we really notice how free and wild our children are compared to other children," he says, laughing. "It's very interesting to see." **H&S**