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Ready

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A city between visions and reality

Milan's gradual transformation owes more to replacement of the existing than to brand new construction. Giampiero Sanguini takes us on a tour of Italy's largest metropolitan area.

ITALY — TEXT: GIAMPIERO SANGUINI

In an article entitled 'Milano 2014' published in *Interni*, Luca Molinari spoke about possible changes to the Lombard capital in the five-year period between now and the inauguration of the 2015 Expo. A sort of diary from the future, in which those structures currently under construction are completed and those already complete are assimilated into the life of the city. According to Molinari, large-scale interventions, such as the redevelopment of the old trade fair grounds and the Maciachini, Bicocca and Santa Giulia neighbourhoods will profoundly change the image of many former industrial precincts, transforming them into residential and service sector areas.

As we await the moment when these visions become reality, this article documents what is happening in Milan by describing the numerous micro-interventions that have begun to transform the city.

The projects presented in this guide illustrate a reality that is far removed from the world of market-driven and low quality interventions with which other Italian cities are confronting the issue of new construction or the redevelopment of obsolete urban areas.

Projects such as 5+1's apartments, cre-

ated inside the former Embassy Cinema, the conversion of the Frigoriferi Milanesi, the new headquarters of the *Il Sole 24 ore* newspaper by Renzo Piano, Cino Zucchi's conversion of the former Alfa Romeo cafeteria, all demonstrate that replacement of the existing is more prevalent than brand new construction.

Vacant space

Another common characteristic of the selected projects is that they are primarily located to the north of the regional capital, a shift explained by Cino Zucchi when he describes the historical dynamics of Milan's expansion towards the lakes, underlining how its post-war industrial areas, now the object of transformation, were strategically located in the 'dry' plains to the north, towards Como and Varese, rather than in the fertile and cultivable lands to the south.

Many of the new-build projects (Zucchi, 5+1, LPzR, Fuksas, Arkipabi) are residential and located inside the consolidated city. In an article published in *La Stampa* in March 2009, entitled 'Deserti urbani' (Urban Deserts), Stefano Boeri spoke about the current demand for housing, explaining why a further expansion of the city is both inopportune and unde-

sirable: 'Of Milan's 164,000 apartments, more than 80,000 are uninhabited as are almost 900,000 cubic metres of office space (the equivalent of 30 vacant Pirelli skyscrapers). Walls, floors, ceilings and furnishings that for years have been waiting for someone to enter them, inhabit them and to reinvest them with the pulsations of everyday life.' This is the result of years of investment in tertiary development, pursuing standards that have now changed. Furthermore, the square metre price of apartments, together with rental costs, have pushed many potential inhabitants with low incomes into a commuter lifestyle, or forced them to accept shared situations.

Some of the architectural offices presented in this article are young (LPzR, Liverani/Molteni), demonstrating that clients, whether public or private, do not always hire starchitects. In the list of selected works, a special place must be set aside for designers such as Italo Rota and Fabio Novembre who, by working in a hybrid and personal field, find space within a discipline like architecture which, today as never before, appears in need of new ideas and personalities.

Strategic lightness

In Barlassina, to the north of Milan, not far from Terragni's Villa Bianca, we find the house (1) designed by Liverani/Molteni. The building is an interpretation of the archetypal double-pitched roof. The brick cladding, laid with the narrowest of joints, gives the building a monolithic and minimalist appearance, a solution that is contrasted by the strategic lightness of the two large bay windows that are carved out of the corner without compromising the volumetric reading of the overall structure. The plan is the product of the intersection of two volumes, adapted and folded to respect the presence of existing trees. The architects' idea was to create internal and private spaces, generated by the position of the building, an approach that allows for a feeling of being inside the building even when using the outdoor spaces.

Leaving Barlassina and moving east, we arrive in the town of Seregno, where Studio Boeri recently completed a block of apartments (2) for 38 families. When designing this low-cost project, which follows the 'L' shape of the site, the architects experimented with different permutations of the patio typology, playing with the variation of dimensions and the alternation between solids and voids. The corrugated zinc panels of the roof fold

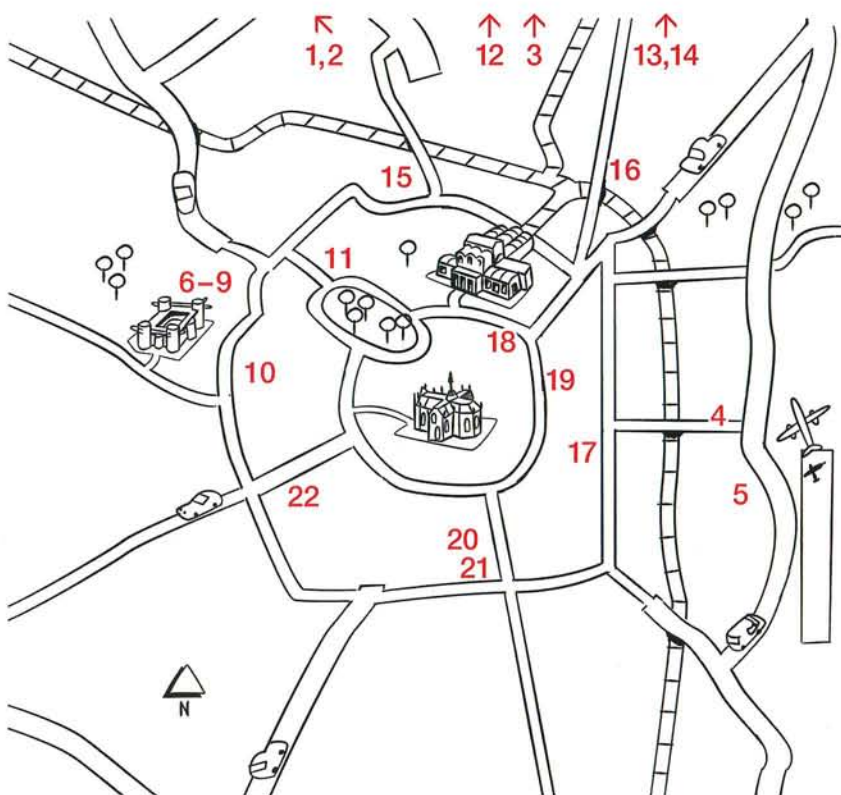
down over the facades and follow the irregular skyline of the block, emphasizing the alternation of triplex and duplex apartments and reinforcing the individuality of each apartment.

Further south, as we approach the periphery of North Milan and Cinisello Balsamo, we find the first shopping mall ever built in Italy (1974), currently the object of a phased refurbishment (3), once again by Studio Boeri. The office recently completed the addition of a multi-storey car park clad in micro-perforated steel with a geometric motif of circular cutouts.

In the eastern part of the city, close to the Porta Vittoria railway station, we find 5+1's redevelopment (4) of the former Frigoriferi Milanesi (1899) and the Palazzo del Ghiaccio (1923). The urban image of the via Piranesi, once divided between one residential and one industrial street frontage, has been reinterpreted in an analogous reality in which exhibition areas have replaced the industrial spaces. The architects transformed the almost 100-metre-long industrial frontage by facing it with a glass screen whose motif, seen from a distance, forms an arrow pointing to the entrance to the site. The interior is defined by the alternation of suspended and underground multi-functional spaces, each with a different treatment according to their use.

Not far from the via Piranesi, in a 1930s residential area, we find another project by 5+1, in this case the residential conversion (5) of the former Embassy Cinema, located at the intersection of via Nicastro and via Faà di Bruno. The Genoa-based office had to deal with an existing situation of three heterogeneous volumes and a building code that dictated retention of the existing profiles and volumes. The residential conversion entailed the construction of intermediate levels which doubled the available floor area and required a radical renovation (in addition to new floor slabs, the architects added underground parking and personal storage spaces). 5+1's design exploits the heterogeneity of the existing buildings by using it to generate unexpected residential spaces, while also blurring it by means of a 'curtain' that masks the differences between the existing volumes and so creates a more coherent and homogeneous skyline.

The redevelopment of the former Alfa Romeo factory in Portello, based on a masterplan by Gino Valle, merits a fuller explanation. It comprises contributions from several different architects, each of whom was entrusted with a particular area, defined by a dominant functional component. Cino Zucchi Architetti →





1 **HOUSE (2000–2003)**
Architect: Liverani Molteni
Address: Barlassina



2 **APARTMENTS (2009)**
Architect: Stefano Boeri
Address: Seregno



3 **SHOPPING MALL (2008)**
Architect: Stefano Boeri
Address: Cinisello Balsamo



4 **REDEVELOPMENT OF FRIGORIFERI MILANESI (2003)**
Architect: 5+1
Address: via Piranesi, Milan



5 **RESIDENTIAL CONVERSION OF THE EMBASSY CINEMA (2008)**
Architect: 5+1
Address: Intersection via Nicastro / via Faà di Bruno, Milan



6 **OFFICE BUILDING (2003)**
Architect: Cino Zucchi Architetti
Address: via Renato Serra, Milan



7 **APARTMENTS (2002)**
Architect: Cino Zucchi Architetti
Address: via Renato Serra, Milan



8 **APARTMENTS (2002)**
Architect: Cino Zucchi Architetti
Address: via Renato Serra, Milan



9 **APARTMENTS (2002)**
Architect: Cino Zucchi Architetti
Address: via Renato Serra, Milan



10 **IL SOLE 24 ORE HEADQUARTERS (2004)**
Architect: Renzo Piano
Address: via Monte Rosa, Milan



11 **FAIR CENTRE (2005)**
Architect: Massimiliano Fuksas
Address: Rho



12 **WAREHOUSE CONVERSION (2005)**
Architect: Stefano Boeri
Address: via Sarca, Bicocca, Milan



13 **APARTMENTS (2007)**
Architect: Arkpabi
Address: via Doberdò, Milan



14 **APARTMENTS (2006)**
Architect: LPzR
Address: via Eracito



15 **FOOD PARK (2009)**
Architect: Paolo Pasquini
Address: via Imbonati, Maciachini, Milan



16 **RESIDENTIAL SCHEME (2008)**
Architect: 5+1
Address: via Padova, Milan



17 **MELTIN' POT SHOWROOM (2007)**
Architect: Fabio Novembre
Address: via Perugino, Milan



18 **BOUTIQUE (2005)**
Architect: Italo Rota
Address: via della Spiga, Milan



19 OFFICE BUILDING (2000)
Architect: Antonio Citterio
Address: via Cerva, Milan



20 BOCCONI UNIVERSITY (2009)
Architect: Grafton Architects
Address: viale Bligny, Milan



21 RESIDENTIAL TOWERS (2002)
Architect: Massimiliano Fuksas
Address: via Giovanni Spadolini, Milan



22 ZEGNA HEADQUARTERS (2008)
Architect: Antonio Citterio
Address: via Savona, Milan

(A city between visions and reality)

was awarded sector 2b–3c, a residential and tertiary area adjacent to via Renato Serra. Their plan includes several different building typologies, including an **office building (6)**, created out of the former Alfa Romeo cafeteria in a design that maintains the original layout and the facade along via Traiano.

To the south, along the viale Serra, Zucchi envisaged a row of **three volumes (7)**, connected in a manner that screens the courts behind from vehicular traffic. In the northern part of the site, a taller and more slender typology was adopted in order to permit views through to the park and the nearby Monte Stella (an artificial hill created after the Second World War from the debris left by wartime bombardment). The **five towers (8,9)** are subdivided into two smaller groups according to their position and the building programme (social or non-social housing). The architect says this is a contextual response to the tradition of tall buildings in post-war Milan, rather than to the contemporary and atypical versions that have popped up on the urban peripheries. For this reason the towers along via Traiano are clad with the same material as the linear buildings along viale Serra (to create the image of an urban block), while the towers overlooking the park have different cladding and are dematerialized in favour of interaction with the landscape. The Portello project proposes a hybrid urban vocabulary, halfway between the model of the urban blocks of the 19th-century city and the dimensional discontinuities of a more contemporary and specific language.

Also in the north-west, in the Fiera neighbourhood, we find **Renzo Piano's** new **headquarters for the *Il Sole 24 ore* newspaper (10)**, a project that included the renovation of an existing 1960s factory. The client required spaces for individual and group work as well as public spaces – a library, meeting and training rooms and an auditorium. Piano created a layered programme, with public spaces in the base and work spaces on the four levels above. During the design phase the architects decided to modify parts of the existing structure, demolishing a side wing to the south and excavating an area at the centre of the factory to create a 10,000 m² internal park. To reduce the overwhelmingly horizontal impact of the 160 metre-long facades, a number of vertical service towers were grafted onto the building.

Further north-west, on the way out of the city towards Rho, we find the Nuovo Polo Fiera Milano (New Milan Fairgrounds), designed by **Massimiliano Fuksas**. The basic concept was a 1300-metre-long **arcade (11)** that serves the exhibition pavilions and covers, with its undulating and irregular roof, the various services, dining areas, reception spaces and entrances to the pavilions. The roof is a steel structure defined by a grid of rhomboid/trapezoid forms that support sheets of laminated glass.

Another former industrial site that has been the object of redevelopment is the Bicocca neighbourhood. In 2005 **Studio Boeri** converted a 1960s **industrial warehouse (12)** into a structure for tertiary sector use. The architects reorganized the interior spaces, creating a mezzanine level and underground parking. For the outside, the architects designed a glass second skin that wraps the four facades and hides the original plan. Rectangular steel frames distributed uniformly across the facade overlap the glass sheets, which were hung using a system of anchors in order to create a triple order that subdivides the facades into three horizontal bands. The architects managed to create an ambiguous packaging that testifies to the contemporaneity of the intervention, while simultaneously revealing a glimpse of the original facades.

Also in the northern part of the city, close to Sesto San Giovanni and adjacent to viale Monza, are two **residential projects** by **Ark-pabi (13)** and **LpzR (14)**, located in an urban quarter that is gradually shedding its industrial past to make way for new housing. The project by Arkpabi in via Doberdò faithfully retraces the regular and elongated contours of the plot. With an evident freedom of expression and typology, the building seeks to oppose the logic of the 'condominium' adopted by new and generic residential developments. The project features apartments of varying sizes, from studio flats to large units.

A short distance away, across viale Monza, is the 25-unit apartment building in via Eracito by LPzR, an intervention made possible by the demolition of an industrial building and modifications to the new structure to match the dimensions of the adjacent buildings. The project was conceived as a volume generated by the aggregation of a minimum modular dwelling unit (45 m²) which, with various additions and subtractions, generates the defini-

tive configurations. The main facade is divided into three vertical bands, each clad in a different material (stucco, wood and zinc), which resonate with the adjacent buildings. Particular attention was paid to the relationship between private interior spaces and the street, while a permeable atrium allows passers-by to look into the interior courtyard in an example of transparency unusual in the city of Milan.

Urban afforestation

The new **Food Park (15)** by **Paolo Pasquini** is located in the Maciachini neighbourhood, inside a recently renovated industrial complex, now nearing completion. The Food Park crosses the central part of the site, connecting via Carlo Imbonati with via Benigno Crespi. It contains two pavilions, both housing restaurants, that are connected by a continuous canopy and a basement level containing the mechanical systems and services. The project is not confined to the architectural intervention but extends to the surroundings which Pasquini conceived as an exercise in urban afforestation. The architect worked with the correspondence between the natural visual elements of the surroundings (the colour of the trees and their trunks), seeking a degree of harmony with the formal elements of the built environment. For this reason, the columns are slender and organized according to a layout influenced by the position of the trees, while the colour of the leaves is recalled in the treatment of the materials (for example, the back-painted glass of the pavilions).

On a green site in via Padova, **5+1** recently completed a **residential scheme (16)** for the Guardia di Finanza. The apartments, in two courtyard buildings, house families united by their employment in the same branch of the Italian military. It is a community that lives around a semi-public courtyard, surrounded by balconies that provide access to the apartments. The units, constructed on a minimum budget, have been defined by the architects themselves as a building type that fuses the single-family urban villa with an apartment, inside a system of distribution that favours intimacy and privacy.

In via Perugino, hidden from the street, we find the **Meltin' Pot showroom (17)** designed by **Fabio Novembre**. The two-storey space seeks to visually recreate the idea of a subway station, a space where, as the client's

name suggests, people from different cultures can meet. An aluminium skin is sinuously grafted onto the original post and beam concrete structure, evoking the vaults of a tunnel or the nave of a church.

Via della Spiga is home to the **Just Cavalli boutique (18)**, designed by **Italo Rota**. This 1000 m² space distributed over three levels is characterized by the use of materials and furnishings (glass, mirrors, leather, Swarovski crystals, exotic fish and flowers) that are both surprising and eccentric. Each space has its own specific character created by the use of lighting and a mixture of styles.

In via Cerva, not far from the Piazza Duomo, we find the **office building (19)** designed by **Antonio Citterio** for his own professional practice. The sober and minimalist design of this five-storey infill project took its cue from the pre-existing office building. Each office is treated as an open space and occupies an entire floor, while the meeting rooms and workshops are located in a basement level.

To the south, on the corner of viale Bligny and via Guglielmo Corrado Röntgen is the building designed by **Grafton Architects** for the **Bocconi University (20)**. Notwithstanding its dimensions and mass, the project was designed to be permeable in any direction, capable of offering an alternation of public spaces for social interaction and more intimate spaces ideal for study.

Continuing south, not far from Bocconi University and Ravizza Park, we come across **two residential towers (21)** completed by **Fuksas** in 2002. The identical buildings are part of an urban redevelopment plan for a 6700 m² area. Diverse dwelling types guarantee the flexibility of the towers, satisfying the needs of a wide range of users ranging from singles living in studio flats to large families. Variations in the size of the units and the use of materials produce differentiated facades that are most unusual in the residential tower typology.

In via Savona, in a neighbourhood almost entirely dedicated to the world of fashion, we find the new **Ermenegildo Zegna headquarters (22)** designed by **Antonio Citterio**. The new building reprises the profile of the existing industrial sheds, redesigning the interior spaces around a new main courtyard. A four-storey gallery connects the showrooms to the offices, while to the north are two exhibition spaces used to present the collections. ←