

## Fili d'erba

Cino Zucchi Architetti for Pedrali new automated warehouse

"With this step from a transparent to an opaque form, an opposition arises between interior and exterior that does not exist in transparent organisms. [...] The surface of the animal, which has become opaque, is transformed into a new body. With it comes a new two-dimensional reality that is largely independent of the internal structures. Such a surface is not only a "border", a casing adapted to protect the internal environment or to ensure its renewal, in other words, a mechanical means of protection, but rather it transforms into an organism with completely new possibilities. [...] The opaque surface acquires its own value as a showcase of optical phenomena. [...] The opaque surface allows relations to be established."

Adolf Portmann, *Aufbruch der Lebensforschung*, Frankfurt am Main 1965 [Eng. trans. *Living forms. New paths in biology*, London 1964]

Two rhetorical figures constantly reappear in the architecture of the first machine age: that of the exposed structural frame and that of the "curtain wall". However, **the wall that protects Pedrali's new automated warehouse designed by CZA in Mornico al Serio (Bergamo – Italy) does not aim to be the representation of its inner content** – a perfect mechanism, where the path for the robot carts cuts through the shelving structures like a canyon – **but rather to be a visual screen that responds to the diverse conditions of the surrounding landscape.**

Over time, Pedrali's success as a business and its awareness in the field of production cycle sustainability has generated a building complex of great environmental quality, within a landscape where the agricultural matrices are still strongly present. The mass of the new automated warehouse, whose height and volume are totally determined by its inner technical devices, completes the southern side of the complex and flanks the path of the ancient Via Francesca.

The **architectural response** of the new warehouse reacts to the abstract theme of the "wrapping" the machines it contains with a specific response that is strongly related to the context, to solar orientation and to the industrial complex it belongs to. Its primary solid mass is articulated by two volumetric projections. The first, in its south-west corner, concludes the visitors' path inside the complex and picks up the direction of the canal that forms the western boundary of the perimeter. The second projects out from the north-east corner with a daring cantilever, stripping back a part of the warehouse wall to reveal its inner mechanisms through a large glass plate, giving form to the missing side of the large loading yard and providing a visual target point from the entrance to the offices on the northern margin. A connecting lower body connects the new warehouse to the existing ones, and hosts the long green ribbon of the suspended visitors' path.

All **four sides** of the new warehouse are faced by panels in natural aluminum color. On these, a series of simple elements made with **extruded aluminum profiles generates a visual pattern formed by a combination of vertical and oblique lines, like gigantic "blades of grass"** that give rhythm, scale and measure to the blind and unarticulated surface of the facades, especially the large surface to the south. These elements have been left in their natural aluminum color on the side oriented to the east, looking towards the urban core of Mornico, while the western side, which faces the fields and the artificial canal, has been enameled in three different shades of green.

The interplay of the length, direction and intensity of the shadows of these "blades" over the course of the day, combined with the mix of their colors and the diversity of point of view they can be seen from, generates a true "optical spectacle" of great beauty. The reflection of the tones of the colored sides on the opposite ones left in natural aluminum color generates a very peculiar iridescent effect – similar to the one of the wings of a butterfly or the elytra of a beetle – for those travelling on the road from east to west.

The dull and uniform volume of new warehouse is thus transformed into a **visual phenomenon rich in variations**, a kind of natural "amplifier" of the time of the day and the seasons. In certain moments it dissolves into the misty sky, reflecting its grey-blue tones, and in others it becomes imbued with the bright green of the agricultural fields in spring.

The architectural design of the warehouse and its related spaces **goes beyond the concept of pure "environmental mitigation"** applied to many industrial facilities. Instead, it becomes an important signal of the roots of Pedrali and the people who work there in their specific territory, as well as testifies their ability to dialogue with the increasingly globalized businesses and markets.

*by Cino Zucchi*

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The design of Pedrali new automated warehouse has received a favorable response from the **Commissione per la Qualità Urbana** (Committee for Urban Quality) summoned by the Municipality of Mornico al Serio and composed of the architects Luca Imberti (Chairman), Prof. Carlo Salone (Vice-President) and Prof. Renato Ferlinghetti (Committee Member).

The landscape project also includes:

- \_ The redevelopment of the west area towards the countryside by planting trees on the bank of the "Mornichello" canal in continuity with the existing bank to the north;
- \_ On the southern side, a substantial planting with a height decreasing towards Via Indipendenza, with the formation of a continuous ecological corridor connecting the agricultural areas, a visual tunnel showing the current road, which corresponds to the path of the ancient Via Francesca.

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**Pedrali Spa – Press Office**

Stefania Bettoni  
Ph. +39 035 8358970  
Mob. +39 338 8023592  
[stefania.bettoni@pedrali.it](mailto:stefania.bettoni@pedrali.it)

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