

THE ARCHIVE SPEAKS VOLUMES

PALAZZO DEL LAVORO IN TURIN: TECHNIQUES AND ART OF PIER LUIGI NERVI & CO.



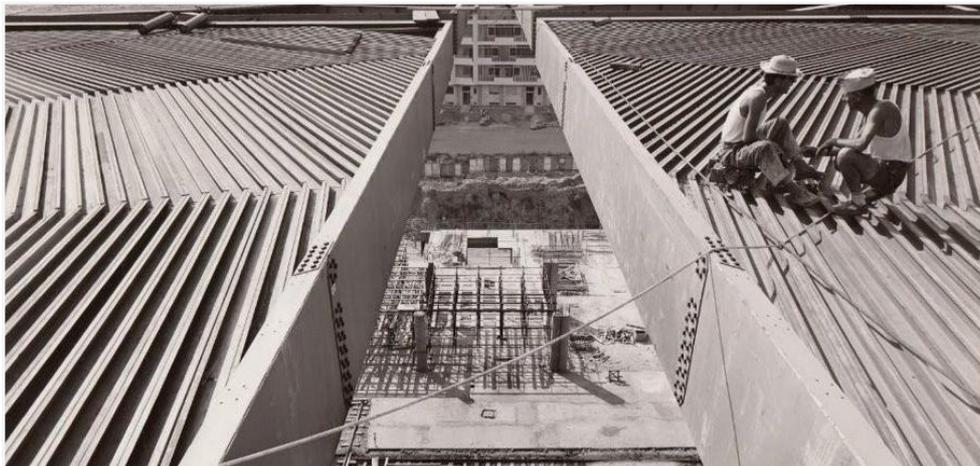
**FONDAZIONE
MAIRE**

The remarkable 1960s

Father and son, one an engineer, the other an architect, look at each other in satisfaction as they contemplate the project that won the public contract in Turin the year before to build the Palazzo del Lavoro, originally the Palazzo delle Nazioni, now known as Palazzo Nervi: a futuristic building to be inaugurated for Expo 1961 to celebrate the centennial of the Unification of Italy.

In February the construction site is ready to start, it is cold and almost every day it snows.

This man, the 69-year-old father, is a national monument: his name is Pier Luigi Nervi, from Lombardy, and he is a multifaceted designer of international renown, one of the symbols of our country's rebirth. In his works he tries to combine the capacity to build, typical of engineers, and the invention of new forms, the purview of architects.



With his ferrocement “recipe,” composed of layers of steel mesh filled with cement mortar that make it light, plastic and flexible, monumental domes, elegant barrel vaults, artistic crossed arches, futuristic spiral staircases are created.

Bold and cyclopic “organisms” endowed almost with a life of their own that seem to defy the law of gravity.



His son Antonio, a tall and extremely handsome 34-year-old, collaborates on the project carried out by his father's company "Nervi e Bartoli", making use of the firm "Nervi srl Architettura e tecnica edilizia" which he had established in Rome a few years earlier: basically the "young line" of the Nervi firm which was joined in 1960 by two more of his four sons: Mario, an engineer, and Vittorio, an architect.

A squadron of professionals, ideal for achieving the Nervian magic formula, technical knowledge and harmony of form, encapsulated in a single project that combines science and art to build cities and homes increasingly worthy of man.



The Palazzo del Lavoro, in which the engineer Gino Covre and architect Giò Ponti are also involved, is a true masterpiece of modernity and beauty. It looks like a squared-off spaceship with its sixteen 25-meter-high "large umbrellas," each consisting of a steel pillar from which steel arms protrude to support the building's roof.

The exterior glass-walls, supported by a series of mullions, resemble a hull from which to explore new galaxies.

Italy, especially that year, is a happy place.

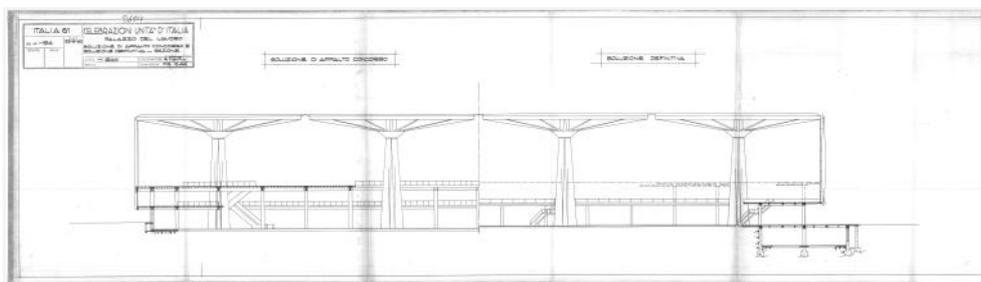


The economic miracle reports a GDP at 8.3 percent; refrigerators, televisions and washing machines become the new must-haves of the population; people go to work on Vespas, but mostly by car.

Turin becomes the city of the automobile with two models that Fiat put on sale a few years earlier: the 600, in 1955, and the smaller, now legendary, 500, in 1957. Nervi himself contributed to making the Savoy city and its metropolitan area more modern and beautiful, and in that period, it became the second "Nervi-esque" Italian city after Rome in terms of the number of projects and works bearing his signature, such as the halls for the exhibition complex of Torino Esposizioni (1947-1954) and the renovations inside the plant Fiat Mirafiori in Turin (1954-1955).



The Bel Paese equips itself with infrastructure, the Genoa-Ventimiglia, Brescia-Verona, Bologna-Florence are inaugurated; and, while waiting for the completion of the Autostrada del Sole, Italians move around more and more, are in a hurry and sing “Volare.”



The Palazzo del Lavoro project is also aiming for a quick project turnaround time by guaranteeing completion 11 months from the call for bids.

A factor that proves to be successful and allows him to edge out other competitors including Carlo Mollino, another of the most vibrant personalities in modern architecture.



Nervi applies a method that has been tried and tested in other jobs: he divides the construction site into two autonomous parts where workers can work in parallel, on one side the in-situ site where excavations and foundations are carried out, and on the other the prefabrication site where parts are prepared for the structures.

Begun in February 1960, by the end of December the building is already finished, including a minor modification that architect Ponti asks Nervi for in a letter, urging him to revise “that row of large hanging lamps, which are so terribly out of place.”

Between geniuses, on occasion, there is a mutual understanding, and so his request is granted.

The doors of the Palazzo del Lavoro are opened on May 6, 1961.

Three days later on a visit an enthusiastic Queen Elizabeth praises Nervi's masterpiece with these words, “It represents a century of Italian economic progress, Italy's modern industry and the promise of active development yet to come.”

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