

'O SOLE

LOCATED ON THE PIAZZA CORDUSIO IN MILAN IS THE FIRST CARLO PAZOLINI FLAGSHIP STORE OUTSIDE THE FORMER EASTERN BLOC.



MIO

**Designer GIORGIO BORRUSO puts his best foot forward with a new store in Milan for Russian shoe brand Carlo Pazolini.**

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PHOTOS ALBERTO FERRERO



**BORRUSO CREATED CURVED ELEMENTS THAT SERVE AS BOTH SHELVES AND SEATING; A DYNAMIC ARRANGEMENT OF THESE SVELTE SHELLS ADORNS THE REAR WALL OF THE STORE.**





THE REAR WALL IN THE MEN'S SECTION IS A CURVED EXPANSE OF WHITE PLASTER FEATURING CANTILEVERED CABINETS, SHELVES AND AN ORIGINAL COLUMN.



## The store is a stage and the piazza an auditorium

A METRE-WIDE STRIP OF ALUMINIUM SERVES AS A PORTAL TO THE OFFICE HIDDEN IN THE BACK AND IS BENT UP TO COVER THE SALES COUNTER.

Milan may be the world capital of design, at least for marketing, but the city's true passion is fashion. Armani is everywhere, and other top names are clustered together in the chic boutiques of the Quadrilatero. Now a new kid has joined the pack: Carlo Pazolini, which has opened a flagship store on the Piazza Cordusio. No surprise if you haven't heard the name before: it's a Russian company with 150 stores in the former Eastern bloc, and this is its first foray to the West. Ilya and Marina Reznik, an enterprising couple who trained as engineers, anticipated the collapse of the Soviet Union and, in 1990, started selling high-quality Italian-made footwear and bags. Carlo Pazolini doesn't exist; the Rezniks gave the brand a fictitious name.

The Russians planned their invasion with care. They found a space with the impressive frontage of a department store and took over the lease from McDonald's, earning the gratitude of the mayor for 'liberating' the site. They hired

LA-based designer Giorgio Borroso and told him: 'We want to go international; can you give us a language that has the power to impress fashion centres, and bring the brand to a higher level?' The Rezniks had no interest in showing him their Russian stores. That was history; now they were looking ahead. Borroso understood their need to make a statement. He researched Pazolini and discovered they had a good product. 'I'm Italian, so if I wear their shoes they have to be good,' he says. 'The client left me completely free to devise an appropriate response, designing elements that defined the language and could be combined in different ways according to the size and location of future stores.'

Borruso began by sketching forms that could serve as display shelves and seating. He found inspiration in the beauty and flexibility of his small son's feet. Of course, as Bernard Rudofsky observed many years ago, women are fashion victims who force their feet into high-

heeled shoes with sharply pointed toes that are hideously uncomfortable and disfiguring. It doesn't matter: the gods of fashion must be served, in Milan above all. A major challenge was to maximize the impact of the concave glass façade: expansive display windows set into a beaux-arts building. By clustering the shelves on the back wall and introducing colour accents in a monochromatic interior, Borroso created a secondary façade that reaches out to the pavement, especially when brightly lit after dark.

The 30-m-long interior was gutted, with the exception of a pair of cast-iron Corinthian columns from the original structure. The floor was covered with large pavers of high-gloss white porcelain, providing a durable surface that is easy to clean. Two-thirds of the rear wall was clad in narrow strips of black wood, and the ribs, set at different depths, peel away at one end. The shelves cantilever on metal rods like outstretched hands, and they mediate between the lofty >>>



## Borruso found inspiration in the beauty and flexibility of his small son's feet

space and the human-scaled bags and boots. A metre-wide strip of aluminium serves as a portal to the office hidden in the back and is bent up to cover the sales counter. The men's section to the right of the entry is more austere. The rear wall is a curved expanse of white plaster, broken only by cantilevered aluminium cabinets and shelves and a second canopy, which frames a couple of vitrines. Mirrors are tilted against the end walls to extend the vistas.

Here, as in many previous jobs, Borruso exploited the Italian genius for craft and invention, seeking collaborators to flesh out his concepts. He wanted seating that would morph out of the shelves to achieve a continuity of shape and texture between objects on the wall and those on the floor. Making it possible was the expertise of inventive furniture designer Paola Lenti. She came up with novel idea of bonding polymer and wool felt without glue, and varying the density of the polymer to provide a soft

surface for sitting and a rigid back for support. As Borruso notes: 'It's a process that has never been used before, and it allowed us to create pieces that are light yet resilient and have a sharp-edged profile that seems to float in the void.' A thinner, harder shell is employed for the display shelves, and the tubular metal brackets are echoed in the frames that support chairs and love seats. Most are green with a white-felt lining, but yellow, orange, and charcoal enliven the mix as they sparkle against the expanses of black and white. Coincidentally, the orange evokes the trams that trundle past the door.

For Borruso, the store is a stage and the piazza an auditorium that's thronged throughout the day. Carlo Pazolini is a spectacle that draws people in, but it's also a poetic fantasy that captures the imagination on different levels. Borruso is a dreamer with a firm grasp of practicalities, building his stage sets a piece at a time. In studying the human foot as a model, he

## CARLO PAZOLINI

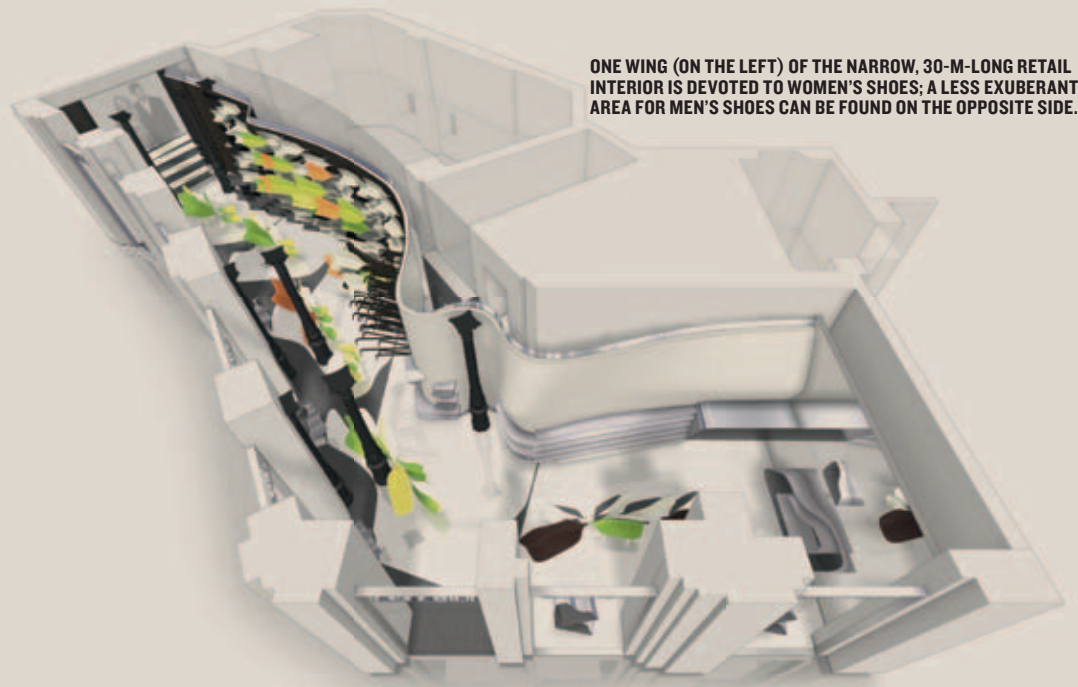
**LOCATION** Via Cordusio at Via Dante, Piazza Cordusio, Milan, Italy  
**DESIGNER** Giorgio Borruso (borrusodesign.com)  
**CLIENT** Carlo Pazolini (carlopazolini.com)  
**FURNITURE** Paola Lenti (paolalenti.it)  
**LIGHTING** Targetti (targetti.com)  
**FLOORING** Graniti Fiandre (granitifandre.com)  
**WALLS** Chiavari (chiavari.ws)  
**AREA** 386 m<sup>2</sup>  
**COMPLETED** October 2010

referred back to artists of the Romantic era, who sought to re-create antiquity and were compelled to abstract the feet of models who had spent too much time in tight-laced boots. That prompted a metaphor: our bodies reshape and are reshaped by the things we wear. To configure the shelves in an impressive way, Borruso thought of the swarm intelligence algorithms that allow the banks in this neighbourhood to organize their data. And he recalled the pigeons wheeling above the Piazza del Duomo, clustering but never colliding.

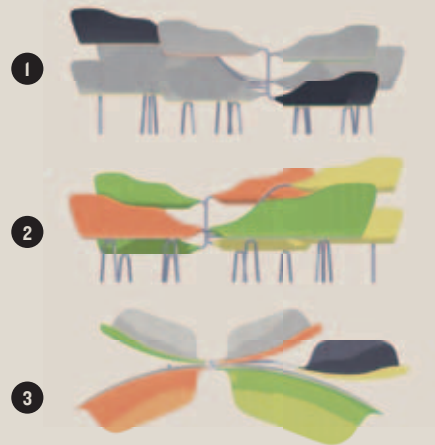
The Carlo Pazolini store is a springboard for a company conceived in a country where fashion was once disparaged as a bourgeois vice. Now Russia and the Rezniks have gone global. As Simone Domenella, the company's European CEO explains: 'This design serves as a model for the store we will soon open in Rome, though that is much smaller, and for the showcases we are planning in London, Barcelona and Berlin.'



THE SPACE WAS GUTTED AND THE FLOOR COVERED IN HIGH-GLOSS WHITE PORCELAIN. NARROW STRIPS OF BLACK WOOD CLAD TWO-THIRDS OF ONE WALL, AND ANOTHER WALL HAS BEEN PLASTERED.



ONE WING (ON THE LEFT) OF THE NARROW, 30-M-LONG RETAIL INTERIOR IS DEVOTED TO WOMEN'S SHOES; A LESS EXUBERANT AREA FOR MEN'S SHOES CAN BE FOUND ON THE OPPOSITE SIDE.



SEATING A.



SEATING B.



SEATING C.



SEATING D.



SEATING E.

1. BACK VIEW  
2. FRONT VIEW  
3. TOP VIEW

BORRUSO WORKED WITH FURNITURE DESIGNER PAOLA LENTI TO DESIGN CLUSTERS OF SEATS, SEEN HERE FROM ABOVE, FROM BEHIND AND FROM THE FRONT. MOST SEATS ARE GREEN; ENLIVENING THE MIX ARE SHELLS IN YELLOW, ORANGE AND CHARCOAL.