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launch
issue

Start

- Car parks, Lisbon
- Cité du Design, St-Etienne
- Shopping centre, Budapest
- Olympic Loop, Paris
- Viewing platform, Aurland
- Youth hostel, Prora

Ready

- Fire station, Nanterre
- 'Im Birch' school, Zurich
- Museum of Occupations, Tallinn
- University library, Azores
- Maritime Youth House, Copenhagen

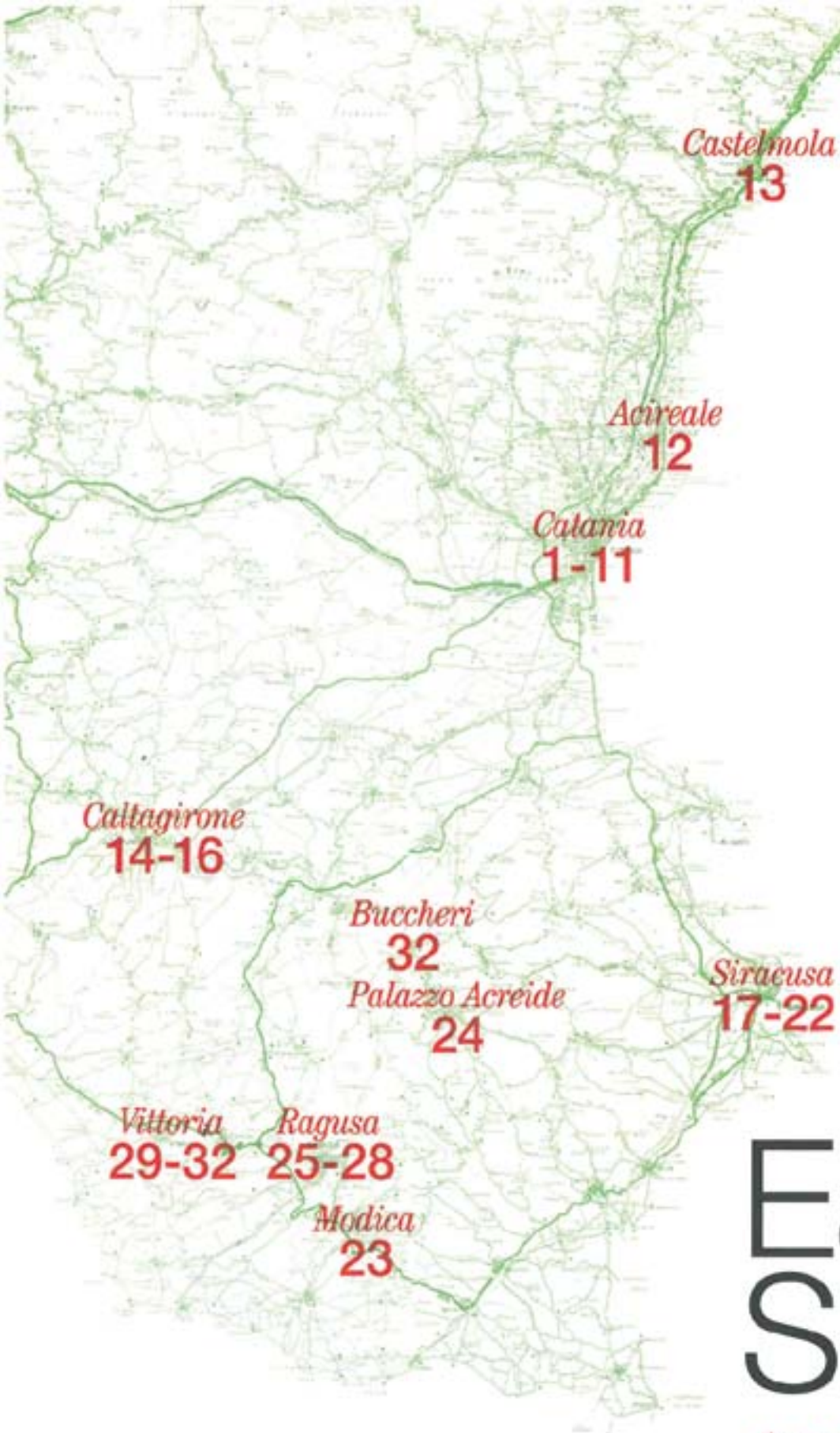
&:

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Eastern Sicily

An architectural tour guide

Rome-based, Sicilian-born Luigi Prestinenza gives us a guided tour of the best buildings in eastern Sicily.

ITALY — TEXT: LUIGI PRESTINENZA PUGLISI



The eastern portion of Sicily distinguishes itself from its western counterpart in many ways. This is also true of its contemporary architecture, so much so that today it is possible to speak of a Catania-Siracusa school on the one hand, and a Palermo school on the other. The difference is a result, above all, of the size of the island: with an area of 25,708 square kilometres, Sicily is similar in size to Belgium or Holland. It is also a result of historical factors: the eastern part of the island has been marked by classical culture – Siracusa and Catania were important cities of Magna Grecia – while the western part of the island was first influenced by the Carthaginians and later by the Arabs. The division between east and west was further affected by three successive factors. First: the rivalry between Palermo, →



1 CONTROL TOWER
 Architect: Manfredi Nicoletti
 Completed: 1977
 Address: Catania Airport



2 SCIENTIFIC GREENHOUSE FOR TROPICAL BUTTERFLIES
 Architect: Manfredi Nicoletti
 Completed: 2002
 Address: Università degli Studi di Catania, Piazza Università 2, Catania



3 HOTEL NETTUNO
 Architect: Stefano Rolli
 Renovation completed: 2002
 Address: Viale Ruggiero di Lauria 121, Catania



4 CENTRO DELL'IMINIERE
 Architect: Giacomo Leone
 Completed: 1993
 Address: Piazzale Asia, Catania



5 PHYSICS INSTITUTE
 Architect: Giacomo Leone
 Completed: 2001
 Address: Via S. Sofia 44, Cittadella Universitaria di Catania



6 FACULTY OF ENGINEERING
 Architects: Salvatore Barbera and Ugo Cantone
 Completed: end 2004
 Address: Viale Andrea Doria 6, Catania



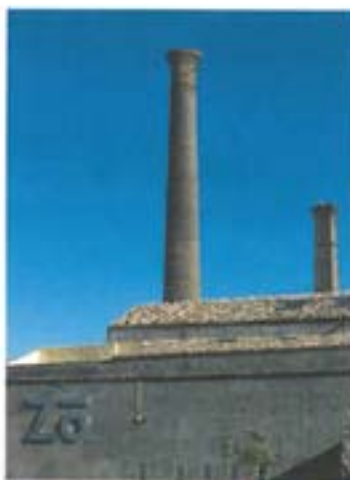
7 RISTORANTE CROCFERI
 Architect: Franco Porto
 Completed: 2004
 Address: Piazza San Francesco di Assisi angolo via Crociferi, Catania



8 HARD ROCK CAFE
 Architect: Antonio Iraci
 Renovated: 2004
 Address: Via Cristoforo Colombo 10, Catania



9 PUB 4.20
 Architect: Salvo Puleo
 Completed: 2004
 Address: Via Dusmet, Catania



10 CENTRO ZO
 Architect: Nigel Allen
 Completed: 2001
 Address: Piazzale Asia 6, Catania



11 BAR HELME
 Architect: Maria Giuseppina Grasso Cannizzo
 Completed: 2003
 Address: Via Redentore 12, Catania



12 SCAU OFFICES
 Architects: SCAU
 Completed: 2000
 Address: Via Nazionale 31, Guardia (Acireale)



13 MUSEUM (CONCEPT)
 Architects: U.F.D., in association with Luigi Centola



14 LINEAR PARK
 Architect: Marco Navarra
 Completed: 2001
 Location: between Catagirone and Piazza Armerina



15 CASA C.
 Architect: Marco Navarra
 Completed: 2002
 Address: Via Dedalo 15, Catagirone

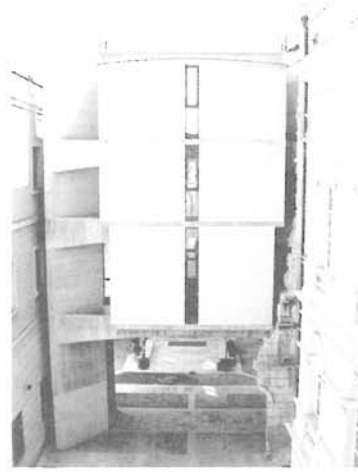


16 GIARDINO ARENA
 Architect: Marco Navarra
 Completed: 2004
 Address: Stazione ferroviaria di San Michele di Ganzaria, Catagirone



CLUB DELL'ARENELLA

Architect: Eleonora di Stefano
Completed: 2004
Address: Strada Ognina 47, Siracusa



PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT OFFICES

Architect: Giuseppe Pagnano
Completed: 2003
Address: Via Roma 31, Siracusa (Ortigia)



OFFICE BUILDING

Architect: Architrend
Completed: 2002
Address: Viale Tenente Lena, Ragusa



CASA LICITRA

Architect: Maria Giuseppina Grasso Cannizzo
Completed: 1998
Address: Via XX Settembre 51, Vittoria



CORTE DEI BOTTAI

Architect: Vincenzo Latina
Completed: 2001
Address: Via Amalfitania / Ronco dei Cassari, Siracusa (Ortigia)



TOURIST CENTRE

Architect: Emanuele Fidone
Completed: 2000
Address: Via Trento 2, Siracusa (Ortigia)



APARTMENT COMPLEX

Architect: Architrend
Completed: 2003
Address: Contrada Cisternazzi, Ragusa



CASA NICOSIA

Architect: Maria Giuseppina Grasso Cannizzo
Completed: 1998
Address: via Libertà, 79, Vittoria



PIAZZETTA BELLOMO

Architect: Salvatore Maltese
Completed: 2000
Address: Piazzetta Bellomo, Siracusa (Ortigia)



HOLIDAY HOUSE

Architect: Maria Giuseppina Grasso Cannizzo
Completed: 1995
Address: Marina di Ragusa via Pescara 6, Ragusa



SINGLE FAMILY HOUSE

Architect: Orazio Carpenzano
Completed: 1995
Address: Via Firenze, Vittoria



CORRADO RIZZONE SQUARE

Architect: Francesco Cellini
Completed: 2003
Address: Piazza Corrado Rizzone, Modica



ARCHIMEDE SCHOOL

Architect: Orazio Carpenzano
Completed: 1994
Address: Via Fabrizio 13, Modica



SINGLE FAMILY HOUSE

Architects: Gianfranco Gianfriddo, Luigi Pellegrino
Completed: 2004
Address: Contrada Piana, Buccheri



747 BAR & RESTAURANT

Architect: Leonardo Annecca
Completed: 2003
Address: Via Roma 112, Siracusa (Ortigia)
Info: www.747bar.com



CASA FURNARI GALLO

Architect: Bruno Messina
Completed: 1998
Address: Via Colleorbo n°14, Palazzolo Acreide

The works listed here are, in fact, very different one from another, if not antithetical.

(Eastern Sicily)

the regional capital, and Catania, the most important commercial and industrial city. Second: the presence of the Mafia, firmly rooted in the 'sperte' (sly) western provinces, but not in the eastern or 'babbe' (naive) provinces. Third: the poor connections between the two halves of the island: suffice it to say that the train between Catania and Palermo takes more than six hours and that the motorway that now links the two cities in two hours was built relatively late in the day by which time the antagonistic relationship between the two sides was already firmly established.

The division also had consequences for the universities. This can be seen in the historical snubbing of the faculty of architecture in Palermo, for many years the only one in Sicily, by numerous students from the provinces of Catania, Siracusa and Messina who preferred to study in Venice or Florence, and in some cases in Rome. Later, for reasons of proximity, the faculty in Reggio Calabria became the preferred choice. A little less than ten years ago a faculty of architecture was created in Siracusa, though it formally depends upon the University of Catania. However, the number of students who choose to study on the mainland remains high. Others prefer the nearby faculty of engineering in Catania, which offers a specialization in architecture. As a result of the popularity of the faculty of engineering it is possible to say that designers from Catania tend to be more pragmatic, while those from Siracusa tend towards classicism, perhaps as a result of the vast number of examples of Greek culture that enrich the city and give it its unique character, or perhaps due to the fact that many of its professors studied in Venice.

This is only half the truth, however. The other half is that the absence of one specific centre for the education of architects has bred a positive plurality throughout eastern Sicily. The works listed here are, in fact, very different one from another, if not antithetical. If there are some architects who, with a certain sense of *local* astuteness, pretend to have no idea about the electronic revolution, not to mention the mechanical one, there are also others who re-elaborate the contemporary, in a very original way, using thousands of different approaches.

When one goes to Sicily it is important to realize that the island has undergone a process of industrialization defined by speculative building, a level of illegal construction that is amongst the highest in Italy and a massive migration from the countryside to the cities – all with few public works and often managed in the most outrageous manner. Even today, when things have improved notably, road connections remain inadequate. If you insist on taking the train, you must resign yourself to moving at a snail's pace. A better option is the private bus companies. They are more punctual and slightly more frequent although, if we exclude those serving the better-known destinations such as Taormina, their schedules are clearly designed for local commuters rather than tourists. This is why I would suggest renting a car, the primary means of getting around in Sicily. I say this because everyone in Sicily uses a car, even for the shortest of trips along narrow and often chaotic roads. One should also consider that the motorway network is sparse and inefficient. For example, the Catania–Siracusa route consists of stretches of motorway and stretches of state roads. There are no motorways to the south of Siracusa, an area that is home to many of the architecturally more interesting cities.

It appears, however, that works are about to begin on a piece of infrastructure that, according to many, will be the start of the renewal of the entire network: the bridge over the Strait of Messina that will connect Sicily to mainland Italy (a service currently provided by ferries). When completed this bridge, with a span of over three kilometres, will be the largest single span in Europe, if not the world. The bridge will mark the beginning of a motorway west to Palermo and south to Siracusa and beyond. For some critics it is nothing but an incredible waste of money – it will cost billions of euros – that could be better used to build roads and railways, less exciting in terms of image, but surely more useful in a region that, as we have seen, has so few while the few that it has are poorly organized.

Whatever happens, it will take decades to build the bridge, given the proverbial Sicilian slowness when it comes to public works, so you can forget about using it on your next trip to Sicily. For this reason I would recommend arriving by air. The airport of Catania Fontanarossa, the third busiest in Italy after Rome and Milan, is located close to the centre of Catania (approx. 10 km) as well as Siracusa (approx. 50 km). Upon arrival you will note that the airport is in the throes of being enlarged, work that I believe has been on going since time immemorial, although they do now appear to be in a more advanced phase.

Take advantage of the opportunity to look at the **control tower (1)** designed by **Manfredi Nicoletti**, a Rome-based architect with Sicilian roots who designed numerous mega-structures during the 1960s, including a helical skyscraper the structural calculations for which were made by the engineering genius Sergio Musmeci. Today Nicoletti builds bioclimatic projects with a more organic structure, including a small **greenhouse for tropical butterflies** at the university in Catania (2).

As a matter of fact, I would recommend Catania as your first stop. You will not require a car as the airport is well connected by bus. For less than one euro you will be taken into the very centre of the city. In this way you can postpone car rental until such time as you decide to visit the nearby cities. In Catania you can stay in the most beautiful Baroque palace in the city: the Palazzo Biscari bed & breakfast (www.palaz-zobiscari.com). Or, if you prefer a view of the sea, you could stay at the **Hotel Nettuno (3)**, recently renovated by **Stefano Rolli**, a talented Rome-based architect and pupil of Luigi Pellegrin. At the moment, Catania appears to be a city focused on architecture. Bohigas has been asked to re-design the seafront and, in preparation for this work, numerous competitions have been organized.

Once in the city you must see the buildings by **Giacomo Leone** and the renovation of the Complesso dei Benedettini by Giancarlo di Carlo. Apart from being the most talented architect in Catania, Giacomo Leone is also a knowledgeable source of information. If you can catch him at a time when he is not busy (you can try calling him on +39 095326054), he will surely be willing to show you his studio and the works he has built. Of these, two are worthy of note: the **Centro dell Ciminiere (4)** and the **Physics Institute (5)** at the university. The first is located near the train station and is a fairground and conference centre created out of a former sulphur factory. In my opinion this is one of the best works of Italian architecture of the last 30 years, a lesson in how to redevelop disused industrial areas.

Other Catania architects include Matteo Arena, whose works include the multi-level car park in via Costantino, an apartment building in Corso delle Province and the restoration of the Sangiorgi Theatre in via Antonio di Sangiuliano. Then there is Carmelo Borzi, the designer of an office building in Viale Africa, and **Salvatore Barbera and Ugo Cantone**, the designers of the new **faculty of engineering (6)** at the university.

This last building accommodates both a nuclear reactor and physics classrooms in an open work, built in several phases and by several different contractors and characterized by different coloured steel beams. The Complesso dei Benedettini merits a visit for two reasons: first because it is an ancient convent that will surprise you, and not only because of its scale, and second because De Carlo, even though he is not Sicilian and even though this conversion is not one of his best works, is still in any case an important Italian architect.

What will surely strike you most about Catania is its magnificent Baroque historical centre, abandoned for many years but today the object of numerous renovations and transformations – all by the younger generation of architects – that have enhanced the structure of the existing buildings. Examples include the **Crociferi restaurant (7)** by **Franco Porto**, the **Hard Rock Cafe (8)** by **Antonio Iraci**, and a radical re-design of an old caravanserai near the port, in the area known as Gli Archi della Marina. Then there are pubs by **Salvo Puleo (9)**

– the **4.20** in via Dusmet and the **Native** in via di San Giuliano. Near the 'ciminere' you will find the **Centro Zo (10)**, a club that represents a mix of the local and the global, realized by English-born Catania resident **Nigel Allen**. At via Redentore 12, you can admire the most brilliant of Catania's architectural works: the **Bar Helme** by **Maria Giuseppina Grasso Cannizzo (11)**, a cosmopolitan designer with a studio in Vittoria. In this work she juxtaposes a refined minimalism with a decorative style. The ceramic tiles are custom-made and hark back to baroque Sicilian weaving motifs.

The time has now come to rent a car and head north towards Acireale, Taormina and Castelmola. In Acireale, at via Nazionale SS 114 for Guardia n.31 you can take a look at the Barragan-esque restoration of a traditional **country house** by **SCAU (12)** who have made it their offices. Taormina is famous enough to need no introduction. Castelmola is a wonderful though less well known city, high up on the mountain, and home to events of both art and architecture. One of these, organized in 2003 as a workshop by Franco Porto, the untiring president of the Sicilian division of the Istituto Nazionale di Architettura, called for the realization of a museum. One of the two winning projects was by the trans-national group **U.F.O.**, in association with **Luigi Centola (13)**. Their work often comes into being over the Internet in collaboration with colleagues in Holland, England and South Korea (the group also won the competition for the Sarajevo auditorium and their work has been on display at the 2004 Venice Biennale).

On your way south to Siracusa I would recommend that you pass through Caltagirone, where the architect **Marco Navarra** works. Winner of the gold medal for architecture awarded by the Triennale di Milano, Navarra is considered one of the rising stars of Italian architecture. If you get in touch with him (tel. +39 093355989) he will show you his studio and his recent works, including the **linear park (14)**, a conceptual structure that lies along the barren agricultural landscape of the Sicilian interior.

Once you arrive in Siracusa you should plan on relaxing for a couple of days. The city is very beautiful, above all the area known as Ortigia, an island tied to the mainland by a series of bridges. If you wish to sleep in Ortigia you should contact Professoressa Nastasi who manages a bed & breakfast a few metres from the Piazza Duomo where there are some rooms with a panoramic view of the gulf (tel. +39 0931483073, mobile + 39 3358416112). If you wish to spend a few days by the sea you can go to the **Club dell'Arenella (17)**, a new and important tourist centre designed by **Eleonora di Stefano**, a Catania-born architect who studied first in Turin and later at the Architectural Association in London.

In Ortigia you should visit four easily accessible works: the **Corte dei Bottai (18)** by **Vincenzo Latina**, inspired by the works of the architect Francesco Venezia; bar **747 (19)** by **Leonardo Annecca**, a very modern intervention in an ancient building; the interiors of the **offices of the Provincial Government (20)** by **Giuseppe Pagnano**, an architect inspired by Carlo Scarpa and also the author of refined interventions in museums; the restoration of the **tourist centre (21)** by **Emmanuel Fidone**, an elegant work, half classicist, half New York Storefront, today compromised by some recent additions. You can try to contact Vincenzo Latina at +39 3355835355 – you might be able to fix an appointment with him to see his work at the Bottai, winner of numerous architectural prizes and particularly interesting from an urban planning point of view because it makes use of old courtyards and abandoned spaces of the ancient city to create a new street. In Ortigia you can also visit the faculty of architecture: it is located in via delle Maestranze, in a recently restored building.

From Siracusa you can head further south. You should visit Vittoria, Modica (23), Palazzolo Acreide (24) and Ragusa. I recommend that you do not skip Ragusa (25-28), home of the work of an interesting group of architects: **Architrend** (tel. +39 0932652661). Nor Vittoria, which is home to the studio of **Giuseppina Grasso Cannizzo** and two of her works: **Casa Licitra (29)** and **Casa Nicosia (30)**. To visit them try phoning her studio: +39 0932916068. You will find someone who speaks English and can give you the necessary information. ←