

Giulia Castelli Gattinara

111 Places
in Milan
That You Must
Not Miss

Photographs by Mario Verin



emons:

Foreword

Ambitious, trendy, and creative on all fronts: we are speaking of the *Milano da bere* (“Drinkin’ Milan”), as the city’s yuppie nightlife was known in the eighties. Milan is a city that works hard by day and parties even harder by night. Start with an aperitif in Brera, the artists’ district, and then move on to the Navigli – the system of canals designed in part by Leonardo da Vinci – for a “chic’n quick” meal. Milan is at once traditional and bold – a city that dons its finest evening dress for the opening night of La Scala, but has the audacity to install a 36-foot-high sculpture of a middle finger pointing straight at the city’s stock market.

Well-cultured, elegant, exclusive – just as one would expect the country’s financial capital to be – Milan is at its best when it turns into a top-class international fashion and design showcase. With its ambitious 26-story “vertical forest” now completed, the city has radically altered its skyline in just a few years – even going so far as to place a replica of the *Madonnina* (Little Madonna – the statue of the Virgin Mary that towers over the Duomo) – on top of the Pirelli Tower, its highest skyscraper. From flamingo-filled courtyards to old warehouses turned contemporary art workshops, the city can be as surprising and bizarre as the Art Nouveau-style façades of its buildings.

Milan is a metropolis that doesn’t show off – you have to go looking for it, landmark by landmark. Whether you search for its essence in the backstage of a theater or the vault of a bank, you will not be disappointed.

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104_ Vicolo dei Lavandai

When men did the washing

Let's bust the myth that in the days before running water and washing machines, doing the wash by the riverbank was a task for women alone. In the 19th century, this was not always the case. Not in Milan, at least, where laundry was actually considered a man's job. Families that could afford it, in fact, would bring their dirty clothes and bedding to the Confraternita dei Lavandai (Fraternity of Washmen), an organization dating back to the 18th century made up entirely of men.

The fraternity also had its own patron saint: none other than Saint Anthony of Padua, to whom one of the altars in the church of Santa Maria delle Grazie, on the Alzaia Naviglio Grande, is dedicated. The church is not far from the street that still bears the name Vicolo dei Lavandai (Washmen's Alley).

This corner of the Naviglio, near Porta Ticinese, preserves a glimpse of the old days. Various courtyards and warehouses look out onto this closed-in *piazzetta* covered with hard-packed earth and bordered with plants, where the merchants used to unload their boats.

On the other side flows *el fosset*, a little stream that draws its water from the Naviglio. The washing basins are still here, positioned side by side under a wooden roof. In later years, the place became more of a women's domain: the older shopkeepers still remember how they would arrive with their buckets, kneel down, and use the stone blocks as washboards. This lasted up until the late 1950s (a photo dated 1957 shows the author Georges Simenon with the washwomen in the background).

Even back then, poets and writers were attracted to the spot's evocative and nostalgic atmosphere. The old grocery store that sold floor brushes, soap, and bleach is now a quaint restaurant that has kept the original fittings and ceiling. In one of the courtyards you can also see one of the first spin dryers.



Address Alzaia Naviglio Grande, Vicolo dei Lavandai, 20144 Milan | **Getting there** Porta Genova (M2 green line); Cantore / Porta Genova (tram 14, 19 and bus 47, 74); Gorizia (tram 9) | **Tip** You can get to Vicolo dei Lavandai from Via Vigevano 9. A series of beautiful earth-covered courtyards reveals the charm of the old houses of the Naviglio; just open the gate at the end and you are there.

101 The Vertical Forest

“Growing up” in the city

In a city with relatively few green areas, the Studio Boeri had a brilliant idea: Why not build a “vertical forest”? The result is a pair of high-rises – 18 and 26 stories respectively – with giant cantilevered, staggered balconies that accommodate a number of large plants and trees.

The towers’ “ecosystem” will encompass as many as 900 species with 5,000 varieties of shrubs and 15,000 types of perennials, say the biologists and botanists who were charged with selecting the flora best suited for the different levels of sun exposure. These include almond trees, cherry trees, ash trees, alder trees, vines, and – of course – a plethora of different flowers.

One may wonder: what is expected of the residents? Replacing a dead oak or olive tree is one thing, but shelling out for a new “Regina Claudia” plum tree is another matter altogether. No need to worry: a team of gardeners and biologists will always be on hand to offer support. The “vertical towers” are more than just buildings – they are a collective project of like-minded people. This also requires following rather strict botanical guidelines (so no herbs and spices on the balcony, I’m afraid). On the upside, the buildings are equipped with a centralized irrigation system, so residents don’t have to worry about watering. They can only pray bugs won’t take up residence inside their apartments, since parasite control is strictly organic: insects vs. insects (1,200 ladybugs have already been unleashed to fight aphids). But a whole bunch of other animals also have been enlisted in the “war on pests”: butterflies, bats, etc., depending on the season.

Like it or not, this is the next stage in the evolution of urban green: solutions that are both pleasing to the eye and the lungs (more plants mean more oxygen and cleaner air). “Only time will tell,” say the developers of the project, which is the first of its kind.



Address Via Gaetano de Castillia, 20124 Milan | **Getting there** Gioia and Garibaldi (M2 green line); Garibaldi (tram 33; bus 37) | **Tip** At number 28 on the same street, in a building dating back to the early 20th century, are the offices of the Riccardo Catella Foundation. Here also is one of the most exclusive restaurants in town, the Ratanà (Tel +39 0287128855, www.ratana.it).

96__Triennale

Happy Hour surrounded by sculptures

Pietra Sonora (Musical Stone), *La Fontana dei Bagni Misteriosi (The Fountain of Mysterious Baths)*, *Luna Caduta in Basso (Fallen Moon)*, *Continuità (Continuity)*: these are just some of the names of the sculptures exhibited outside in the gardens of the Triennale. There are thirteen open-air works in total, including pieces by artists Giorgio de Chirico (1973), Ettore Sottsass (2005), Pinuccio Sciola (2010), and even architect Andreas Wenning (for the Baumraum studio), famous for his tree houses.

You can reach this corner of the Sempione Park from the Triennale building, opened in 1933 under the direction of Giò Ponti and Mario Sironi. The exhibition area is in the middle of a lawn that would make the British proud.

On a sunny day you'll be tempted to sit on the three armchairs by the artist Gaetano Pesce (2005): the "ladies" (as they are nicknamed) sport sinuous, rounded, and prosperous bodies like those of Neolithic Venuses. If only they weren't made of bronze, you could imagine sinking into their softness. Oh well, c'est la vie: best to make do with the slimline chairs of the open-air cafe, which, in any case, are not your run-of-the-mill seats, but designer chairs set out on a rotating basis from a collection of about 100. It is like a museum within the museum.

The Triennale is an open space – in every sense of the word, with an important permanent collection of fashion and design objects that are being curated and displayed constantly. Its 130,000 square feet host temporary exhibitions (with an entrance fee), theater performances, and shows that run the gamut of all fields of creativity, including digital technology. After all, the new Palazzo dell'Arte, designed by Giovanni Muzio for the fifth Triennale (when the Torre Branca was first opened to the public), was intended to promote unity in the arts, which it continues to do to this day.



Address Viale Emilio Alemagna, 6, 20121 Milan, Tel +39 02724341, www.triennale.it | **Getting there** Cadorna (M2 green line); Triennale (bus 61) | **Hours** Tue–Sun 10:30am–8:30pm, Thu open till 11pm | **Tip** In Piazza Cadorna you can view *Ago, Filo e Nodo (Needle, Thread, and Knot)*, a public artwork by Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen. The knot is a few meters from the needle but joined to it metaphorically by the metro. The work was commissioned for the opening of the new railway station (Cadorna) in 2000, but the Milanese are not particularly fond of it.

78 San Maurizio al Monastero

The “Sistine Chapel” of Milan

Forced into a cloistered life, the erudite nuns of the Benedictine convent of San Maurizio would cheer themselves up by traveling vicariously among the magnificent scenes frescoed on the interior walls of the church. Upon entering, it becomes immediately apparent why this is known as the Sistine Chapel of Milan. In fact, the *Last Supper* by Leonardo da Vinci is not far away (the master was at the time commissioned to paint the *Virgin of the Rocks*).

The convent of San Maurizio rounded up the best artists of the Lombard School, including Bernardino Luini, to decorate its church. This is not surprising, given that the convent’s sponsors included Ippolita Sforza, niece of the Duke of Milan Ludovico Moro and wife of Alessandro Bentivoglio, a nobleman from Bologna and nephew of Alessandro Sforza, who had confined four of her daughters to the convent. What is surprising is not to find crowds lined up at the entrance to this magnificent example of Renaissance painting. Entirely painted in tempera, the colorful frescoes depict numerous biblical scenes, rural landscapes, episodes relating to the history of the Church, and powerful people belonging to the family of the abbess.

Many daughters from the most aristocratic families of the time were enclosed in this golden cage, which communicated with the outside world through a grille in the wall. The church was built with a single nave, divided in the middle by a painted partition that didn’t reach the ceiling so that the nuns could attend mass without the risk of seeing outside or of being seen. Vice versa, from the outside one could only hear the polyphonic chants of the female voices of the choir, accompanied by the pipe organ made by Antegnati, also from the 16th century. It’s a cloistered destiny that seems to continue to this day, seeing that many ignore the beauty hidden behind the wall.

Address Corso Magenta 13, 20123 Milan | **Getting there** Cordusio and Cairoli (M1 red line); Cadorna (M2 green line); Meravigli (tram 16, 27); Largo D’Ancona (bus 50, 58, 94) | **Hours** Tue–Sun 9:30am–5:30pm | **Tip** In front of the church is the beautiful façade of the Baroque-style Palazzo Litta, built in the second half of the 17th century by Francesco Maria Richini for Count Bartolomeo Aresa, one of the most influential men in Milan. Inside there are a series of courtyards and a sumptuous grand staircase that leads to a *piano nobile* (“noble floor”), where the national railway company now has its offices.



77 San Bernardino

The house of bones

Maybe it was the custom of the time, or simply the ingenuity of the ossuary custodian, but the fact of the matter was that something had to be done with all those bones from the cemetery of the nearby leper hospital. It was therefore decided to use the wall niches as frames for a rather macabre picture, with human tibias used as an added refinement, their linearity lending itself magnificently to the bizarre creation.

So that was how things went. In 1430, the cemetery chapel was given to the Milan-based Disciplini (disciplinarians) confraternity, whose patron was Saint Bernardino of Siena. Following a series of restorations in the 17th and 18th centuries, it was transformed into a much larger church, connected to the first by a triumphal arch. From here a corridor leads to the ossuary.

As people died – many of them due to the plague – the “house of bones,” as the populace knew it, began to fill up with the skeletons of sick and poor people, of prisoners and murder victims, and even of a few nobles who couldn’t find a more dignified burial place. The cult of the ossuary grew in popularity over time, and perhaps also for this reason, when the place underwent restoration, it was decided to give the site a complete makeover.

Tibias, femurs, and skulls were divided up and arranged in an orderly fashion inside the gold-stuccoed framed niches. Today, two columns of skulls flank the statue of Our Lady of Sorrows, with the dying Christ at her feet, above the altar, surrounded by friezes of tibias that look like angels’ trumpets and ex-votos.

The frescoed ceiling of the cupola, painted by the Venetian artist Sebastiano Ricci, dominates from above, depicting the triumph of the souls ascending into paradise. It is surrounded by skulls that seem to stare as they protrude like pigeons from the cornice above the oblivious visitor.



Address Piazza Santo Stefano / Via Verziere 2, 20122 Milan | **Getting there** Duomo and San Babila (M1 red line); Duomo (M3 yellow line); Larga (tram 15); Sforza / Andreani (77,94) | **Hours** Mon – Fri 7:30am – 12pm, Sat 7:30am – 12:30pm | **Tip** At Via Larga 2, the Neapolitan Gran Caffè Cimmino is a great place to have breakfast. Its custard brioches and ricotta-filled puff pastries are truly delicious, especially if accompanied by a cappuccino (Mon – Sun 6:30am – 8pm).

67 Parco delle Basiliche

A park with an ominous past

Just imagine if witches and warlocks could come back and liven up the Parco delle Basiliche (Basilicas' Park) with their lunatic, joyous, and liberating Sabbaths. It would be worth it if only to cancel the ignominy of the *damnatio memoriae* ("damnation of memory"), which declared that nothing should remain of the dead who received such condemnation on account of their supposed "atrocities."

A testament to this can be found in the Church of Sant'Eustorgio, where a mysterious person's name has been erased from the epithet on his/her headstone. The church, which was the seat of the Inquisition Tribunal during the Middle Ages, is located at the southern end of the Basilicas' Park, which is a park only in name and not in size.

During the day, the park is animated by young children, and retirees out for a stroll, but for those who know the fateful story of the witches it is difficult not to be touched by the place's dark past. A well-manicured lawn is not enough to erase the memories of the events of 1617, when – among the columns of the churchyard, in front of the Basilica of Saint Lawrence – Caterina de' Medici was burned at the stake for witchcraft. Today young people arrange to meet here for a beer and nothing upsets the nightlife of Porta Ticinese.

They say that the devil makes the rounds at Piazza Vetra among the syringes, broken bottles, and sprayed graffiti, despite the regular police raids. After sunset the piazza becomes a refuge for outcasts: characters that we would define "anarchic" and "hostile to social rules" – just as the emancipated women, preachers, heretics, and free spirits were labeled in the Middle Ages.

Another grim story is that of the barber Gian Giacomo Moro, unjustly accused by his pious neighbors – who would spy on him from the windows in Corso Porta Ticinese – of spreading the plague. He died on the gallows erected in the piazza in the summer of 1630.



Address Piazza Sant'Eustorgio-Via Molino delle Armi-Piazza Vetra, 20123 Milan |
Getting there Molino delle Armi/Vetra (bus 94); Ticinese/Sant'Eustorgio (bus 163) |
Tip In front of the columns of Saint Lawrence, a plaque commemorates the house of Gian Giacomo Mora, burned down by the Inquisition Tribunal, which erected a column on the site: the "column of infamy" with the words *damnatio aeternae* ("damned for all eternity") engraved on it, also mentioned by Alessandro Manzoni in his famous novel. It was dismantled in 1778, and now stands in the courtyard of the Sforza Castle.

42_ The Interactive Museum of Cinema

Look who's talking!

It is like taking a trip back in time when you exit the hyper-modern lilac metro line and enter the rationalist building that once housed a tobacco factory – and still sports the original sign on its façade.

As soon as you step inside, you are instantly transported to the black-and-white world of the Lumière brothers. This is just the beginning of a wondrous journey among puppets, old instruments, and monitors that reproduce memorable films and historic documentaries.

There is an archive of thousands of reels, 30 hours of footage that can be viewed on interactive screens, and more than 100 vintage items ranging from movie cameras to magic lanterns. Have fun dubbing your voice for that of Robert De Niro's, and then e-mail yourself the recording; enjoy a trip down memory lane to the Futurist Milan of the 1920s, in the company of Marinetti, Balla, and Depero; or get to know Italo Pacchioni, who brought cinematography to Milan when he filmed the funeral of Giuseppe Verdi in 1901.

Then you have the “talking wardrobes” film archives: just insert an index card and – *presto* – the requested film appears. The wealth of material available is astonishing: from the work of the Italian film stars of the 1920s, to the commercials of the 1970s.

An illuminated map allows you to zoom in on the geographical location, city, neighborhood, or piazza where some of the most famous scenes of Italian cinema were shot, and experience the emotion of being on the set with Fellini or Visconti (elsewhere in the museum you can view signed sketches and designs by these and other famous directors).

Finally, you can listen to someone's opinion or give your own: just stand on the footprints in front of the *Senti chi parla* sign and have a conversation with whatever film star appears in the hologram.



Address Viale Fulvio Testi 121, 20162 Milan, Tel +39 0287242114, www.cinetecamilano.it | **Getting there** Bicocca (M5 lilac line; tram 7, 31) |

Hours Mon–Fri 3–6pm, Sun 3–7pm, every Sunday guided tours at 4:30pm | **Tip** At Porta Venezia, at Viale Vittorio Veneto 2, there is the Oberdan cinema, run by the Cineteca (Milan's film archive), which puts on retrospectives of quality films (oberdan.cinetecamilano.it).



39 Hangar Bicocca

From steel factory to contemporary art laboratory

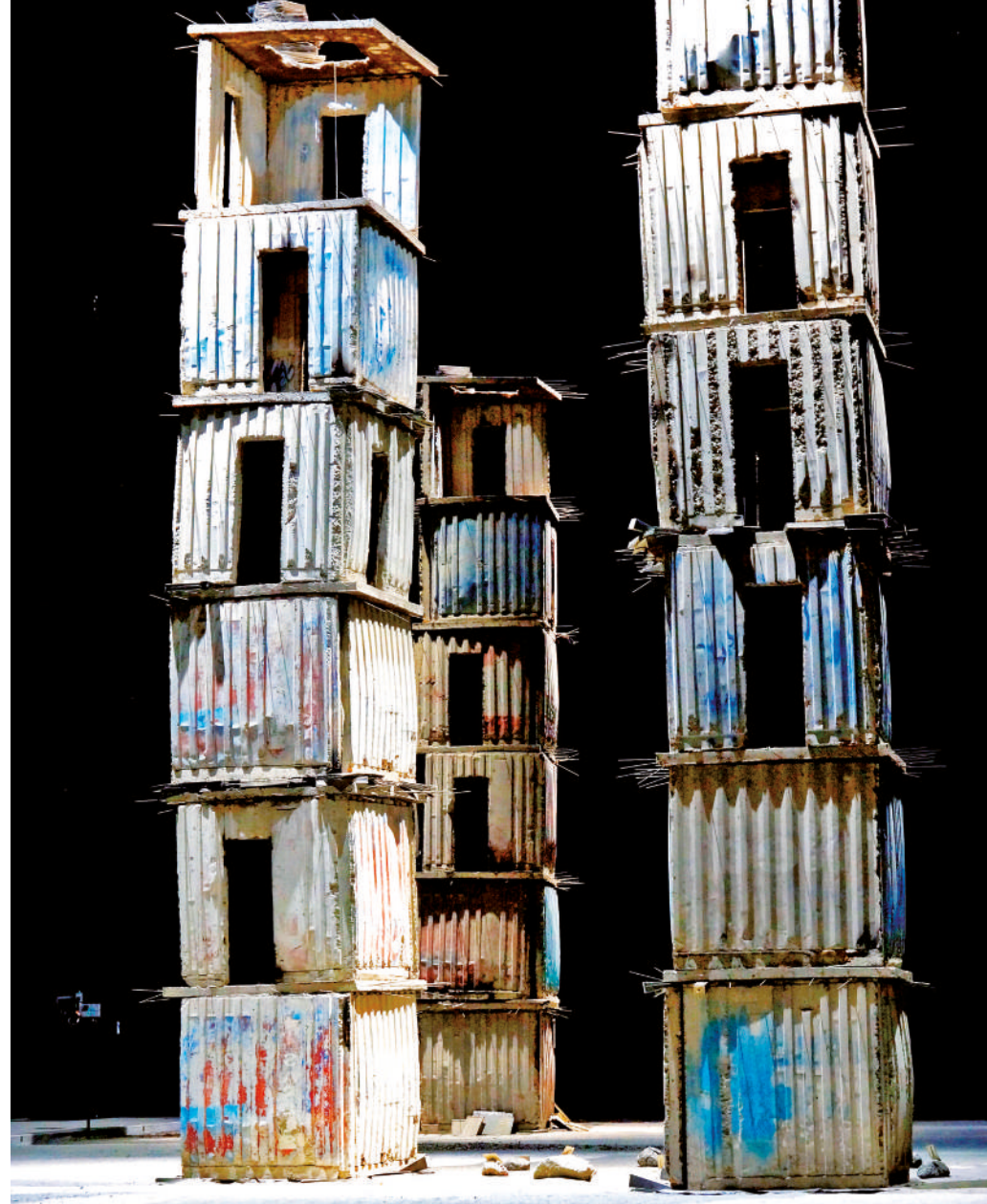
The creativity of an artist juxtaposed with the impersonal machinery of a factory: this is the theme in *Sequenza* (Sequence), Fausto Melotti's iron sculpture positioned at the entrance to the Breda steel factory. For almost a century – beginning in 1886 – thousands of steelworkers gathered here every morning to begin their workday. A lot has changed since then: today the redbrick gabled buildings host exhibitions, art labs, and avant-garde video performances. The grandchildren of the workers who once toiled for Ansaldo, Falk, and Magneti Marelli now come to the bistro, notable for its colorful designer tables, for happy hour.

Even with the passage of time and change of purpose, a strange atmosphere still lingers in this former factory district, as if the walls and gray avenues still exude labor and fatigue. A small door opens into a 100,000-square-foot hangar, which houses the monumental work by Anselm Kiefer, *I Sette Palazzi Celesti* (The Seven Celestial Palaces). Inside the giant nave, in semidarkness, seven towers rise up to 60 feet in height like dilapidated skyscrapers made of piled-up shacks, cement, and war debris.

The impressive installation was inspired by an ancient Hebrew text about a man's spiritual journey in search of God. Clearly, the artist believes that humanity still has a long way to go, and this informs his view of the 20th century – one of war, avant-garde movements, urban growth, and industrial revolutions.

But little is left today of the old city of steel, the “Italian Stalingrad” – famous for the processions of red flags that would gather in front of the Duomo, the blast furnaces, the control rooms, the nuts and bolts; gone is the echo of the 1943 strikes that sent so many workers to the Nazi concentration camps.

For a trip down memory lane, wait for a sunny day and take a (guided) bicycle ride through the industrial area.



Address Via Chiese 2, 20122, Tel +39 0266111573 Milan, www.hangarbicocca.org | **Getting there** Ponale (M5 lilac line); Sarca/Chiese (bus 728) | **Hours** Wed 12–3:30pm, Thu–Sun 11–midnight; bicycle tours are organized by HB Tour every Sunday, advance booking is required (check the website) | **Tip** At Viale dell’Innovazione 20 is the modern Teatro degli Arcimboldi, a veritable “theater workshop” and music store (www.teatroarcimboldi.it), conceived by Vittorio Gregotti.

31_Fondazione Pirelli

A Formula One archive

Today it is known mainly for the tires mounted on Ferrari racing cars, but back in the day, Pirelli made much more than just tires, as evidenced in this archive: from the latex swimsuit worn by Marilyn Monroe to raincoats; from the linoleum flooring found in gyms to stiletto heels; from the diving mask worn by 007 – and mentioned by Ian Fleming in *Octopussy* – to foam-rubber sofas. It's a long journey that began in 1872 and spanned the 20th century, especially in Milan. Its symbol *par excellence* is the Pirellone, once the highest skyscraper in Europe. It was built between 1956 and 1960 on the ruins of the original factory, which was destroyed in the war, and housed the company's management offices, until they were relocated to the Bicocca neighborhood.

Pirelli has always stood out from the crowd, with its strong and racy ads – not easy in prudish and Catholic Italy. How to forget its risqué calendars, which were a guaranteed feature in every garage and truck cab the country? The archive's showroom is also like no other: there are TV ads from the 1960s projected on the floor, and an enormous interactive board to play with. An illuminated chess-board chronicles the years of economic boom, the film stars, the Formula One races, and the construction of Milan's metro. Every six months the theme changes; there's no lack of material, after all.

You can view documentaries from 1912, or the 1966 film by Hugh Hudson in which a Pirelli truck pursues a GT driven by a beautiful woman. Two copies remain of the film: one here and one at the MoMA in New York City.

Downstairs are the archive vaults, where the *sancta sanctorum* relics – the holiest of the holiest – are kept, including 200 original sketches by the likes of Ugo Mulas, Bruno Munari, Renato Guttuso, and Jean Grignani, as well as publicity campaigns dating back to the 1920s that have fueled the imaginations of millions of Italians.



Address Viale Sarca 222, 20126 Milan, Tel +39 0264423971, www.fondazionepirelli.org |

Getting there Ponale (M5 lilac line); Sarca / San Glicerio-Chiese (bus 728) | **Hours**

Mon – Fri 10am – 5pm (bookings only) | **Tip** Through the trees where Viale Sarca crosses Via Pirelli, you can see the lovely 15th-century farmhouse called Bicocca degli Arcimboldi, from which the district gets its name.



23—The Crying Madonna

In the courtyard of the old leper colony

Milan has its very own weeping Madonna. Not the famous Madonnina, but the Virgin and Child painted by a monk from Mount Athos and donated to the Russian Orthodox congregation of the Church of Saint Nicholas. A sign on the street indicates the side entrance, which might otherwise go unnoticed. From there, you enter a courtyard immersed in vegetation – there are so many vases and plants scattered around that you can hardly move, and the space is made even more cramped by the dozens of sacred icons, crucifixes, candlesticks, and water pitchers that fill the portico in front of the chapels.

This tiny hybrid between a garden and a courtyard is a veritable oasis of peace and serenity. While sitting on a bench under the loggia, you can sometimes hear, wafting from the first chapel, the soft, plaintive singing of foreign women praying in their own language. Protected under a red velvet canopy, the Virgin and Child receive their guests. And occasionally she weeps, maybe in response to the pain of those who visit: Christians escaping persecution in the Middle East, Eritreans, Russians, Moldavians, and Romanians. The baby Jesus weeps as well. It appears to be a type of vegetable oil that emanates a perfumed essence and leaves no trace on the painting. The phenomenon was first witnessed in the spring of 2010, and is now observed on a regular basis, each time drawing a steady crowd of pilgrims. Legend has it that after visiting the Virgin Mary, a woman was cured of cancer, while another one, apparently unable to have children, gave birth to a healthy boy.

The Metropolitan bishop Evloghios, an 80-year-old man sporting a long white beard, confirms that the mystery “cannot be humanly explained.” But believe it or not, one thing is certain: nestled in the noisy district between Corso Buenos Aires and the central station, this welcoming courtyard is a miracle unto itself.



Address Chiesa Ortodossa Russa San Nicola, Via San Gregorio 5, 20124 Milan |

Getting there Lima (M1 red line); Settembrini (tram 1, 5); Tunisia (tram 1, 5) | **Tip**

At number 20 Corso Buenos Aires – the avenue of shops built in the 19th century after the demolition of the leper colony of the Lazzaretto – is the historic Ambrosiano coffee shop, a small but delightful bar offering a wide variety of coffees (Mon–Sun 7am–7:30pm).



20 Conca dell'Incoronata

When Brera was a little Venice

The great wooden gates that once blocked the flow of water in Milan's canals were designed by Leonardo da Vinci. His drawings of the gates were published in the famous *Atlantic Codex*, which can be admired at the Biblioteca Ambrosiana. These weather-worn, powerful sluices, with their gates still intact, half open, can be seen at the end of Via San Marco, ready to hold back water that is no longer there.

Restored in 1996, and then subsequently neglected again, today the sluices act as a refuge for stray cats and a rubbish dump for windswept litter, which gathers under the brick sentry box and the bridge, the only one built in *ceppo d'Adda* stone. It was a crucial thoroughfare connecting the town built around the Navigli to the Martesana, the canal that linked Milan to the Adda River, extending well beyond the Spanish Walls (built by the city's Spanish rulers in the 16th century). Originally at the height of the "Tombon de San Marc," the site was later moved about 300 feet.

This is where duty was paid on goods and people entering the city, which is why the place came to be known as Ponte delle Gabelle ("Gabelle" after the unpopular salt tax of the same name). Its current name, Conca dell'Incoronata, refers to the 14th-century church of Santa Maria Incoronata. The old-city atmosphere of the place, so rare to find these days, is accentuated by the picturesque *piazzetta*, where a typical palazzo – once used as a warehouse to store goods that were loaded and unloaded in the small port – has been transformed into the Carlsberg beer house. It is worth taking a walk downstairs in the building where you can see the old vaulted red-brick ceilings, and, hanging on the wall, pictures of a time when water still flowed through the Naviglio. The lively and trendy district of Brera is distracting, though, and those who frequent it don't often come this far down.



Address At the end of Via San Marco, at number 45, 20121 Milan | **Getting there** Transit Moscova (M2 green line); Principessa Clotilde (bus 43); Pontaccio (bus 61) | **Tip** At Via San Marco 20 is Brera's most famous restaurant, the legendary El Tombon de San Marc, which takes its name from the old port where the Martesana canal connected to the internal circuit of the Navigli.