

## Architecture

This page, the artisans who craft Celine bags enjoy light and the views of vineyards thanks to expansive glass walls, while a second skin of grey-toned glass bricks shades and cools the building in summer and retains heat in winter

Opposite, the concrete and glass northern façade, where no shading is required. On the upper floor is the staff dining room



# Light industry

Amazing glazing and chic shades of grey at Celine's new Tuscan manufactory

PHOTOGRAPHY: MARCO CAPPELLETTI WRITER: LAURA RYSMAN

Nestled amid the lush and gently undulating hills at the heart of Tuscany, the bucolic small town of Radda in Chianti encompasses dozens of vineyards and centuries-old farmhouses. Last August, this agricultural bastion became the home of a contemporary and cosmopolitan new neighbour from Paris, when Celine inaugurated a sprawling handbag-making plant there. Designed by Fabio Barluzzi and Barbara Ponticelli of the MetroOffice architecture studio, 'La Manufacture', as it is named by Celine, is a glass and concrete hilltop monolith that doesn't apologise for its industrial muscle. Instead, its transparent walls are designed to eliminate the boundary between the viticultural hills and the workers inside, exalting the role of the artisans by encircling them with Tuscany's natural beauty.

'We never intended to hide the fact that this is a factory,' said Barluzzi, pausing before

one of the building's full glass walls, which faces out towards the hilly crests neatly combed by snaking rows of grapevines. 'We just wanted to help the factory to exist within this countryside context.' The architects devised full walls of glass to open the panorama in every direction for the factory's workers, swearing off view-blocking window blinds and curtains to mediate the sun. The upper half of the glass walls are instead sheathed in semi-transparent, light-diffusing glass bricks, creating a second skin that wraps around all but the northern façade and echoes the bowed form of the hill on which the building sits, formerly the site of a kitchen furniture factory. 'Factories generally make the landscape uglier,' comments Ponticelli. 'This one follows the shape of the landscape instead.'

Unlike many luxury brand constructions, La Manufacture eschews grandiose entrances

and large logos. A small, unmarked entry-road at the site's rear is designated only by the remains of a tiny 18th-century church; the 5,400 sq m crystalline structure almost dissolves into the sky. 'The building changes according to the sky it's reflecting,' Ponticelli says. 'It's most beautiful when it's cloudy.'

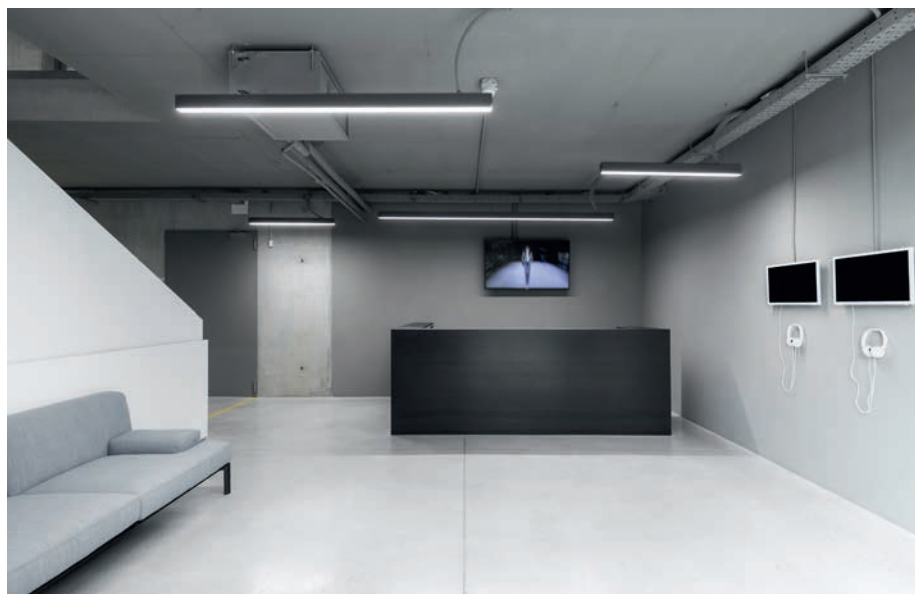
Barluzzi and Ponticelli point out the white-walled expanses of the utilitarian interior, accented uniquely and ubiquitously in grey – RAL 7030 to be exact, the stone-ish tone used for the cabinets, pipes, pillars, cement floors, and everything about the building except the outdoor greenery. It's the same grey the architects used throughout the Celine factory in nearby Strada in Chianti, designed in 2013. And the same grey now adopted as the door colour at Celine's Paris headquarters. 'There's a logic to always using the same colour,' explains Barluzzi, walking past a few grey-smocked »



Left, the building's main entrance, with door in RAL 7030 grey

Below, matching grey in the reception area, where screens show a video installation about the construction of the project, by Italian artist Matilde Gagliardo

## 'We try to transfer the essence of the fashion house to its working spaces'



a cause of energy waste. Built in just over a year, the factory needs little electrical illumination in the day, and benefits from an automatically adapting LED system. The double façade is designed to draw a shaft of air in between, cooling the inner glass walls in summer; and the design retains so much warmth in winter that the heating was never switched on during this year's cold months. Celine took the further ecological steps of equipping the roof with rainwater collection and with a basketball court's worth of solar panels. Disposable plastic and paper have been banned from the site.

The subtle humanity of the industrial structure is founded in the bespoke aspects of its construction: its 33,000 glass bricks, the fruit of more than 20 material experiments by the architects, were crafted in a bespoke grey by the glassmakers of Bormioli Luigi. Specially cut and glued bricks allow the corners of the building to remain completely transparent. The steel-frame lamps, awnings and handrails, among other details, were custom-made by small Italian producers, underlining the fortified role of craftsmanship at La Manufacture.

At the same time, La Manufacture is educating a new generation of artisans, with recruits receiving seven weeks' training in the art of bag fabrication, learning from leatherworkers with decades of experience. There are currently 129 staff at La Manufacture, gathered from the Radda in Chianti area. The factory expects to more than double its staff for 2021. As Toni Belloni, managing director of LVMH, says, 'this project perfectly reflects LVMH's philosophy, which aims at preserving local expertise and stimulating it by training young generations of craftspeople'.

In much of Italy, the long-running artisan culture is at risk, as the small workshops that traditionally fabricated stock for luxury goods houses have shuttered, snubbed in favour of cheaper production abroad. La Manufacture depends on a new generation working as artisans in a different context, as employees of a brand. It represents a commitment to the upkeep and updating of craft, crystallised in its encouraging outlook on the Tuscan horizon. ✨  
*metrooffice.it*

artisans as they manually stitch bag handles, surrounded by high-tech cutting machines and leather skins draped on sawhorses. 'The continuity of the colour expresses the elegance of the brand, even in this manufacturing environment.'

Married Florence natives, Barluzzi and Ponticelli founded MetroOffice in their hometown in 2006, and specialise in working with fashion companies, such as Valentino and Balenciaga. 'We try to squeeze out the essence of the fashion house and to transfer that to its working spaces, so that the

company communicates a cohesive identity,' said Barluzzi. Given that many brands today transform identity every three years as they switch creative directors, and most offices and factories will be renovated only every ten years, this requires a healthy dose of the duo's signature understatement – in the case of La Manufacture for Celine, allowing a subdued interior and the visibility of a breathtaking natural landscape to communicate an enduring sense of luxury.

The sustainable design of the building relies, surprisingly, on its glass walls, often