PRESS RELEASE

Assicurazioni Generali: the historic "Olivetti Showroom" in St Mark's Square, Venice, to house the Fondo Ambiente Italiano

Trieste 15 July 2009. Assicurazioni Generali has signed an agreement granting the FAI Fondo Ambiente Italiano – the National Trust for Italy – use of the "Olivetti Showroom" in St Mark's Square, Venice, on a gratuitous loan basis. Owned by the insurance company, the showroom is a prime example of contemporary Venetian architecture.
As home to the FAI's Venice office, the "Olivetti Showroom" will host cultural events – conferences and exhibitions – and act as an information point for visitors investigating the history and art of Venice and the Veneto region.

Assicurazioni Generali chairman **Antoine Bernheim** said: "The agreement with the FAI for the Olivetti Showroom is a further tangible sign of Generali's commitment to and affection for Venice, in addition to the forthcoming restoration of the façade of the Procuratie in St Mark's Square. It also reflects the importance our Group attaches to providing specific support for cultural and artistic initiatives, as a way to achieve a permanent improvement in the quality of life and well-being of the local community."

FAI president **Giulia Maria Crespi** said: "The FAI considers it a great honour to take over management of the Olivetti Showroom designed by Carlo Scarpa. The showroom is a delightful gem, a tiny location overlooking the most beautiful square in the world, planned and designed down to the tiniest detail, where the harmony between the space and the decor creates a "total masterpiece"! We are deeply grateful to Assicurazioni Generali for responding to the many invitations to return this outstanding example of Italian culture from the 1950s to the community and for choosing the FAI as the ideal partner to bring the project to fruition."

Situated on two floors in the Procuratie Vecchie in St Mark's Square, and owned by Assicurazioni Generali, the "Showroom" was created between 1957 and 1958 from a project by architect Carlo Scarpa commissioned by Adriano Olivetti. Intended originally as a prestigious showcase for the company's office products, it would later come to be regarded as one of the most important examples of 20th Century architecture in Venice.

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THE OLIVETTI SHOWROOM

Brief historical profile and critical assessment

The project

Having won the Olivetti Award for Architecture in 1956, in 1957 Carlo Scarpa was commissioned to design the Olivetti Showroom in St Mark's Square by Adriano Olivetti, a distinguished name in Italy's postwar cultural circles.

The location

The Showroom is located in Crosera de piazza, a key position in St Mark's Square, under the colonnade of the Procuratie Vecchie and overlooking the huge square. Scarpa transformed this small site, a sort of corridor measuring 20 x 4 m, into a locale of impressive scope and transparency that blends seamlessly with the city's history and architecture.

The materials

Great care was taken in selecting the building materials, which include local Istrian stone for the sign outside the shop, Belgian black marble beneath a veil of water for the plinth of the gilt sculpture by Alberto Viani, suspended slabs of Aurisian marble for the impressive staircase, African teak for the parapets and ceilings.
The various elements are linked by an unusual mosaic floor made of irregularly shaped rectangles of glass, in red, blue or gold to indicate the various areas of the showroom.

Architectural significance

In the Olivetti Showroom Scarpa flanks his clear vision of space and light with meticulous attention to formal detail and a design of unparalleled refinement. Only the extraordinary construction skills of Carlo Scarpa could have turned an anonymous passageway into an integrated space that eliminates the distinction between interior and exterior to achieve an admirable visual continuum with the famous square. As Ragghianti wrote in 1959, the Olivetti Showroom is unquestionably "one of the most limpid masterpieces of contemporary architecture".[1]

The relationship between architect-client

"The Showroom shows just how important the relationship between the architect and the client is for the success of a project. From this point of view, too, the Showroom is a pertinent lesson in an age notable for its dearth of accomplished architects and enlightened patrons. Adriano Olivetti was one such patron and the Showroom Scarpa designed for him is also a crucial document in the history of Italian entrepreneurialism, which Adriano ennobled more than any other." Francesco Dal Co, 2009[2]

Editor Lucia Borromeo Dina
FAI Chief Scientific Officer

[1] Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, *La "Crosera de piazza" di Carlo Scarpa*, in ZODIAC, no. 6, 1959, pp. 128-147
[2] from: Il Notiziario del FAI no. 112, Sept-Oct-Nov 2009, interview with Francesco Dal Co edited by Lucia Borromeo