

# RENAISSANCE MAN

FOR HIS COSMOPOLITAN PAD IN ROME, VALENTINO'S **CARLOS SOUZA** TAPS INTO A LIFE OF TRAVEL AND SPIRITUALITY.

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The living room of Carlos Souza's apartment in Rome's Termini neighborhood. The vintage Chinese rosewood opium bed is topped with cushions by Madeline Weinrib, the wallpaper is by Souza's sister-in-law Jennifer Shorto, and the photographs flanking the daybed are by Fernando Bengoechea.



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CARLOS SOUZA KNOWS HOW TO LIVE. HE'S SPENT HIS LIFE basking in the reflective glow of world-class everything: people, places, fashion, food, fame, and refinement. His is one of those only-in-the-1970s stories wherein a young Brazilian man's magnetic beauty cuts through the crowd at Rio's Carnival to catch the eye of a famous fashion designer, Valentino Garavani. Garavani promptly swept Souza up in his entourage, where Souza has remained a member of a most fabulous inner circle for four-plus decades.

Souza's role as brand ambassador, VIP, and public-relations pasha at the house of Valentino—requiring him to crisscross the world many times over in a single year to entertain and squire clients, friends, and press—sounds like a made-up job, and it kind of is. Professional charmer is a role that Souza was born to play, and one in which he's so naturally skilled that he is still an essential agent to the brand, even more than a decade after Valentino himself retired. "I've been breathing these amazing worlds—the Valentino palaces, the most beautiful homes of fantastic people with incredible taste—because we are kind of a family," Souza says.

Rome, where the Valentino atelier is based, is now Souza's home. He has a country house in Nova Friburgo, Brazil, and recently sold his New York City apartment, combining its contents with those of his primary residence, an apartment in Rome's Termini neighborhood, which he has had for 15 years. "It feels a little bit like New York's Meatpacking District the day before Diane von Furstenberg arrived," Souza says of the area, which is cool and slightly rough around the edges. "There are artists, gallery owners—and always the pretty and young."

The vibe inside his home matches the eclectic bohemia outside. For all the grandeur to which he's been exposed, Souza's interior taste is highly personal, crowded with carefully collected pieces that radiate nostalgia and spirituality. "I like to mix things. I like a lot of color, a lot of information in one room. I'm not a spare person," he says, noting that while he didn't enlist an interior designer, his friend the stylist Carlos Mota weighed in. "We have the same taste," Souza says. "He wrote a book called *Beige Is Not a Color*, and I agree."

**OPPOSITE:** Chinese porcelain vases rest on a console draped with an ikat sarong purchased 25 years ago in Bali. The artwork is from a thrift shop in Rome. **LEFT, FROM TOP:** In the living room, the sofa is in an Ultrasuede, the lamp is by Fortuny, and the artwork is by Luciano Bartolini. A pair of Barcelona stools by Mies van der Rohe and bronze cachepots found in Japan and planted with citrus trees face a custom fireplace clad in Pietra Serena sandstone; the rug is by Federica Tondato, and the gallery-style artworks include pieces by Viviane Sassen, Spencer Sweeney, Alberto Di Fabio, and James Brown.



De Vera, the New York design shop and gallery, is a source of inspiration, as are his travels all over Asia and the South Seas, his Brazilian roots, and, of course, his fabulous friends. For example, the pair of Ultrasuede sofas in the center of his living room are a reference to the ones he recalls from the late New York socialite Nan Kempner's Park Avenue apartment. Wallpaper depicting trees was designed by his sister-in-law, the London-based textile artisan Jennifer Shorto. The tapestry-like rugs in shades of violet and blue are by the Italian designer Federica Tondato. The walls are covered with art by Viviane Sassen, Spencer Sweeney, Alberto Di Fabio, and James Brown. The frames are perfectly hung salon-style, thanks to his friend Pepi Marchetti Franchi, a founding director at Gagosian Rome. "I asked if she could recommend someone to hang everything, and she did," Souza says. "When I went to pay the bill, she said, 'No, it's a gift.'"

Raised Catholic, Souza considers himself a religious person. His spirituality encompasses many of the Eastern practices he's experienced on visits to temples in India, China, and Japan. "It bleeds into my home too," he says. A table draped with a Balinese ikat is a shrine to his travels; it is set with blue-and-white Chinese porcelain and Buddha statues strung with shell necklaces from Brazil. There are design books galore, including his own. His third book with Assouline, *Amalfi Coast*, written with his former wife Charlene Shorto, is forthcoming.

Perhaps the most intriguing piece in Souza's home is a rosewood opium bed purchased years ago in Hong Kong. When he's feeling tired, he takes to it to restore himself. As impressive as it appears, Souza downplays it. "It really makes the room because it means a lot to me sentimentally," he says. "I have beautiful pieces—nothing museum-quality, let's face it. But it's all done with lots of love." ■



**ABOVE LEFT:** In the master bedroom, the bedspread is by Calvin Klein, the suzani wall hanging was purchased in Istanbul, and the rug is Moroccan. **ABOVE:** Souza, wearing Valentino, in the living room. The doors are clad in wallpaper by Jennifer Shorto. **LEFT:** A side table is topped with objects from his travels, including a bamboo-wrapped stone from Japan and jade pieces from Jaipur, India. For details, see Resources.