

'LA RINASCENTE' - IMAGE AND MARKETING COMMUNICATION

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*la*Rinascente

[prima della Rinascente]

1865 - 1915

What really stood out was the name of the department store (Aux Villes d'Italie) that the brothers Luigi and Ferdinando Bocconi decided to locate inside a former hotel, after having successfully managed a small shop in Via Santa Radegonda for a few years.

A name that clearly sounded French and that brought to mind the *grands magasins* of Paris that were already a cultural phenomenon. In this way also Milan, and soon afterwards Rome, came to know the appeal of these new retail spaces.

“Who hasn't seen that splendid hall in English Gothic style that make the *Magasins* of Paris jealous of those in Milan?” this was the comment of the 'L'illustrazione italiana' that continued by celebrating the assortment of goods: “From the suit that costs 8 liras to the one for 400 liras, from tea towels to the splendid linen tablecloths from Flanders”.

These goods, no longer kept in built-in cupboards, were now displayed in scores at eye level on open shelves that allowed on open and broad view. These same goods were depicted in regularly printed mail-order catalogues: similar to window displays that could be delivered at home, the catalogues were printed and mailed out to places outside Milan

taking advantage of the improved network of transportation within and outside the city.

Nowadays these catalogues, which were then the new and effective means of communication, represent a precious record and enable us to understand

the vast assortment of merchandise that the department store handled: from flowers to furniture. So at that time, the department store started to take on the appearance inspired by the new sales model: no longer a single shop, but many different categories of merchandise under a single name and management. Fixed prices, unrestricted entrance and flashy store signs make up the new image of urban retail.

Especially the store windows would become the *trait d'union* between the outside and the space inside, completely redesigned to host new low furniture that allowed

a completely open view. When dark, the windows were spectacularly illuminated (using the same spotlights that were used in theatres, which together with shops played a central part in the implementation of electric illumination in Milan in those years) adding an element of attraction to the overall architecture of a store.



Rinascente interiors, Milan, about 1940

The success was such that in 1889, around the same time as the 'Mele' department store opened in Naples, the Bocconi brothers decided to build a new store in Piazza Duomo where the new façade flanked by domed towers, created by the architect Giovanni Giachi, would turn into the first brand image of 'Alle città d'Italia' (as the store was renamed).

With the new ownership, given the advent of Senatore Borletti in 1917, the department store of the Bocconi brothers took on the name coined by Gabriele D'Annunzio: *la Rinascente*. The poster for the inauguration, created by the French illustrator Achille Luciano Mauzan, depicted a stunningly dressed grand lady who is being offered the key to the door of the store on a velvet cushion. As a result, the image of refined elegance of the department store is generated. These were the years in which a lot of attention was given to quality and the search of a style centred on good taste that was to become the common denominator for all the goods in the store.

Evidence of this are the sophisticated and delicate illustrations that Marcello Dudovich (who had already

created the fortunate campaigns of the Mele department store) created to advertise *la Rinascente* starting from the early 20s to the 50s: years when the use of images was intensified giving advertising more persuasive power. Even catalogues were re-

designed, structured to highlight images of the goods, described in clear captions and with precise prices and measurements.

In these years Gio Ponti, with Lancia, designed the line of modern furniture Domus Nova and the department store started trying out collaborations with external designers, who were at the heart of its creative and innovative drive after the war.

After the fire of 1918, the new *Rinascente* would rise greater than ever in 1921. "The interior is of striking amplitude, airy and with subtly diffused colours. The gigantic windows made of impeccably curved glass every now and again sparkle with reflected rays of light." Looking at photographs

of the windows from the 1920s, the impression is that of sophisticated elegance: the displays feature compositions with mannequins that make up islands to present goods, showing that the trend for display



Achille Luciano Mauzan, *la Rinascente* inaugurates its department store, 1917

models based on great visibility had already been adopted. Everything was staged with great care under the glass roof that enclosed the 400 square metres of the central grand hall.

Set up to enhance the company communication,

the house organ 'Echi della Rinascente' must also be mentioned. One of the first to be published in Italy in 1929, it would become 'La Famiglia Rinascente-Upim' (the latter incorporated in 1934) in 1936 and then 'Cronache', with the subheading 'Rassegna di vita e di lavoro nei grandi magazzini' [lit. 'Review of life and work in a department store']. After the war, pictures of the advertising campaigns and the life of the department store would be mainly published in this magazine that had been set up for its employees. In fact, in the post-war period *la Rinascente* became committed to divulging its imagine through every means.

In the years following the war, Bruno Munari, Erberto Carboni, Marcello Nizzoli and Roberto Crippa and Brunetta, that is the avant-garde in terms of Italian design and graphics at the time, all took part in the realisation of window displays. From 1950 – when the department store in Piazza Duomo was reopened with

the interiors redesigned by the architect Carlo Paganini – the launch of *la Rinascente* was entrusted to the communicative synthesis of a young Max Huber (creator of the famous monogram), while over the same period the Art Director for window displays was

Albe Steiner, and they came up with innovative ideas for marketing and advertising; for example the use of graphics combined with photography or the use of solutions with a "neo-realistic" character to make sure passers-by were more actively involved in the staging of the window display. In the early 50s, *la Rinascente* was the first company in Italy to set up an advertising department where subsequently the best names from the world of advertising in Italy would work until the end of the 60s.

The same importance attributed to window displays and posters was given to the quality of the packaging designed by graphic designers such as Maderna, Ferrario, Cappellato and Piaggio,

then divulged by the first journals of Italian industrial design, such as 'Stile Industria' by Alberto Rosselli, that highlighted how important packing had become within the scope of a larger advertising project of the company.



Inside view of *la Rinascente* department store, Milan, 1931