

MILAN

SECTION 1

Making miracles happen

GOVERNMENT / MILAN

Fortunes have been mixed for Milan in the years since 2015's triumphant Expo, with a hugely successful regeneration offset by its experience in the eye of Italy's pandemic storm. We meet the city's newly installed culture head to discuss what the future holds for his home town.

By Laura Rysman
Photography Andrea Pugiotta



Milan is Italy's capital of design and its most international city, attracting people from across the country and beyond to relocate here. The city's councillor for culture, Tommaso Sacchi, recently returned to his home town from Florence, where he occupied the same position, to join cabinet of Milan's mayor, Giuseppe "Beppe" Sala. The arrival of this well-known, telegenic advocate for culture comes as the city is still riding high from its 2015 World Expo, attempting to bounce back from its especially arduous pandemic years and readying itself to welcome the 2026 Winter Olympics. As Milan returns to the international stage with a much-anticipated full-scale edition of Salone del Mobile, we sit down with Sacchi to hear his views on where the city is heading.

What does Salone del Mobile mean for Milan?

With Salone, the future of design is on the table but also the future of Milan itself. And with this edition we're marking the return to the kind of life the city was accustomed to before the pandemic – an occasion when new ideas are unveiled in a stimulating context of lively social exchange, where Milan is the setting that brings these exchanges to life.

In the 1980s, when the Salone del Mobile trade show became too expensive for many who wished to participate, young designers and small studios created Fuorisalone. It's a week-long multifaceted happening that's become as important as the official fair itself. Fuorisalone set the framework for events in Milan, where occasions such as Bookcity and Piano City [offering readings and concerts held in a wide number of venues throughout

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Milan] became citywide festivals, with thousands of diverse and independent voices creating happenings around a theme. It all grows from Milan's incredible creative and cultural output – and Salone, especially Fuorisalone, celebrates that.

Milan has become vastly more international in its appeal and its demographics in recent years. How can you help the city grow in this direction?

We're always thinking about how to render our cultural institutions more international and create new institutions that will be important at a global level. We'll be launching MAD, the national museum of digital art, as well as BEIC, the European library of information and culture, with a significant investment from the state for institutions that will be in dialogue with all of Europe. We're currently spending €140m on new institutions, including doubling the Museo del Novecento [dedicated to 20th-century art], the BEIC library and the museum of digital art. This is our contribution towards the Milan of the future.

I'm also a firm promoter of the idea of federalism among the cities of Europe. I've just returned from a meeting in Madrid to get a plan going. I have a dream of

building a coalition of capitals of culture, so we can help each other to create exhibitions with the resources of these incredible repositories of art that all of these cities have and that need to be shared. This is what's going to help us expand the kind of tourism that's interested in culture.

Post-Expo, Milan became one of Italy's fastest-growing tourist destinations. How can the city benefit from tourism without falling into the trap of over-tourism that plagues other cities, especially Florence, where you were recently employed?

Milan and Florence are vastly different cities. Florence has a museum or a monument on every corner. Milan is more of a metropolis, with high-profile events like Salone and a strong network of contemporary cultural output that helps attract a culturally curious traveller. Many of its treasures take more work to discover than in Florence, yet it's a city that's symbolised by both masterpieces of the Renaissance, such as the Michelangelo's "La Pietà Rondanini", and the best of contemporary architecture at the Triennale. We need to continue to help Milan flourish as a cultural city. The higher the level of culture, the more we're able to attract tourists who are informed and have respect for the city as a destination.

What role does culture play as the city prepares for the 2026 Winter Olympics?

The Olympics are an important time for sports but, like all historic moments, there will be an enormous amount of collective enthusiasm that will affect the cultural network as well. As we saw with Expo 2015: the whole city unites to embrace a moment like this and we're planning a huge exhibition, as yet to be determined, to accompany the occasion that will span multiple museums across Milan.

Do you have a dream project for Milan?

I hope to see public art take a greater role in the city. The piazzas of every neighbourhood should be filled with contemporary art. Already, we have fantastic examples – great works by Arnaldo Pomodoro, Maurizio Cattelan's hand ["L.O.V.E." – a gargantuan classically inspired sculpture giving the finger to Milan's stock exchange], the Artline at CityLife that has a series of sculptures by Adrian Paci, Shilpa Gupta, Ornaghi & Prestinari and more. But I would like to see every neighbourhood have its own art monument. We're working on it.

Milan in its hedonistic 1980s era was known as 'Milano da bere' – a city made for drinking. How do you see Milan in its new heyday?

In Italy, Milan is setting the example of what's possible today and creating new prospects in the contemporary world. It's the country's experimental urban laboratory, generating new ways of doing things in cities. Milan has already changed dramatically in the past years thanks to Expo, investments in expanding the subway and the creation of new neighbourhoods.

It's a different city today. And in the coming years, it will change dramatically again. We've gone from *Milano da bere* to *Milano da vivere*. It's become a city of experiences; a once-grey place has transformed into a colourful city that is looking towards the future. Milan isn't just for aperitivo anymore; Milan is for living.

EMERGING STARS

DESIGN / MILAN

Titi Ogufere on a trio of Nigerian designers.

By Nic Monisse

Titi Ogufere is a curator, interior and product designer based in Nigeria. A regular at Salone del Mobile, she was inspired to establish Design Week Lagos in 2019. Providing an important platform for African designers to showcase works that use regional materials and techniques, she's now bringing a trio of Nigerian designers to present at Milan as part of the Salone Satellite programme. Here, she tells us about Africa's design potential and why having a presence in the Lombardy capital is important.

Tell us about your show at Salone Satellite.

We've selected three designers whose work we're going to showcase. But for us this is about trying to support African design more broadly. There was research done by Ethiopian-American industrial designer Jomo Tariku which showed that from more than 4,000 collections produced by the 150 leading furniture brands, only 14 of them were by African designers. So we're on a journey looking at how we can support African designers by bringing them to international platforms like Salone del Mobile to showcase their work.

Who are the three designers you've selected, and what makes them stand out?

Olufisayo Bakare is heavily influenced by the continent and has come up with a collection that we'll be unveiling at Salone. And then Josh Egesi and Tolulope Adebayo are amazing designers too. Adebayo's first show was



Design Week Lagos last year and we saw something really great in her. There are lots of designers in Africa but we selected these three because of the storytelling in their work, which is in the process and meaning behind their pieces.

All three are in an early phase of their career. Why is it essential that you champion their work now?

I live on the continent, so I see the amazing work that people are doing here. Giving these designers the capacity to tell their own story is really important. If we don't, their story will be told for them – and that's what's been happening for a long time. Africa has experienced a shift in recent years, where people are thinking about African design in a contemporary way. In the past, people really thought about it in a more traditional sense, as if it was still the 13th century. And while we can enjoy that heritage, we have an endless source of inspiration in the form of new designers and a whole continent just waiting for us to explore.

"Giving these designers the capacity to tell their own story is really important"

BEST IN SHOW

DESIGN / OPENINGS

Milan has welcomed a host of new design openings over the past year. Here are 10 of the city's finest showrooms.

FLEXFORM

Architecture and interior design firm ACPV Architects is behind Flexform's new two-storey flagship, with its large windows. 33 Via della Moscova, Milan

UNIFOR

A new collaboration with OMA architects will be unveiled by Unifor at this year's fair. Visitors can see it at the brand's new permanent showroom in Porta Garibaldi. 5 Viale Pasubio, Milan

OCCHIO

The German brand's first Italian flagship is warm and inviting, capturing the ethos of a name known for sensitive lighting. 13 Corso Monforte, Milan

D STUDIO

Visitors to D Studio can plan their next design moves with B&B Italia, Flos, Louis Poulson, Maxalto, Azucena and Arclinea. 14 Via Durini, Milan

POLTRONA FRAU

A new installation by interior designer Greta Rosset graces the courtyard of Poltrona Frau's 18th-century flagship. 30 Via Alessandro Manzoni, Milan

FENDI CASA

Furniture by Piero Lissoni, Cristina Celestino and Toan Nguyen fills Fendi Casa's two-floor space, offering inspiration for living spaces inside and out. Piazza della Scala, Milan

LORO PIANA

A new interiors showroom has opened inside Loro Piana's Milan HQ, with fabrics, textiles and furniture lines all on display. 33 Via della Moscova, Milan

HENGE

Natural light falls across all three floors of Henge's newly opened space, illuminating sculptures suspended from the ceiling. 34 Via della Spiga, Milan

LAUFEN

The Swiss bathroom specialist's showroom is designed for flexibility, with a fluid layout allowing displays to be changed with ease. 23 Via Alessandro Manzoni, Milan

ANTRAX IT

The Italian radiator brand has worked with the likes of Daniel Libeskind to make heating chic – and that extends to its new showroom. 5 Via San Damiano, Milan

• NIC MONISSE

