

Sustainable development of traditional buildings key to regional housing

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As "Housing the World" is set to dominate MIPIM, Annalisa Bruno from Apulia Property Design in Italy highlights the importance of cultural sustainability within regional and local markets.

With the United Nations predicting that nearly all of the world's population growth, over the next 14 years, will be absorbed by cities it is no wonder that "Housing the World" is being put centre stage as a key topic at MIPIM 2016.

With this rapid urbanisation leading to an ever-increasing demand for housing there is an understandable enthusiasm within our industry to re-evaluate construction techniques and focus on sustainable development. However, while it is good practice to employ sustainable and green methods when constructing new properties, it is also important to consider cultural sustainability with regard to the renovation of older, traditional buildings within our towns, cities and countryside.

Delegates at this week's MIPIM will be asked to consider what homes in the future will look like. It is also important to look at how to we ensure the provision of practical and sustainable housing without losing our architectural legacy. For the sake of protecting our culture and heritage, I believe that it is vital that we contemplate how we adapt and modify existing, traditional buildings to make them useable as modern dwellings while preserving their fabric for future generations.

At Apulia Property Design, we work tirelessly to restore, renovate and reshape the traditional rural buildings of Puglia in southern Italy, using the techniques handed down over generations. We do not just do this because the traditional Trulli and Masserie buildings make attractive homes for locals and the thousands of tourists that visit the region each year, but because the materials and techniques used in the construction of the Lamie, dry stone walls, help protect the environment and preserve our unique architectural heritage.

Adapting and restoring these buildings is like restoring a mosaic; every stone has its own position and has to be carved to the exact size. Manual labour is the only option. It may not be the cheapest option, but it is a price worth paying to ensure the provision of modern homes while preserving the traditional buildings and culture of the beautiful Puglian countryside.

We believe it is vital for the cultural identity of our region that, when modernising and restoring traditional buildings that a detailed statistical and architectural analysis of the property is undertaken to help develop a conservation and renovation plan that is focused on bringing each building back to life. Only by employing specialist artisans and by using only traditional, local and sustainable materials can it be ensured that the finished building provides a home fit for use but also one that fits into its surroundings perfectly.

The sensitive regeneration of traditional buildings is key to providing homes that meet both the needs of the market while preserving the culture and heritage of local and regional communities.

Annalisa Bruno is managing director of Apulia Property Design, the company she founded in 2010 with architect Daniele Corsaro.

**apulia
property
design**

Apulia Property Design s.r.l.
Via Mulini Vecchi 11
72014 Cisternino (Brindisi)
Mobile 0039 334 9528623
info@apuliapropertydesign.it
www.apuliapropertydesign.it