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PREMISE

Making architecture, drawing, and thinking, definitely does not mean improvising, but it is a mission aimed at creating sensations and emotions. There is a concept behind every choice, a criterion, an order and a way of thinking; therefore, this is not the result of a simple and mere inspiration but the outcome of a lot of passion and love for their work.

FOOD AND ARCHITECTURE

By now we know, design today is an integral part of the soul of activity and must agree with the philosophy in the kitchen, as well as making spaces pleasant and functional. The aesthetic is indeed an element that affects the overall experience of the meal, in which the balance between volumes, lines and materials determines the atmosphere.

The Casadonna project by Cristiana and Niko Romito, designed by the architect Leonardo De Carlo, reflects simplicity, cleanliness and the search for balance between shapes, colours and accuracy of details. Through this philosophy, the three figures of Niko, Cristiana and Leonardo have found a fruitful dialogue. Besides being a great chef, Niko Romito is a man with a deep and eclectic culture; meanwhile, Cristiana is a woman of a unique elegance who knows how to transfer that to the hall of Reale and to the whole Casadonna. Niko and Cristiana are both very passionate about architecture, and they are very knowledgeable of the subject. A logic based on conceiving and rationalizing the spaces to get the purest essence out of it has allowed Leonardo to imprint a work based on synergy. The architectural concept applied to Casadonna is very much like Niko's approach to food.

Simplicity, cleanliness and rationality are the lowest common denominator of the Casadonna project.

THE PROJECT

The project was born from a courageous and measured restoration of a former monastery of the '500 in the Abruzzo National Park.

In 2011, Il Reale moved to and assumed a new identity through the extrapolation of the truthfulness and purity of the structure, keeping intact its historical charm and adding in a clean way everything that was necessary, without interfering with the strong identity of the place.

Casadonna is not the simple sum of materials and works but the symbol of Niko Romito's personality, land, painting and kitchen, as well as the idea of designing the environment and the landscape.

Value recovery

The reconquest of sensory qualities is at the heart of the design philosophy used, including values such as silence and temporal expansion, the recovery of the relationship with nature through an essential architectural language capable of creating patterns between the old and the new, sometimes through contrasts, others through mergers, identifying inaccuracies and emphasizing them to transform them into distinctive elements and integrating them into the general atmosphere of the restaurant spaces.

The structure reflects the philosophy whereby each building must fit harmoniously into the environment as a natural continuation and grasp its full potential.

Nature

It cannot be conceived or understood as organic architecture or bioarchitecture; the truth is that Casadonna is much before and much beyond, all the past and much beyond. If we speak about relationship with the landscape, coherence and constructive function, use with materials, harmony, any reference of the past centuries is more modern than ours. The ecological dimension was not an ideology but part of existence, and it was not a detail of the building but a fundamental element. There is clash: behind the majestic Giogaia, in front of the monastery with its mysteries, its new and past unknowns, of this volume that nothing but hopes to show itself and make itself master of the place where it is born.

The renovation must be respectful but without being too polite, rougher than soft without imperative philological, without futuristic dogmas but simple and contemporary. The minimal expression of the roofs reinforces massiveness of the volumes. There is the desire to dialogue with nature: the trees on the square, the rose garden, the chestnut tree, the botanical garden, the orchard, the high-altitude vineyard and the desire to insert modern elements made of concrete, steel and plastic, designed according to a contemporary taste. The shell wants to maintain the primordial nature of the use of stone, stone and brick but inside acquire its own identity and personality, creating a feeling of simplicity and geometry, an open and fluid scan, a plot of full and empty spaces where the chef makes it his own, and where he creates, teaches and sells his art.

Craftsmanship as luxury

Creating a simple environment is not limited to the essential, but is an opportunity to return to the traditions of craftsmanship to interpret in a modern way. It is a regenerating way of life in an age like ours, where everything becomes complicated. The use of craft techniques, even if it takes more time, ensures the product a long life cycle and a particular charm, which leads to pass the test of time with dignity. The idea of luxury changes its parameters, giving way to an individual trait and attention to detail, the expression of absolute sophistication expressed in the simplicity and in the value of the "handmade".

Materials

The project comes to life through interspersed materials which assume different weights, alternating in predominance while dressing the space, influenced and shaped by internal elements such as volumes and dimensions and by external ones such as light exposure and positioning. Materials have coherence and rigour of forms, where every surface and component contributes to the definition of apparently different but strongly complementary environments.

The textures that the materials draw create precious imperfections dictated by gestures and manual processes that influence and enhance each other.

The philosophy is to detect material inaccuracies and emphasizing them to transform them into distinctive elements, giving a unique and clearly distinguishable atmosphere to the spaces.

No forcing, no attempt to bend the nature of the materials, but once again, devoted respect for the personality of each element. The most inconvenient features become a strong point and not a limit. Niko Romito's "Made in Italy" restaurant follows a type of menu proposing an idea of Mediterranean diet linked to his territory and expression of a global philosophy. The thought that follows Casadonna is the contemporary that meets tradition through a sophisticated choice of materials.

There is balance at the base of everything, thus the balance of materials: recovered wood, iron, glass, ancient stone, old ceramics, linen and boiled wool.

The large spaces are marked by walls heated by simple but design furniture, no unnecessary decoration: a sophisticated and spartan interpretation of the Abruzzo style.

- Stone.

One of the project objectives was to reuse the natural stone available at the place for the paving of the interiors of Reale restaurant, the entrance, the fireplace room and the tearoom. Each block of marble was sliced, and each slab was selected according to color and size and was placed on the ground as a perfect puzzle.

-Cocciopesto cement.

The walls of the structure, as well as the tables of the main room, are worked and finished with cocciopesto cement,

a compound composed of fragments and scraps of bricks minutely crushed and fine mortar based on aerial lime. According to this ancient and natural method of grouting, the base has to be shaved with lime and then to be sanded gently, and strictly waxed by hand with natural waxes.

- Glass.

The transparent lightness of the glass, in contrast to the mighty presence of the walls and the stone floor, facilitates the emotional perception of the overall space, which takes on its maximum expressive power in the Restaurant hall, where the large window frames the room and the surrounding landscape in the opposite direction. The overall structure reflects the philosophy whereby every building must fit harmoniously into the environment. The constant relationship of the interior and the exterior contributes to the magic of this place.

- Iron.

Particular attention was given to the design of doors and windows, as these elements had to have the role of framing landscapes and historical components, unifying and dividing relevant environments, as well as having an adequate technical value. The doors and windows were designed and made of aged iron with a pivoting opening so that they had a clean and linear image and simultaneously could withstand significant loads.

- Linen.

Linen, a yarn of great beauty and value, is opposed to the materiality of the surfaces, able with its brightness to acquire great importance to the colors and chromatic effects.

In this way, tablecloths, napkins and all the elements of textile furniture illuminate and lighten the tones of the surrounding environment, creating an elegant and refined *mies en place*.

Linen curtains, in addition to the strong impact on the warm and welcoming perception of the space, also have a relevant role in the soundproofing strategy in the restaurant, so that you can take advantage of the phono-absorben-ts properties, giving at the same time a value and a spatial image suitable for the context.

- Recycled wood.

Wood is deeply akin to the aesthetic research of the project as a living material for its characteristics of durability, flexibility and naturalness, and it is highly evocative of nature and the surrounding environment.

The surfaces of the fireplace room and the suite come to life thanks to the fire wood planks, recovered wood obtained from ancient roofs and floor.

Furthermore, suites and the different furnishings in the various environments, from the outdoor square to the rooms, have wooden table feet.

- Light.

The light - understood as a material- is very relevant in the project as represents a fundamental element to create atmosphere and arouse emotions. The structure is furnished entirely with the light, which becomes the main element. Lighting bodies and systems have been specifically designed to perfectly match the characters of harmony and uniqueness of the project. The aim was to give a dual appearance to lightning, to create an elegant contrast. The choice of many light bodies, such as the bulbs inserted directly into the restaurant wall, were meant to integrate into the environment. In contrast to what many think, the winning effect is not only achieved by using lampshades and *abat jour*, but with fixed lights, almost hidden in the architectural body.

The Papiro floor lamp by Pallucco has been added to illuminate the tables of Reale restaurant: an icon of contemporary design with a chrome effect, adjustable, sinuous, immediately recognizable for its scultural organic presence. Changes have been made to Papiro to better serve its purpose and give the right amount of light to the chef's dishes. In this way, the ideal atmosphere for a unique experience comes to life, with illuminated spaces all around and a warmer light to highlight the gastronomic experience level.

THE STRUCTURE

The areas are distributed on multiple levels where different identities coexist.

On the first level, Reale restaurant and an enclosed garden used as an event room; the large kitchen and the lab surrounded by the reinforced concrete corridor.

On the second level, the lounge room connected by a large door to the tea room that faces on the front square through eight doorways ; behind the square there a glass trasure chest that serves as the entrance to the restaurant, an old stable transformed into a cellar. It climbs through the majestic marble staircase to the two upper floors where the six rooms are distributed.

The event room

The design of the event hall was added later during construction. The idea was to create an enclosed garden, surrounded by high walls, as used in the structures of that time. The cover has been made with a semi-transparent and slightly darkening material, which leaves intact the feeling of being outdoors in a suggestive and particular environment, supported by an iron structure with rust finish, where the beams and pillars are welded together and drowned in the concrete floor, thus without the use of screws and bolts.

Mosses and ornamental climbing plants are set to cover the vertical interior walls, backlit with LED floor lights; though in the center of the hall there are large succulents placed in pots, which can be transformed into bases for tables if necessary.

The suites

The suites of Casadonna have been conceived once again according to the balance of materials: recovered wood, cement, iron, old cement, linen and boiled wool.

It has been chosen to play on simple contrasts and inconcistencies, studied by Leonardo and Niko to represent the realization of a common idea:

Progetto Imperfetto.

The reclaimed cement tile floors and ceilings in old wooden planks, left to their natural appearance, express the true essence of the rooms. The delicate white of the lime walls illuminated by recessed bulbs and pure linen fabrics, broken by the dark and clean lines of the iron structure, give rise to a harmonious contrast.

The rooms furnishings are unique and distinctive; the made by hand structures in aged iron are opposed to the large volumes of beds and baths.

The lines of the metal elements are Imperfect: thin materials that, by their nature, cannot be flawless and exemplary because they undergo a twist that makes them less straight.

In the bathrooms, interposed between the wooden ceiling and the cementine tiles, there is a large Carrara marble shower with Hammam and a Jacuzzi.

To close the circle, lamps, planks, natural wood: pure furniture, where the only solid element is the bed, upholstered to give more warmth and comfort to customers.

The whole space is animated by accessories unique in their design which, alongside craftsmanship, contribute to the right balance between perfection and imperfection, new and old, which seamlessly express the general design throughout.