

POLITECNICA BUILDING FOR HUMANS SIGNS THE RESTORATION AND REFUNCTIONALIZATION PROJECT FOR PALAZZO MERCALLI, THE NEW HOME OF UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO

Over 7,000 sq m of protected heritage transformed into spaces for offices, teaching and services through an intervention that works by subtraction, respecting and enhancing the building's memory.

Milan, May 7, 2026 - In the centre of Milan, the historic complex at Via Mercalli 23 is being brought back to life as the new administrative and teaching headquarters of **Università degli Studi di Milano**, thanks to the restoration, refunctionalization and building upgrade project designed by **Politecnica Building for Humans** together with **Studio Valle Progettazioni**.

Built in the early decades of the twentieth century at the initiative of Cardinal Ferrari, with a social and educational purpose, the building comprises over 7,000 sq m of protected heritage, now transformed into **contemporary spaces for offices, teaching and services**.

Politecnica developed the entire intervention, from design through to construction supervision, coordinating architecture, structures and building services within a unified scheme that transforms the complex without adding new volumes: it works from within, through subtraction and integration, with the aim of restoring coherence with the building's original function without compromising its historic identity.

A method: designing by subtraction

Over time, Palazzo Mercalli has undergone several transformations that progressively modified its internal layout, accompanying its functional evolution within Milan's urban context.

The **project developed by Politecnica with Studio Valle Progettazioni intervenes selectively**, working by subtraction rather than addition: **it removes the layers accumulated over time, restoring the rooms' original proportions and establishing a new hierarchy of spaces**. This operation is not merely formal. The **recovered rooms are rethought to accommodate contemporary modes of use**, becoming **places for work, teaching and interaction that are more flexible** and adaptable to the needs of a constantly evolving university structure.

The most emblematic choice of this approach is the **underground archive** created beneath the internal courtyard: instead of occupying the open spaces with new volumes, the project excavates, preserving the system of courtyards and the relationship between solids and voids that characterizes the original building organism.

The discovery: a frescoed apse returned to the project

During the construction phase, the opening of several walls brought to light a frescoed apse belonging to the building's former chapel. A discovery that could have complicated the design process became an opportunity: Politecnica integrated the rediscovered space as a representative element of the complex, **where the historic component becomes an active part of the architectural experience**, not merely a relic to be preserved.

This discovery reflects the essence of Politecnica's approach to historic heritage: **the ability to guide a building created for one function toward a new use, enhancing its original identity** rather than merely preserving it, even when the construction site reveals what the documents had not recorded.

The restoration: facades, atrium and flooring

The complex at Via Mercalli 23 is a significant example of late **Milanese Liberty architecture**: a language expressed not only in its volumes, but also in the graffito-decorated facades, ornamental features and surface details.

Politecnica worked on this system with precision, **restoring the original plasterwork, incisions and colours, recovering and repositioning the historic cement-tile flooring, and restoring to the monumental atrium the material quality that time had compromised.**

Structure and accessibility: rewriting the building from within

Alongside the work on the historic fabric, Politecnica designed a **structural intervention aimed at improving the building's safety and performance**, effective yet non-invasive, while keeping the overall perception unchanged.

The reorganization of vertical connections and circulation routes makes **the building more accessible and legible**, while a new distribution structure enables the administrative offices and teaching spaces to function in an integrated way, with support areas and services designed for a broad and diverse university community.

Students enter from the campus side and find **open, continuous environments** where the sequence of spaces fosters not only learning, but also **lingering and interaction**.

The upgraded courtyards and common areas extend this experience outdoors, completing a system in which the university inhabits the historic building without forcing it.

Sustainability: towards LEED® Gold certification

The intervention on Palazzo Mercalli is **currently undergoing LEED® Gold certification**, confirming a design approach oriented towards **environmental sustainability, energy efficiency and the quality of interior spaces**. The certification process accompanies the recovery of the historic complex, integrating advanced performance criteria with respect for the existing heritage and strengthening the value of the intervention as an example of responsible, lasting regeneration.

POLITECNICA BUILDING FOR HUMANS

Politecnica Building for Humans is an integrated design company that manages complexity with method, strategic vision and a multidisciplinary approach capable of bringing different skills into dialogue to generate lasting value for territories and communities.

Founded in 1972, it is now one of Italy's leading integrated architecture, engineering and urban planning design companies. Independent and owned by 45 engineer and architect partners, over the years it has developed public- and private-sector projects in more than 60 countries worldwide, with annual turnover exceeding 30 million euros (2024 estimate).

With four offices in Italy - Modena, Milan, Florence and Rome - and an international presence in 10 countries and 3 continents, Politecnica operates across numerous design sectors, including healthcare, manufacturing, offices, infrastructure and mobility, restoration and industrial archaeology, urban regeneration, hospitality, culture and energy.

POLITECNICA

building for humans

With over 350 people including designers, planners, engineers, consultants and specialist technicians, Politecnica integrates diverse expertise, from building services to urban planning and from structural design to architectural design, enabling it to govern every phase of the design process.

Politecnica develops its projects according to the main international sustainability standards - LEED®, Envision™, BREEAM®, WELL® - integrating ESG criteria and the advanced use of BIM methodology. The company also aligns its activities with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

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Martina Tabacchi

m.tabacchi@keywords.design

M. 3479786355