

02- The new Cobianchi

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In 2007, the Official Milan Province Tourist Board (Ente Informazione e Accoglienza Turistica della Provincia di Milano) or IAT, was transferred from the left wing of the Arengario building to the underground facilities in the Colbianchi building. The internal structure of what was originally the first public bath house in Milan, was renovated to house the new offices without altering the architectural style, a magnificent example of the period between Liberty and Art Deco, which can be seen immediately in the entrance to the building under the arcades in Piazza del Duomo.

The building was built in 1924 by a businessman from Bologna, Cleopatro Cobianchi, who had the clever idea of providing the public with all the services necessary for personal hygiene, health and well-being in a single facility: baths, showers, manicure, hairdressers, clothes pressing service, ...but also ticket offices for purchasing train and theatre tickets, public telephones, and leisure rooms for writing correspondence and listening to music. The establishment was a clamorous success and within a very short time the Cobianchi became a reference point, not only for travellers and tourists, but also for the citizens of Milan. It became so popular that in the first ten years of the 20th century, Cleopatro Cobianchi built a whole chain of public bathhouses in all the largest Italian cities.

Among all the centres that were built, the Cobianchi in Milan stood apart for its luxurious furnishing and interior decor, luxury re-echoed by the Benevolo Architectural Studio when it was assigned the restoration work in 2003. Wherever possible, the architects restored the original materials such as the sumptuous marble and precious hand-carved woods, or performed painstaking reproduction work to replace certain elements like the multicoloured tiles on the lowered ceiling. During the restoration work, certain archaeological remains were discovered which date back to Imperial and post-Imperial Roman times, all of which can be admired in the large area which has been set up for their display near the entrance in via Tommaso Grossi. The most important elements are an ancient well and part of an imposing semicircular wall, which probably formed the perimeter of an apse or Great Hall.

The Cobianchi building still attracts hundreds of tourists and local visitors today, just as it did in its years of former glory. The IAT offices provide visitors and the local population with all the information they could possibly need concerning the city and the surrounding province: cultural and sporting events, concerts, art exhibitions, trade fairs, food and wine fairs and festivals. Printed material includes the invaluable booklet: "Milano Mese", published every month by the Tourist Board, in both Italian and English.

In addition, following the recent restoration work carried out by the architect Simone Micheli, adjacent to the Tourist Help Desks, that exalt the former liberty style, a new section has been opened. On the occasion of the 2008 Furnishing Design Week in Milan (Salone del Mobile), an installation has been realized, with the contribution of important Italian firms. It has been donated to the city, to aid in doing of Cobianchi an urban meeting place.

The new interiors create an "urban salon" in which it is possible to communicate, exchange ideas and information on topics like design, fashion and culture, that in the Milanese area have their centres of excellence.

The Cobianchi evolves towards the Expo 2015, to be more and more the point of reference for the four millions of citizens and for the about ten millions of tourists that every year already visit the city.