



The Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II—housed in a four-story arcade—dates back to the 1860s and is considered the world's oldest shopping mall.

Opposite: A fashionable Milan denizen outside Peep-Hole, a contemporary art space.



MADE IN *MILAN*

WHERE AN AGE-OLD DEVOTION
TO CRAFTSMANSHIP IS
HONORED—AND UPDATED BY—
TODAY'S ARTISANS AND DESIGNERS

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The author, jewelry designer Laura Rysman.
Right, this page and opposite: Street style observed in the city's various neighborhoods.



THERE IS A THINGS

After living in New York for most of my adult life, I moved to Paris with my Swedish husband and then we continued on to Milan, where I have been for almost four years now. Presenting this trajectory to Italians, I invariably get the same ponderous look in response, as if my life were a willful downward spiral. “Why?” they murmur, “Why would you move to . . . Milan?” I understand the incredulity; Milan is not exactly a city of grandeur. While nearby Lake Como’s otherworldly beauty has inspired endless poetry, Milan is thought of as gray, unfriendly, and un-Italian. But Milan, in reality, is an example of such happy compromise. It’s the crossroads where this historical country becomes modern—mixing old-fashioned artisanship with new industry, creating one of the world’s great capitals of design.

I am a jewelry designer, laboriously crafting everything by hand. In Italy, the artisan has always held a place of great importance, and beauty is intrinsically linked to workmanship. Here I am able to collaborate with incredibly talented artisans who bring genuine passion to their craft. It is a remarkable trait I’ve found even in the most seemingly unexciting fields. For instance, a trimmings manufacturer once exclaimed to me with veritable glee that he is in love with making buttons.

There is a reverence here for doing things well—from making espresso to buttons to jewelry—that inspires actual joy in the people making things. It is a pre-industrial mentality, where a person’s labors are intimately and satisfyingly linked to the beauty and quality of the product made. The objectives, as well as

REVERENCE HERE FOR DOING WELL—THAT INSPIRES ACTUAL JOY IN THE PEOPLE MAKING THINGS.

the pace, are different here. It is considered fundamentally healthy to take long, multi-course lunches, to go somewhere beautiful on weekends, and to take month-long vacations. It’s surely what keeps everyone so friendly and relaxed. When I described my nonstop New York work lifestyle to my very sweet Italian friend, she furrowed her brow and asked, “But how do people form strong bonds between each other?” Ah, the wisdom of the innocent.

The agricultural traditions that have disappeared in most of the industrialized world exist here still. Street markets overflow with farm-fresh, seasonal fruits and vegetables, and restaurants prepare classic, regional

dishes that date back ages. Milan’s most interesting restaurants—like Erba Brusca and Ratanà—exploit traditional dishes and ingredients to create innovative versions of them, giving a little touch of renewal to frozen-in-time Italian cuisine. Beyond Milan, 10 miles in any direction yields a different local food culture to discover, as well as *sagre*, town celebrations that confirm Italians’ sacred bond to the joy of eating.

Even with stores, something pre-industrial survives. Traditional Italian shops still form the backbone of the city—the small



CENTRO

The recently opened **Gallerie d'Italia** (Piazza della Scala, 6; gallerieditalia.com/en) converted a neo-classical palazzo and bank into double museums with an incredible collection of Italian art, spanning the 19th and 20th centuries.

Lorenzo Borghi (Via dei Piatti, 5; +39 02 874705) started making hats at age 12 and in the decades since has crafted exquisite creations for top Italian designers, royals, and normal people lucky enough to find his tiny chandeliered shop.

The '30s-era **Villa Necchi Campiglio** (Via Mozart, 14; casemuseomilano.it/en) is a beautiful example of Italian rationalist architecture. The house has been transformed into a museum filled with the Necchi family's modern art and original furniture.

Taveggia (Via Visconti di Modrone, 2; taveggia.it) makes having a pastry feel like high teatime—with its vaulted ceilings, giant chandeliers, and original 1909 interior. The renowned *budino di riso* (rice pudding pastry) was a favorite of Maria Callas'.



Clockwise from left: Knife-maker G. Lorenzi. Bar and music venue Wasabi. A colorful dish at Ratana. The restaurant's chef, Cesare Battisti.



Clockwise from top left: At Galleria d'Italia, architectural details hint at the building's past life as a bank. The Necchi family's art and furnishings are on display at Villa Necchi. Taveggia has been satisfying sweet teeth since 1909.



kind that close for long lunches, where you request what you need rather than browse for something that catches your eye. The countless *erboristerie*, or herbalists, that have existed for hundreds of years stock locally produced natural beauty and wellness products. Pharmacists are frequently trained in homeopathy and can mix herbal cures for you in ancient-looking ceramic urns. In this town where until the 1980s most clothing was handmade, there survives a great number of tailors who create bespoke suits and dresses for their customers. My cobbler, like many in the city, constructs shoes to order. Originally the word milliner—derived from Milan—described not just hats but all of the finery the city was, and is, famous for. The talent, the craft, and the devotion to quality fabrics (down to the buttons) have made Milan one of the principal fashion hubs of the world, even if life here is slower and slightly anachronistic.

Ascendant young brands are embracing the duality of Milan, combining cutting-edge creativity with the superior

BRERA & PORTA GARIBALDI

In the midst of the chicest Brera stores is **G. Lorenzi** (Via Montena-poleone, 9; lorenzi.it), a knife-maker with the strangest collection of razors, tools, and blades to be found.

In neighboring Porta Garibaldi, among the modern skyscrapers that are going up is an old railroad storehouse in a tiny green park, now home to the restaurant **Ratana** (Via de Castilla, 28; ratana.it). Serving the best risotto in town, other classics are likewise elevated.

The young Isola district around Porta Garibaldi is full of unpretentious bars and is a great area to explore the creative scene in Milan. One of my favorite spots, **Wasabi** (Via del Pollaiuolo, 8), is a miniscule and relaxed living room of a bar with live music and a diverse crowd.





*THE SURROUNDING HISTORY
IS EXHILARATING
AND SOOTHING.*

Construction for the Naviglio Grande, Milan's oldest canal, got under way in the 12th century. Today, its banks are home to boutiques, ateliers, antiques markets, cafes, restaurants, and bars.



This page: Sala Venezia, an old-school style dance hall and restaurant, draws a multigenerational crowd. (Its location is a bit hidden from the street, so keep your eyes peeled.)

IN ITALY, THE ARTISAN HAS ALWAYS HELD A PLACE OF GREAT IMPORTANCE.

craftsmanship available to them. Super (retrosuperfuture.com) is a local darling turned international star, having brought progressive design to the big brand world of sunglasses using traditional hand fabrication of frames. Their glasses incorporate distinctive Italian techniques like leather wrapping and metal work with radical colors and silhouettes. The young pair at my favorite clothing brand, Comeforbreakfast (comeforbreakfast.it), create ultra-modern collections for men and women with the kind of artisanal tailoring that is only possible in Italy, using the celebrated silk of Como and wool and cotton from the renowned mills of Biella.

Milan is well known for its powerhouse designer names, who apply their brand names to the full scope of Italian life here. If you want to experience the shiny, big-name fashion

of Milan, you could easily spend an entire logo-emblazoned vacation staying at the Armani Hotel, drinking espresso at Caffè Gucci, dining at Dolce & Gabbana's superlatively-named Gold, and partying at Cavalli. But to discover the heart of style in Milan, leave the Quadrilatero d'Oro and head for the Navigli district where many of the young brands are based along with the stores and youth that support them.

The most evocative spot in the city, the Colonne di San Lorenzo, marks the beginning of the Navigli district. It appears like a time-lapse picture of Milan, with every moment of history visible: second-century Roman columns frame a Byzantine church; the piazza's entrance is formed by a medieval gate; circles of students smoke and play guitar while casually employing the ancient



Above and below: QC Terme's expansive lawn and some hot tubs are surrounded by the remains of a 16th-century wall. The vintage shop Gattò turns into a bar in the evening.

PORTA VENEZIA & PORTA ROMANA

Though Milan is full of top-notch furniture design, **Spotti** (Viale Piave, 27; spotti.com) in Porta Venezia stands out for its gorgeous selection and presentation. The small goods offer attainable pieces from this very covetable realm.

Nearby, **Gattò** (Via Castel Morrone, 10; gattomilano.com) is a vintage shop with a secret restaurant in back that offers nouveau takes on local and Ligurian food, and a live music aperitivo with intimate weekly sets by edgy bands.

Milan's blending of new and old is in full bloom at **Sala Venezia** (Via Alvisé Cadamosto, 2/A; +39 02 70128680) and its outdoor cousin **La Balera dell'Ortica** (Via Amadeo, 78; labaleradellortica.com). Both historical dance halls of another era, the gray-

haired older folks who come to dance classic ballroom styles are now joined by hordes of enthusiastic youngsters.

For a far less strenuous activity, in Porta Romana, the Roman baths at **QC Terme** (Piazzale Medaglie d'Oro, 2; termemilano.com/en) always make me feel as if I've gone back in time. Housed in a refurbished Art Nouveau train depot, this sprawling spa has endless indoor and outdoor thermal diversions.

In the middle of Milan, the public spaces organization Esterni transformed an old communal farmhouse, **Cascina Cuccagna** (Via Cuccagna, 2/4; www.cuccagna.org), into a locavore restaurant and bar, organic store, giant garden, free bicycle repair shop, and community space.





Clockwise: The interior of 28 Posti. A dessert served at the restaurant. Erba Brusca's chef, Alice Delcourt, in the garden.



NAVIGLI

A legendary institution, at the **Spazio Rossana Orlandi** (Via Matteo Bandello, 14/16; rossanaorlandi.com), furniture design is at its artiest and most elevated. The warren of rooms reveals inspiration and surprises at every corner.

Barbershops are a fundamental part of local life; the creative kids head to **Gum Salon** (Via Vetere, 9/C; gumsalon.it). I love their line of organic products.

Across from Gum, **Frav** (Via Vetere, 8; fravshop.com) is the first store I go to. The array of international brands epitomizes Milan's cutting-edge style. The in-house line of clothes often combines innovative designs and accessible prices.

Built in a 1920s silent movie theater, **Antonioli** (Via Pasquale Paoli, 1; antonioli.eu/en) is Milan's temple to avant-garde fashion. The cavernous space now exhibits futuristic creations.

A Scandinavian outpost in Milan, the tiny **Frip** (Corso di Porta Ticinese, 16; frip.it) stocks clothes from Europe's modernist northern brands. There's also a kids' shop, **Frippino** (Via Urbano III, 3).

I love **Wok** (Viale Col di Lana, 5a; wok-store.com) for its artfully chosen selection, with a great inter-

national range complemented by interesting and locally produced choices, like Simona Vanth shoes and Roberto Collina knitwear, plus Italian crafts like Amalfi-made sandals and woven straw bags.

On the Naviglio Grande canal, **Erba Brusca** (Alzaia Naviglio Pavese, 286; erbabrusca.it) faces fields of farmland and feels like a countryside getaway. This "vegetable garden with a restaurant" is chic and minimal inside, while the menu features dishes that let the simple flavors of the quality ingredients shine.

A modern restaurant with inventive gourmet takes on Campania cuisine, **28 Posti** (Via Corsico, 1; 28posti.org/eng) is the result of a collaboration between three architects and the local Bollate prison. The architects taught a group of inmates the craft of furniture making and construction, and obtained permission for them to leave and build the restaurant's interior.

According to my extensive tasting research, the best gelato can be found at **Gelateria della Musica** (Via G.E. Pestalozzi, 4; lagelateriadellamusica.it)—with three kinds of pistachio, seasonal fruit flavors, and hand-made cones.



Clockwise from left: Pottery at Spazio Rossana Orlandi. The Hotel Maison Borella in the Navigli area. Shoes at Frip. Apparel at Frav.





The restaurant Dopolavoro Bicocca.
Left: Fluxia Gallery's co-director, Angelica Bazzana.

LAMBRATE & BICOCCA

The coolest space for contemporary art in the city is **HangarBicocca** (Via Chiese, 2; hangarbicocca.org), where the unspeakably enormous ex-hangar hosts provocative large-scale exhibits, plus the looming, eerie towers of Anselm Kiefer's mythic work, *The Seven Heavenly Palaces*. The on-site restaurant, **Dopolavoro Bicocca**, serves experimental small dishes and offers one of the most gourmet aperitivos in the city.

Lambrate's thriving contemporary art scene has become home to a number of excellent galleries, including the great **Fluxia Gallery** (Via Giovanni Ventura, 6; fluxiagallery.com), which always hosts interesting exhibits by international artists, as well as publishes the fantastic *Kallat* magazine.

columns as backrests; strutting between shops and bars are the local *modaioli* (the less overused and therefore less annoying Italian term for fashionistas). Behind it, the lovely Parco delle Basiliche parallels the main drag of the area, a green oasis and favorite picnic destination.

Fairly small and flat, Milan is best traversed by bike to appreciate the chance treasures, semi-hidden courtyards, and narrow medieval streets that can surprise you in the city. Despite having a dearth of bike lanes, it has the bike-friendly culture of its northern neighbors, with young and old moving around on two wheels. It lacks the terrifying driving style that is popular in much of Italy, a method best described as "rocks in an avalanche." A citywide bike-sharing program makes it easy for tourists to rent a bike (www.bikemi.com), plus a public car-share with electric and regular cars (www.atm.it/en) and a very accessible transportation system make Milan simple to explore.

In Italy, with so much of the ancient and medieval world at hand, the present moment seems to get lost in the weight of what has preceded it. The surrounding history is exhilarating and soothing, assigning everyday existence to part of a much longer moment than the rapid-fire succession of

life in New York. Designers, artists, and creatives are pushing boundaries to move Milan, and Italy, toward the future, but with an attitude of calm, a long view of history, that is impossible to imagine anywhere else. Here I am able to see the jewelry I make as part of a much longer continuum, and to focus on making beautiful things that were made to last through the ages.

Italians are oblivious to the charms of their own country. They take it for granted that people should be friendly, eat well, surround one's life with beauty and pleasure, and make time to form strong bonds with people. In this eminent city that has nurtured artists from Leonardo da Vinci to Lucio Fontana, invented fine fabrics, and pro-

duced the designers that bring them to the world, the general humanity of life here is continually heartwarming to me. The Milanese, in their chic finery, will still strike up a conversation with you in the elevator, in the supermarket, or at the café counter while you sip your perfectly made espresso; they will drop everything to gesture with both hands in order to communicate, in their way, with you, and you can't help but love the pure *Italy* of it all. •



At HangarBicocca—a multifunctional exhibition space—*La Sequenza* by Fausto Melotti greets visitors. The sculpture is situated in the garden.