



# Italy

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# The Young Sensualists

**Pino Scaglione** perceives a new sensuality at play in Italy. He takes us on a tour that takes in the elegant and sober forms of +Arch's new headquarters for Dolce & Gabbana in Milan and the highly original new soccer stadium in Siena by Iotti + Pavarani. Heading south he highlights some remarkable new architecture in Naples, Sardinia and Sicily injected with a rare poetic sensibility.





Giovanni Vaccarini, New cemetery, Ortona a Mare, Chieti, Abruzzo, 2005

Things are currently rather lively in Italy. The current group of 50-year-olds has cleared the way for others as a result of their relationships, experiments and their formal and stylistic development, but above all through their new open and multidisciplinary approach to design, no longer seen as a closed and enclosed episode. There are many offices spread across the country. The north is considered to be more operative and the south more creative. Then there are those that are simultaneously inside and outside Italy, who have found that participating in competitions represents a new terrain for comparison and exchange, and who see foreign work experiences as important moments of growth and detachment from a more rhetorical and useless tradition.

The most exemplary approach can be found in the work of the group known as Corvino+Multari (Vincenzo Corvino and Giovanni Multari) who, together with others mentioned here, began with an attentive and interesting rereading of the Modernist lesson – beginning with their experiences in Naples, the city in which they live and which boasted a lively production during the important years of the Rationalist movement – and they are now producing architecture and projects that are a truly original and authentic transfiguration of contemporary images that have little, if any, links with a traditional past. The project for the Palaponticelli on the periphery of Naples, a difficult area in both social and urban terms, proposes the figurative redemption of its context by inserting a highly innovative piece of urban architecture that looks more towards the landscape, and effectively constructing a new one, rather than at the lessons of the past. What is more, it is precisely because of this lesson, later deformed by Rationalism, a movement that actually contributed to building inhospitable cities and peripheries, that the separation is so sharp: the colours, surfaces, forms, materials (hypercontemporary) and the deliberate out-of-scale dimensions of the Palaponticelli are a manifesto of a new

scale of design for the office of Corvino+Multari, who also belong to a broader school of research that aims at comparisons with the European and international panorama. In this project they identify and trace a new approach for the coming years, which will undoubtedly yield interesting results. Very similar in this sense is the path taken by Carlo Cappai and Maria Alessandra Segantini of C+S Associati, though we can say that this partnership, operative mostly in the Veneto region, aims at a more rigorous search for continuity with the lessons of past Italian experiences.

The courageous, though intelligently fractured monolith (a form imposed by the master plan prepared by Leon Krier) of the university residences in Novoli, Florence, gives us a taste of their professional bravura and the control of the project at



**Corvino+Multari, Palaponticelli project, Naples, 2005**

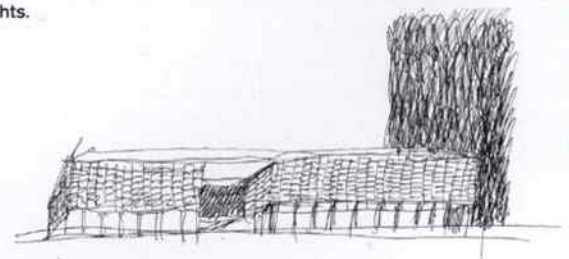
While their initial work was elegant, though traditional, Corvino+Multari have recently begun to design projects such as this that are characterised by a more decisive figurative impact within their architectural context, in this case a fragment of the abandoned Neapolitan periphery.





**C+S Associati, Student residences, Novoli, Florence, 2006**

This university residence synthesises many of the architectural themes pursued by C+S: the simplicity of the plan, the juxtaposition of materials with different patterns and colours (in this case reinforced concrete and wood) and an attention to lighting, visible here in the use of screening panels on the exterior and skylights.





**Camillo Botticini, Municipal pool, Mompiano, Brescia, Lombardy, 2005**

Botticini's work is characterised by a taste for the modern that plays with elementary volumes interrupted by perforations or large glazed surfaces, as can be seen in the design of this pool project.

various scales. There is a level of coherence between interior and exterior, in the choice of expressive and lasting materials and the revisitation of past forms and their modernisation. Ample surfaces of glass block are supported by exposed concrete bases. The use of large coloured exterior walls and wood cladding in particular areas creates an architectural 'mosaic' that can be read at multiple levels and which demonstrates various threads of research, from the modern to the contemporary, from the artistic to the graphic and the macro to the micro, passing not only through the rich universe of figurative Italian design, but also the more recent interpretations of, above all, contemporary Spanish architects.

If we were to speak of a proper balance between research and innovation, with analogous expressive methods, then a fine example can be found in the work of Camillo Botticini, though he sets himself apart through his original stylistic approach and a particular coherence in the use of the suggestions and rigour of Nordic Rationalism, taken from the most interesting experiences of the masters, and infused with a satisfyingly contemporary and positive 'Italian' signature.

Botticini's project for a pool in Mompiano is an exemplar of this passage and his research: a skilful play of suspended volumes whose surfaces have been treated with a dense and elegant grey-black, tempered by the light glazing and reveals

between the base and the upper volume. The interiors, devoid of vertical structural elements, give the space of the pool a sense of limitless, horizontal dilation, while the glazing offers an interrupted dialogue between the interior and exterior. Finally, the interesting relationship with context is marked by the volumetric mass that connotes the site itself.

The Milanese group +Arch (Francesco Fresa, Germàn Fuenmayor, Gino Garbellini and Monica Tricario) have, for some time now, worked primarily on buildings for the fashion industry, a sector that in Italy has pushed for a strong contemporary image. Their most recent work is the new headquarters for Dolce & Gabbana, whose interiors were designed together with Ron Arad. This building is an exemplar of an attitude of courageous innovation that pushes the group to build works of architecture that are both solid and simultaneously Mediterranean and Nordic, elegant and sober and, above all, with an excellent control of form and space. Their work also boasts a perfect balance between materials and construction solutions, together with a refined, balanced and sober minimal-sensual play of white and grey-black. There are no excesses or contaminations between the interior and exterior, culminating in the interior courtyard, which in itself represents an interesting thesis in the construction of a contemporary microlandscape.





**+Arch, Dolce & Gabbana headquarters, Milan, 2006**

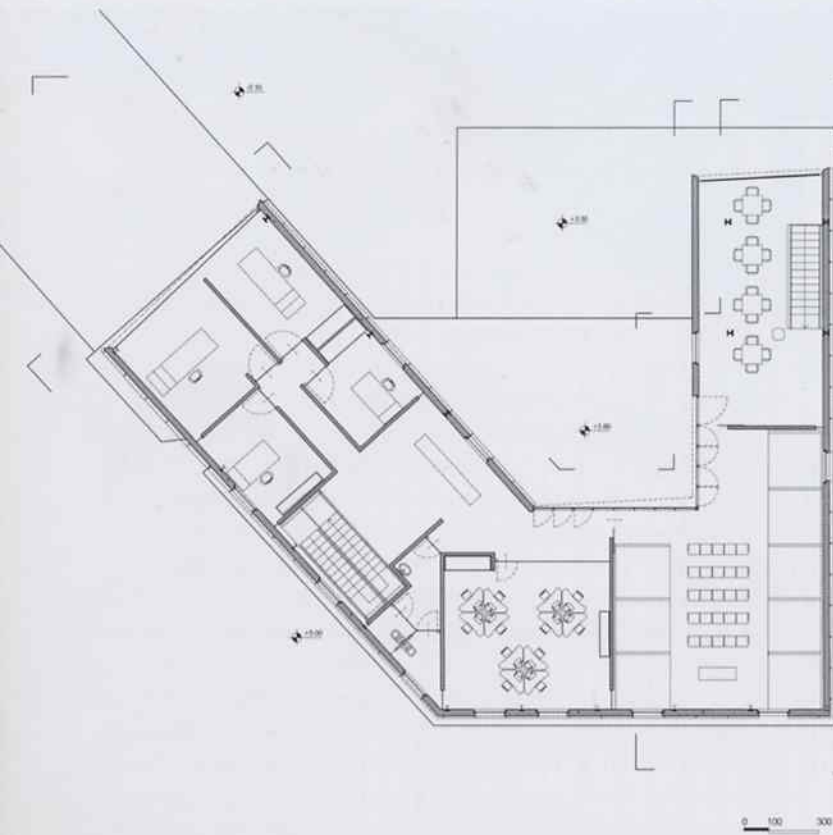
The projects of this Milan-based office are characterised by a refined elegance that results from an essential design, careful detailing and the use of precious materials. The architects have honed their skills in many of their projects for factories and offices, and stores for fashion designers Dolce & Gabbana.





**UdA, Ilti Luce head office extension, Turin, 2002**

The projects by this group from Turin are characterised by their transparency, immateriality and lighting effects. The building shown here features walls made of transparent panels and fibre-optic lighting that gives the panels different colours.





**Iotti + Pavarani Architetti, Soccer stadium, Siena, 2005**

Iotti + Pavarani are two 30-something architects who gained recognition after winning this important competition. Their solution was convincing for the masterful way in which the decidedly cumbersome stadium is brilliantly inserted within the delicate landscape of its site.

Still in the north, and in the realm of this suggestive play of transparent yet solid boxes similar to the buildings by +Arch, the work of the Turin-based office Ufficio di Architettura (UdA) is interesting for its Italian and original manner of dialoguing with context, in particular their conversion of a factory building from the 1950s, the home of Ilti Luce. The project includes the addition of an extra storey on the flat roof using a translucent and vitreous material to create a sort of giant lantern which, when illuminated, becomes airy and light. It is set atop the office building and becomes both a container and exhibition of the company's main product (fibre-optic lighting). It is an original method for resolving the theme of the building within a building, a courageous and intelligent choice and an attentive and inventive way of using technology and innovation to create a work of architecture with a strong visual and expressive impact, even considering its small scale.

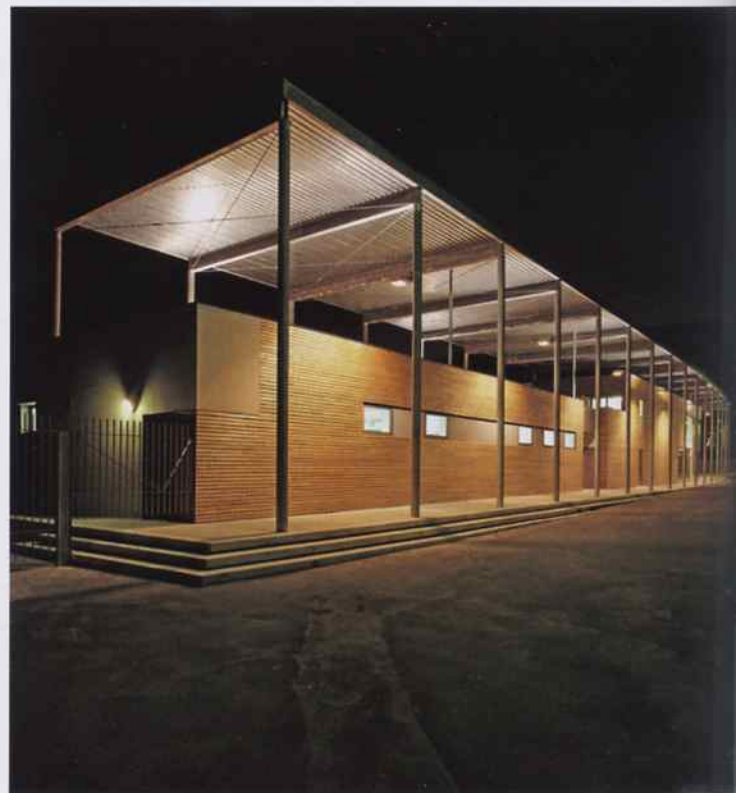
Seen as operative, productive, advanced and closer to a European condition, it is in the north that we find the rapid echoes of changes in society and economy that confer new responsibilities upon the architect and architecture and the

city and the landscape, the last being the true object of investigation and excavation and recent reconsiderations and rereadings for Italian architects.

Another interesting and original example of the measurement of architecture against the Italian landscape – typical and ironic by antonomasia – is the design of the new Siena soccer stadium by Paolo Iotti and Marco Pavarani (Iotti + Pavarani Architetti), which simultaneously measures the landscape and measures itself against the landscape. The architects here identified an original formula for the concentration of the entire stadium within a single block with chromatic finishes and edges, treated as though it were part of the Siennese terrain and maintaining the role of the landscape as the undisputed protagonist of the valley in which the building sits. The section re-proposes the stepped model of the city's Piazza del Campo, without altering the physiognomy of the site, but rather exalting it and redefining it through small and intelligent works of environmental engineering. The building is folded and shaped, like a large terracotta box, and made to match the forms of its context.



**LFL Architects, Sports complex, Olgiate Molgora, Lecco, Lombardy, 2005**  
 Despite having only a limited budget, LFL managed to renovate this existing sports centre and create a new building that contains the bar and changing rooms and two terraces protected by a canopy. One overlooks the soccer field, while the other offers a view of the public square designed to host special events.



Piero Luconi of LFL Architects, on the other hand, appears to be interested in converting technology into poetic-expressive forms, without renouncing its innovative impact. This can be seen in his sports complex in Olgiate Molgora. A large canopy runs along the building, overlapping it and functioning as both a 'blanket' and the expressive link in the interesting alternation of service spaces, solids and voids, transparency and materiality. The choice of materials, including wood, plaster and exposed steel fins, gives the architectural volumes a sense of both lightness and materiality. The flying canopy that overlaps the long building sharpens the outline of the entire complex and passes over the fence, acting as a decisive urban marker. This is a simple theme which has, however, been resolved in a very intelligent manner, transforming an ordinary service building into a monumental redemption of its surroundings. Once again, the lesson learned from other European experiences (mainly Spain) appears to emerge and represent a 'forced' source of icons from the Italian tradition, conferring a civic role upon this work of architecture.

Three different experiences, which vary in terms of the architects' education and attitude, though analogous in terms of context, describe a new geography of signs and research in the south of Italy.

Giovanni Vaccarini and Giovanni Leoni live along a parallel geographical axis, in Abruzzo and Sardinia respectively, aligned between two meridians, though different in their attitudes towards design and its contemporary declinations. Leoni's work is pared down and essential, though without any form of renunciation, while Vaccarini's work is exuberant and expressionist. The houses by Leoni, who works between Barcelona and his native Sardinia, are a sort of revisitation of the theme of the row house, a banal theme that is often rendered even more banal by the economic constrictions of

the market. In his O House project, (2004), a small block of row houses located in Capoterra, Cagliari, Sardinia, the theme is resolved with taste and sobriety and, above all, through a play of volumes that tends to confer tension on the built forms. Leoni uses the theme of the solid and the void and excavation to exalt light and shadow and subtract this group of buildings from any form of standardisation. Even the surfaces, a mix of masonry, steel elements and glazing contribute to the definition of the articulated volumes, creating a 'skin' that reacts with its context.

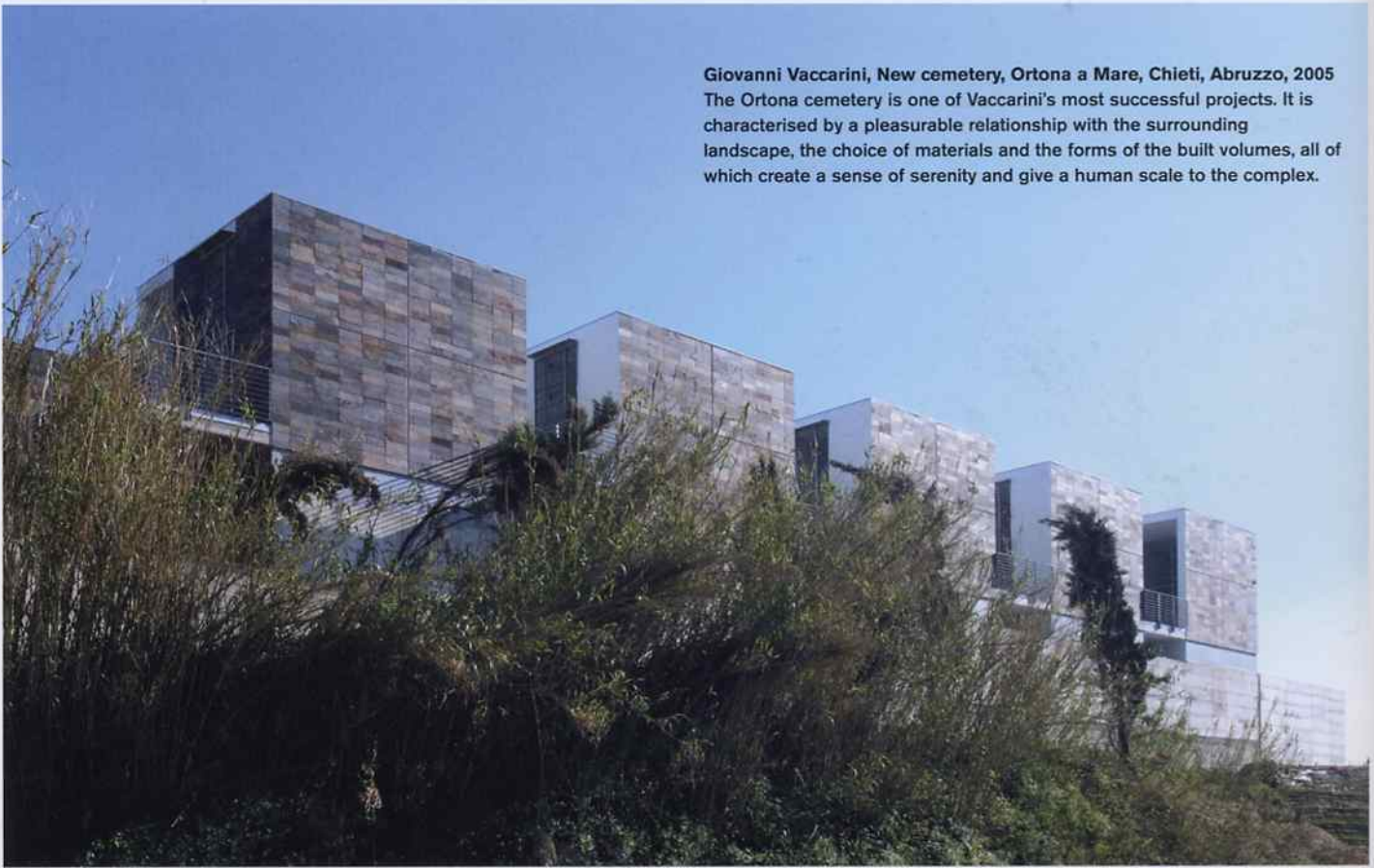
The cemetery in Ortona a Mare by Vaccarini is, instead, a sort of symbolic, 'votive' sculpture, an architecture path, a sequence of spaces that range from the sacred to the onerous, creating a physiognomy that is played out through shadow, white and stone and sea and sky, which become part of the universe of architectural forms. Even in this case it is a volumetric game that guides the composition. Solids and voids alternate and follow one another, matter and light are intertwined, symbology and concreteness give life to an expressive, intense and original sequence.

Leoni and Vaccarini are both rooted in an articulated approach to research: the first with a highly refined residential project that represents a courageous and innovative scheme set in the heart of the Sardinian landscape, marking a turning point in his work, and the beginning of the incorporation of the research related to his Catalan experience, while the latter, with a house in Abruzzo, brought his love for contemporary Dutch poetics to the extreme. Both projects feature evident signs of a dialogue with different cultures from the contemporary panorama, adding force and experimental weight to their work with space, form and language.

Even further south, in the extraordinary and dense story that is Sicily, between the fields of fruit trees and the baroque



**Giovanni Vaccarini, New cemetery, Ortona a Mare, Chieti, Abruzzo, 2005**  
The Ortona cemetery is one of Vaccarini's most successful projects. It is characterised by a pleasurable relationship with the surrounding landscape, the choice of materials and the forms of the built volumes, all of which create a sense of serenity and give a human scale to the complex.





**AtelierMap with Francesco Cacciatore, Baglio-Fallisi residence, Buccheri, Sicily, 2004**

This single-family residence has received numerous awards, including an honourable mention for the 2006 Gold Medal for Italian Architecture promoted by the Milan Triennale. In particular the project has been applauded for its balance between the clearly contemporary image of the house and references to local traditions, such as the organisation of spaces around a central patio.

city of Modica, we find the work of AtelierMap (Gianfranco Gianfriddo and Luigi Pellegrino) perhaps the most representative of an attitude towards 'revolution', renouncing any connection to a particular school, seen here as a pure 'label'. Sicilian by education, European by condition, the work of this young partnership appears to be a happy synthesis of exuberance, rendered poetic by the Mediterranean and the use of new forms of innovation and expression, both in terms of architectural language and the formal and spatial results. Distant and detached from a particular brand of imported Minimalism that conditioned design in Sicily for years, Gianfriddo and Pellegrino challenge us with a proposal for a more contemporary dimension of the Mediterranean that is successfully realised in a beautiful private residence in Buccheri, where clean and regular walls, that are both closed and compact, alternate with open spaces and large windows that overlook internal and external landscapes.

The project is an attentive re-reading of the elements of the traditional residence which is, however, reined in and avoids any nostalgia or redundancies. It is simultaneously rich with expression and intensity, articulation and suggestion, memory and innovation, and force and sensuality. If a house can be assumed as a paradigm of this new approach, almost as a reference for positive signals, part of a theme that is as actual and assiduous as that of the residence in particular, the elements of this innovation would appear to inform not only the original house in Buccheri, but also, positively, all of contemporary Italian architecture. ◻

Translated from the Italian version into English by Paul David Blackmore

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