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IL FONDACO. A PROJECT BETWEEN ART AND ARCHITECTURE IN PORTOFINO



Location: Portofino, Italy
Year: 2014
Type: Architecture, Interior, Design
Client: Niasca Portofino
With: David Tremlett

The Ligurian tradition is reinterpreted in this comprehensive example of the conversation between Luca Cipelletti and David Tremlett, from the restoring of the decorated façade to the interior renovation.

*"A brilliant dialogue between art, design, architecture and landscape that promotes history to the future" - "The result of a virtuous meet between a passionate architect, Luca Cipelletti and a master of contemporary art, David Tremlett...a dialogue as a total project, built on correspondences between art, architecture and design" (Francesca Taroni - Filippo Romeo, **LIVING 6 - 2014** - Corriere della Sera)*

*"The region's stiff architectural stipulations meant that Cippelletti could only faithfully restore what was once there. But he brought on board English artist David Tremlett" - "This is the first time in a hundred years that anyone has brought change to the codified structures of Portofino." (JJ Martin, **WALLPAPER*** - July 2014)*

*"The dominant colors of the village, the classic genoese yellow and red, have been reinterpreted in geometric lines by the wall-drawing Artist David Tremlett, who decorated the facade in the recent renovation of a conviviality shelter, with the aim of reawake the locals and create a movement committed to the recovery of the territory and traditions." (Elisabetta Caprotti, **VOGUE** - May 2015)*

The Fondaco in Portofino is a building without specific architectural quality that is inserted into an exceptional context. Sited on the outskirts of the built part of the village, it sits astride the main road to the Natural Park in the hills above. In recent years, new interventions in the urban fabric of the village reiterated the theme of the "Ligurian façade". Resulting in trivial solutions of little real significance, insofar as this strategy did nothing to promote a harmony of architecture and context and has nothing to do with a genuine cultural reinterpretation of local building practice. This approach, mostly a summary of simple window frames, adopted a decorative language commonly used in the historical past of the region as an artistic strategy based on a form of interpretation that ended up impoverishing the tradition it sought to preserve.

The redevelopment and preservation of the Fondaco is part of [Niasca Portofino](#) initiative, a company founded by residents and regulars who share a passion for the town. Its objective is to recover what is living in the local tradition by reversing the process of abandonment of arable land that in some areas has been uninhabited for a considerable time.

The Fondaco revitalized this part of the town. It makes it into a hub of activity for Niasca and hence also a quintessentially public space: to this end the architect took great care in the design and execution of offices, the "frantoio" (oil press), a research laboratory, and a lecture hall. Yet, by means of this programmatic renewal, the goal was also to generate a new center. This involved a transformation of the site into a highly recognizable place appealing to a new public and serving as a tourist attraction showcasing the natural beauty and local produce of the Park

With these motives in mind, the architect and museographer Luca Cipelletti invited the English artist David Tremlett to collaborate with him. To this end they undertook an in-depth inquiry into local architectural typologies and traditional facades. Focussing his inquiry on color, pattern and material, Tremlett's pictorial intervention radically reinterpreted regional forms, communicating with the context and its historical layers of experience and craft. As such it recuperated chromatically recognizable characteristics by rewriting them anew in a way that highlighted a play of formal motifs and traces of startling contemporaneity. His contribution ended up stimulating a new type of thinking about decoration that spoke to the theme of the Ligurian Façade in a compelling and up-to-date fashion.

The colour scheme follows the Sikkens palette designed specifically for Portofino: in accordance with this scheme, the string course of the building, in gray, orders the two main floors by means of specific chromatic combinations: red on the ground floor (ca' de San Sebastian) and a yellow on the first floor (ca' du frantoio). Tremlett's approach mobilized a series of dynamic frames, opening up the scheme to a set of highly graphic geometries. These followed the situation of the actual building as it moved up the hill as well as the formal logic of the context to create a kind of "magnetic" effect of interlocking elements. In the end what the project proposes is an invitation to continue on the path that takes the visitor to the initiatives and events of the Park.

The same philosophy that animated the mural is evident in the conversation between Tremlett and Cipelletti, which also inspired the renovation of the interior. In this way the exterior and interior enter into a new reading that is reciprocally based upon the idea of a visual and material continuum.

The materials deployed were chosen in accordance with local tradition: Bedonia stone, left in its rough natural state with minimal artifice and used traditionally as paving; olive wood for the doors, furniture and a large main table seven meters long. The choice of rough plaster and interior colors echoes the material and formal strategy of the exterior facades. In the end the project reads as a totality in which the trapezoidal geometries of the facades set up resonances with a whole set of details visible in the door handles and the furniture, the decoration of the dishes, and the internal lighting designed in collaboration with [Studio Pasetti](#).

For more information about Niasca Portofino products', guided tours, cooking classes and more, check www.niascaportofino.it

photo by Henrik Blomqvist | writer: JJ Martin, photography: Danilo Scarpati, Wallpaper*- july 2014