



NEGOZIO VITRUM (VITRUM SHOP)

You can find this point of interest in Como - Path 5 - Stage 2

INFORMATION

Location: the old Vitrum shop (which has now become the Croci clothes shop) is located in Piazza Duomo – corner of via Cinque Giornate in Como

Paving: the portico of Piazza Duomo is paved with stone slabs. Via Muralto is made of porphyry tiles, with a strip paved with stone slabs on each side. The step is made of stone

Architectural barriers: to access the shop from both its entrances one must climb a stone step

Access: access is from Piazza Duomo 9 (main entrance) and from via Cinque Giornate

Services: the Municipality of Como's info point in Piazza Duomo. Bus stops available nearby. The "Trenord Como Lago" Railway Station is at a short walking distance from the piazza, in largo Leopardi

Leisure and Food: there are various bars and cafeterias, a tourist restaurant and quite a number of shops in the area

Other information: the area is within a limited traffic zone. Even if Piazza Duomo is completely car-free it may be quite crowded, with the presence, too, of election stalls, stalls advertising the activity of non-profit organizations, and street performers and artists.

DESCRIPTION

«There is hardly anything left to remind Como citizens of a very important period of urban improvement. But there is a shop sign above a shop in Piazza del Duomo which, for some time now, has not sold the type of articles once on sale at its opening, eighty years ago. The store is called *Vitrum* and its Latinizing sign, designed by Giuseppe Terragni, is nowadays protected by an architectural restriction order issued by the Superintendence for Architectural Heritage, which also covers the green streaked Cipollino marble coating and the metal frames on the façade of the shop looking onto Piazza del Duomo and along the corner of via Cinque Giornate, the only remains of the original furnishings. Let us step back in time to the years 1929/30. Terragni is twenty-five years old and has recently achieved national fame, but not widespread appreciation, for his 1927 design of the *Novocomum*, the first example of a condominium built according to the principles of architectural Rationalism...

Luminosity was to be the dominant feature of the furnishings of a store like the *Vitrum*, which the owners Antonio Camanni & Sons, as the picturesque vintage note paper reveals, dedicated to the sale of "*crystalware, fine and decorated glassware, lamps and lighting items, earthenware, china, household items*" plus "*demijohns, water-closets, cutlery*", and even "*funeral wreaths*" - made of ceramic flowers, of course. In other words items that would inherently act as sources of light or reflect external brightness, which the furniture had to enhance through an appropriate arrangement of shelves and transparent showcases, illuminated by "*opaque glass*" (similar to opaline) surfaces, and alternating vertical cylindrical shapes with horizontal ones so as to intensify the overall visual effect and make the most of contrasts, chiaroscuro nuances, and flashes of light, giving greater prominence to the items on display. The black and white photographs of the shop interiors do not do justice to another valuable element, the use of colour. Those who believe that the formal rigour typical of Rationalism ruled out any outburst of colour should admit to be mistaken, noting that on this occasion Terragni exploited the appeal of a wide range of colours for the floors, walls, and the sides of the shelves: pink, grey, light blue, salmon, blue, and green were chosen to accompany the sparkles of Venetian glass and Bohemian crystalware, vases, bowls, and cups on offer.

The Camanni company experienced the peak of its fortunes in the years preceding the Second World War, establishing a chain of *Vitrum* stores located in Bergamo, Monza, Piacenza, and Cremona, while maintaining its distribution centre in Como. The storm of war swept away any possibility of success in retailing, particularly with regard to the high-end sector, destined to the homes of the wealthier middle class. Nonetheless, Antonio Camanni managed to keep going until 1997, when his glassware and gift shop gave way to another commercial activity in the clothing sector. All the interior furnishings were dismantled, but the exterior was left much the same, although the shop sign is faded and is no longer illuminated. What remains is only a pale witness to past times which invites us to ponder on the value of the gifted designer who, even in minor projects, where the architectural vision had to fit in with the requirements of the items

exposed for sale, managed to create an artistic whole, thus provoking our imagination using his solid professional excellence» (A. Longatti, *Razionalismo "pop" all'insegna di Terragni*, in *La Provincia*, 29 maggio 2011).