“Milan’s new U.S. Consulate General will add a wonderful new chapter to an historic campus that had once been a special gathering place for Milan’s sporting community. Looking to the future, we know the campus will again become a cultural landmark for Milan—with art exhibitions in the public Liberty Building and open space in the Liberty Plaza—and will support the region with improved consular services and expanded representational spaces. This unique campus will truly represent the full scope of our bilateral relationship, applying the best of both nations’ design and construction methods to promote our common values and continued friendship. This monograph offers a brief insight into the expansive collaboration and diverse expertise of our teams, which will ultimately create a unique Consulate campus that serves American and Italian citizens alike.”

Henry V. Jardine Acting Director
Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations

2021
The new U.S. Consulate General in Milan revives the site’s architectural and historic legacy as a secure, functional, and resilient project—in tribute to the close collaboration of American and Italian people. The Liberty Building (shown on the previous spread in 1905, the year of its construction) is a one-and-a-half story entry pavilion, flanked by two matching, symmetrical structures. The elegant and enduring example of neoclassical architecture with Liberty-style detail will welcome visitors and staff to the new campus.
A VIEW TO THE FUTURE

The rendering at left looks out from the arch of the 1905 Liberty Building, respectfully preserved and repurposed, over the water feature and the restored Pavilion, which frame the new building directly ahead.
The site was long defined by—and developed for—socializing, recreation, and civic engagement. The human scale of the buildings was a result of the activities within, where generations of Milanese people gathered for sporting and cultural events. Three miles northwest of the city center, this once-dynamic hub of community stands decades later as an ideal location for connecting two countries and cultures, with the shared goal of bringing people together once again in the spirit of inspiration, communication, and collaboration.

Iconic enough that its Italian Liberty-style structures and locals on bicycles would appear on postcards and advertisements for Italian bitters, the 10-acre site became outdated and fell into disuse in the 1970s. It sat largely dormant in severe disrepair until 2008, when the U.S. government looked to the site with plans to build the new Consulate General. In 2017, the Department of State’s Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO) contracted New York-based SHoP Architects as the lead architect for the Consulate campus on the legacy site at Piazzale Francesco Accursio.

With a large and broad range of stakeholders, the team identified that smooth collaboration would be key—well before the global pandemic added pressure and complications. More than 20 design and engineering firms worked, innovated, and planned together as an adaptive team to design an expression of individual contributions and collective purpose.

A view of the Liberty Building during restoration for the new campus. The team took every care to preserve its original grandeur while providing state-of-the-art amenities for buildings and visitors.
Creating a secure environment is a driving factor for the new campus, which will have communal spaces for ceremonial and more casual events and meetings. The site map (above) shows significant amounts of green space throughout, including tree groves to reflective gardens. The landscape design was greatly influenced by the historic layout, with layers of contemporary, environmentally- and culturally-sensitive spaces in between. New, healthy trees replace old, diseased ones, with state-of-the-art water retention facilities hidden below the reconstructed formal garden of Liberty Plaza. Gently raised landforms imitate the once-existing berms that were once used for target practice.

“The project truly represents the Milanese identity, a combination of tradition and innovation. You have the tradition of the culture, of restoration and recovery of the historical heritage, and at the same time, a propensity to welcome innovative and contemporary architectural languages.”

Annamaria Terafina
Architect and Landscape Area Coordinator, Superintendent of Archaeology, Fine Arts and Landscape for the city of Milan

“The campus is a very interesting juxtaposition of historic Italian values retained by an old building compound and the adaptive reuse of the site. It all comes together in a fascinating contemporary expression of American architecture, in a very respectful and complementary way.”

Andrea Grassi
Principal, Genius Loci Architettura

The site itself brought additional stakeholders: The Comune di Milano’s 100-year easement gives the municipality a portion near the southern border of the parcel. With input from OBO, the Consulate General and Italian Mission, and the Comune di Milano, the collaboration was cultural, intellectual, and multi-institutional. Milan-based firms provided initial project design and documentation for the historic restoration, working closely with the U.S. team on every detail from wood carving intricacies to utility connection strategies. An added twist was the incorporation
A 1905 cover (above) of the lifestyle magazine *L’Illustrazione Italiana*, showing a festival for the Italian Touring Club, which to this day promotes bicycle tourism in Italy.  

Photo: Biblioteca di Storia Moderna e Contemporanea  

The design team incorporated a water feature (facing, left) with a shallow basin that creates a reflecting surface connecting views of the existing and new architecture with the gentle sound of falling water. Common across the Consulate landscape elements, the plaza that follows the lines of the water was designed according to best practices for universal access as well as pedestrian safety.
of specialists from the Lombardy region’s superintendents of fine arts, who advised and inspired with their expertise across disciplines to assure the preservation of the site’s integrity while revisioning it as a new secure and resilient campus.

The team together achieved a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity on a historic site to create state-of-the-art, safe, and sustainable spaces to conduct business and represent American values. The result is an environment that is respectful and forward-looking in every aspect and that features both Milanese and American design and stewardship.
A rendering within the Pavilion illustrates the planned reconstruction work, including the addition of lighting. These updates to the historic structure will give it new life as a place that workers and visitors won’t simply pass through but can become a vital part of the Consulate’s work.
Originally a kind of social club for the countrywide association Tiro a Segno Nazionale, which is affiliated with the Italian Olympic Committee and the international sports shooting federation, the site houses four historic elements. The 1905 Liberty Building is an intriguing example of neoclassical massing with Liberty-style details and decoration. Italy’s representation of Art Nouveau, Stile Liberty elements are ornate yet restrained and feature prominently throughout the Liberty Building and the historic Pavilion. The former will be fully restored with space for exhibitions, to host visitors, and to celebrate local history.

The nearly 80,000-square-foot Parade Ground — historically the main gathering place for events — connects the Liberty Building with the Pavilion, the second definitive structure. When built, it was more advanced than any firing range, with an expansive tettoia, or canopy, to protect people from the elements. For competitions, the Pavilion was converted from 36 lanes to 72. The team
The Liberty Building will offer a variety of spaces for exhibitions and events, with gallery space (above) to display imagery of the history of the site and surrounding area.

The Pavilion is the only example of floral-decorated wooden architecture in Milan. It visually mimics the long, low lines of the Liberty Building and is adorned with intricate carving details. As part of the new campus, the Pavilion connects the historic and the contemporary parts of the site, framing views of the Liberty Building to the east and the office building to the west.

In these relationships between the structures, the lines that define access are integral to the site’s

retained and reimagined this design to serve a wide variety of functions, including as a consular arrival path and an event and meeting space.

The other historic architectural aspects are a fragment of fencing, its details reinterpreted and incorporated into the proposed perimeter wall, and a 23-foot-high masonry wall, originally used as shelter during target practice exercises, that will be structurally stabilized and displayed as a ruin in the contemporary site plan.

The cafe (above) pays tribute to the historic coffee shop that was once here. A mix of traditional and sleek furniture pieces, materials and finishes give the space new life while respecting the importance of coffee in Milanese culture.
The Liberty Building, with its sprawling yet orderly footprint, establishes the principal axis through its portico and decorated steel gate. Perpendicular to it, the new building, the Pavilion, and the nearby embankment create an axis that visitors can follow from Piazzale Accursio to the water feature of Liberty Plaza. A series of gateways, pavilions, and gardens along the way humanize the scale of the spaces and offer moments to enjoy the landscape. The new office building, which is centered on the principal
The deteriorated Pavilion (above) required demolition. But thanks to historic documents and reports of existing conditions, such as the image from 1905 (left), and the detailed elevation of the central pavilion (next page, right), the arcade will be precisely rebuilt to its original grandeur.

Photo: Biblioteca di Storia Moderna e Contemporanea

axis, initiates a constant visual dialogue between past and present design elements to complete the promenade — inviting a respectful, reflective, and chronological walk through the site’s history that preserves the security necessary for any consulate project.
As seen from the main access road, this rendering (left) shows the formal arrival court, where dignitaries are first introduced to the site. Trees and gardens are interspersed with ample seating to set a serene, relaxed tone for a variety of events or meetings.
The site reflects its history as a communal space, drawing people in and promoting a natural flow of movement centered around encouraging social engagement and inclusion. The triangular Liberty Plaza features a welcoming public garden that orients visitors to the first pavilion they will pass through: the Liberty Building.

A 1,300-square-foot reflecting pool mirrors the rich architectural styles and materiality surrounding it. The pool, serving as a threshold to the rest of the site, is flanked by Italian-made long-format planters that reference the brickwork of the historic buildings and connect the crafts and textures across generations. The serenity of the pool also adds a subtle measure of security that functions as a ha-ha—a recessed landscape element that allows for expansive views without granting access. Though only visitors on official consulate business will proceed beyond this point, the views connect everyone to the experience.

The space is visually welcoming for all, without the hedged-in feeling of an enclosed campus.

In the garden, the Wave/Cave sculpture, designed and manufactured by SHoP and its collaborators, represents the spanning of time as experienced on the site. To create the contemporary art piece, the team applied next-generation technologies to one of architecture’s oldest, most proven materials, terracotta—uniting 1,670 individually crafted blocks of it into one coherent form.

Federica Vallabrega

“The new consulate building in Milan will be the platform on which the United States government engages our Italian counterparts on all political, economic, and cultural initiatives for years to come. I’m excited to play a role in realizing this objective.”

Jason DeRosa
Management Officer, U.S. Consulate General Milan

“The design summit SHoP Architects held in New York with OBO and other stakeholders was a huge success and a particularly memorable moment. It turned skeptical city officials into project partners, fully on board with the design team’s vision and direction, and fostered a spirit of teamwork that has continued to this day.”

Maurizio Dovigi
Real Estate Manager, U.S. Department of State

Wave/Cave, the freestanding terracotta structure (top right) designed by SHoP Architects and MBA Keramik, was originally constructed for Interni’s 2017 “Material Immaterial” exhibition at FuoriMilan. Two modest, grounded brick buildings (middle) reinforce the symmetry of the site layout and create welcoming entry points to the campus. The plaza entry of the Liberty Building (bottom) will feature a sculpture by Beverly Pepper.

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Maurizio Dovigi
Real Estate Manager, U.S. Department of State
“This project has certainly moved me both materially and immaterially. I think it will bring a breath of fresh air from an architectural point of view and be widely considered a part of the city.”

Franco Zinna
Architect and Director, Urban Design, Urban Planning Department of the Municipality of Milan

“It was a challenge to bring a function of international importance to an area that needed major redevelopment, but also an opportunity to ignite the positive transformation of the whole area. The campus has all the characteristics to become an important place of interest for the whole city.”

Giovanni Oggioni
Deputy Building Department Director, Urban Planning Department of the Municipality of Milan

The diagram (above) shows the new building inserted along the site’s central axis. Taken from the main archway in the Liberty Building, this photograph (left) looks out to where the new building will be constructed.
One of OBO’s primary goals for each project is natural resource stewardship in concert with resilient design, and the team is dedicated to leveraging sustainable practices throughout the planning, design, and construction process. Water was identified as a key resource to conserve in Milan, leading to bioretention facilities and stormwater vaults across the site that will prevent stormwater runoff from inundating the city’s sewers while providing for the reuse of the runoff.

Due to the careful interplay of design, engineering, and the geothermal system, almost zero heating energy will be required. The ground-source system supplements the heating and cooling services, with process water stored for site irrigation. Solar and ground-sourced heat—geothermal energy, coupled with photovoltaic panel arrays—will save 43 percent of annual energy costs, exceeding local efficiency requirements. The window-to-wall ratio is optimized to 25 percent to prevent heat gain, LED lighting offers sophisticated occupancy sensors and daylighting controls, and the air systems feature demand-controlled ventilation as well as dynamic pressure and temperature resets.

Working in collaboration, the result is a design that solves for lower energy costs, reduced greenhouse-gas emissions, increased security, and resiliency strategies that advance the shared goal of the United States and Italy to augment renewable energy usage. These environmental stewardship efforts will result in a consulate prepared for the future, projected to achieve LEED Gold certification.
The team conducted a series of design reviews for the façade using digital renderings (above) and full-size mockups (facing page). In the SHoP Architects fabrication lab, the team explored options for materiality and fenestration (far right, bottom) and how to best illuminate the building’s skin (far right, top).
Designed as a gathering place for the Consulate General, the staff courtyard (right) echoes the original purpose of the campus as a place to come together. Whether the space is used to host all-hands meetings or more casual events, with stadium seating in the sunken garden beneath the lit canopy, it serves as the ideal environment to support the multifaceted work of the campus.
This rendering shows the new building as the embodiment of the project goals: to provide functional, secure spaces for productive, collaborative work that fit within the historic context. The team approached every aspect of the innovative building, shown here from the historic canopy, to complement and enrich its environment rather than compete with the elements around it.
The main lobby is carefully detailed as an impressive yet warm space to welcome staff and visitors alike. The space is scaled to not overwhelm those who pass through, while the large Great Seal expresses a more official welcome to the Consulate General.

The addition of the office building to this historic site subtly reflects — and clearly respects — the past. While it is the main event functionally and architecturally, it is also directly correlated, physically and philosophically, to the elements around it.

The chancery is formed of two volumes: a five-story tower atop a plinth. The tower volume, on the site’s central east-west axis, ensures that the design connects—not competes—with the site, including the Liberty Building. For anyone approaching, the consular garden, the historic Pavilion and Parade Ground offer an immediate sense of context for the new building, while leading them to the building’s entrance.

Overall, the design celebrates the materiality of Italian architecture, using a mix of modern and historic methods and materials. The façade is an intricate framework of digitally-processed and fabricated stone panels in a warm cream color, recalls the buildings at the historic center and piazzas of Milan, as well as other Italian cities. The panels gradate from transparent to solid, with a depth of texture that is deepest at the base and recedes as it climbs the façade. The effect evokes a rusticated, relatively rougher-surfaced base that transforms to a precise edge that meets the sky. The coloring picks up the earthy hues of the terracotta roofs and wood columns of the Pavilion and the Liberty Building. The overall effect is timeless, presenting a functional, efficient face that references the classical elements around it.

The new U.S. Consulate General offices will improve our ability to serve Americans and Italians. The preservation and restoration of the Liberty Building shows how much the United States values Italy’s architectural history. It will also be a unique space we can open to the Italian public for cultural events, meetings, presentations, and for showcasing the strength of our bilateral relationship.”

Rober Leadham
Consul General, U.S. Consulate in Milan
“The project takes its DNA from the buildings on the site and Milan. It was always about creating something that has that DNA but then leverages technology to bring the old-world craftsmanship of the city and the site into the 21st century. We used technology to unlock all those traditional elements — the stone, the metalwork, the woodwork — and make sure they were speaking the same languages, in an expression of today.”

William Sharples
Founding Principal, SHoP Architects

“Milan is so significant in the design world that we wanted to pay our respects to the importance of that legacy but also showcase American design and designers, in the furnishings, the artwork. We selected this beautiful creamy white marble, rich woods, a burled walnut you’d find in traditional Italian architecture, richly patterned, deeply colored stones. All of this pays tribute to Milan — and then you have the work of artists like the Haas Brothers, with their colorful, whimsical sculptures and contemporary American presence.”

Coren Sharples
Founding Principal, SHoP Architects

“We focused on scale and materiality. Milan is so gorgeous because it operates on all scales. The buildings are compelling from afar in their iconic forms. Then the richness reveals itself the closer you get, into the stone, the textures, the details, the craft. Our design has a presence and a strength, but it’s also subdued in a way that respects and contributes to the fabric of the city.”

Dana Getman
Principal, SHoP Architects

A central goal of the Consulate General is to inspire and welcome visitors, whether coming to conduct business at a consular window (right) or joining the staff for conferences and presentations (above).
Inside, a variety of effective working and meeting spaces present a similar mix of past inspiration and present-day innovation. The materiality is inherently Milanese, inspired by traditional materials that are reimagined with new patterns and assembly. A reception area beyond the main lobby features a milled stone counter with a unique multicolor marble that contrasts and complements the wall panels, which in turn echo the facade panels.

Adjacent to reception is a large, double-curved stairwell that sweeps and tapers as it moves up. Designed as the main circulation method, it is a statement in quality of craft, refined detail, and thoughtful proportion that draws people to the gallery above, a triple-height space with panoramic site views. The consular waiting area continues the use of large-format marble panels and a rich wood plank ceiling that references the historic canopies outside. Visitors are welcomed into consular booths that instill a sense of security and privacy, lined in deep green, sound-absorbing soft velvet ribbed panels with Italian green marble wainscotting.
A true 21st-century center for practicing American diplomacy, the new Consulate General campus is an expression of globally influenced design that celebrates and advances local tradition. It will serve as an enduring testament to cross-cultural collaboration—not only between two countries, but also to honor all of the places where exceptional individuals met throughout history, and will continue to meet into the future.
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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BUREAU OF OVERSEAS BUILDINGS OPERATIONS
This oblique plan of the central site (below) shows the importance of the main axis from the decorated steel gate of the Liberty Building to the new building. The axis ensures a constant visual dialogue between historic and contemporary elements, honoring the site's past while embracing its modern-day reinvention.