

ARCFILIO



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The Design Issue

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JASPER MORRISON
Object Lessons
2024



Laguna~B

Marie Brandolini in 1996, portrayed with her sons Guido (left) and Marcantonio (behind her), and a selection of Laguna~B Goto glasses.

Request access to the Digital Archive at lagunab.com/about

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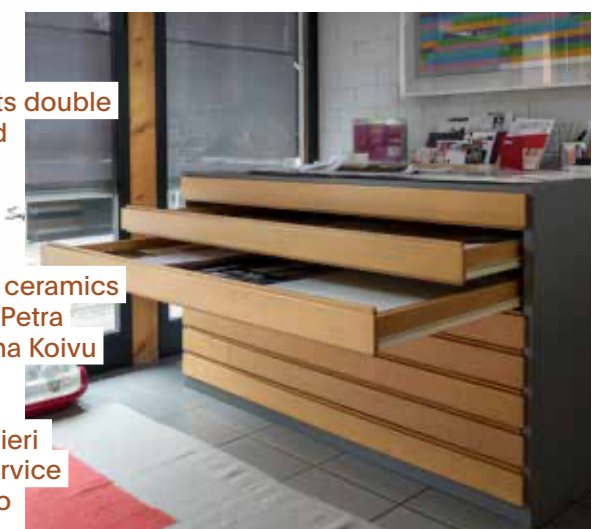
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Something Else

Alias

Spaghetti, Giandomenico Belotti
1979

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Ph. Alberto Strada



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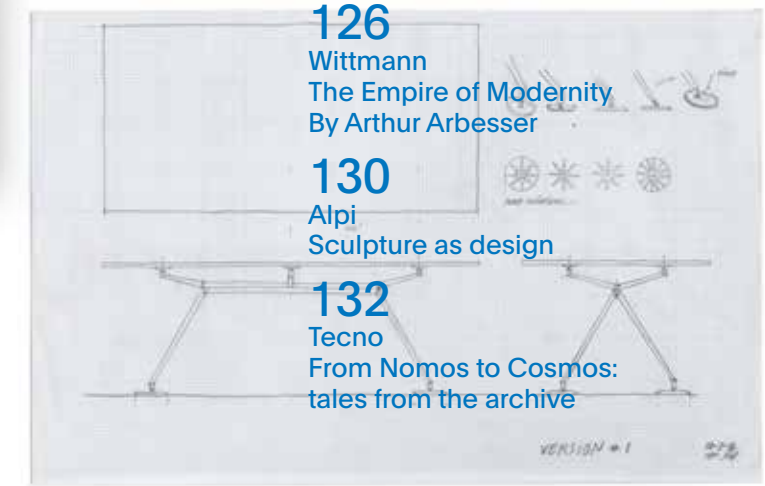
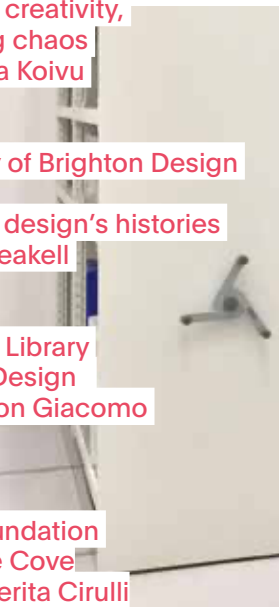
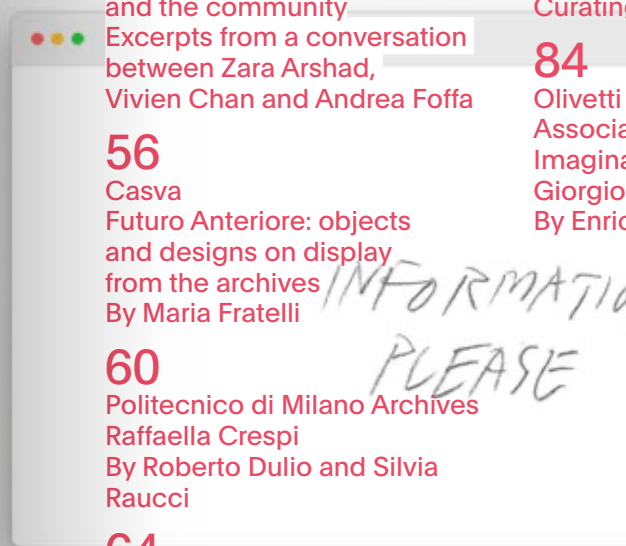
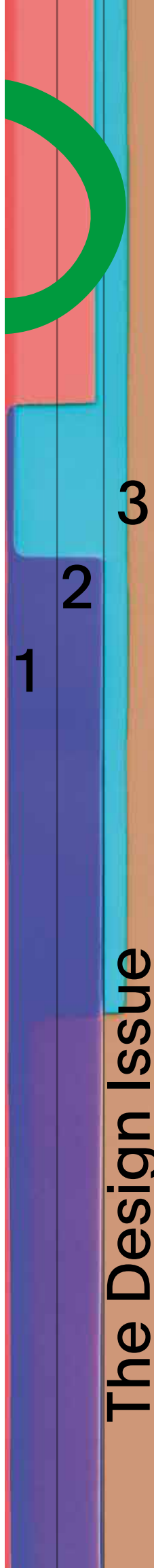


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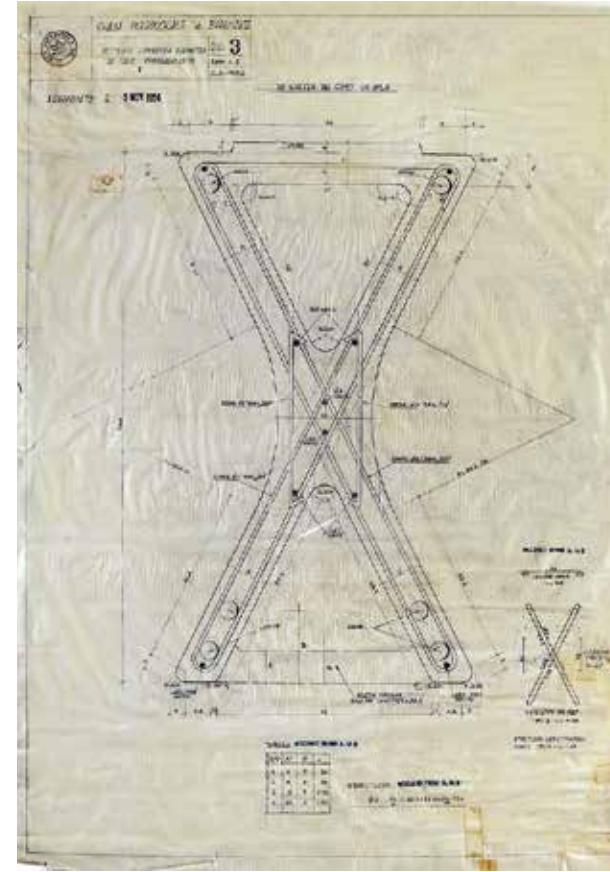
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Aldo Favini, The church of Baranzate, design of the structure, section of the prefabricated ashlar of the roof, pen and pencil drawing on tracing paper, 1956, Favini Fond, Historical Archives of the Politecnico di Milano

By
 Giulio Barazzetta

The parish of "Nostra Signora della Misericordia" was built for the program of new churches of cardinal Giovanni Battista Montini, in Baranzate, north-west of Milan. Designed and built between 1956 and 1958 by architects Angelo Mangiarotti and Bruno Morassutti, with structural engineer Aldo Favini, the "Glass Church" is considered a masterpiece of modern architecture, still remarkable for the originality and innovation of its pre-stressed reinforced concrete roof coupled with the cladding of the liturgical hall in large translucent glass panels supported by a slender metal frame. A wall made of concrete and pebbles standing over six feet high, sloped on the outside, delimits the open space around the church, defining the sacred perimeter of the whole complex. This wall brings inside the panels of the Via Crucis, which surround the small white glass volume of the liturgical hall that stands on a relief of land, connected to the countryside by a grassy slope. It is the size of a chapel or oratory, rather than a parish church. The floor level of the classroom is six and half feet above the surrounding ground. This coincidence means that from afar the church appears to be resting on a large plinth. The enclosure is accessed by a wide sliding gate on the south façade. Once inside you find yourself faced with two staircases in the church, positioned side by side: a wide one, ascending to the shiny box of the hall and a descending one

in the shade of the base. You enter the church from below, one by one, going down towards the water basin outside to access the solid concrete shade of a narrow entryway with the baptismal font on the left and the Chapel of the Virgin and the Sacristy on the right, opposite the wide staircase that must be climbed to ascend to the opalescent brightness of the hall above. Its liturgical space, protect-



ed by the reinforced concrete roof, is surrounded by the light curtain of the glass cladding. The roof rests on four slender columns which transversally carry two main beams cast on site and six longitudinal secondary beams made up of thirty prefabricated concrete segments assembled and pre-stressed on site. The roof is completed by a sequence of prefabricated panels placed between the secondary beams that make up

the elegant coffered ceiling. Outside, the roof crowns the main façades of the church, revealing the X-shaped heads of the pre-stressed beams transformed into architectural decoration. The cladding screen is supported by a light metal structure that carries the translucent and opalescent glass panels. Its curtain touches neither the roof nor the floor, allowing glimpses of the sky above and the ground below. Worshippers leave the church at the end of the services all together through the wide sliding door, opened at the end of the celebration, into the small churchyard outside, and then down the wide staircase which extends it downwards towards the countryside. Photographs of the newly completed work document how the original insulating material guaranteed the opalescent character of the cladding during the day, making the white volume of the church dazzle on the outside, while diffusing the sunlight filtered by the whitish material throughout the interior. This visual and tactile perception was the first conservation objective in the change in casing technology.

After being made safe in 2003, the restoration project was developed by Bruno Morassutti together with Giulio Barazzetta, who formed a design team made up of the three original designers in collaboration with three of their younger counterparts: Anna Mangiarotti, myself, and the engineer Tito Negri. This line-up, which was gradually implemented by the other necessary specialists, ensured the accurate management of the design, which was overall developed by SBG Architetti studio, with the construction site supervision by architect Sergio Gianoli, until the work was completed and handed over to the parish in January 2015. The project and its implementation, approved by the Parish Council supported by the Technical and Artistic and Cultural Heritage offices of the Archiepiscopal Curia of Milan, took the time necessary to identify the appropriate technical solutions in a line that was difficult to pursue. If this restoration was imposed by the deterioration of the cladding, to the point of uninhabitability of the building, its objective

was always the strictly conservative restoration of the architectural complex, adapting it to the necessary needs and standards of comfort required by the conditions of present-day use. Making a constant comparison between the construction inaugurated by Montini on November 7, 1958, the project as a representation of his idea of architecture and, lastly, its image spread and replicated over time in numerous publications, our reference has always fluctuated between the identification of the true and the plausible. Faced with the disarming observation of irrecoverability, it was fundamental to note the good conditions and efficiency of the roof, as well as the basement rooms, which also allowed the recovery of the property for liturgical use and of spaces previously used for service purposes. Work progressed without aligning the casing to standards at all costs.

This turned out to be unnecessary in consideration of the given restriction and given the characteristics of the building, the requirements of use and particular legislation for religious buildings. This also risked leading to a shift in the character of the building towards a high-tech construction, an idea of architecture resulting from the complete transfer of advanced technologies. Had things progressed in this way, the form of the building would have been altered by a composition of current materials together with new ones, created at an artisanal site using highly innovative techniques, the substantial feature of this building thus responding to its essential architecture.

Last but not least, the contribution of the documentary material in the Archives of the designers was essential to this research: the Morassutti Archive conserved in the Projects Archive of the IUAV University of Venice since 2008; the Favini Fond conserved in the Historical Archives of the Politecnico di Milano since January 2012; the Angelo Mangiarotti Archive, active since 2012 and conserved at the Angelo Mangiarotti Foundation in Milan since November 2017. These three were joined by the Giorgio Casali Archive, which is also conserved in the Projects Archive of the IUAV University of Venice. For this reason and for the objective of this

contribution, the images that illustrate this text are original and from the Archives.

As can be seen, the particular conditions of this work, their very elaboration and implementation have contributed to re-establishing the idea of the so-called Restoration of the Modern and in general of conservative restoration, or conservation project if you prefer. First of all, this was the assumption imposed by the involve-



ment by the designers of the same building, in which 're-work' raises the question of 'imitation' of the original, to be reproduced with different technologies, together with the necessary distinction of the parts, of the gap between 'new' and 'original', where there is a difference or an addition of elements.

The good condition and the efficiency of the pre-stressed reinforced concrete roof con-

centrated work on restoring the attic of the classrooms, adapting it to the exercise of crowded functions and to containing the contribution of its floor to energy efficiency.

For all these operations, the diaphragm of walls, attic and façade was immediately identified as the place dedicated to the new installations and new construction elements.

A small space carved out in the limit between above and below, between inside and outside, in the layers of the building, highlighting the gap between the old and new 'inside' the building in the difference 'between' materials.

The new cladding installed is the result of careful selection work to identify new materials that mimic the original in search of a sensitive appearance that evokes the effects of the original façade, illuminated by the layering and characteristics of the glass. All this was carefully balanced in order to ensure the constant interplay of reflection, refraction and opalescence of the light.

In conclusion, in the general consideration of critics, the state of the construction, the

main objective of this work, has been preserved in its transformation and adaptation. In the subjective consideration of the audience of worshippers and visitors, the fruition and especially the constantly variable and multifaceted perception of this architecture has been regained.

Giulio Barazzetta is an Architect and Professor of architectural design at Politecnico di Milano. He is the scientific director of the Angelo Mangiarotti

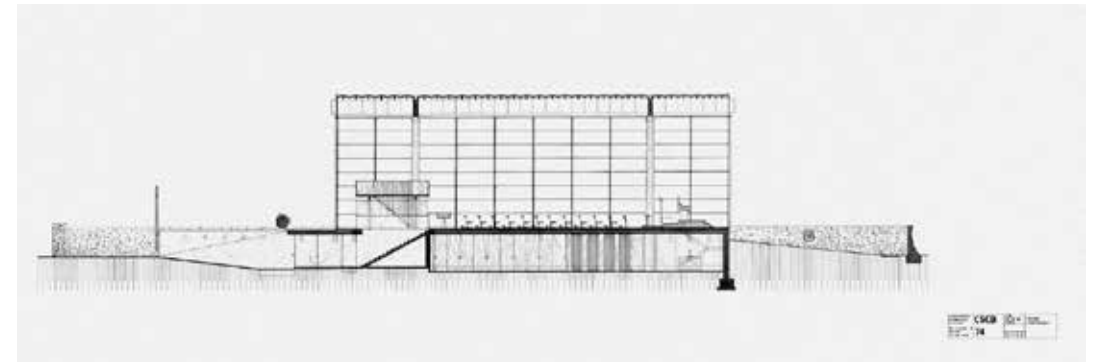
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The church of Baranzate, construction site, threading of the post-tensioning cables into the prefabricated ashlar, 1957. Photo Giorgio Casali, Favini Fond, Historical Archives of the Politecnico di Milano

D. The church of Baranzate, completed work, the interior in preparation, 1958. Photo Bruno Morassutti, Morassutti Fond, IUAV Archivio Progetti
E. Angelo Mangiarotti and Bruno Morassutti, The church of Baranzate, architectural project, longitudinal section, 1956, Morassutti Fond, IUAV Project Archives



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