

Ask a local: *Piero Lissoni*

Milan

Modernist designer and architect Piero Lissoni shares his go-to places to visit, shop and eat ahead of April's Salone del Mobile, where he will showcase his latest creations for legendary Italian brands

PHOTOGRAPHS LAVINIA CERNAU

I find that, every day, Milan is a source of inspiration in one way or another. When I wake up; when I move around the city; and when I am walking, cycling or catching the tram. It's a kind of mirror that helps me to see things more clearly. It's as if many different worlds are condensed into the city.

Milan is in a privileged position compared to other European cities in attracting incredible designers and makers, both in the past and now. We've been designing for over 500 years. Everything that happens here, in this business, revolves around the existence of a system. Milan is the capital of a system that extends across Italy. In the north there is Brianza, to the east are Bergamo and Brescia, to the west Turin and to the south the area of Piacenza. These places have always been in dialogue with – and connected to – Milan. So you find production, research, artisans and companies based nearby, such as Living Divani in Brianza, the heart of the furniture district. The city has these connections – it is what would today be called a productive ecosystem.

What to see and where to visit

Even though Milan is a fairly small city, it has many districts, each with its own identity. These are areas that are very much lived in by their inhabitants. My district is Brera, so when I need to think, I go into the courtyard of the Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera (accademiadibrera.milano.it/en), which is housed in the same buildings as Pinacoteca di Brera gallery. Or I take a walk to the Botanical Garden (ortibotanici.unimi.it/en). On other occasions, I go to Via Monte Napoleone. The people, the shop windows and this sort of retail amusement park all help me to focus. If you are a shopaholic, you should definitely head there. Another place I love to visit, on my way home from the studio, is the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II (Italy's oldest active shopping gallery). It is like a gigantic collage – a collection of characters I enjoy observing. At the Via San Marco street market, I always stumble across a rich mix of people and, every Monday and Thursday, I buy flowers there for the studio and my home. If you are interested, you should visit the Romanesque-style Basilica di Sant'Ambrogio (basilicasantambrogio.it/en), or one of the two basilicas in the Parco delle Basiliche. Or you might like to wander in the gardens of the Università degli Studi di Milano Statale and breathe in an atmosphere that has remained intact for more than 500 years in the grounds of the vast, elegant building known as Ca'Granda, founded as a hospital in the late 1400s. If I need a moment of quiet, the Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense (biblioteca.braidense.org/en) is a wonderful place to pause and reflect.

I think the two places that illustrate the extent of modernism

in Milan are La Triennale di Milano (triennale.org/en) and the ADI Design Museum (adidesignmuseum.org/en). They provide a more nuanced picture compared to places like the Tre Torri in the CityLife district or Piazza Gae Aulenti. At these museums, you can perceive the depth of modernism and learn about its wide geographical origins. For me, the modernity of Milan is about a city that is not just bound to its past, but is also one that uses its past as an element necessary for growth. We are not a classic historical city. Milan was founded around 600 BCE but, despite this, we don't base the strength and beauty of this city solely on our history. The joy of being in Milan is a presence, not necessarily a physical one, that nourishes us: the exhibitions, the shops, the work that is done. A highlight is the annual Salone del Mobile, where my new products for Alpi, Boffi, Glas Italia, B&B Italia, Kartell and Porro – among others – will be on show.

Where to eat

There are dozens of incredible places to dine in Milan – from my friends at the Tuscan restaurant Rigolo on Via Solferino (ristoranterigolo.it/en) and the seafood restaurant Langosteria Bistrot on Via Privata Bobbio (langosteria.com/it/langosteria-bistrot), or the little pizzeria tourists avoid because they don't speak much Italian, to Radetzky bar and café (radetzky.it/en). I like Fioraio Bianchi because it is near the studio and it sells flowers as well as coffee (fioraiobianchicaffe.it/en). The small bars in Brera and places like Trattoria Torre di Pisa (trattoria.torredipisa.it/en) make me feel as if I am in a time machine. And then there are the more sophisticated restaurants such as Oldani D'O (cucinapop.do/en), Cracco (ristorantecracco.it/en) and Da Vittorio (davittorio.com). Life in Milan is not limited to just one or two options, however: it's all about moving around and making choices according to your mood.

Where to shop

For design, you have to walk round Via Solferino, Via Durini and Via Uberto Visconti di Modrone to come across some real gems. Though sometimes it's a case of actively seeking them out. Towards the end of Corso Garibaldi, for example, there are some wonderful antique shops. In the area behind Viale Piave, there are a host of antique shops that specialise in glass and, when I want refined, more modern pieces dating from the 1950s to the middle of the last decade, I head to the shops on the other side of Porta Garibaldi, such as Officina Antiquaria or Galleria Rossella Colombari on Via Maroncelli. And if I'm looking for something particular, say Scandinavian, I go to the area in front of Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli on Viale Pasubio. On the same street, Feltrinelli is great for books, as is Rizzoli in Galleria. Near here is one of the oldest bookshops in Milan, Libreria Bocca – it is a veritable institution □ *Lissoni & Partners: lissoniandpartners.com*

TOP ROW FROM LEFT Via Montebello reflected in the window of Fioraio Bianchi Caffè, which sells both flowers and coffee. The chapel of St John the Baptist in the Basilica of San Lorenzo Maggiore. The interior of Rigolo, a favourite restaurant of Piero's, which is close to his studio in the Brera district. MIDDLE ROW Milan's Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense is one of the largest public libraries in Italy. Piero in his studio, sitting on a 'Sing Sing Sing' chair by Shiro Kuramata, beside an antique lamp to which he added a new shade. Find antiques and old books at Mattei Antichità in the Centro Storico. BOTTOM ROW Distinctive pink-hued Candoglia marble was used for the Gothic exterior of the city's Duomo. One of the Portrait Suites at the Portrait Milano hotel, where a variety of breakfast options are available from room service

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