

The *Condominio*: The New Housing Model During the Italian Boom

Chiara Ingrosso

Associate Professor, Università della Campania "Luigi Vanvitelli", Napoli, Italy
 chiara.ingrosso@unicampania.it

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Introduction: Quantity and Ownership

After the Second World War, new models of housing spread in the Italian cities: multilevel *palazzine*, isolated or inserted in residential parks, with gardens and collective spaces, *condomini* which follow the plots of the consolidated city, aggregated to form "urban curtains," observing the building regulations. The *condomini*, in particular, were perhaps the clearest expression of the prevailing housing model based on private ownership and on the typical urban growth of that period called "concentration spontaneity," devoid in most cases of any level of planning.¹ Many urban accounts have been written based on the denunciation of this growth, linked to the so-called *speculazione edilizia*, and therefore on quantities.

Indeed, the data describe an impressive increase in lodgings: the houses newly built in Italy went from 148,000 in 1953 to 275,000 in 1958 and 450,000 in 1964, recording a 400% increase in investment (public and private) in housing between 1951 and 1964,² while the number of construction workers increased from 1,100,000 in 1951 to 2,100,000 in 1964.³ In particular, the need to provide accommodation for the victims of the bombings, combined with high unemployment and the recovery of the economy, contributed to the construction sector, private and public, becoming a powerful driver for the Italian economy in the new free market based neoliberal politics⁴.

The legislative framework confirms a clear political-economic orientation based on this model: the 1949 *Progetto di legge per incrementare l'occupazione operaia, agevolando la costruzione di case per i lavoratori* [Law to increase worker employment, facilitating the construction of houses for workers], promoted by Amintore Fanfani, the Christian Democratic Minister of Labor and Social Security, was promulgated and, based on it, the Ina Casa plan started; in the same year, the *Legge Tupini* [Tupini Law] granted contributions for public housing and established tax exemptions for "non-luxury" private homes commissioned by 1955; the *Legge Aldisio* [Aldisio Law] was added in 1950, which regulated long-term construction loans for "economic" residential houses.

If these years were marked by a liberalization outburst in the construction sector (beginning with the housing market), owning an apartment had been an old dream of the middle-class, partly fulfilled even before the war: in 1927, a board⁵ was set up to establish rules facilitating the institution of the *condominio* and, with it, the practice of living in freehold flats in multi-story buildings. Full recognition of the *condominio* as a widespread system became effective

1 Giovanni Ferracuti, Maurizio Marcelloni, *La casa* (Torino: Einaudi 1982), 61.

2 *Ibid.*, 46.

3 Guido Crainz, *Storia del Miracolo Italiano* (Roma: Donzelli, 1996), 122.

4 Guido Crainz, *Il Paese Mancato* (Roma: Donzelli, 2005).

5 Amongst other members of this board were Alberto Calza Bini and Giuseppe Gorla, presidents of the *Istituto Case Popolari* [Social Housing Institute] in Rome and Milan respectively.

only in 1939, when the new urban land registry introduced taxation for a property unit instead of taxation for a building or a vertical portion of it, permitting horizontal splitting of property and, thereby, facilitating the transmission of single units.⁶

Several national political measures that sanctioned the liberalization of rents and favored the spread of *condomini* (rather than of the undivided property advocated by the left), in conjunction with the extension of construction loans, proved the importance conferred on property by the fascist regime. From that moment on, property was conceived as something stratified and it was possible to exploit the soil intensively through multi-story buildings.

Living in a *condominio* became definitely a new lodging model after World War II, especially during the 1950s, when Italy experienced an extraordinary economic growth, the so called “economic miracle.” A number of factors, including energy self-sufficiency and low wages, paved the way for an unprecedented boom: between 1951 and 1958, the GDP growth reached an average of 5.5% per year, thanks mainly to investments in construction, public works and agriculture.⁷ Subsequently, in just a few years Italy became one of the most industrialized Western countries⁸ and the urban and rural landscape, houses and lifestyles underwent a radical change.

During this period, home ownership constituted one of the political priorities of the Italian Christian Democratic governments, which encouraged the purchase of apartments (through bank loans), gradually liberalizing the rental market and giving maximum freedom to the private construction initiative - between 1946 and 1963 only 16% of investments were allocated to public construction works, with peaks around 1959 in conjunction with the implementation of the Ina-Casa plan.⁹ This political orientation was supported (even made possible, one could say), by

“the constant and significant increase in national income, the prolonged stability of construction costs, the sustained demand for housing, the lack of serious obstacles of an urban administrative nature, the presence of solid guarantees of credit support and tax relief and, last but not least, a contribution from public buildings that is anything but negligible, especially between 1958-1961.”¹⁰

According to the *Istituto Nazionale di Statistica* (Istat) [Italian National Institute of Statistics], the number of owned homes rose significantly from 40% in 1951 to 52.8% in 1969.¹¹

From the *Palazzina* to the *Condominio*, from Milan to Naples

During the 1950s, *condomini* spread with local variations throughout Italy, following a building process that had already started at the beginning of the 20th century. Due to the local policies and socio-economic changes, living in the city and living in owned apartments became a typical choice for Italian families, contrary to what was happening at the same time in other countries, especially in Britain and America, where the suburban model was consolidating.

Typologically, the *palazzina* is composed of a volume isolated on four sides, of different heights and with a small central courtyard. It appeared in many Italian cities like Naples and Rome at the beginning of the 20th century, especially in the areas of the old cities where middle-class was expanding. While the *villa* was generally owned as a single property, the *palazzina* could consist of several apartments that occupied an entire floor, with two or more families.

6 Guido Bortolotti, *Storia della politica edilizia in Italia* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1978), 72-73.

7 Paul Ginsborg, *Storia d'Italia dal dopoguerra* (Torino: Einaudi, 1989), 289.

8 Crainz, *Storia del Miracolo Italiano*.

9 Ferracuti, Marcelloni, *La casa*, 46.

10 Ibid., 44.

11 Istat, *Indagine speciale sulle abitazioni* (Roma: Istat, 1969).

The *palazzina* made its appearance in Naples, especially in the areas where the middle-class was growing, in the old city: Vomero, Chiaia and Posillipo, taking on the eclectic or Art Nouveau languages typical of the period.¹² Certainly, the detached building with a garden, with several floors (but not more than five), generally without a courtyard, was much more satisfactory than the block of flats with the (locally) traditional central courtyard, taken up in the nineteenth century for the central areas by the Piano del Risanamento.¹³

In Rome, the *palazzina*, introduced in the 1920s for the growth areas as an intermediate sort between the *villino* and the *intensivo* (big blocks with apartments)¹⁴ became from the 1930s the type commonly applied in the new middle-class neighborhoods: Parioli, Trieste, Salario, Nomentano.¹⁵ From the outset, the declared aim was to increase the number of buildings by making maximum use of the building area “without completely abandoning green areas and the need for lighting, ventilation and decoration.”¹⁶

In Milan, from the beginning of the 1900s, the middle-class residence

“respects the hierarchy between front, back and courtyard of the traditional palazzo, updating the stylistic-formal repertoire of the façade and common areas (such as the entrance hall and staircase) in line with the evolution of style and taste, welcoming first the Liberty style, then the Novecento style, and finally a generic modern style.”¹⁷

Unlike small villas with a single ownership, the *palazzine* could be inhabited by several families, but there was still no legislation to divide ownership vertically: since the classical Roman law, this meant from the ground to the sky. The only way to divide the buildings was to rent them out. As mentioned, the *condominio*, as a type of real estate divided into several units that were each separately owned, spread only after the end of the 1930s, when, during fascism, access to home ownership was facilitated instead of renting. It was not until the end of the war, with the reconstruction and the “economic boom,” that this new housing model spread widely, thanks to the aforementioned economic strategies and legislation put in place by the Italian governments.

In the post-war period, the modern block of flats became the safest and most profitable investment for private entrepreneurs who were able to exploit technological innovations and erect taller and taller buildings with less land consumption. The architects, for their part, found themselves having not only to satisfy their clients, which, in the case of the developers, coincided with the demands of the real estate market, but also to observe the constraints deriving from the parameters predetermined in the administrative framework: the building area, the orientation, the position within the land plot, the heights and so on. The standardization, together with the industrially prefabricated building elements that were often simple and assembled on-site with unskilled labor, contributed to constraining the compositional choices.¹⁸

In Milan, volumetric decompositions (starting with the front/back scheme), began with research into “slab” buildings, as well as the updating of technology and materials: standardization, modularity, structural innovation. It was, however, the urban fabric divided into blocks that dictated, especially in the central areas, the typology of residential complexes with internal courtyards placed side by side to create continuous curtains of homogeneous heights.¹⁹

12 Renato De Fusco, *Il Floreale a Napoli* (Napoli; ESI, 1959); Sergio Stenti, *Luoghi e architetture del moderno Napoli Guida e dintorni. Itinerari di architettura* (Napoli: Clean, 2010), 9.

13 Giancarlo Alisio, *Napoli e il Risanamento. Recupero di una struttura urbana* (Napoli: Banco di Napoli, 1980).

14 Alessandra Muntoni, “Dal ‘villino’ alla ‘palazzina’.” Roma 1920-1940,” *Metamorfosi* 8 (1987): 2-4.

15 Alberto Maria Racheli, “Introduzione,” in *Palazzine Romane, Valutazioni economiche e fattibilità del progetto di conservazione*, ed. Alfredo Passeri (Roma: Aracne, 2013), 21-22.

16 Francesco Bartolini, *Roma borghese. La casa e i ceti medi tra le due guerre* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2001), 14.

17 Paolo Brambilla, “Il condominio milanese,” in *Itinerari di architettura milanese, L’architettura moderna come descrizione della città* (Milano: Ordine degli Architetti di Milano, 2004), 2.

18 Luca Ciancarelli, “La palazzina romana negli anni Cinquanta. Tipi e miti,” *Metamorfosi* 15 (1991): 24.

19 Fulvio Irace, “Condominio milanese,” in *Milano Moderna, Città, critica, architettura negli anni ‘50- ‘60* (Milano: Motta, 1996), 50-58.

In Naples, administrative, economic and technological constraints were combined with environmental factors which influenced the projects more than anything else, as much as numerous construction sites were blocked or suspended by the *Soprintendenza dei Lavori Pubblici* [Superintendency of Public Works] precisely because they were not considered as respecting the landscape. On the other hand, the best Neapolitan *condomini* were precisely those that covered the city's hillside and managed to fit in with the various differences in elevation, exploiting the particular conditions of the landscape. Many of the buildings have recurring patios, garden-terraces, balconies and windows piercing the façades to open up views to the outside, while the interiors are arranged according to the natural panorama, with the living area looking directly onto the sea and the service areas to the back.²⁰

Desires

The *condominio* was unquestionably an architecture designed to be chosen as part of the housing offer. In terms of social demand, there is no doubt that it clearly reflected the desires and aspirations of a huge segment of the population in search of wealth and prestige: the emerging middle-class. The need for a maximum exploitation of the land combined with new aspirations, such as individualism, consumerism and the ideal of ownership, led to the expansion of this model of housing. Living in a *condominio* coincided with an intimate, isolated way of life, but was also linked to the privilege of privacy, which was affirmed in those years as a value opposed to the promiscuity of the popular neighborhoods.

For Paul Ginsborg the social change triggered by the boom was negative because the private prevailed over the public, and the individual over the community:

“The social dynamic of the ‘miracle’ helped to create the atomization of civil society. The role of the single-family unit became more important than before; the new urban structures helped to isolate families, smaller in number, in small and comfortable apartments, but offered few spaces for community life; women became the main target of the new consumerism, and the emphasis on their homely dimension accentuated their isolation; the car and television further encouraged the use of mainly privatized and family free time.”²¹

For the historian, in short,

“the development model implied by the boom (which the boom was allowed to assume) implied a race for well-being centered on individual and family choices and strategies, while ignoring the necessary public responses to everyday collective needs.”²²

On the other hand, as Guido Crainz has pointed out, these tendencies did not consume the complexity of the “miracle,” which was in many ways disruptive and innovative, especially in terms of the liberalization of certain practices and customs among young people and with regard to intergenerational relations and mixing of social classes.²³

With regard to architecture, most critics of the time emphasized its more conformist aspects, considering it, above all, as the banal result of the social demand, of its emerging values and desires. Paolo Portoghesi spoke of a “re-mirroring of the type with respect to a certain social structure: a certain type of middle-class would recognize itself, beyond any linguistic awareness, in a compositional mechanism,”²⁴ a mechanism that

20 Chiara Ingresso, *Condomini napoletani. La “città privata” tra ricostruzione e boom economico* (Siracusa: LetteraVentidue, 2017).

21 Ginsborg, *Storia d'Italia*, 337.

22 Ibid., 292.

23 Crainz, *Il paese*, 19-21.

24 Paolo Portoghesi, “Tipi e simboli,” *Edilizia Moderna* 82-83 (1963): 7.

“relies on easy instruments of identification (the protruding balconies, the setbacks, the small green spaces that occupy the regulatory detachments, the hierarchy of the penthouses and penthouse apartments) and sings its congenital diseases in a hoarse voice: the conventionality of relationships, group rivalry, the rejection of any discipline outside the family nucleus, the lack of civic spirit.”²⁵

Similarly, from the pages of *L'Espresso*, Bruno Zevi commented that “the language prevailing in the apartment blocks in Rome and Milan reflects the mentality of the upper classes, of morally bankrupt people squandering money on luxuriously ugly houses.”²⁶ The article is illustrated with works by Moretti, Albini and Luccichenti, but it is not clear whether his positive comment refers to them: “[...] it must be acknowledged that there are at least ten or twenty architects who worked seriously: in terms of quality, it is they who make architecture in Italy.”²⁷

Again, for Manfredo Tafuri, this is the typology for the upper and middle classes, “perfectly suited to fleece the condominium ambitions of a substantially static class; the popular classes are reserved for the intensive buildings that cluster on the outskirts; the underclass are the *borgate* and the squatters.”²⁸ For Tafuri, the apartment building “is installed in the areas adjacent to the historic center, to designate with its small balconies, neo-organic ‘Rietveld-style,’ its compulsory volumes that do not renounce exhibitionism, its well-kept materials, the status-symbol that is required of it.”²⁹

In more recent years, critics started to look with a different perspective at these architectures, who coincided with the housing model most used in the medium and large Italian towns. Knowledge about some of them became more widespread, even from a series of urban guides published in the early 1980s, especially describing Rome and Northern Italian cities.³⁰

Newly, some multidisciplinary and comparative studies have been published, mostly referring to the cities of Milan, Turin and Rome, including *Storie di Case. Abitare l'Italia del boom*, thanks to which habitation started to be studied as a reflection of the demands and wishes of entire groups of the population seeking comfort and modernity.³¹

Cultural history, on the other hand, has highlighted how the market trend of those years led to the production and consumption of goods at an ever more accelerated rate, often influenced by overseas models.³² Less investigated still remain two important questions: how the house also became an object of consumption inserted in the mechanism of competitiveness; and how it has been affected by the new images conveyed by advertising and marketing. There is no doubt, however, that the *palazzina*, and more generally the *condominio*, took on a fundamentally symbolic value by becoming a genuine “object of desire” for the emerging middle class in the 1950s.

25 Ibid., 7. Paolo Portoghesi “Palazzina romana,” *Casabella* 407 (1975): 17-25.

26 Bruno Zevi, “Gusto della mediocrità lussuosa,” in *Cronache di architettura* (Bari: Laterza, 1978) [published for the first time in *L'Espresso*, 31 August, 1954].

27 Zevi, “Gusto della mediocrità lussuosa.”

28 Manfredo Tafuri, *Storia dell'architettura italiana 1944-1985* (Torino: Einaudi, 1986), 36.

29 Ibid.

30 Maurizio Grandi, Attilio Pracchi, *Milano. Guida all'architettura moderna* (Milano: Zanichelli, 1984); Piero Ostilio Rossi, Ilaria Gatti, *Roma. Guida all'architettura moderna 1909-2000* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1984); Agostino Magnaghi, Mariolina Monge, Luciano Re (eds.), *Guida all'architettura moderna di Torino*, (Torino: Designer Riuniti, 1982).

31 Filippo De Pieri, “Storie di case: le ragioni di una ricerca,” in *Storie di Case. Abitare l'Italia del boom*, eds. F. De Pieri et al. (Roma: Donzelli, 2013), XIX. Recent studies on *condomini* between Rome, Turin and Milan also include: Gaia Caramellino, Filippo De Pieri, Cristina Renzoni, *Esplorazioni nella città dei ceti medi Torino 1945-1980*, (Siracusa: LetteraVentidue, 2015); Gaia Caramellino, Federico Zanfi (eds.), *Post war middle class housing. Models, construction and change*, (Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2015). The undersigned Chiara Ingrosso authored the monograph *Condomini napoletani* (Siracusa: LetteraVentidue, 2012), which introduces the Neapolitan case in the national context, and of which this paragraph is a synthetic and partial reworking.

32 Enrica Asquer, *Storia intima dei ceti medi* (Bari: Laterza, 2011).

Regarding the dichotomy of the public and private architecture, this has been recently reinterpreted in a more problematic way. Indeed, private building was favored and was generally highly stimulated by state and local authorities through financing and the fiscal relaxations through a dense series of laws founded in the fascist tradition, when building, whether public or private, was considered a highly significant element of the national economy and therefore had to be incentivized as much as possible by the central and local governments. The majority of the laws (including the *Legge Tupini* of 1949) and the public funds facilitated private building, contributing to the enrichment of those who decided to “invest in bricks and mortar” during the boom. It has been broadly demonstrated then that even public construction, including in particular the Ina-Casa project, contributed to feed the sprawl of cities and the urbanization of peripheral land, which facilitated private investment - and even unauthorized building. Furthermore, the mechanism of the variants and the ever-more frequent deviations from the plans of urban transformations of all Italian cities at that time fall fully within this process.³³

Lastly, to make the border between public and private ever more fuzzy, many architects were, unavoidably, designing at the same time for both public and private clients, by simultaneously building social constructions and *condomini* for the developers.

As for the Milanese context, beyond the contribution of the best-known authors, the design ability of a wide range of “cultured professionals” involved in the construction of such residences has also been reconsidered more carefully, their “attention to structure, flexibility, industrialization and prefabrication, accompanied by suggestions deriving from the artistic movements of those years, from abstractionism to informalism.”³⁴ In Milan, during all of the 1950s and 1960s, in fact, the theme of the middle-class condominium was experimented “without drama, as a mainly technical and professional choice, exterior to the dichotomy of ethics and aesthetics.”³⁵

If we are not referring to “signature” architecture, the *condominio*, with its declination *palazzina*, can be studied as a “witness” to a long historical process that exploded with the modernization of Italy, and which has taken on new values recently, starting from the global economic crisis up to the alleged disappearance of the middle-classes. To reverse the process through which architecture and architects have been blamed for pandering to the inhabitants who had become customers, we should perhaps consider that architecture as a product linked to consumption can be one of the main indicators of the contemporary lifestyles.

An Italian Model

Far from the experimentation and formal purism of the first rationalist international vanguard, from the end of the 1940s to the 1960s the *condominio* was characterized by a forced and showy variety in order to diversify the product “home” and make it desirable to the new ascending middle-class; a remedy to the repetition and the homogeneity imposed by the law of the maximum land use and standardization.

In Rome, the *palazzina* spread due to the morphology of the capital city, composed mostly of land plots in a checkered pattern. To accommodate the tastes of the new middle-class, it became more communicative and captivating, opening up to fashions and generally abandoning the need for decoration in favor of a deliberately flashy symbolism that testified to the achievement of social status.

33 Federico Zanfi, “Convenzioni urbanistiche e nuovo paesaggio residenziale per i ceti medi a Milano tra gli anni '50 e '70,” *Territorio* 64 (2015): 66-73.

34 Maria Vittoria Capitanucci, *Il professionismo colto nel dopoguerra* (Milano: Solferino Edizioni, 2013), 6.

35 Grandi, Pracchi, *Milano. Guida all'architettura moderna*, 282.

“The *pilotis*, the ‘pure’ volumes, the *fenêtres en longueur* of Poissy and Garches were happily combined with the Roman-style *brise soleil* of Luccichenti and De Renzi in the hope of succeeding in ‘animating the masses’ while removing the severe *rappel à l’ordre* of the Master.”³⁶

Already historicized, the references to modernity were now reworked in an eclectic way:

“One dreamed of the middle-class interior as an essential Gropius ‘Total Theatre’ that winked complacently at the onyxes of the ‘fluid spaces’ à la Mies, at the colored planes à la Rietveld and at the sinuosity à la Aalto, but which was then realized with the folding wall à la Gio Ponti, with the fragmentation of the marbles recombined in the Venetian-style floors, or with the aerodynamic legs of Swedish-style furniture.”³⁷

In Milan, because of the block arrangement of the buildings, residential complexes were built with courtyards and with similar heights, side by side to create a continuous line; critics called them *condomini* making explicit reference to their property regime.³⁸ If a “red thread” can be found, as Fulvio Irace pointed out, that unites the experimentation of the various Ponti, Gardella and Caccia Dominioni, it consists precisely of the common strategy of diversification of the plans of the apartments and, therefore, also of the different floors of the *condomini*, elaborating complex and articulated layouts and facades, due to the difficulty of “providing a typologically homogeneous response to a demand that is so diverse in terms of the needs and origins of rapidly fluctuating classes in social classifications.”³⁹

In Naples, since the post-war years, isolated *condomini* spread in several urban areas and were built according to legislation and the complex topography of the city. What made the modern Neapolitan *condomini* unique in the Italian panorama was the relationship with the landscape, the morphological and topological characteristics of the city.⁴⁰

Despite the apparent variety, dictated by the need to meet the changing demands of the emerging middle-class and regardless of the different stylistic and compositional declinations of the various architects in their contexts, it is possible to find many similarities between the various solutions designed to articulate the volumes and heights of the apartment buildings of those years. Some of them quickly became real “formulas” that, introduced by an architect in a particular building, were also adopted in other apartment buildings in other cities.⁴¹ The starting point was the beam-pillar structural grid of the *maison Dom-Ino*, reworked in new combinations and through a hybrid language, contaminated by international influences and local references.

A recurring theme is the “dual façade” intended as an autonomous element cladding the structure: a theme that derives directly from the development, to extreme consequences, of one of the founding ideas of rationalism, that is to say the system of the structural frame, which leads to non-bearing, light facades, acting merely as a cladding. The detachment between structure and volume is also obtained by rotating the masonry covering the exterior or interior, and varying the angles in order to create a “zigzag effect,” which transforms the front into what could be described as “urban theatre wings.” In many *condomini*, the disjunction between structure and volume reveals the supporting frame, while the building mass shows the “soul” of the building. The structure is autonomous and a second structure of cladding is generated, so that the two represent a parallel system. This theme is applied masterfully in the *palazzina* in via Fratelli Ruspoli in Rome by Ugo Luccichenti (1948-1949), where the acute angle of the plot resulting from the confluence of two roads is enhanced by the moving back of the building volume, leaving a void in which two free pilings stand to emphasize the structural arrangement.

36 Ciancarelli, “La palazzina romana negli anni Cinquanta,” 26.

37 Ibid.

38 Irace, “Condominio milanese,” 50-58.

39 Ibid., 52.

40 Ingrosso, *Condomini napoletani*.

41 Alessandra Muntoni, “La palazzina romana degli anni '50,” *Metamorfosi* 15 (1991): 4.



Fig. 1: Michele Capobianco, *condominio "C"* in Comola Ricci Park in Naples, 1955.

Michele Capobianco experimented with the “double façade” in the so-called *condominio "C"* in the Comola Ricci Park in Naples (1955). (Fig. 1) The body of the building consists of two blocks that open with an acute angle where the road that runs alongside takes a turn. The left wing rests on a sort of double-height portico, which shows the structural texture of the building. This texture is also confirmed by the non-symmetrical façade, which generates another acute angle (a convexity this time) and is played upon by the “gabled” crowning.⁴²

A slight variation of the tendency towards a matrix of pillars characterized the fronts with balconies of Ignazio Gardella’s “Casa al Parco” in Milan (1947-1954), which in its plans and façades impressively represents the gradual overcoming of the codes of rationalism based on the extrusion of the frame.⁴³

Generally, while in Milan much care was devoted to the façade as a flat surface, and so to the cladding and windows of this curtain wall, in Rome and less in Naples the volumes were more articulated thanks to the presence of a series of projections and recesses obtained by lodges, terraces, bow-windows or external stairs. These elements, characterized by cut profiles, not always parallel to the façades, broken or curved, are used to ensure effects of light and shade, as well as to gain living space.

At times, the interplay of the alignments of the various elements finds a correspondence on the outside, as in the Neapolitan *condominio* in via Cimarosa by Davide Pacanowski, known as “La Fontana” (1955), which is located at the confluence of two streets, the corner being emphasized by balconies that are conspicuously convex with respect to the contour of the building.

42 Antonio D’Auria, *Michele Capobianco* (Napoli Electa: Napoli, 1993), 122-128.

43 Francesco Buzzi Ceriani, *Ignazio Gardella, progetti e architetture 1933-1990* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1992); Stefano Guidarini, *Ignazio Gardella nell’architettura italiana. Opere 1929-1999* (Milano: Skira, 2013).



Fig. 2: Davide Pacanowski, *palazzine* in via Petrarca in Naples, 1950-1959.

Fig. 3: Davide Pacanowski, *palazzine* in via Petrarca in Naples, 1950-1959, view of the “spiral” staircase on the back façade.

Another application of this theme is found in the *palazzine* on via Petrarca in Naples (1950-1959), also by Pacanowski. (Fig. 2) The balconies are composed, according to the definition of the author, “as a chain” obtained by staggering the volumes and shaping the spaces of the various floors with variable sections.⁴⁴ Moreover, in the same building complex, the presence of the “spiral” staircase on the back façade, consequence of the construction expertise of the designer and of the fundamental influence of Le Corbusier, is a clever stratagem to save volume.⁴⁵ (Fig.3)

Vertical links on the outside of the building, often attached to the façade, are another recurrent element in many Italian *condomini* of those years. For example, the staircase on the façade, with its transverse and diagonal pattern, joining the last two levels of the buildings of the housing complex in piazzale delle Medaglie d’Oro of Ugo Luccichenti (1949-1953), or, again in Rome, the hexagonal staircase that divides the building in via San Crescenziano by Vincenzo Monaco and Amedeo Luccichenti (1952).

An emblematic example of a “broken façade” is the lateral one of Luigi Moretti’s “Il Girasole” (1947-1950) where a series of windowed walls are arranged at right angles to the street to allude to a virtual opening to the exterior and, at the same time, provide as much light as possible to the trapezoidal rooms. Precedents of this way of designing the rooms have been identified in the bedroom of Scharoun’s “Schminke House” (1933) and in Alvar Aalto’s dormitory rooms at MIT (1947-1948), although Moretti’s use of it is completely original, so much so that he can be credited with a real invention, widely exploited later in many other subsequent buildings.⁴⁶ A similar solution is repeated on the side façade of Michele Capobianco’s *palazzina* in Parco Comola Ricci, and it might be possible that the Neapolitan architect was inspired by his Roman colleague in developing this solution. Ultimately, these are methods by which the plasticity of the façades responds directly to the functional requirements, sunlight and distribution of the rooms.

In many cases, the intent of conferring prestige on the building translates into extreme attention to the cladding materials, also made possible by the loss of load-bearing function of

44 Davide Pacanowski, “Tre palazzine panoramiche,” *Edilizia Moderna* 55 (1955): 39.

45 Elena Manzo, “La cerniera urbana di Posillipo e Davide Pacanowski,” in *La città che si rinnova. Dal manufatto architettonico alla forma urbana, L.I.D.A. numero 02, Laboratorio Interdisciplinare Documentazione Architettura*, eds. C. Ingrosso et al. (Napoli: La Scuola di Pitagora, 2018), 69-98.

46 Alessandra Muntoni, “La Casa del Girasole di Luigi Moretti (1950) e la Villa sull’VIII colle di Mario Paniconi e Giulio Pediconi (1953),” *Metamorfosi* 15 (1991): 52.



Fig. 4: Michele Capobianco, *palazzina* in piazzetta Santo Stefano in Naples, 1956-1958.

the walls and therefore the progress made in the domain of light facades. Overall, the claddings of the modern *condomini* express their nature of external coating of the building.

Starting from the post-war years, in Naples, where, historically, the most common building material was tuff, while brick structures were seldom used, completely coated, frame-structured buildings began to appear ever more frequently: bricks covered the *palazzina* by Michele Capobianco in piazzetta Santo Stefano (1956-1958), (Fig. 4) while brilliant “sea blue” clinker lined the *condominio* by Carlo Cocchia in via Palizzi (1957).

In Milan, clinker replaced bricks in the *condomini* of Caccia Dominioni in via Ippolito Nievo (1955) or via Carbonari (1960-1961), while in via Beatrice d’Este Attilio Mariani and Carlo Perogalli (1956-1957) were experimenting light facades composed of a two-color clinker (grey and beige) or in the nearby “Abstract House” (1951-1952) they were applying a synthesis of the arts then being pursued in the wake of the *Movimento Arte Concreta* [Concrete Art Movement] in Milan.



Fig. 5: Vittorio Amicarelli, *condominio* in via Manzoni n. 131 in Naples, 1948-1954.

The cement in the façade is often colored or decorated with bright colors, like in Milan, in the building in via Dezza by Gio Ponti (1956-1957) with its windows “as “living paintings” on the street.”⁴⁷ In Naples, Vittorio Amicarelli resolved the façade of the building in via Manzoni 131 (1948-1954) (Fig. 5) with abstract geometric patterns with the strong color of the parapets and loggias (now painted over), and the tiled pillars of the entrance floor with blue mosaics to dematerialize the volumes and therefore not break up the view of the sea that opens up from this sight-offering portico. With regards to the coloring of the façades, an explicit reference has also been found in the Neapolitan Concrete Art Movement⁴⁸.

The architects of this period often worked with artists to embellish their architecture by inserting special elements of detail. In many cases, this process of project customization by the designers managed to combine with the needs of the builders, who wanted to give their investment higher quality and exclusivity. This is how we can interpret the contributions of artisans and artists who decorated lobbies and façades of many of the most emblematic *condomini* of those years with inserts of tiles and mosaics, paintings, sculptures and bas-reliefs. The entrance lobby became the *condomino* space *par excellence*, where, in many cases, was the door-keeper’s lodge and from which the stairs and elevators branched off. In Naples, while the ceramic tradition was enriched by a number of laboratories of applied arts, there were many new *condomini* decorated with ceramic tiles and sculptures. The use of skillfully alternated cladding materials is very refined in the Palazzo Della Morte by Stefania Filo Speciale (1951-1957), where inserts of ceramics, mosaic tesserae in strong colors, local traditional baked clay, with glass, plaster, bricks, and marble, to create effects with a strong aesthetic value.⁴⁹ (Figs. 6-8)

47 Luca Molinari, “Vivienda, Milán, Apartament Building, Milan,” *2G Obras y proyectos Works and projects* 15 (2000): 112.

48 Giovanni Menna, *Vittorio Amicarelli architetto 1907-1971* (Napoli: ESI, 2000), 96.

49 Marco Burrascano, Marco Mondello, *Lo studio Filo Speciale e il modernismo partenopeo. Palazzo della Morte*, (Napoli: Clean, 2014).

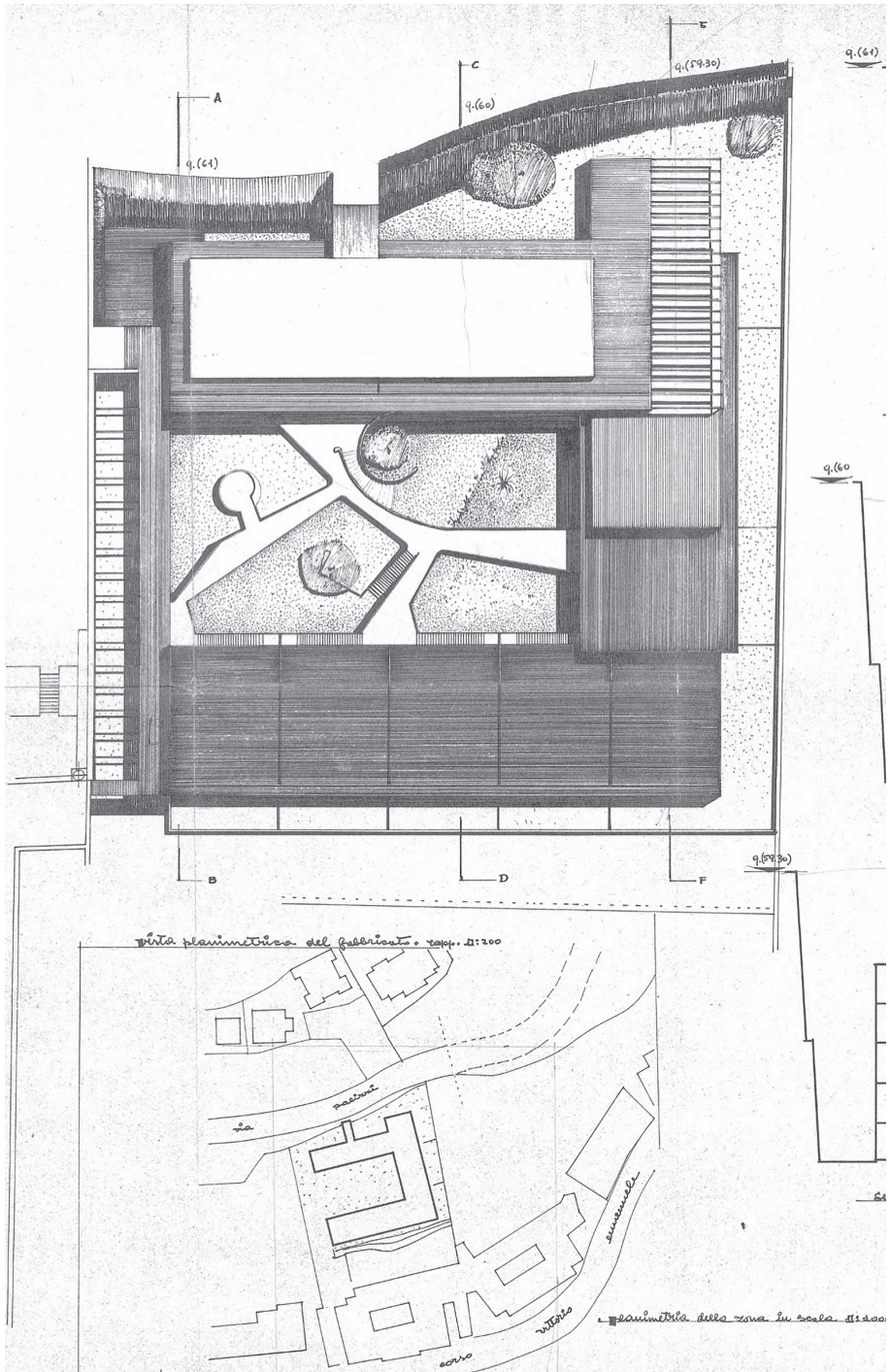


Fig. 6: Stefania Filo Speziale, Palazzo Della Morte in Naples. Volumetric view and roof plan (1954).



Fig. 7-8: Stefania Filo Speziale, Palazzo Della Morte in Naples. Above: view of the main access from Corso Vittorio Emanuele with the staircase (2021). Below: The walkway on pilots of the central courtyard-garden (2021).



Palazzo Della Morte: A *Condominio* Overlooking the Bay

Palazzo Della Morte is one of the most successful Neapolitan *condomini* and is one of Stefania Filo Speziale's most successful works, in which the theme of middle-class housing is resolved in a functional way, with an original style and admirable integration in the context of the slopes of Naples and the landscape of the bay. This work also helps to highlight the character of Filo Speziale: the first Neapolitan female architect, the only woman professor of composition for many years in the local Faculty and the first designer of a high-rise building in Naples, the *Grattacielo della Società Assicurazione* "La Cattolica" (1954-1958). She was one of the talented but unfortunate Neapolitan architects of the period who was struck by *damnatio memoriae*, precisely because of the skyscraper project. This design was accused of not fitting into the context of the historic city and ended up not being one of her best projects, also because of the changes imposed by the *Soprintendenza*. It inexorably marked her professional career, so much so that she disposed of her personal archives before her death.⁵⁰

The project for Palazzo Della Morte was commissioned to the Studio Filo Speziale in 1951, before the "skyscraper scandal," by the company ICEVA (Impresa Costruzioni Edili Vendite e Acquisti s.r.l.) and was completed in 1957. The Palazzo owes its name to the builders and clients, Della Morte, who still own several apartments in the building. It is located between corso Vittorio Emanuele and via Palizzi, in a plot with a very articulated conformation, on a slope of more than 60 meters, close to the Vomero hill, in a highly scenic area of middle-class expansion and where numerous prestigious residential buildings were already there. The same typology of the buildings and dwellings, the construction materials and details, and the greenery, all bear witness to the social destination of the complex. It consists of three buildings, of different typologies and heights, enclosing a courtyard-garden crossed by a walkway on *pilotis* that connects the accesses to the buildings placed at different heights. The southern body houses small villas of three floors, so as not to obstruct the view of the gulf to the other buildings, while the other two constructions are "in line." The main access is from the lower level, from corso Vittorio Emanuele, and is set back from the road because the plot coincided with a strip of land, similar to a passageway easement, which did not permit the construction of any buildings. A tunnel dug through the hill connects the external door-keeper's lodge with the elevator shaft leading to the central court and the garden, as well as to the upper floor, on via Palizzi. The vertical connection is also guaranteed by an external staircase, redesigned by Filo Speziale in place of a pre-existing one, in reinforced concrete with cantilever slabs, which develops along the tufa ridge.

The project uses modern techniques and materials to shape the complex with a strong landscape value. The theme of integration between nature and the artificial is resolved in a non-mimetic way, according to an expressive style typical of Filo Speziale, already anticipated in the project for the Metropolitan Cinema-Theatre (1946-1948). This architecture, in fact, excavated in a natural cavity below Palazzo Cellammare, may be considered the first experimentation of a compositional theme dear to Filo Speziale: the relationship with the context, whereby it is the natural given that dictates the form of the building, adjusting the initial Cartesian geometry in complex, diversified forms and spaces.⁵¹

Like in the best Neapolitan *condomini* of the time, in Palazzo Della Morte, the relationship with the morphological and topological characteristics of the city was fundamental. The entire complex was designed in relation to the site's orographic features: the orientation and light dictated by the presence of the bay to the South, the relationship with the sea, the presence of the tufa banks that form the ground on which the buildings are dug, the staircase, which clings

50 Chiara Ingresso, Aurora Maria Riviezzo, "Stefania Filo Speziale and her long-overlooked legacy to twentieth century Italian architecture," in *Women's Creativity since the Modern Movement (1918-2018): Toward a New Perception and Reception* (Torino: MOMOWO 2018).

51 Mario Tedeschi, "Lo spunto formale e la creazione dell'ambiente," *Domus* 251 (1950).

to the hill's tufa ridge, to the courtyard-garden, the true "green heart" of the composition, crossed by an articulated walkway on *pilotis* among the tall trees, bushes and flower boxes. The strong sunlight is used, both in the façades and in the interiors, to create refraction games through the use of bright colors and polychrome majolica and tufa.

Like the other Italian *condomini*, Palazzo Della Morte is full of references to a spurious modernity, with many compromises and nostalgia. Far from the functionalism of the "masters," it is shaped according to a code which is undoubtedly modern, also due to the use of certain elements such as white plastered concrete, walkways and *pilotis*, but at the same time perfectly integrated into the context through strongly expressive solutions, never dogmatic.

Conclusion. Architectures Still to Be Rediscovered

Palazzo Della Morte can help us to revise the interpretation still applied to private residential architectures, for which the speculation of the builders would be inexorably guilty of producing poor quality architecture damaging the landscape.

Even if the Palazzo was also linked to the personal use of the client, who contacted a qualified architect to guarantee the quality of the project for his own home, this case study confirms that not all the Italian *condomini* were of poor quality, nor were they the mere result of political malfeasance as an outcome of the free market, and although the constraints imposed by speculative logic tended to standardize construction, there were numerous cases in which these limitations were turned into design opportunities. In other words, if the rules of the market and prefabrication strongly conditioned construction to the point of increasingly limiting the scope of design, it is nevertheless true that the best *condomini* of the period coincided with what started from these constraints and transformed them into design occasions, such as in Palazzo Della Morte. This case study is also particularly useful to highlight the architectural quality that was achieved in Naples, a city too often forgotten by post-war Italian architectural historiography, and only recently partially reviewed through the contribution of some of its protagonists.⁵²

In this sense, Naples is emblematic of the critical process of *damnatio memoriae* to which most of Italy's post-war private architecture has been subjected, with the recent exceptions already mentioned. And precisely because of this state of the art, the goal of this research is to try to place it within a debate on the discipline and in a wider context, to initiate a comparative study that would highlight differences and similarities in the Italian national context.

For what has been said so far, wanting to sketch a brief comparison, we could say that if the relationship with the landscape of the bay and the hills can be considered as the element that characterizes the best Neapolitan *condomini*, the experimentation in Milan or in Rome was different. Those in Milan are more introverted: having defined the elevations according to the urban alignments, greater attention was given to the interiors, elaborating plans articulated in different ways according to the levels and the furnishings, in many cases designed by the architects themselves (think of the famous case of Azucena, the furniture firm founded in 1947 by Luigi Caccia Dominioni and Ignazio Gardella). The Roman line of research was more spectacular and "appealing" in the exteriors, in the elevations and in the volumes, showing off in the extremely varied urban context of the capital.

Today the *condomini* stand in Italian cities as witnesses of a bygone era, when the progress seemed to be unstoppable. They continue to be the most "desired" housing for the middle-class and the real estate market based on family capital and facilitated by bank loans is still strongly encouraged, even if with all the limits that have been manifested in the various economic crisis

⁵² Among new essays on architects working in that period in Naples published recently and not mentioned so far: Barbara Bertoli, *Giulio de Luca 1912-2004, opere e progetti* (Naples: Clean, 2013); Chiara Ingresso, Elena Mendia, *Un'architetta nella Napoli del Secondo-Dopoguerra* (Siracusa: LetteraVentidue, 2020).

that have followed. The mechanisms of rent and land consumption change according to the urban context as well as the new architectures that have been built in the cities. What remains is a huge housing stock built after World War Two, subjected, especially in the south of Italy, to a progressive dilapidation due in some cases to the poor quality of materials, combined with negligent or completely absent physical and environmental maintenance. It is a heritage which should be reconsidered for its historical and architectural value and, in some cases, protected and recovered.

In conclusion, we report a testimony of Ugo Luccichenti in 1949 referring to his complex in piazzale Medaglie d'Oro in Rome and reflecting the difficult conditions in which many architects had to operate in those years:

“This is an architecture that, when you see it for the first time, it may seem easy, amusing or simply strange. Instead, when you assess the reasons, when you research the components, you find that in that freshness there is a mature solution to the problems that still greatly afflict our cities, which are the reasons why our cities seem doomed to ugliness. And, as always in art, the solution to the problems is all the more valid and specific the less it denounces the presence of the same and the effort that it would take to solve it.”⁵³

And it is exactly this effort that led Luccenti and his colleagues to design innovative architectural solutions of great aesthetic appeal, which reflected the taste and expectations of comfort and modernity of those who chose to live there during the boom years.

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