Castelvecchio Museum
Re-designed by Carlo Scarpa
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OVERVIEW

Site & Context

Location: Castelvecchio is a museum in Verona, northern Italy, located in the previous medieval castle.

Castelvecchio means “Old Castle” in Italian.

The castle was re-designed and re-stored into a museum by Italian architect Carlo Scarpa.

The castle of Verona had gone through four major constructions before Scarpa’s work. In 1957, Licisco Magagnato became the museum’s director and assigned Scarpa as the architect for Castelvecchio.

Museum Castelvecchio is a masterpiece of the Italian architecture. Moreover, it is also an excellent example of great design around the world. Scarpa was able to adapt this famous monument into a museum where each artwork is placed to enhance the visitors’ experience in both historical and artistic way.
OLD TYPOLOGY:

Castelvecchio Castle

This castle is considered to be the most important military construction of the Scaliger dynasty during the Middle Ages. The castle is quite modest in term of decoration; however it is very powerful because of its square compact size. The Gothic architecture is reflected in the use of red bricks, with M-shaped merlons along the castle and bridge walls.

It has seven towers with four main buildings inside. The castle was once surrounded by waters from the nearby Adige river.

In order to discourage attack from its powerful neighbors such as Venice, the Gonzaga and the Sforza family, Lord Cangrande II della Scala built this castle along with its bridge. The construction started in 1354 and was completed in 1276. During Venetian rule in the area, slits were added to allow defense by cannons along the walls of the castle.

The castle was also damaged during Napoleonic Wars (1796-7) by French.
NEW TYPOLOGY:

Castelvecchio Museum

The restoration led by Scarpa was from 1959 until 1973.

Scarpa’s unique architectural style can be presented in the various places of the museum. His expertise of detailing are shown even in the fixtures that hold the art pieces.

The museum has a large collection of gold works, ceramics, ancient weapons, paintings, statues, sculptures and even old bells.
Overarching Concept

Scarpa found the opportunity to create new design that was related to the existing structure. To him, the existing has significant historical and artistic meanings.

His love of water lasted all his life and is apparent in almost all his projects. Scarpa intentionally had the pavement inside the ground floor as polished concrete and plaster to represent water.

Scarpa despised the repetitious and his work clearly showed that. There is not repetitive pattern in any of his window screens, shuttering patterns of concrete, or timber boarding. In fact, no two adjacent widths ever equal in Castelvecchio.
Programmatic Strategies

Scarpa first persuaded director Magagnato to demolish the staircase and the barracks built during Napoleon’s rule. During the demolition, he discovered the ancient moat which lead to the following excavation. Scarpa re-designed the law, paving and fountains in the great courtyard and added a bridge.

Scarpa also redesigned the ground floor for gallery space and set up new screens, windows and doors.

1. Passage to Reggie wing
2. Torre del Mastio
3. River Adige
4. Cangrande della Scala
5. Gallery [Napoleonic] wing: paintings
6. Exit stair
7. Sala Avena
8. Northeast tower
9. Sala Boggian
10. Portadel Morbio
11. Old Entrance
13. Sacello
14. New entrance
15. Library
16. Fountain
17. Pond
18. Main entrance
19. Bridge over moat
20. Moat
21. Comune Wall
22. Road to Scaligeri bridge
23. Scaligeri bridge
Scarpa’s approach is highly distinctive. The semi-theatrical approach, where individual works are provided with unique settings, not only enhance their qualities but also connect directly to the visitors.

Bruno Zevi said in 1958: “We had been accustomed to museums conceived architecturally on a monumental scale, a shell into which the works of art were inserted at a later stage. But now this concept is being reversed: the works of art themselves create the architecture, dictating the spaces and describing the proportions of the walls. Each picture is studied for the best possible view; it’s then put into the necessary spatial quantity.”

There are **three themes** in Scarpa’s approach:
- First is the notion of balance and unity between the new function of the museum and the quality of the existing building in which it is placed.
- Second is the idea of the particularity of each object requiring individual thought and precise placing in a sequence.
- Third is the concern to make the visit a vivid and stimulating experience for the visitor, dramatizing the communication between object and viewer.
Material Strategies

Scarpa kept many of the castle’s existing materials which were from 600 years of Roman ruins. He precisely added layers of stone, steels and timber to existing frames and facade.

“If there are any original parts, they have to be preserved. Any other intervention has to be designed and thought out in a new way. But you can’t say,”I’m modern: I’m going to use metal and plate glass.” Wood might be more suitable or something more modest” - Scarpa.

“He preserved rather than restored, repaired fragment rather than reconstruct its entirely.” Scarpa also paid close attention to how the existing and the new materials or structures are met. These junctions of materials are where Scarpa’s great skill of detailing is most profound.

In almost every case, each material or element changes its condition to meet another.

He chose both of the rough and smooth textures of pink, mauve and white local Prun stone to be the exterior of the Sacello.
Lighting Strategies

Compared to some contemporary projects, Scarpa’s solutions at the museum are considered ‘low tech’. Artworks are protected from direct sunlight by cotton blinds. These devices can be swung open or closed during the day by museum staff. Some artworks are displayed outside as well.

Ventilation throughout is also natural. The way artworks are arranged allows free air movement.
“If the architecture is any good, a person who looks and listens will feel its good effects without noticing.”
Sources


Carlo Scarpa’s Re-design of Castelvecchio in Verona, Italy
By Samia Rab (University of Hawaii Manoa)
http://www.academia.edu/543331/Carlo_Scarpa_s_Re-designing_of_Castelvecchio_in_Verona

Museum Website:
https://museodicastelvecchio.comune.verona.it/nqcontent.cfm?a_id=42555&tt=museo