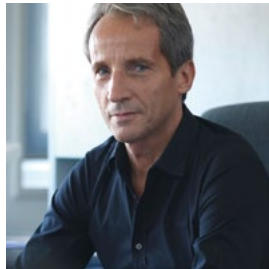


“The beginning of the creative process is the most stimulating part of all the draft stage.”



Paolo Balzanelli

Paolo Balzanelli studied architecture at Polytechnic University of Milan in 1990, graduating with highest honors. He was an assistant professor at the Polytechnic from 1990 to 1995, and a freelance architect in Milan, Strasbourg, and London from 1995 to 2000. Balzanelli established Paolo Balzanelli//Arkispazio in 2000 in Milan. His practice undertakes projects at different architectural scales, including the redevelopment of industrial areas, museum upgrades, and apartment renovations. His works have been featured in prestigious architecture magazines and publications.

PROJECT NAME—Gruppo Cimbali headquarters
LOCATION—Milan, Italy
COMPLETED—2016
AREA—15,069 square feet (1,400 square meters)
DESIGN—Paolo Balzanelli//Arkispazio
PHOTOGRAPHY—Germano Borrelli
CLIENT—Gruppo Cimbali S.p.A.

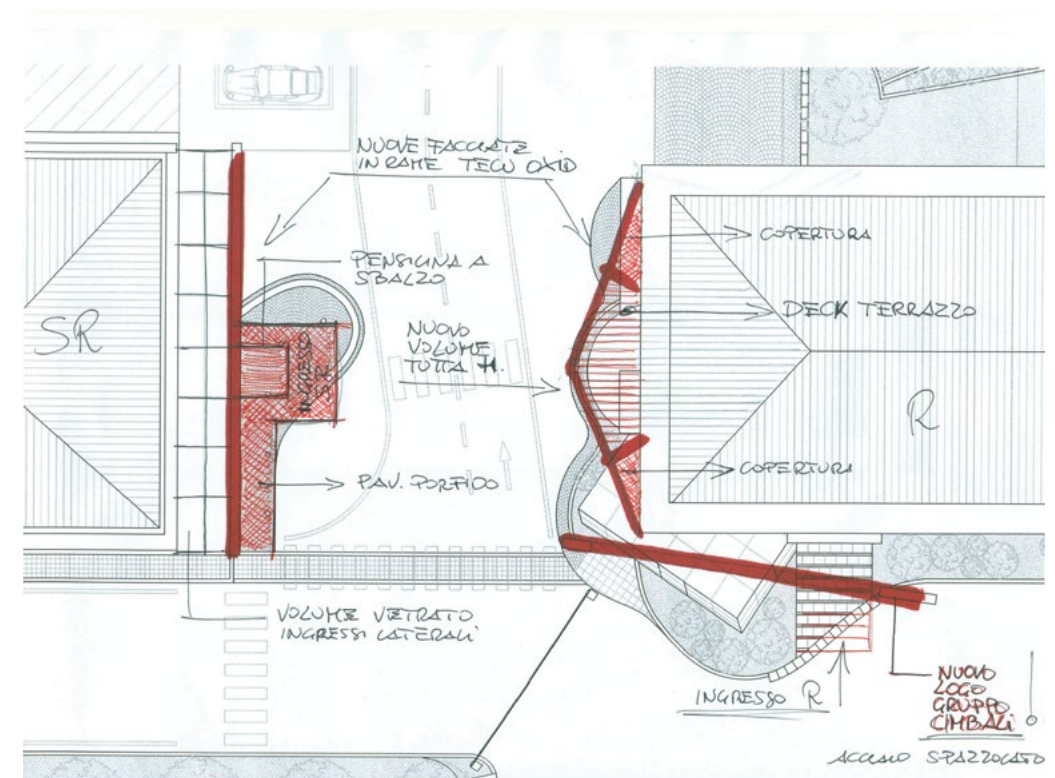
Gruppo Cimbali engaged Paolo Balzanelli//Arkispazio for the restoration of two important buildings for its reception and showroom. The restoration work began with creating a more contemporary space.

The reception building is marked by a new prow-shaped volume that turns to the showroom building. The new volume hosts two new meeting rooms on the ground floor and a terrace on the upper level. It also visually absorbs the glass cube of the switchboard. The prow is coated with a pre-oxidized copper skin; the clippings emphasize the vertical



rhythm of the main façade. The material is the same as the existing portal, oxidized with time.

The showroom façade can be seen as a whole, thanks to its curvilinear protrusion. Its simple linear form is emphasized by the pre-oxidized copper-sheet coating, which is also on the facing façade of the reception extension, thereby relating the two renovated buildings to each other.



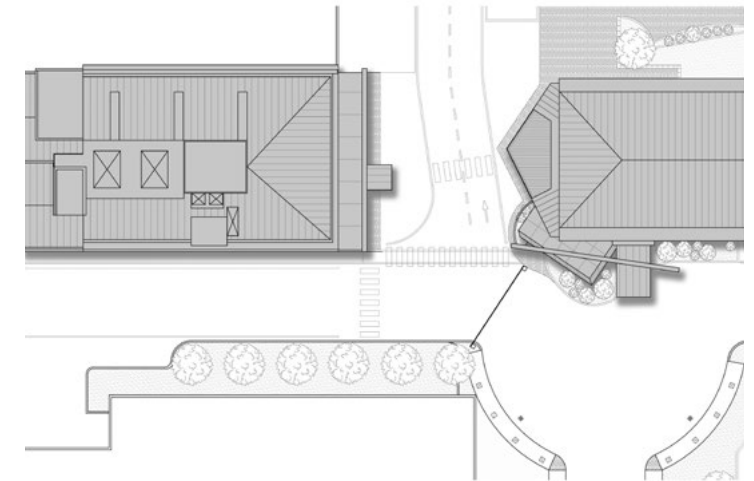
Floor plan

How do you resolve the unfavorable factors of site conditions?

The study of the characteristics of the site is essential and decisive to starting the project in an ideal way. The great architect Renzo Piano wrote that the first thing he does is measure the site with his own steps. The site must be studied in an analytical way, and also in a creative way. Reinterpreting the site is the first step towards the project.

How do you put forward solutions comprehensively and objectively without any prejudices?

It is important not to have any prejudices, leaving the mind free to create something that in the first attempts was not possible. It may be important to leave the project for a little time and come back to it with "new eyes." Be open minded. New issues may be noted that were not evident before.



Planimetry

How do you understand the importance of spatial visualization in your work?

Very often, I close my eyes and imagine being inside the space that I am designing and how to move through it. It's like a "dream-like memento," which can bring me new ideas. For me, architecture is creating a spatial shell within which people can move. This is the great difference between architecture and other visual arts.

How do you coordinate the relationship between function, space, style, and circulation?

The study of the site, functions, and circulation are the generating principles of the project. Certainly, any architect interprets them based on their own sensitivity. The style is the creation of a recognizable language; it is not a factor that can generate a project. I don't like the idea of having a recognizable style.

How do your plans and ideas help with the derivation of a design?

The beginning of the creative process is the most stimulating part of the draft stage. I start to design the first ideas when



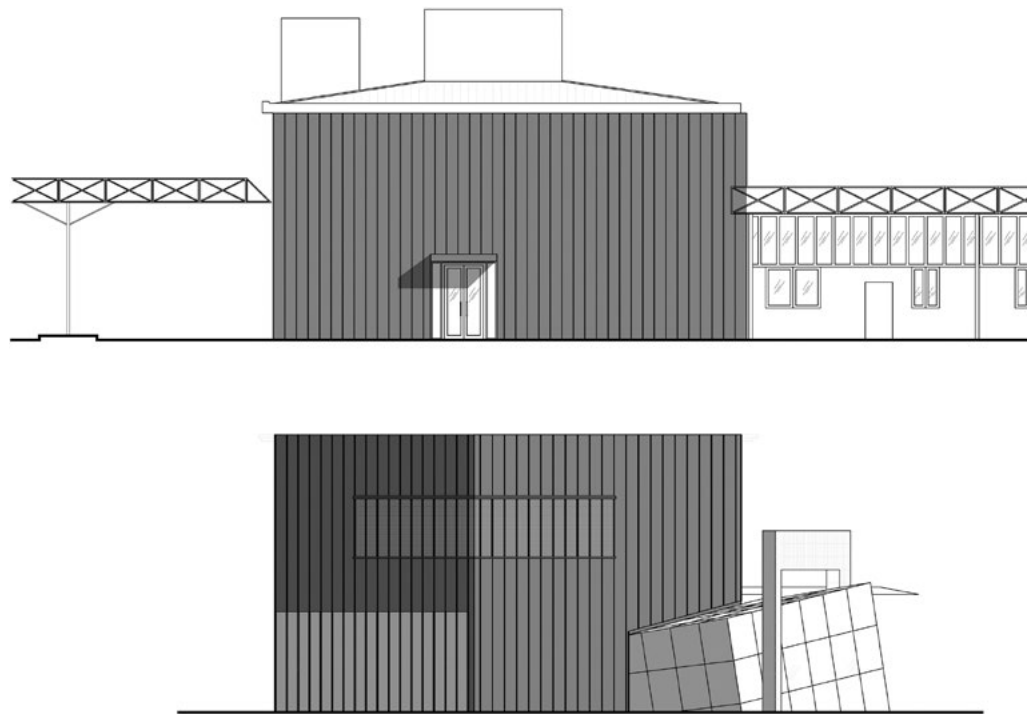
I am sure I have carefully analyzed the site and the client's requests. You must always think that the first ideas are not necessarily the best.

How do you try to understand your clients' intentions?

The client's intentions and requirements are an essential part of the creative process. The constraints that are located along the route must not be seen as a limitation but as generating principles.

How do you deal with incorporating your clients' proposals into your design schemes?

Being a very good architect is not enough to make a good project. It is essential to have a good client who has clear ideas and knows their needs very well. A very good client of mine once told me, "The client must know when it is time to stop asking and let the architect do the work."



Elevations





How do you make evaluations and judgments on your own schemes?

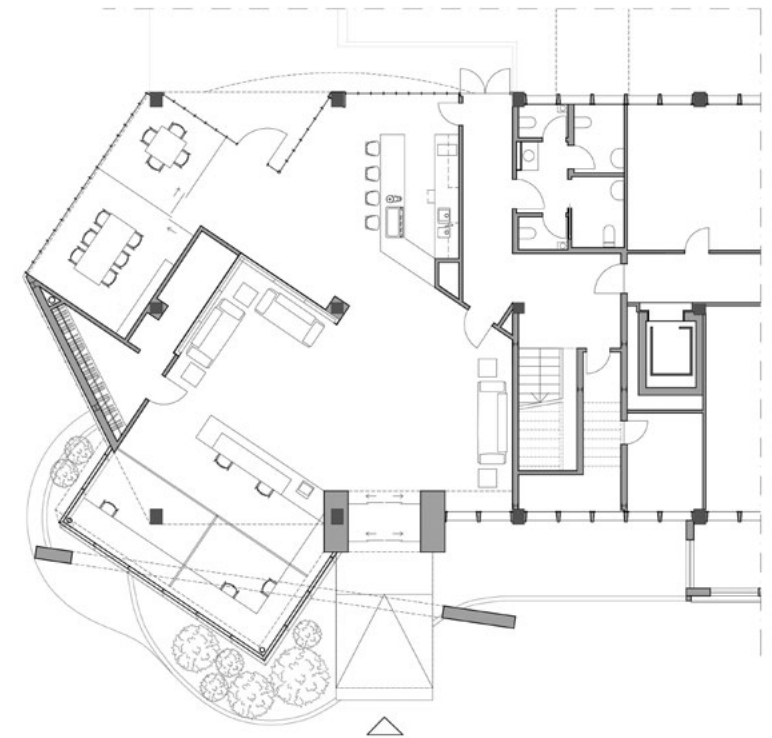
I have a very simple creative process that I have followed for many years. According to this process, the project must answer the functional program, which depends on the client's needs in a specific place and with a specific budget. Every designer has to deal with these constraints by following their own sensitivity that grows and changes over the years.

How do you stay curious in complex and disordered situations?

Curiosity and the wish to learn and improve every day are basic factors to try to be a better designer and a better person. Without a healthy curiosity, one does not improve in any workplace.

Why do you believe an effective design measure is still promising, even when it cannot be implemented?

I do not believe that a creative process cannot be implemented. One must have a consolidated scheme, but it is also correct to be ready to make changes. For example, the study of the site is the first stage of the creative process, but it must not be done in a schematic and repetitive way. We must be able to identify the principle peculiarities of a site and to know how to reinterpret it. Learn from the masters,



Reception plan



Showroom plan

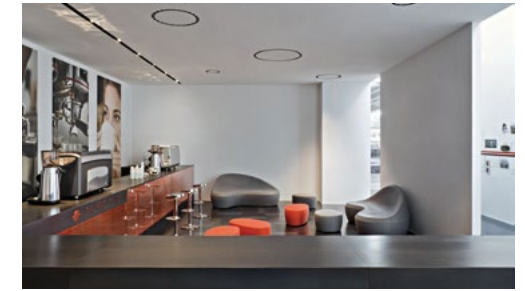
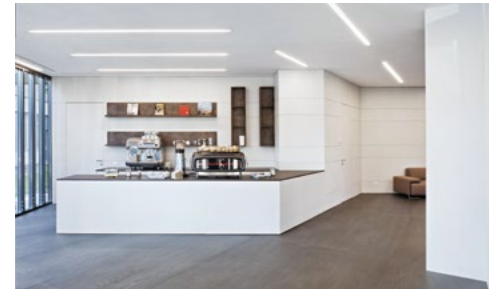
for example, Herzog & de Meuron's Museo der Kulturen in Switzerland. Look at the roofs of the existing buildings and look at the roof of the new building, which is the essence of the project .

Why do you think it is necessary for an architect to stop a design scheme when it has deviated from the design direction?

A pause of reflection can be very useful. If you think that you are locked in the creative process, it is better to leave and do something else, and then go back to the design with a fresh mind.

How do you make a comprehensive judgment on a design's progress and optimize the process?

Especially when entering the executive stage of the project, it is very important to optimize the process of work, especially for the variants of project that, inevitably, will have to be done. Therefore, it is better to be very organized and have a tested way to proceed. Using a parametric drawing software is indispensable to optimize time in a work that may be monotonous and repetitive.



How do you identify critical problems and seek solutions?

It can happen very often to have problems during the design process. I look forward to resolving them in a creative way. Sometimes the problems may improve the project because they make you see things from another point of view.

What role does teamwork play in identifying problems that may have been overlooked?

We must never forget that architecture is teamwork. We always have to find the suitable technical consultants to ask the right questions to. That's why I dedicated a lot of time to building my network of consultants and external suppliers, which allows me to easily explore projects of different functional themes, and also to move from small-scale work to a larger scale. It is not a causality that the first monographic book about Arkispazio is titled *Thought-out Spaces: 15 projects from 10 to 1,000,000 square meters*.

How do you respond to unexpected problems that occur during the design process?

The main purpose of the project is to anticipate the reality. A good designer must envision—a few months before what is going to be built and or even a few years after construction is completed. However, problems can always happen. Sometimes a problem may lead to unexpected advantages, if you face them without panic and in a creative way. It's not easy, sometimes is not possible, but sometimes it can be done.