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Restoration and renovation of Teatro alla Scala

Immagini

Location: Milan, Italy

Client: City of Milan

Supervision of works: Antonio Acerbo, engineer

Executive project consultant: Mario Botta, architect

Stage machinery project: Franco Malgrande, engineer

Contractors: ATI Consorzio Cooperative Costruzioni - F.lli Panzeri - DEC

After only 30 months of intense work, the world's most famous opera theatre opened its doors on December 7 2004 with a performance of the opera "Europa riconosciuta" by Antonio Salieri, conducted by maestro Riccardo Muti. This was the first opera performed when the [Nuovo Regio Ducal Teatro](#) built in Milan under Empress Maria Teresa of Austria was inaugurated in 1778.

The renovation work on the theatre had been in the planning since the early 'nineties, and could no longer be put off as the structure failed to meet today's safety standards. The monumental part of the theatre, including its façades, the theatre hall itself, the atrium, the foyer, the foyers for the boxes and gallery and the "ex casino Ricordi", historic home of the Theatre Museum, were subjected to a thorough preservation and restoration project under the direction of **engineer Antonio Acerbo**, City of Milan central technical director.

The restoration project brought back to light such historical elements as the original Venetian "seminato" scattered stone flooring in the corridors and the marble-like decoration on the walls of the corridors, formerly hidden by several layers of plaster, carpeting and linoleum.

Wherever possible, the original decorations were restored in the historical boxes, such as the blue paintings from Piermarini's day which were restored in the viceroy's stage-box.

The floor of the stalls was completely cleared of the ruins of the 1943 bombing that damaged the theatre, which had been simply buried under a layer of cement and covered with carpeting to hasten the reopening of the theatre after the war. A new raised floor composed of layers of different materials, ending with oak parquet, was designed to improve the theatre's acoustics by world-famous acoustician and physicist **Higini Arau**. The new seats in the stands, covered with traditional red velvet, are fitted with modern illuminated displays on which the libretto of the opera can be displayed in multiple languages.

In addition to the conservation project aimed at freeing the structure of the many additions that had altered its original look over time, the renovation project looked toward the future and provided the theatre with one of the world's most advanced, highly functional stage and stage machinery structures.

The new scene tower will make it possible to accommodate more than one stage set at the same time, so that more performances can be held and the theatre can attract more diverse audiences. The new L-shaped scenery spaces measures 1,600 square metres and is contained in a scene tower measuring up to 18 metres deep and rising 38 metres above road level.

It is a true jewel of technology, designed by Teatro alla Scala scenery director **engineer Franco Malgrande** and worked by means of a complex electromechanical system.

The historical eighteenth-century façade designed by neoclassical architect Giuseppe Piermarini is now surmounted and emphasised by the new volumes and abstract lines of Swiss architect [Mario Botta](#), volumes providing a sort of background to the building's sober profile.

The now famous "ellipse" emphasises the differences from Piermarini's architecture in a carefully measured dialogue between old and new. Articulated on three levels, it houses the theatre offices, dressing rooms, and rehearsal rooms for the orchestra, choir and dance company. The new structure is also a response to the need to restore logistical and architectural order to the multitude of constructions that had accumulated over the years in the courtyard and on the roofs.

The second volume is parallelepiped in shape, as tall as a 12-storey building, and houses stage machinery with a futuristic structure capable of handling three different stage sets at the same time. Little lights set into the finish of the façade vibrate in the night, lightening up the imposing bulk of the tower.

[Ariostea](#) is very proud to have contributed to the renewal of Teatro alla Scala as Technical Sponsor by supplying 7,000 square metres of flooring and finishing materials. In Mario Botta's famous ellipse, Ariostea materials [Botticino](#) and [Argenté](#) were chosen for the flooring and finishes in the performers' dressing rooms and the offices, the café, the scenery workshops (stage sets, sculpture, carpentry, costume tailoring), the dressing rooms and the corridors. The new structure, which rises above the nineteenth-century wing of the theatre and symbolises its new image, can accommodate up to 350 people. The Ariostea materials used in the theatre are the product of ultra modern productive processes and are capable of guaranteeing aesthetic continuity with the traditional materials already present in the theatre (marble and Venetian "seminato" flooring), while at the same time offering greater convenience and durability.