

Press release

Atelier(s) Alfonso Femia interprets the design legacy of Agnoldomenico Pica: the new Ersel Bank in Milan

Milan
June 27th, 2022

In the 1930s, Milan was a city of water: the Navigli, the Lambro and the Ticino traced the guidelines of public life, defined the places of aggregation and the routes. The year 1930 marks a border date: many streams were buried in that year. Gradually, the urban water became a memory and, what little remained, is in tourist folklore. It is worth recalling the original identity of the ancient Mediolanum, in the middle of the plain, land between two rivers, Adda and Ticino, intersected by the Lambro, Olona and Seveso, because it is in this Milan city of water that was built, in 1928, the building destined to be headquarters of the General Electric Society of Adamello, active in Valle Camonica until the sixties of the last century, precisely in the production of hydroelectric energy.

At the time, Ulderico Tononi's studio was commissioned to design its architecture. Agnoldomenico Pica and Pietro Cassinoni collaborated on the project. Pica's hand reveals itself in the rigorous geometry that lightens a composition still based on classic rules. The stone that covers the base of the building draws a landscape at eye level, typically Milanese for color and tactile perception. The other elements develop in a harmonious and equally familiar formal balance: the tympanum that closes the window of the main floor with the overhanging balcony supported by columns and the entrance to the whole room. The four figures on the facade, two female and two male, work of the sculptor Leone Lodi, contribute to the compositional narrative typical of the early twentieth century.

The building was taken over in 2018 by Ersel Spa, today one of the largest private banking groups in Italy specialising in wealth management and unique reality on the Italian scene since 1936 for its absolute independence, for the quality of the service, for the direct and personal relationship with the customer.

Winner, in 2018, of the invitation competition for the redevelopment of the building, Alfonso Femia elaborated the project, conducting a philological research, deepening the genesis of the building and its transformations over the decades.

Knowing how to interpret and return is the philosophy of Alfonso Femia and his Atelier(s): the new concept is respectful of the existing, without giving up a functional update, calibrated to the needs expressed by the client and the enhancement of the original compositional focus. The definition of a flexible layout for the internal spatial organization, developed through the adoption of dry technology, was an element of reconciliation between historical pre-existence and contemporary objectives.

The project involved the entire building: four floors above ground and the basement, a new roof to make the top floor accessible, the grafting of a green area in the inner courtyard, the replacement of mechanical and water systems and the creation of a hall, a generous size that invites to the break, the aggregation and the sharing.

Careful restoration work was carried out on the facade of Via Caradosso and on the original portions. New high-performance wooden frames have been installed, adapted to the required standards requested for the energy efficiency of the casing. The front towards the courtyard has been renewed and the facades redefined with a superfetation at roof height and additions for the vertical connection elements.

FIVE ACTIONS FOR A GENEROUS ARCHITECTURE

Architecture and generosity, the conceptual combination, the cornerstone of Atelier(s) Alfonso Femia, is expressed in the complex actualization of the building of Caradosso 16, through five specific actions that aim to harmonize the development of the maximum admissible surface with the formal and functional enhancement of important portions of the property.

- The careful analysis of the historic rooms, of the attic and the basement has made it possible to carry out a functional redistribution program, balancing the autonomy of Ersel spaces and those for multitenant use, through the management of the entrances and internal flows, also providing for a future expansion of Ersel appurtenances.
- The central courtyard, which was – and still is - in bad condition, despite being a front area for all offices, has been transformed into a green space, equipped with new plantings. This is one of the indicators of the design generosity of the intervention: a garden that is a real quality area for the offices, remodeled in different dimensions such as to bring light to the entire basement, making it completely usable.
- The hall exits from the typical management logic of the entrance areas: it goes beyond the “primary tasks” of flow control and representation. The project envisaged, in fact, to “empty” and free the central space of the ground floor, creating a double height and a complete transparency between the street and the garden of the central courtyard. The intention was to “disperse the surfaces” to build a different visual perception, expanding them into a rhythmic scan and attributing a heart that is intersection and generation, pause and decompression of the building. The Ersel lobby is a space that narrates spaces, empty of architecture with an uncoded narrative function, customizable on the intimacy of each individual.
- The building has been upgraded for energy aspects, replacing existing closures and applying an inner coat. The reduction of the gross surface area (caused by the application of the coat) was calculated and the distribution of offices was reconfigured.
- The main thread of the intervention was the congruence with the compositional legacy of Agnoldomenico Pica through the respectful interpretation of the formal cleanliness of the geometries and the redefinition of the front towards the courtyard, a design bridge between the twenties of the 20th century and the twenties of the 2000s, without solutions of continuity.

Alfonso Femia commented: “Our intervention on an architecture of the 1930s did not simply have a goal of re-functionalization. The Milan of the twentieth century is characterized by variety and fragments, its buildings make up a dense urban landscape, but also unitary even in marked differences. To be respected and preserved.

For this reason, we worked particularly on the office floors and on the common areas, the internal hall and the external courtyard, trying to unravel a thread that accentuated the original characters, even in the necessary transformations, up to the metamorphosis of the front facing the garden. We integrated the green, raised the coverage discreetly, always emphasizing the character of Pica’s work. “

THE FRONT TOWARDS THE COURT

On the side towards the courtyard, the inner layer of the roof has been rectified, a design choice that has allowed the creation of an appropriate surface to make the attic floor accessible. The integrated structure is made of steel with aluminium profiles that attach to the eaves surface. The courtyard/garden houses three additions, two for the stairs and one for the elevator, also made with aluminum profiles with the same formal composition of the new volume on the roof. The body of the elevator is made of clear glass. New high-performance aluminium windows have also been installed on this front, replacing the existing ones.

THE INTERIOR

Through partitions and false ceilings in plasterboard, the layout of the five office floors has been redesigned. Minimal were the interventions on the mezzanine floor, historical and identity space of the building, in which the staircase and the original liberty windows were preserved, in wrought iron by Giovanni Magnoni. Entering on the left, in the redesigned hall, a metallic spiral staircase acts as a counterpoint to the volume of the transparent elevator with the same metallic coating. Among the furnishing elements chosen by Ersel, *Sparrow* desks, *Spider & Mary Jane* tables and *Ciuli Fruli* lamps, a directional table in glass, steel and wood, designed by AF*Design (Alfonso Femia, Simonetta Cenci, Marco Corazza, Enrico Martino, Fabio Marchiori), with 7.27 The Moon Codex. The furnishings of the kitchens and the two reception areas were made to measure, also to AF*Design design.

The General Electric Company, built in the city of water and passed through multiple changes of use, confirms its vocation as a credit institution, in contemporary Milan, center of international finance.

June 2022

text: courtesy Atelier(s) Alfonso Femia
photos: Stefano Anzini

NEW ERSEL BANK HEADQUARTERS, MILAN

location: via Caradosso 16, Milano

client: Caradosso 16 Srl

*architectural and landscape design: Atelier(s) Alfonso Femia *AF517*

architect in charge: Alfonso Femia

structural and services engineering: BMS Progetti Srl

construcion site management: Progetto CMR srl

artistic direction: Alfonso Femia, Marco Corazza

legal advice: Leone – Torrani e Associati

*lighting design: Alfonso Femia/AF*Design con IN-VISIBLE lab*

project director: Marco Corazza

project leader: Arianna Dall'Occa

design team

Simonetta Cenci (Coordination), Alfonso Femia, Angela Cavallari, Arianna Dall'Occa, Alfonso Marotta, Francesca Recagno, Vincenzo Tripodi, Vittoria Paternostro, Carlotta Turrato, Sara Massa, Carlo Occhipinti, Stefano Cioncoloni, Francesca Zampetti,

collaborators

Elisabetta Alfonsi, Mariana Duarte de Santana, Nicola Scognamiglio

plan

Rehabilitation and renovation of the building on Via Caradosso 16 in Milan with main destination for offices. It is characterized by a basement floor, a semi-basement floor and 5 floors above ground (including the fourth attic floor currently used for plant systems)

area: SLP: 3219 sqm

cost: 9.024.820,64 €

*calendar: competition (winning design): 21.12.2018
completed 03.2022*

renderings

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