



Ca' Scarpa. The architectural project Sheet by Studio Scarpa

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On first inspection, the Church of Santa Maria Nova appeared stripped of its religious symbolism and 'invaded' by structures with a clear functional character serving the large depository of documents of the Intendenza di Finanza, kept in mighty cabinets resting on the ground and accessible on three levels via metal decks. The iron structure, dating back to the 1980s, had been placed inside the church, keeping it independent of the historical masonry, and the large cupboards, which had already been removed at the time, left obvious marks by the presence of through-holes in the floors on all floors.

The existing staircase and hoist proved to be inadequate for the new function intended to accommodate the public, while the presence of the plaster ceiling protected and concealed the now visible wooden roof.

A thorough analysis of the building immediately revealed valuable traces of the presence of numerous historical passages, which the project aimed to preserve and enhance. Tobia Scarpa's intervention takes the form of a skilful mending of the tears produced in the factory by the presence of heterogeneous functions at different historical moments.

Closing the gaps in the attics has allowed the entire floor area to be reappropriated, maintaining open and flexible spaces that are well suited to the exhibition requirements. The rooms are directly connected by the new staircase, which, like a thin ribbon, runs from the ground floor to the upper floors, allowing a clear view of the church's central direction at all times. Two overlapping floor openings have been kept open and allow the eye, like all the horizontal and vertical crossings in the building, to traverse the internal volume of the church in all directions, without interruption.

The new staircase, made of iron and concrete made integral to form a structure with a limit thickness of 8 centimetres, is completed by the parapets with thin vertical bars that accompany the staircase and wrap around the perimeter of all the decks, allowing the view from any point, even observing the "mute" capitals of the two monumental stone columns.

The placement of the staircase in the initial part of the hall has as a counterpoint in the apse the new technical volume housing all the most efficient plant equipment, toilets and the lift, indispensable for adapting the building to the new museum functions. The entire plant distribution network runs on the ceiling and wall, 'designed' openly.

The conformation of the apsidal volume follows the spirit of the existing metal structure and is configured as an element totally independent of the historical masonry of the church. The choice of the colour black is also in line with the objective of condensing and attenuating its presence in space. The small 'alley' that forms between the new technical volume and the apsidal curvature becomes, also thanks to the lighting, a magical place to walk through and perfectly integrated into the exhibition route, also as a necessary escape route.

A fundamental role for the perception of the space and for a better enjoyment of the works to be exhibited from time to time was played by the design of all the luminaires. The lamp designed for the exhibition areas has a different lighting-technical character from that of classical point

source lamps: a linear LED light source contained by two shell-like shells has been used, which, when opening and closing, direct the light directly or reflect it onto the surfaces. This linear source system mimics the effect that occurs when an object is illuminated by sunlight. Each luminaire consists of two lamps that can be rotated and 'dimmed' separately, providing a wide range of application possibilities. The same light source is declined, within the spaces of the church, as a ceiling lamp, wall lamp and floor lamp, to irradiate the architecture, objects or images on display from time to time.

On the third floor, in the attic, prepared for a 50-seat room with provision for the necessary technology for projections and video conferences, a specific lighting system has been designed: the lamps take the form of long luminous wooden "tubes" inserted between the chains of the trusses, with the ability to rotate 180 degrees and direct the beam of light at will by manually adjusting the inclination. For the lighting of the staircase, Tobia Scarpa created a ceiling-to-floor light installation of great impact and technical refinement in a combination of light bars, wood and small gold leaf details.

The exhibition system is arranged as a flexible and changeable element, always in relation to specific themes and exhibition moments. Currently, the exhibition makes use of large lime-wood frames measuring 4 x 2 metres, in which beautiful large-format presentations of photographic material can be made.

