

A success story: Skyscraper of Melegnano

The Problem

Autumn 1993. The city of Melegnano (south of Milano, Italy) had a problem: the tallest building, right in the heart of the city had become an eyesore. This ten story dwelling had, through age, deteriorated into an unpleasant concrete bunker sitting prominently in the center of town. The architect who had the job of restoring the structure called on me because of my reputation for handling color.

The Solution

I studied the building, its setting in the city, the climate, the prevailing lighting and I met a lot of the people who live in the building. Melegnano is quite far north, almost as far north as the Canadian border in North America, and the sun is quite low in the sky for most of the year. The southern face of the building get much more sun that the north face and, in general, the climate is gray and foggy much of the year.

With this research I designed a color scheme that would respond to the building, it's setting and the climate, a design that would make the building itself imitate and amplify the natural light of the sun. I choose a bright yellow as the basic tonality to reduce the pervasive gray of the climate. Each face of the building needed a different shade of the base color because of the different amount of light each face receives and reflects into the streets below. And each floor of the building needed a different shade too. Lower floors receive less light and need a lighter shade and higher floors needed darker and more saturated versions of the base tonality to balance the light along the structure.

Something else I did was to paint the undersides of the balconies the average color of the sky, with a little emphasis on blue, in order to give the inhabitants more sense of an open sky above their heads.

The Results

Spring 1996. The color design was very, very well received. The architect and the Mayor were so grateful to see the eyesore transformed into a warm, inviting building that brings up all the buildings in its area with its warm reflected light. For me the most gratifying comments have been from the people who live in and around the building. They are very pleased to live in a building that they say is transformed.

Laura Ruggeri

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Pantheon Design

4701 Monterey Oaks Blvd. #1026, Austin, Texas 78749 USA

t. (512) 899-0535 -- c. (512) 694-7859 -- info@PantheonDesign.com -- www.PantheonDesign.com