

DESIGN

OUR GUIDE TO MILAN'S DESIGN GREATS

Milan is a city that reveals itself slowly. While ancient ruins or picturesque medieval districts are in short supply, its urban fabric reads like an atlas of 20th-century Italian design and architecture. After the city was badly bombed during the Second World War, a new generation of architects stepped in to rebuild. Virtually all of Italy's design greats – Gio Ponti, Franco Albini, Giovanni Muzio, Aldo Rossi, Ettore Sottsass – lived and worked in, and left their mark on Milan. Some of the city's modernist triumphs are difficult to miss, while others are tucked away in suburbs and courtyards. So stop by these emblems of Milanese design. You might well find that this Italian city has become your favourite of them all.

• STELLA ROOS



GIOVANNI MUZIO / 1922

Ca' Brutta

When this Brera apartment block was built in 1922, the Milanese were scandalised: its nickname is "ugly house". At the time, the building towered far above the neighbourhood and the curved façade – a jumble of travertine, concrete, stucco and marble – broke with all architectural convention. It was the first project by the young Giovanni Muzio, who went on to design dozens of buildings, including the Palazzo dell'Arte. Today the Ca' Brutta is credited with inaugurating modernist architecture in Milan and looks as good as new thanks to a respectful renovation in 2013. *Via della Moscova 14*



TRANSPORT / 1928

Milan Ventotto tram

The most elegant way to traverse Milan has for almost a century been the city's classic tram. The yellow Ventotto streetcars were put into production in 1928 and of the 500-odd ever made, 151 are still criss-crossing the city. Hop on at the front to catch a peek of the driver's antique console panel, stamp your ticket and take a seat on one of the glossy wooden benches lining the carriage. From here, you can admire the glass pendant lights and enamel signage, which are all original designs; a few of the oldest trams even feature a small separate salon for smokers.

MARCELLO PIACENTINI / 1940

Palazzo di Giustizia

Milan's most monumental example of fascist-era architecture is the main courthouse designed by Marcello Piacentini, constructed between 1932 and 1940. The imposing neoclassical structure is said to be the largest in Italy, occupying an entire city block. But don't be intimidated: it is open to the public and is well worth a visit. *Via Carlo Freguglia 1*



PIERO PORTALUPPI / 1935

Villa Necchi Campiglio

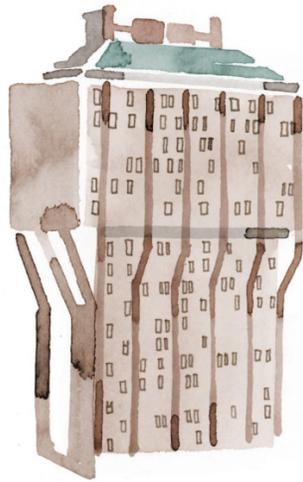
Villa Necchi Campiglio was built by a wealthy Lombardian industrial family that had newly arrived in Milan and wanted a home fit to entertain the city's high society. Architect Piero Portaluppi created an opulent villa in the rationalist style, surrounded by a verdant garden equipped with a tennis court as well as the first private swimming pool in Milan. Today it serves as a home museum and admission is ticketed. If you're in a rush, the pool and surrounding garden can be admired for free by popping in to the separate bistro tucked in the back of the garden. *Via Mozart 14*



HOSPITALITY / 1950S

Bar Basso

During Salone the design crowd can be found bathed in the red glow of Bar Basso, sipping negroni late into the night. Its large neon sign dates back to the 1950s, when the bar was still run by its founder, Giuseppe Basso. It made history under Mirko Stocchetto, who had worked in five-star hotels in Venice and the Dolomites before taking over in 1967. He invented the negroni *sbagliato* (replacing gin with prosecco) and popularised the aperitivo cocktail. "The 1960s was the end of the *dolce vita* but the beginning of Milan as capital of design," says current owner Maurizio Stocchetto. *Via Plinio 39*



BBPR / 1958

Torre Velasca

The Torre Velasca, designed by architecture practice BBPR, became the brutalist beacon of Milan's skyline in 1958 after being constructed in less than a year. Sitting right at the heart of the historic city centre, the concrete skyscraper has a protruding top that evokes a medieval tower and sharply divided opinion when it was erected. But it has come to be accepted as an integral part of the city and is affectionally nicknamed *grattaciello con le bretelle*, or "the skyscraper with suspenders", by locals.

The Torre Velasca was bought by a US property developer in 2020 and is currently covered up for a three-year renovation. After the scaffolding comes off, the tower will have luxury apartments and offices and will be open to the public for the first time. *Piazza Velasca 3/5*



GIO PONTI / 1964

Chiesa di San Francesco d'Assisi al Fopponino

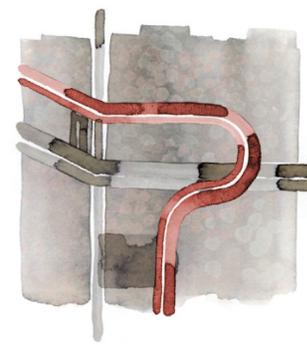
Straddling the San Vittore and Washington districts, not far north from Navigli, is Milan's most famous modernist church, which was designed by Gio Ponti in 1964. The project was part of 22 new churches that were constructed to serve the city's quickly growing suburbs during the 1960s and also includes two blocks of housing for the clergy, which flank the church to form a small, sloping piazza in front. The church interiors were also custom-designed by Ponti and the originals have all been retained.

The three concrete buildings are linked by a grey false façade with diamond-shaped openings that frame the sky beyond, essentially rendering it part of the decoration. The slender hexagon motif is repeated throughout the design, from the entrance doors to the interior arches and stained-glass windows. It was Ponti's favourite shape and is also the footprint of the Pirelli skyscraper, his other iconic mark on the city, which was completed six years earlier. *Via Paolo Giovio 41*

FRANCO ALBINI AND FRANCA HELG / 1964

Metro Linea 1

Milan's metro line 1 connects the key stops at Salone, from the Rho Fiera via the city centre to the Alcova fair at Inganni. So it is only fitting that its stations are design destinations in themselves. Architects Franco Albini and Franca Helg, and graphic designer Bob Noorda won the Compasso d'Oro for the scheme. The design is understated but intuitive: the colour red acts as a thread guiding passengers to the train and then back up above ground. The simple P-shaped squiggle at the end of the steel railings has become something of an icon for the city.



OSCAR NIEMEYER / 1975

Palazzo Mondadori

Towards the end of the 1960s, publishing house Mondadori invited Oscar Niemeyer to design its HQ. It is worth taking the trip to only look at the façade. The building is enveloped by a massive white archway with columns placed at irregular intervals, the impressive effect doubled by a vast pool in front. *Via Privata Mondadori 1*



ETTORE SOTTASS / 2000

Malpensa Airport's departure gates

If your flight departs from Malpensa Airport, take a closer look at the check-in desks. Painted a light teal hue, with rounded corners and charmingly analogue information screens, they recall Memphis, the irreverent design movement that swept Milan in the 1980s. That is because they were made by its founder, Ettore Sottsass. In the late 1990s the famed postmodern architect designed the entire terminal, from the speckled terrazzo floor to the glassy façade seen from the plane at takeoff.



It's good to talk

SUSTAINABILITY / MILAN

An acclaimed design studio and Prada focus on a greener future.

For a creative city on the up, one of the most promising developments in Milan recently has been the arrival of Formafantasma, the lauded design studio led by Andrea Trimarchi and Simone Farresin (pictured on right with Trimarchi). Respectively from Sicily and Veneto, the duo relocated their HQ to Milan's Via Padova neighbourhood after more than a decade in Amsterdam. Italy had long provided craftsmanship and inspiration for Formafantasma's projects and with their return to their home country, Trimarchi and Farresin are already helping to shape the most significant cultural events here. Their first major effort was designing some of the exhibition halls of this year's Venice Biennale with bold colour and sculptural installations. And for Salone del Mobile Formafantasma is curating a series of sustainability workshops, in collaboration with Prada.

"Prada Frames: On Forest" talks run from 6 to 8 June and mark the first time that the Milan-based fashion brand is presenting a symposium beyond its own premises for Salone. "We were all enthusiastic about presenting ideas rather than products," says Farresin of the collaboration. Following up on their Cambio exhibit at London's Serpentine Gallery and Prato's Pecci Museum, the designers decided to build on the themes that they presented there, with a hard look at the timber industry, wood in the world of design and what sustainability really means. Wood is one of the principal materials of design for furniture as well as packaging, shipping and paper. "We believe in using design as an instrument of innovation and social change," says Farresin.

The presentations bring together scientists, curators, architects, activists, law experts, artists, a plant neurobiologist and students from Farresin and Trimarchi's department at Eindhoven University. While



other Salone pavilions are displaying chairs and lamps, Formafantasma will open up discussion around the intelligence of plants, the complexity of species, carbon offsetting and much more. The seminars will be held in the National Braidense Library, a sprawling 18th-century archive attached to the Pinacoteca di Brera.

With almost all of the design world gathered in Milan for the week, Salone represents an opportunity to spread such messages to a sector in urgent need of guidance. The free talks are a chance to shed light on "real R&D that can guide companies and individuals", says Farresin. "Everyone is confused and the result is greenwashing but what's needed is truly radical change." The event aims to show that every architect, designer and manufacturer needs to rethink their approach to fabrication and consider using recycled and low-impact materials, reducing their carbon footprint, making long-lasting goods and providing repairs.

"Wood is a carbon sink," says Farresin. "It's crucial that we understand what we're doing with the material, yet many companies still don't even have any idea where their products come from. It's fundamental that we create interdisciplinary bridges," he adds. "It's important that everyone talks to each other because fragmentation of knowledge is ultimately the fragmentation of responsibility."

• LAURA RYSMAN