



the architecture & interior design international magazine | middle east

DESIGN BLENDING FORM AND FUNCTION

Focus:
New trends
in Italian design



Special
Ten years
of Compasses

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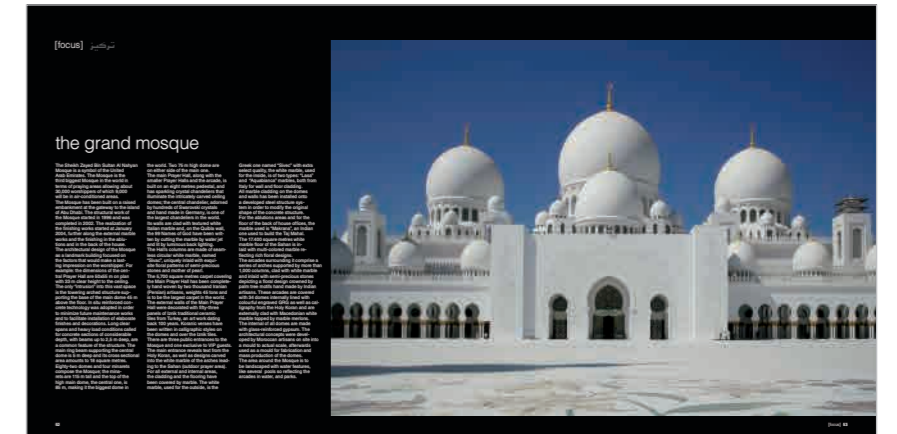
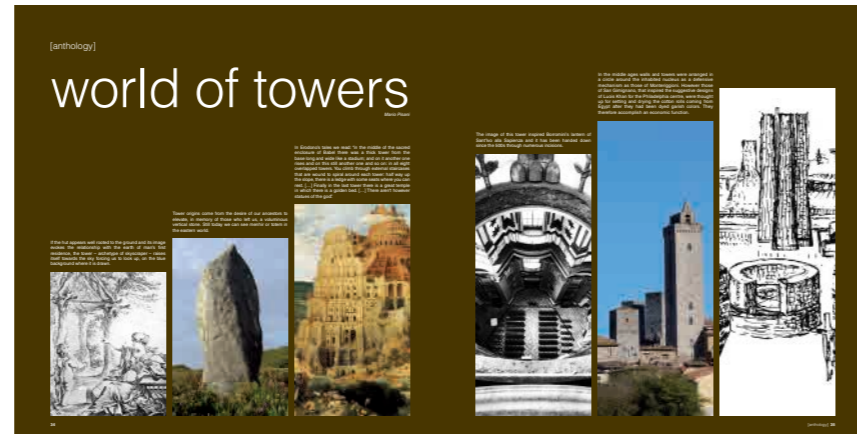


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Giovanna Russo Krauss
Damiana Trecozzi

10 years: a brief history of Compasses



The birth of the magazine
In 2008 a new architecture and design magazine came out on the publishing scene. It was Compasses, which, starting from the Middle East, devoted itself to «search for quality differences, specificity in individual approaches» in architecture. What the publishers of the new magazine wanted from their creature was to draw a portrait in movement that focused on a polysemic eclecticism, a portrait based on rigorous choices in search for newly awaited architectural beauties. As stated in the first issue, the beauty of the designs was to be intended as

the result of a higher poetic intensity for human living with respect to the biological equilibrium of the planet. *Metropolis*, *landscape* and *ecology* were the keywords of the editors presentation of the magazine in the first issue. Ten years away from that issue it is clear that Compasses has remained true to these pillars, though enriching its own themes over time by widening its gaze on the world of architecture by also focusing on the small scale of interior design and furniture design. The credit of this result goes to the publishers of the magazine which in 2010, with issue n. 9, welcomed

Francesca Maderna who, together with Marco Ferretti, is currently at the base of Compasses' project. Maderna and Ferretti are indeed the *fil rouge* of the magazine, guiding it over this decade, expanding it through the years and innovating it in the new series, though keeping it coherent. In Compasses the past and the future have always been the faces of a same medal, for there is no innovation without knowledge and respect of the past and there is no life without a tension for the future. For this reason Compasses has withheld from the chronicle of present architecture, not wishing to

pursue an impossible competition with online architecture magazines. Indeed, not only in the quarterly periodicity Compasses differs from a newspaper, the daily updates on "what's new" have been left to other sources of information while Compasses has devoted itself to the world of architecture in a more profound way, selecting designs for their meaning, both present and future. In the past ten years historic architectures, recent realisations and renders of futuristic designs have all found a place on Compasses' pages, coexisting without effort because of their inner coherence.

The first two issues of Compasses, at the time directed by Cherubino Gambardella and Lorenzo Capobianco as deputy director, have set the identity of the magazine, delineating the path upon which the following directors, Luigi Prestinenza Puglisi (and Anna Baldini as deputy director) and Andrea Pane, would operate, each in their own way. Compasses scientific committee mirrors the transnational quality of the designs featured on the magazine. Universally recognised masters of architecture such as David Chipperfield and Peter Eisemann have joined Compasses'

scientific committee from the very beginning, immediately acknowledging it as an editorial project of quality and content. Over the years other well-known masters and promising designers as well as prestigious scholars have joined Compasses' team, which from the third issue presented in its colophon to the readers the map of its correspondents, demonstrating the global network behind the magazine, a network that still goes from North and South America, to Europe, to Africa, Asia and Australia. Taking a closer look at Compasses' issues it is possible to delineate an

evolution of its structure and content. The first two issues, published under the direction of Cherubino Gambardella are built around the main "project" section, preceded by the editorial and made of project from all around the globe - from Beijing to Madrid, to New York - by architecture firms as Steven Holl, Boeri studio and Tadao Ando as well as Asymptote and Italo Rota. This section, which features buildings, schools, museums and urban projects, is punctuated by the "anthology," "theory," "focus" and "rewind project" sections, each consisting of a single article coherent with the theme of the

issue ("sky architecture" in the first, "morphing" in the second) except for the "focus" which analyses the work of a single architect (Koolhaas in the Emirates in the first, Jean Nouvel in the second one). The articles of these first issues demonstrate attention to architectural and urban scale works, addressed in short articles that present the designs to the reader by accompanying the text with sketches, renderings, plans, section and photographs of the completed work as well as from the construction site, this way providing the reader the knowledge of the multiple faces of an architecture >



and of the long process they require, from the design to the realisation. Other sections of the magazine present in the first two issues were "Books" and "Web selection", both on the topic of the issue, and "dedicated to compasses", which featured unpublished drawings and sketches by famous architects interviewed by Compasses: Massimiliano Fuksas and Franco Purini. The design aspects of architecture earned their space on the magazine very early, starting from the second issue which made "interiors & design" follow the also brand new "real estate" section, this way combining big

scale projects such as the Lagoons of Dubai with the Blobwall installation by Greg Lynn. **Widening the gaze: the second series** However, the structure of the magazine underwent some changes with the passing of the torch between Cherubino Gambardella and Luigi Prestinzenza Puglisi who, while still maintaining the iconic magazine layout, divided the index in the sections still present: "experiences", devoted to middle east architectures, "focus", "architecture" and "interiors". While the

first two issues revolved around the main and wide "project" section, from the third issue onward "experiences", "architecture" and "interiors" would all have their own space, a space dedicated to multiple articles by architects and scholars on the works of established and promising designers and architectural firms. Only the "focus" was still differing from these multifaceted sections, placed in the middle of the issue, as in the first numbers, clearly standing out at first sight thanks to the contrast of its black pages, and this time devoted to a single architecture, an architecture whose

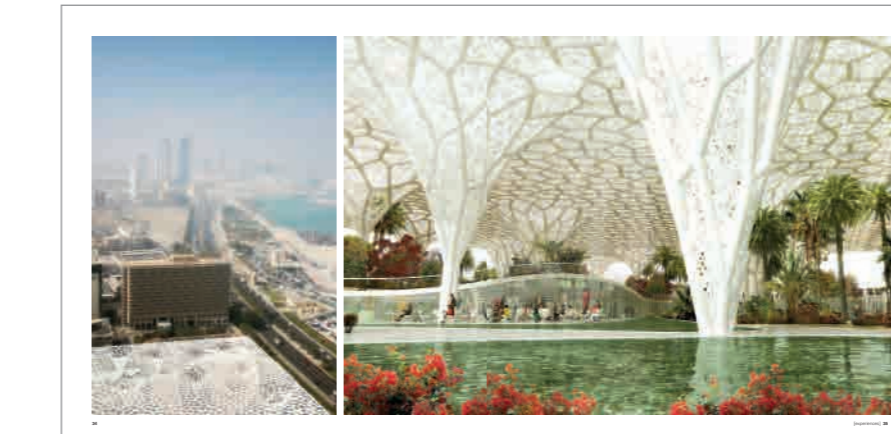
main feature it's not its novelty, but its «cultural, social and religious impact, independent of the innovative strength of [its] formal elaboration». Finally, Prestinzenza Puglisi introduced the "ideas" section which contains articles about the ideas and issues at the base of architectural projects, therefore giving space to more historical reflection and theoretical research within the magazine. The themes covered by Compasses in these past ten years are many, ranging from the value of difference in the global society to the demand of both contemporary icons and

simple and natural habitats (issues n. 6 and 10). While Gambardella addressed prevailing themes such as "sky architectures" and "morphing", inaugurating the long collaboration between Zaha Hadid architects firm and Compasses, in his many issues Prestinzenza Puglisi covered green themes such as "nature architecture", "ecologies" and "design for the future" (issues n. 3, 8 and 15), as well as aesthetic ones such as "contemporary elegance", "archiscape" and "colours" (issues n. 4, 11 and 12) and themes more focused on designing processes such as "fluid energy", "sign of design",

"making cities" and "new plasticity" (issues n. 5, 7, 9 and 13). **Changing worlds: towards a transitional phase** As time passed by and several issues were published, Compasses gained a major role within the international magazine scene. With its 15th issue, devoted to the "Design for the future", Prestinzenza and Baldini's aim was that of questioning on where architecture was heading for. However no mainstream replies were provided. A plausible response was given by the published projects themselves, which

somehow suggested new trends and high-quality design, thus improving life and hopefully leading out of the spreading economic crisis. Another possible answer to that query would have been given by the 16th issue as well entitled "New stars"; far from being an archi-star-addicted magazine, it was the directors' choice to put emerging architects under the spotlight in order to seize new architectural orientations. The same approach was followed in the 17th issue "Emerging countries", where rather than concentrating on single designers, they depicted a general overview on less known and

promoted geographical areas, where contemporary architectural design is certainly absorbed but returned in reinterpreted ways, usually deeply bound to local traditions. Moreover, this very last aspect was also argued within the following issue, the 18th having as main topic "Situation specific": in Compasses that is considered as an unavoidable requisite for good architecture which is requested not only to build a relationship with the site's history and environment, but also to respond in detail and with creativity to the uses to which it is devoted. The selected projects definitely



demonstrate how that combination of elements may produce a gorgeous effect both of interest and amazement in the final users. Nonetheless the 19th issue hosting “Culture buildings”, started from the very same premises. These kinds of works were taken into account by Prestinzenza and Baldini who believed that they represented a certainly interesting sample as they usually constitute an exclusive selection to analyse being both their clients and designers sensitive to the educational role that shapes, colours and atmospheres actually have on their users. Compasses has always

been moulded in the awareness that creativity generates creativity, inspiration, thoughtfulness and that’s exactly what a culture building is meant to do, as the chosen projects show. Speaking of ethics, the very last issue directed by Prestinzenza and Baldini, that is the 20th, dealt with “Respect”: if contemporary architecture is put on trial for its designers’ responsibility for the destruction of environments and local identities, then the defence provided by the directors is that one single word titling the issue. All the published projects demonstrate how good architecture totally goes in the

opposite direction to that of which it is accused. After all, this Compasses era ruled by Prestinzenza and Baldini surely represented an attempt to try to grasp contemporary architecture trends, also considering those coming from the least known architects and geographical areas, thus offering a sort of guideline for good design through their issues. Soon after that, Rafi Raja opened a sort of transition stage for Compasses presenting the 21st issue entitled “Interface.” That is a building’s façade, which in fact is that element separating indoor from outdoor spaces. In

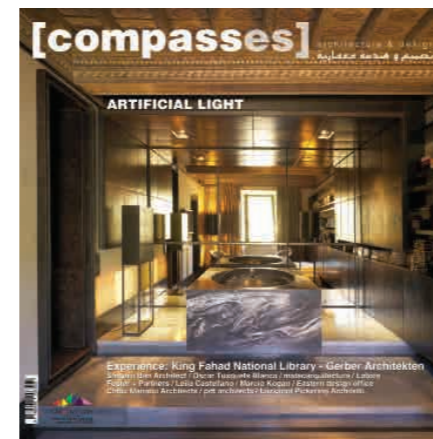
the issue, the interface becomes a metaphor of the vain desire of appearing, rather than being, affecting architecture other than people. But what does a building’s surface say about it? That’s a certainly interesting quest when referring to skyscrapers, as Raja did. These architectures in fact tend to homogenise in stressing verticality. That of course unless their “skins” are capable of conveying more expressive meanings to them, as in the case of the towers presented not by chance in the issue. Another strongly characterizing feature in architecture, apart from façades, surely is identified

in light, to which the 22nd Compasses is addressed. Passing from daylight to “Artificial light”, the director wanted to show how spaces are transformed and atmospheres changed as the sequence of projects presented in both lighting situations. **From the third series to future challenges** After a two years long time break, Compasses was finally restarted in 2016 with its 23rd issue, the first of its new era. Still believing in this editorial project, its publishers Marco Ferretti and Francesca Maderna persistently

sought to give it a new life. As a phoenix arising from its ashes, Compasses came back even stronger taking on a totally new guise. Being no longer just a simple magazine, its brand new editorial team created a wide architecture and interior design international network named Compassesworld in which the journal is the driving element, yet not the only means of communication; together with the main magazine, there are the C-plus booklets, which are special magazines delivered at international events and therefore devoted to one specific topic; the new, stylish website

together with the social media life system and international newsletter, always keeping Compasses followers up-to-date on worldwide design and events. Nevertheless, the magazine has been renewed as well by its new scientific director Andrea Pane. This Professor of architectural conservation at the University of Naples Federico II took the reins of the magazine conferring to it a new structure and approach. Trying to push on its scientific contribution rather than only on its leisure one, Pane reinvented a new role for Compasses

in the international scenario. The most meaningful innovation has been the introduction of the “essays.” In fact throughout all its history, every Compasses issue has always been dedicated to a single, very well selected topic which was then developed across the “focus” and the “experiences” sections, set as to give a look to the present day and future panorama. A somehow historical glance at the topic was missing, so that was what the essays section would have covered: its purpose is that of offering to the readers a critical framework of the issue’s main focus, >



written by specific field experts. Now Compasses can project to the future with a mayor awareness of the past. Its new look perfectly resembles the novelties introduced in its contents. Uncoated paper is used for the "essays" lending a quite vintage aspect to it, rekindled by numerous, small images while in the other sections much more space is given to the descriptive part of the projects. Yet the common trait of the magazine always is its minimal and elegant graphic design. Within its fix grid, the Art Director Ferdinando Polverino de Laureto, having taken part to

the Compasses team over the past thirteen issues, always succeeds in creating new captivating layouts. So starting from the 23rd issue "EXPO. Sailing from Milan to Dubai", a bridge between Europe and the MENA countries, between past and future was finally reconstructed, taking advantage of the expedient of the EXPO event. Then followed the 24th issue devoted to "INSIDE. The Art[ist] House". Through history and across modernity, a question is instilled into the readers: what makes a house artistic? Is it the consumer for whom the home is thought for, is

it the collection of artworks exhibited in it or does it have to do with its artistic will which fills its shapes and essence? Thus the selected projects suggest an answer to these questions. "MUSEUMS. Back to the future" is the 25th issue dealing with those particular architectures having as a common trait that of guiding people through time, letting them become aware of the past, that is to say museums. But how have they adjusted to our consumer society and how do these changes affect their inner distribution and general concept? A wide range of projects

explain the terms of this evolution and its final outcome. Finally comes the 26th issue "CONNECTIONS. Joining lands and people" where the infrastructures, such as bridges and train stations, become much more than means for transportation as they end up being places where civilizations and cultures meet and thus connect. Even though Compasses has gone through several different changes over time, from its editorial team members, to its Scientific Directors, to its format and so on, it has never really changed its core idea. Today, just as 10 years

ago, its leading aspiration to spread all over the world the amazing and innovative changes which were and still are happening in the heart of the Middle East at an always higher rate, is still fully respected and perhaps strengthened. In fact, as time has gone by, even more attention has been given to other emerging countries too, enlarging the overview extent beyond the MENAs (Middle East North Africa), capturing all those sites in which planning and design have been opening to new trends. In its tenth anniversary, Compasses definitely confirms its nature: not just

a simple, commercial magazine, but rather a platform where opposite "worlds" meet in time and space, always trying to keep its readers minds open. Hopefully in the future new challenges will be undertaken, as that bringing Compasses beyond specific geographical boundaries, to new, broad destinations, starting from Europe and going even farther. *Although the present paper is the outcome of a collective work between the two authors, par. 1 and 2 are written by Giovanna Russo Krauss and par. 4 and 5 are written by Damiana Treccozi.*

