

Steeling beauty

By Saxon Henry





One new building in Milan curves its way into architectural fame

A glimpse at the Milan skyline with its warren of construction cranes makes it clear that this is a city on the move. Preparing for its debut as the host of the Universal Exposition in 2015, Italy's fashion-focused city is putting all its muscle behind a Jack-and-the-Beanstalk pace of skyward reaching buildings that will serve as the city's newest architectural gems.

You might imagine that these latest additions to Milan's architectural milieu, with their winking plates of glass and ribs of steel, will turn a cold eye on the city's existing architecture. That may be the case for some but there's one building

in town – the Lombardy Regional Government building, or Altra Sede Regione Lombardia, designed by New York-based Pei Cobb Freed & Partners (PCF-P) – that will take those snide glances in stride.

The firm won the project through an international design competition and the requirements were to make the building at home within the urban context of Milan and, more immediately, within the Lombardy region. "Milan is a city of modernist masterpieces, such as the Pirelli Tower by Gio Ponti," says PCF-P's senior associate Matteo Milani, PhD, OAM, who noted the iconic



architect's building is a natural reference for current modern architecture in and around the city.

Putting a subtle bend on the tried-and-true skyscraper form, PCF-P created arced towers that are embraced by a geometrically rich public plaza. Called the Piazza delle Citta' Lombarde, it forms the heart of the complex, notes Henry N. Cobb, FAIA, the design partner on the project.

The undulant wavelike features in and around these street-level public spaces had local inspirations. "The rivers and valley of Lombardy as seen in a very large scale map of the region played a role in shaping the building," he says of the rising and falling forms.

To celebrate tradition, steel and glass were married with another material that has long held Italy's fascination: stone. "We used Ceppo Lombardo, a local natural stone commonly used in Milan for building decorations in the 19th and 20th centuries," explains Milani, "but we used it for cladding large surfaces, which has not been the norm."

The biggest feat the firm achieved, perhaps, is that the design, through the plaza, maintains a modest scale to correlate with the neighborhood's other buildings, while the new towers dance gracefully side by side as they extend into the sky. We're betting these are curves not even Milan's model-obsessed can denounce!

