

domus

俄罗斯联邦

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Le infrastrutture del potere

The infrastructure of power

Miniere e paesaggio Mines and landscapes

Pianeta Europa
Planet Europe

Architettura dei supermarket **Supermarket** architectures

a italiano S.p.A.
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Viale L'Acqua 1,00125 Milano
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Architettura
Attenzione al contesto
Bellezza e consumo
Dignità architettonica
Rinvigorire i sobborghi

Storia dell'Esselunga
Testo
Christiane Bürklein
Foto
Giovanni Chiaromonte
Giovanni Giordano
Vincenzo Martegani
Pino Musi
Stefano Topuntoli

Architecture
Attention to the context
Beauty and consumption
Architectural dignity
Invigorizing the suburbs

The Esselunga story
Text
Christiane Bürklein
Foto
Giovanni Chiaromonte
Giovanni Giordano
Vincenzo Martegani
Pino Musi
Stefano Topuntoli



158 scatoloni decisamente migliori

158 definitely better boxes



In November 1957 the first Esselunga supermarket opened in Milan, the start of a long company history entwined with the work of famous architects and graphic designers

"The one-eyed man rules in the land of the blind" is an Italian aphorism that well describes the approach of the Esselunga supermarket chain, which constructs buildings that are sympathetic to their surroundings.

Founded in 1957 by the Caprotti brothers in partnership with the Rockefeller family, Italy's first supermarket opened on 27 November 1957 in Viale Regina Giovanna, Milan, replacing a former repair shop. Its founder, Bernardo Caprotti (1925–2016), wrote about the aesthetics of his stores saying, "I don't think making lovely things costs much more than making ugly ones; it takes just a touch of elegance and some who is good with a pencil." He knew people who were good with a pencil, first and foremost Max Huber who, by 1957, was a world-renowned graphic designer; he created the sign with the extended "S" from which the current name of the supermarket is derived: "Esselunga" (long S). Then in 1960, Caprotti turned to Gio Ponti for his fourth supermarket in Milan, the first one constructed on a vacant site. Ponti's 800 m² building was small and the supermarket soon had to be demolished, a decision Bernardo Caprotti lamented during a *lectio magistralis* on 20 January 2010 when he was awarded an honorary degree in architecture by the La Sapienza University, precisely because, when building his supermarkets, Caprotti "gave architecture a central role by collaborating with leading contemporary architects."⁵

Of course, the desire to offer its customers a lovely shopping space stemmed from a supermarket chain's first priority: to attract as many customers as possible, to keep/increase them and then to increment their average spend, as the founder's son Giuseppe Caprotti has written.⁶

Esselunga's major turning point coincided with an almost essential partnership with the



PHOTO: P. PAGLIA

great 20th-century architect Ignazio Gardella. After working with Gio Ponti in 1960, Caprotti conducted no more architectural experiments while retaining a certain uniformity and quality in terms of materials, from the brick facades to the pre-painted white-aluminium tops of the buildings. This design choice did not, however, survive the 1970s' expansion of the supermarkets to the suburbs. As Caprotti said, "They were the cousins of those ugly and brutal retail receptors popular with the French and the objectionable to the eye."⁷

So Caprotti embraced a suggestion by the Alessandria management and asked Gardella, who had already designed major projects in the Piedmontese city, to design a new supermarket (1980) 2000 m² in size. Ignazio Gardella broke away from the factory-like prototype applied to supermarkets and built not a "big box" but a live architectural organism, a building with some dignity. A new architectural type – the "supermarket building" – was born in a coming together of "organised function and logistics, localisation, presentation and architectural enrichment."⁸

Gardella built more than 40 supermarkets for Esselunga, alongside others by famous architects (Luigi Caccia Dominioni, Vico Magistretti who designed Milan's first supermarket in 2000 and the Bar Atlantic, an iconic rendezvous of "organised function and logistics, localisation, presentation and architectural enrichment".⁹

Nonis believes that once a building has regained its dignity it must become a part of its city and forge a dialogue with the surrounding area. So,

a focus on the specificities of the urban fabric with purely architectural designs is flanked by urban intervention to redevelop post-industrial areas to the benefit of the local population and clients, from street circulation to parking, public parks and green roofs.

One example of this is the Esselunga supermarket in San Donato Milanese (2001–2004), a low-rise building in the heart of a "Business District" designed by Kenzo Tange (1991). In order to create a link with the surrounding high buildings, including an office block and BMW headquarters by Tange, Nonis proposed a 15-metre high, 80-metre wide and approximately 16-metre deep canopy, a link to the context that creates a city plaza where before there was nothing. This is exemplary placemaking, the scope of which extends beyond the mere "lovely big box" for a retailer.

To date, Italy has 155 Esselunga buildings, a mix of supermarkets and superstores in Lombardy, Piedmont, Liguria, Veneto, Emilia Romagna and Tuscany, and in Lazio, too, since 2014. When even music magazines speak of the Roma Prenestino Esselunga as having "opened up a future that people had been waiting decades for and that seems to have arrived"¹⁰ then Caprotti's lovely big boxes have secured a place in the Italian consciousness. They give a sense of what Italian suburbs might be like if inspired by integrated urban planning in which beauty is not optional. Christine Bürklein

In alto: l'Esselunga nel centro commerciale Le Torri di Firenze, progettato da Mario Botta. Il concorso è del 1988 e la realizzazione del 1989–1992. Pogno a fronte: diversi esemplari del complesso immobiliare di Viale Monza. Fabio Nonis (nato 1968) collaboratore e dal 1988 al 1995 associato di Ignazio

Gardella, ha affiancato il progetto della Le Torri di Firenze con quello per il superstore e sta continuando ora con nuovi incarichi dell'edito da sinistra. In senso orario, gli edifici di Viale Fornaciogsta, Milano, 2010–2011; Viale Adrano, Milano, 2015; San Donato Milanese, 2004



PHOTO: G. MELCHIONI

Opposite page: the Esselunga store at Le Torri di Firenze shopping centre designed by Mario Botta. The competition was in 1988 and the store built in 1989–1992. This page: examples of commercial buildings by Studio Nonis. In 1987 Fabio Nonis started working for Ignazio Gardella and they were partners from 1988

to 1995. He joined the master in designing numerous supermarkets and other structures with him, in particular: From top left, clockwise: buildings in Viale Fornaciogsta, Milan, 2010; Viale Adrano, Varese, 2009; Viale Adrano, Milan, 2015; San Donato Milanese, 2004



PHOTO: G. MELCHIONI



PHOTO: G. MELCHIONI



PHOTO: G. MELCHIONI



In questa pagina: il contributo di Vico Magistretti a Esselunga. In alto a sinistra: veduta notturna e schizzi di studio dell'edificio EsseLunga di Pontigliate, nell'area metropolitana di Milano, 1999/2001. Sopra il Bar Atlantic. Nato nel 2003

per la sede di Pontigliate, il modello di luogo di ritrovo con piccola ristorazione è ora riprodotto in circa 80 sedi della catena



This page: Vico Magistretti's work for Esselunga. Top and left: night view and study sketches of the EsseLunga store at Pontigliate, in the Milan metropolitan area, 1999/2001. Above: the Bar Atlantic, designed in 2003 for the Pontigliate store,

the model of a place for congregating with a small cafe is now reproduced in some 80 of the chain's locations

In questa pagina: anche Luigi Coccia Dominioni ha avuto un ruolo importante nella storia di Esselunga. Dalle foto: la sede di Vico Magistretti a Pontigliate, 2001/2006; quella di via Rubattino a Milano, 1998; infine, quella di Macherio, Monza Brianza, 2001-2007



This page: Luigi Coccia Dominioni also played an important part in Esselunga's history. From top: stores in Vico Magistretti, Pontigliate, 2001/2006; Via Rubattino, Milan, 1998; Macherio, Monza Brianza, 2001-2007

158

sedi Esselunga
Esselunga stores

7

regioni italiane in cui si collocano le sedi
Italian regions where the stores are located

5

milioni clienti
million users

24.000
dipendenti
employees



These pages: Ignazio Gardella was the designer who made the deepest impression on Esselunga's architectural image, both in its formal vocabulary and in the number of projects (45). From opposite page top, clockwise, stores at: Corsico (with Fabio Nonis), 1997



In queste pagine: Ignazio Gardella è stato il progettista che più ha conosciuto l'immagine architettonica di Esselunga, sia per linguaggio formale sia per numero d'interventi (45). Dall'alto da sinistra, in senso orario, le sedi di:

Corsico (con Fabio Nonis), 1994; Alessandria, 1986 (primo progetto di Ignazio Gardella per Esselunga); Monza (con Fabio Nonis), Varese, 1998; Vimercate (con Fabio Nonis), Milano, 1991; Leini (con Fabio Nonis), città metropolitana di Milano, 1997

