



# FASCISM, MIDDLE-CLASS IDEALS, AND HOLIDAY VILLAS AT THE 5<sup>TH</sup> MILAN TRIENNALE

Flavia Marcello

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Keywords: pavilion, fascism, Milan Triennale, exposition, housing prototype, middle classes.

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**Fascism, middle class ideals, and holiday villas at the 5<sup>th</sup> Milan Triennale**

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# FASCISM, MIDDLE-CLASS IDEALS, AND HOLIDAY VILLAS AT THE 5<sup>TH</sup> MILAN TRIENNALE

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## Abstract

*With the diffusion of architectural modernism in the first couple decades of the twentieth-century, exposition pavilions presented new and daring forms, and tested structural possibilities and innovative materials. In some cases, the form and function of these pavilions reflected idealised versions of society, which could combine entertainment, tourism and propaganda. In this context, pavilions became integral to a constructed discourse of national identity and culture. This function was crucial for fascist Italy, where the aestheticisation of politics was integral to the consent-building process and where architects played a central role in Fascism's mission to transform Italian society. Through an analysis of prototype holiday homes from the Milan Triennale of 1933, it is argued that these pavilions manifested a nexus between four inter-related elements: 1) the technology, forms, materials and ideals of modernity; 2) the Mediterranean architectural tradition; 3) the socio-economic reforms of the fascist regime; and 4) the central role of the emergent middle classes in fascist political life. As examples of Italian Rationalist architecture, they combined the 'international' aspects of modernism with Italian regionalism and tradition. They applied modern technology to construction systems and materials, and incarnated the belief that architecture could act as an engine for social change. As physical manifestations of an idealised lifestyle, they cemented the position of the new ruling middle class, reflected the aspirations of the lower middle classes and offered a sense of opportunity to workers wanting to improve their lives.*

## Introduction

This paper explores the relationship between the pavilions of the Housing and Living Exhibition (*Mostra dell'Abitazione*) of the 5<sup>th</sup> Milan Triennale of 1933 and the ideology of Italian fascism. It argues that these pavilions were manifestations of a constructed discourse of a uniquely fascist socio-political identity and culture. Furthermore, it determines that they assumed the form and function of an idealised middle-class lifestyle and consumer culture, which was made possible by the social, political and economic reform encapsulated in

Corporativism or the Corporative State.<sup>1</sup> Although the Milan Triennale was independently organised, it fulfilled a staunchly political function. Indeed, the artist Mario Sironi (who together with architect Gio Ponti curated the event) considered its exhibition spaces as 'identical to the transformed space of political representation brought about by Fascism' (Schnapp, 2004, n.p).

Italy in the 1930s witnessed the emergence of a new architectural style. Educated between the tradition of their classical forebears and the radical newness of more recent Futurist ones, Italy's young architects were also influenced by recent seminal works from outside Italy, such as Le Corbusier's *Esprit nouveau* pavilion and Konstantin Melnikov's USSR pavilion at the Paris International Exposition (1925), as well as Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's German Pavilion at Barcelona (1929). Between 1930 and 1933, the Italian Rationalist movement in architecture came to the fore. Much to the joy of architects like Giuseppe Terragni and Giuseppe Pagano, and critics like Pier Maria Bardi, Mussolini in effect declared Rationalist Architecture the official 'Art of the State.'<sup>2</sup> As histories of modern Italian architecture have made evident, this architecture distinguishes itself by its integration of the aesthetics, techniques and spatial configurations of European Modernism with a uniquely Mediterranean approach to form, planning and materials resonating with the nationalist elements of fascism.

The *Mostra dell'Abitazione* consisted of 25 pavilions. These were housing prototypes destined for all members of fascist society: from artists to aviators, from scholars to skiers, from factory foremen to their workers.<sup>3</sup> They offered the sense of a domestic setting for the emerging 'new man,' thanks to fascism, regenerated and totally integrated into the community

<sup>1</sup> The corporative state can be defined as 'a system of institutional arrangements by which capital and labour are integrated into obligatory, hierarchical and functional units (corporations) recognised by the state, which become organs of self-government [...] as well as the basis for participation with other corporatively organised interests in policy decisions affecting the whole society (Corporative parliament).' See Cannistraro, 1982, p. 138. An exhaustive contemporary account is offered in Pitigliani, 1933.

<sup>2</sup> 'La quinta triennale di Milano solennemente inaugurata dal re', *Il messaggero*, 11 May 1933, p. 1. See also Pagano, [1934] 1989, pp. 108–13.

<sup>3</sup> These pavilions have been discussed by authors such as Doordan (1988, pp. 113–21) whose analysis, focuses on them as architectural objects within the trajectory of Italian Rationalism, and as important milestones in the development of each architect's personal explorations. Ciucci (1989) and De Seta (1989) talk about the position of Triennales within the wider debates going on at the time. See also Gregotti (1976, p. 18).

(Griffin, 1998, n.p.). This new male (with his wife and future family) was the member of a re-invented middle class, or even the progenitor of a new ruling class that would ensure the perpetuity of the fascist state (De Felice, 1999, pp.53–5). This paper focusses on the domestic settings of holiday and weekend homes because their position – slightly removed from the public everyday sphere – allowed for a more fluid context for idealisation. For large amounts of the population, leisure time had only just been made possible by the socio-economic reforms of the regime. Hence, to give prominence to holiday homes was an evident political move.

### Corporativism and aesthetic culture

Corporativism came into being between 1925 and 1929. It was a uniquely Italian (and fascist) economic policy and was presented as a ‘Third Way’ between Capitalism and Communism. Born of a fusion between syndicalism and authoritarian nationalism, it was tied to new models of hierarchical organisation made manifest during World War I. These were latched onto by middle class officers in the search for both a solution to the perceived problems of liberalism and a more active role in political society. Founded in 1930, the Ministry of Corporations acted as an economic parliament with its own councils and assemblies made up of employer/worker organisations for industry and crafts, agriculture, banking, internal communications, commerce, transport, and the arts professions (Cannistraro, 1982, pp.138–9).<sup>4</sup> The Triennale was principally concerned with showcasing achievements of the first and the last of these, and the 1933 edition fell within the high point of corporative experimentation, thus emphasising the need for its successes to be given material form.

As many scholars have demonstrated, Italy of the inter-war period was at the forefront of the aestheticisation of politics, where images of power and the power of images were inextricably woven together (Falasca-Zamponi, 1997, pp.185–91). This uniquely twentieth-century phenomenon brought artists, politicians, social philosophers and (even) journalists into a common political discourse that was played out in various material and non-material forms.<sup>5</sup> Fascism had set itself the task of transforming Italian society, and great emphasis was placed on art, spectacle and ritual as essential elements in fascism’s transition from

movement to regime. The participation of citizens of every class in this public spectacle, on the ‘stage’ of newly created cityscapes, cemented their position in a new political community that accommodated them all. This era was also defined by new consumption trends that depended on both the development of a market economy, new modes of production and distribution and new technologies for the reproduction and diffusion of image-based media (Falasca-Zamponi, 1997, p.185).

In this arena ‘the complexities of the Italian past played themselves out against the fascist agenda for the Italian future’ (Berezin, 1997, p.41) along a line drawn, by the regime itself, between the spectacle of politics and the spectacle of consumption (Falasca-Zamponi, 1997, p.186). Exhibitions became a form of ‘Advertising in Three Dimensions,’ and British architectural journals held up the Milan Triennale as an example where they (the authorities) were able to build things that elsewhere could only be imagined (Gloag, 1933, p.109). The Milan Triennale was an exhibition of modern industrial and decorative arts that displayed material goods to the public as readily accessible items while the pavilions constituted a ‘stage’ on which a new middle-class lifestyle, made possible by fascism, was played out. This operated on two levels: for the newly-emergent ruling (middle) class, it acted as confirmation of their values and their role in political life; for workers and the aspiring middle classes, it brought what was previously unattainable within reach.

The crisis of the class system was an aid to the forces of totalitarianism in Italy and was used to help build consent. In the first instance, it targeted what each class lacked, and then focussed on the disadvantages avoided through the sense of day-to-day security that Fascism, for better or worse, could provide (De Felice, 1999, p.51). Fascism gave the middle class the impression that they played an active and important role in political life whilst enjoying the material benefits of socio-economic reform (Arendt, 1976, p.11). Fascism as a movement was the expression of the desires of the emerging middle classes who, as a result of World War I and the nationalist movement, saw an opportunity to take a stronger political role and replace the established *bourgeoisie* with a new ruling class (De Felice, 1999, pp.30–31).

As the regime’s power consolidated in the mid-twenties and found its height in 1935–6 with the Ethiopian campaign (and the establishment of Empire), the middle classes felt properly recognised as protagonists in national life. Throughout the years of the liberal democracy and during the early phases of Fascism, this ‘non-class’ had expressed the (real)

4 See also Pitigliani, 1933, pp.101–10; Gregor, 2005, pp. 128–36.

5 Marinetti’s Futurist movement and the *Voce* circles in Florence were prime examples. See Berezin, 1997, p. 39; and Antliff, 2002, pp. 148–69.

sensation of being kept on the margins of political and economic issues. Once Mussolini had risen to power against the working classes at one end and the industrialists and plutocracy on the other, he championed the moral wealth of the new, empowered middle classes and a set of values founded in God, the Fatherland and the Family (Venè, 1988, pp.41–2). At the same time, the lower middle classes were offered concrete forms of mobility and aspiration.

The *popolo* (or working class) was to be: first, kept at a distance from Communism; second, reminded of their essential role within the means of production; and third, given an improved quality of life by a benevolent state. Firstly, strikes and blockouts were abolished whilst the trade union movement was slowly dismantled and replaced with syndicates and federations that significantly weakened their power. Secondly, workers' leisure time was placed under the control of subsidised para-governmental organisations known as *opere*, which also provided social assistance and insurance for its members. There was one each for: ex-servicemen, mothers and infants, youth, and workers for whom the *Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro* (National After-Work Circles) provided spaces where power could be directly transmitted to the bodies, gestures and daily actions of the workers (Pitigliani, 1933, pp.234–6).<sup>6</sup> The *Dopolavoro* was also responsible for the physical and moral improvement of its members and differentiated itself from pre-existing company-based organisations by being national and under state control.<sup>7</sup> Party-organised leisure time, therefore, gave the impression that its very existence owed to fascism, and that the working classes could show gratitude through consent. Thirdly, and most importantly, they were given the impression that the reforms of Corporativism placed a middle-class lifestyle within their reach.

These three developments worked together to give the *popolo* a 'consciousness of common interest' and a sense that the party provided for them and their families: a small price to pay for the subordination of the individual to a national collectivism within the ethical state (Fogu, 2003, p.25). Corporativism was not just an economic reform policy that helped save Italy from the detrimental effects of the 1929 Crash, which were being felt more sharply in other industrialised nations (Castronovo, 1987, p.18); it synthesised the material and spiritual values of the Italian race, allowed the country to industrialise according to its

6 On this subject, see Foucault, 1980, pp. 150–2; and De Grazia, 1981, pp. 34–8, 52–7, and 128–30.

7 Indicators of increased amounts of organised leisure time are reflected in the exponential growth of members from 1926 (300) to 1932 (9367).

own traditions, and mandated changes in collective behaviour. It allowed both for a redefined relationship between individuals and the state, and for the triumph of a new set of (middle-class) values to underpin the type of social transformation that allowed each class to progressively improve their lot. Moreover, it gave the new ruling (middle) class a reference point for ideas about the political role of intellectuals and the role of culture more generally in the new, fascist society (Ben-Ghiat, 2001, pp.101–2; Pitigliani, 1933, pp.216–22).

### Exhibitions and pavilions of the fascist period

During the 1920s and 30s, exhibitions realised by the Italian state were an integral element of the processes and techniques of building consent; they lent material consistency to ideology, through interventions in social space (Lefebvre, 1997, pp.44-45). These exhibitions were placed under varying degrees of Party control and had a range of different themes: social, historical, artistic, architectural, industrial, and commercial. They were staged with the decisive and indispensable contribution of the artistic and architectural professions, with the aim of promoting fascism. The latter was done through a combination of entertainment, tourism and propaganda. All of these were vital to a constructed discourse of Italian identity and culture.

Because they were originally independently organised trade fairs, the political charge of these exhibitions (including the Triennale) was not as overt as, for example, the famous *Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista* (1932). They were, however, political in the sense that they were now conceived – along with almost every other kind of aesthetic, cultural or economic event – as an opportunity to exalt the successes of fascist society. The president of the Triennale, for instance, who was Giulio Barella, clearly acknowledged its political role; in a personal telegram to Mussolini, he described it as:

■ the clear affirmation of modern Italian architecture and modern Italian decorative arts whose future glories must surpass the glories of the past as your excellency wills it to be in all areas of national activity.<sup>8</sup> ■

From 1934, these exhibitions were put under the auspices of the Ministry for Industry and Commerce, and by 1936 were directly funded by the Ministry for

8 Telegram from Giulio Barella to Mussolini dated 1/11/33. ACS SPDCO (Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Segreteria Particolare del Duce. Carteggio Ordinario) B. 231 f.1809.

Corporations.<sup>9</sup> Like their more political counterparts, they created a scenario where industrial production, decorative arts, and the pavilion as architectural object, struck a balance between ‘sensory-visual stimulation and mental-visual projection’ (Fogu, 2003, p.128) The didactic function of these exhibitions and pavilions was also at the forefront of the propagandistic aspect of fascism, and constituted a kind of ‘invisible’ but clearly tactile campaign to promote a (now attainable) lifestyle. The Triennales, therefore, took the idea of fascist historic agency – usually reserved for Mussolini in more politically charged exhibitions such as *Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista* (Fogu, 2003, pp.138–9) – and placed it in the hands of design and industrial production. This way, each class, whether emergent or otherwise, could find within them a proof of their own agency.

### The Milan Triennale

In 1933, the fifth edition of the ‘International Triennial Exhibition of Modern Industrial and Decorative Arts and Modern Architecture’ was moved from the industrial Lombard town of Monza (just north of Milan) to Milan’s Parco Sempione, with a shift in focus from decorative arts and industrial production to architecture.<sup>10</sup> This shift was brought about by the more prominent position taken up by Rationalist Architecture as the ‘Art of the State,’ together with the revolutionary image of fascism embracing broader modern ideals. Together with the Venice Biennale and the Rome Quadriennale of Art (founded in 1931), the

Milan Triennale created a trio, which ‘reviewed [Italy’s] forces in the field of the plastic arts,’<sup>11</sup> and acted as a medium for change. That is, through the Triennale, architects, artists, technicians, and writers were seen as having the power to change – once more – the face of Italy (Pica, 1957, p.25).

Although some might want to argue that the modernist adventure was over in Italy by 1933, this was only true of ‘official’ or institutional architecture (with the notable exception of Terragni’s 1936 *Casa del Fascio* in Como). Within the realm of exhibition architecture, this was certainly not the case. Writing in *Quadrante*, Bardi (an art critic and champion of Rationalism) spoke of the timeliness of the 5<sup>th</sup> Triennale occurring as it did hard on the heels of the lively and active debate over ‘coherent architecture’ (Bardi, 1933, p.3). As late as 1939, Anna Maria Mazzucchelli wrote in *Casabella*: ‘The origins of new architecture in Italy remain confined to the chronicles of Exhibitions and Fairs ... which remain, for architecture, only an account of lost genius’ (1939, p.6; see also De Seta, 1989, p.248). For its editor, Pagano, exhibitions were the:

■ demonstration, par excellence, of levels of taste, a test of coherence, they are the testimony of a degree of civilisation [and] ... when carried out with a strict programme and coherence, educate the masses and their aesthetic sense. ■

(Pagano, 1937, p.6)

The 1933 Triennale was a hallmark event in the history of modern Italian architecture where, according to Bardi, Rationalism and Tradition made faces at each other like children in a schoolyard (Bardi, 1933, p.5); Ponti felt that these rival camps had, instead, achieved a perfect synthesis, as he explained in several articles. It was also a manifestation of a particular discourse of Italy’s changing class identities and their positions both within socio-political reform and the processes of building consent. Art and Industry, Family and the State were four cornerstones of Fascist society that came together at the Triennale. Sironi and Ponti (who had also worked together on the 1927 and 1930 Monza exhibitions) oversaw the creation of 35 different structures with the involvement of twenty-three nations and over 120 artists and architects. The exhibits were of two types: the ‘documentary,’ held in the purpose-built permanent pavilion built by Giovanni Muzio - the *Palazzo dell’Arte* – and the ‘practical and demonstrative’ (Pagano, 1933, p.2), a set of ephemeral structures arranged along a picturesque pathway within a park-like setting (Figure 7.1).

9 See the letter to Giuseppe Bianchini from the Duce’s personal secretary in ACS SPDCO B. 231 f.1809 and Regio Decreto Legge 29/1/1934, n. 454; and Triennale President Barella’s correspondence with Duce’s personal secretary dated 30 August 1934 in ACS SPDCO B231, f.1809. L 21/12/1931 n. 1780. Conversione in legge del RDL 25/6/31 n. 949 concernente la istituzione di un Ente autonomo denominato ‘Esposizione triennale internazionale delle arti decorative ed industriali moderne e dell’architettura moderna,’ in *Gazzetta ufficiale*, 6/2/32 n. 30. By 1937 its financing was a joint affair between the ministries of the Interior, Corporations and Finance. See letter from Osvaldo Sebastiani to Ciano Foreign minister dated 8 July 1937 in ACS SPDCO B. 231 f.1809. See also Pica, 1957, pp. 56-60, and Curtis, 2008, p. 29.

10 The Milan Triennial Exhibition of Modern Industrial and Decorative Arts and Modern Architecture developed out of the biennial International Exhibition of Decorative Arts originating in Monza in 1923. These exhibitions had a distinctly local flavour, arranged according to regions and showing traditional handcrafts. After three editions, the State endorsed the exhibition and decided that it be run every three years, and in 1930 it was renamed the International Triennial Exhibition of Modern Industrial and Decorative Arts. The exhibits became more ‘national,’ and began to be organised according to techniques. See Pica, 1957, pp. 53-9.

11 *Il messaggero*, 11/5/35.

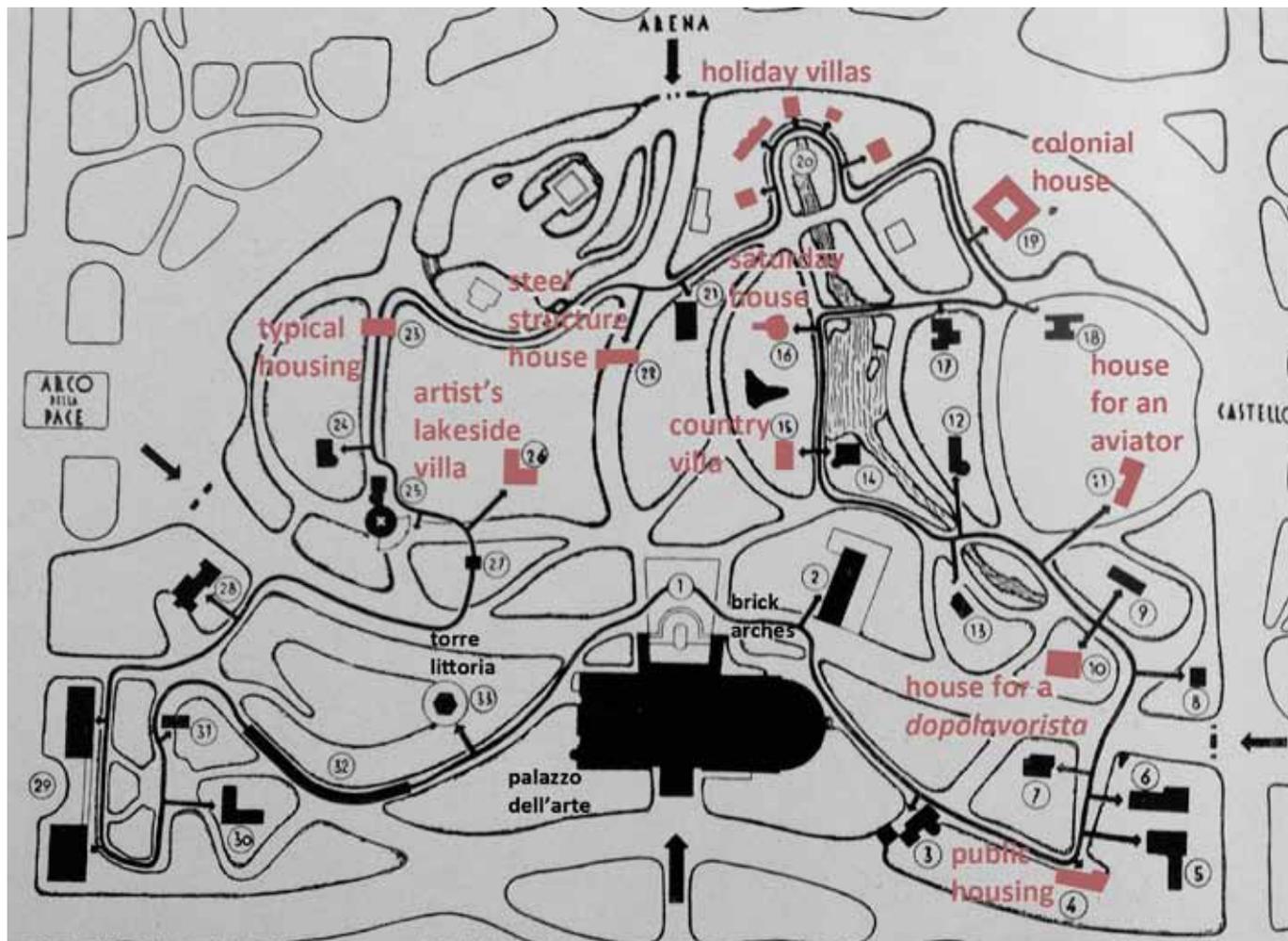


Figure 7.1: Map of the park and its pavilions. From *Domus*, May 1933, 230. Copyright Editoriale Domus S.p.A. Rozzano, Milano, Italy. Shading and annotations by the author.

The 'documentary' section consisted of the Painting and Sculpture Exhibits (including a vast cycle of frescoes by Sironi, which have now been lost), seven sections devoted to the Decorative and Industrial Arts, a Transport Exhibition (which included the first architect-designed train carriage), an exhibition dedicated to antique bronzes, and finally the International Exhibition of Modern Architecture, which was curated by Agnoldomenico Pica. This last featured panels by twelve of Europe's leading Modernists, including the Futurist Antonio Sant'Elia, who had died in 1916 (Pica, 1957, p.59).<sup>12</sup>

The temporary pavilions of the 'practical and demonstrative' section were divided into five sections: the Press Pavilion, the Sacred Art Pavilion, the Art School Pavilion, the Exhibition of Floriculture and Gardens, and finally the Exhibition of Modern Housing and Living (or *Mostra dell'Abitazione*). These pavilions were designed by Italy's leading Rationalists: Terragni, Pagano, Piero Bottoni, BBPR and the team of Gino Pollini and Luigi Figini. This last section consisted, in

itself, of twenty-five separate structures offering 1:1 scale housing prototypes as previously employed at the Monza Biennale of 1930. Both the Monza and Milan exhibitions were modelled on the *Weissenhofsiedlung*, the housing village built for the *Deutscher Werkbund* exhibition in Stuttgart (1927), and the *Deutsche Bauausstellung* in Berlin (1931), which was entitled *Wohnung unsere zeit* (Living for our time).<sup>13</sup> Neither of these models, however, had featured any holiday homes.

Like Pagano, Ponti believed the aim of the Triennale's architectural exhibitions was to bring the knowledge of architecture to a wider public. Reports in the press stated that the Triennale made the 'supreme mystery' of artistic creation available to a wider audience.<sup>14</sup> Modern architecture was going through a period of great conceptual, stylistic and technical transformation, driven by 'a civic and social evolution, that is already intensely being enacted, for which the life needs of the various classes are being refined' (Ponti, 1933a, p.2). The resulting new aesthetic would have vast repercussions on the 'habits and customs of today' because modern

<sup>12</sup> The Breda ETR 300 train carriage was designed by Ponti and Pagano.

<sup>13</sup> See Pommer & Otto, 1991; and Kirsch, 1989.

<sup>14</sup> *Il messaggero*, 11/5/35.

architecture was 'the mirror of today's civilisation, habits and customs,' and the pavilions on display would constitute 'the rules and regulations for tomorrow's architecture' (Ponti, 1933a, p.2).

Architecture was, therefore, a social art, and the exhibition was not just aimed at professionals, who were well aware of what was happening, but at the public. This was in order to 're-educate the ruling classes on the subject of architecture, which is essential to sustain the livelihood and to the glory of this social art' (Ponti, 1933a, p.2). Ponti is of course referring to those sectors of the pre-WWI middle class who had embraced fascism to become its ruling class. However, the range of housing types demonstrates that this public necessarily encompassed aspiring middle classes and workers alike. This is confirmed by Bardi, who proclaimed that real opportunity for architectural renewal lay in solving the problems of worker housing, and that architects should 'Reach out to the People' (p.6)<sup>15</sup> – a conscious quotation of the *Dopolavoro* slogan. Further, their presence was demonstrated in the *Casa del Dopolavorista* designed by Luisa Lovarini, one of the period's very few female architects.

### Holiday homes and attainable lifestyles

The pavilions of the *Mostra dell'Abitazione* can be loosely grouped by type, class or context: holiday homes, family homes and professional homes; luxury middle-class homes, aspiring middle-class homes and worker housing; seaside, countryside or alpine homes. The predominance here of non-urban settings is indicative of the contradictions inherent in fascist social and economic policies. This contrasted with the inevitable pull to the cities due to increased work opportunities, primarily in the construction sector because of all the new roads and building, and in the white collar work-force due to the burgeoning bureaucracies of the party machine and the many new institutions set up to further transform and maintain the new society. Versions of the new, secure middle-class lifestyle afforded by fascism were manifest and presented architecturally, through efficient planning, healthy access to the outdoors and new technology in materials with just the right mix of traditional elements to give each pavilion a distinct Italian identity.

Some pavilions were targeted specifically to professionals belonging to the new ruling middle class: the *Casa di campagna per un uomo di studio* (Country House for a Scholar) by the Roman team of Luigi

<sup>15</sup> This was a point also noted by the German author writing on the Triennale in the *Wasmuths Monatshefte für Baukunst*, who immediately attributed the slogan to Mussolini.

Moretti, Mario Paniconi, Gino Pediconi and Mosè Tufaroli, for instance, and the *Casa dell'Aviatore* (House for an Aviator), complete with hangar, by Cesare Scoccimarro<sup>16</sup>, as well as the two Villas for Artists that will be further discussed below. The homes for professionals featured integrated artworks which, like the architecture, merged modern themes, subjects and styles with the traditional techniques of bas relief, mural and mosaic. This gave the impression that 'the modern Italian architect regards mural decoration as essential to modern domestic architecture' (Yerbury, 1933, p.221). The works of prominent artists such as Sironi, Lucio Fontana, Arturo Martini and Pietro Chiesa were destined to be as ephemeral as the pavilions themselves, and stand, on the one hand, as testimony to the mutual respect existing between artists and architects of the time and, on the other, as emblems of the elevated status of the professional class and the corporation to which they belonged (Campiglio, 1995, p.77).<sup>17</sup>

Houses for families predominated, and these took on a particular redolence during the fascist regime. The family unit – one of the key features of Italian society – became ever more important as the regime further consolidated its consent base in the mid-thirties. Apartment types for new middle-class family life were showcased in pavilions such as the *Casa in struttura d'acciaio* (Steel Structure House), the *Casa di campagna* (Country Villa) and the *Casa Coloniale* (Colonial House); these were examples that, however efficient in their use of space, always included a servant's room.<sup>18</sup> The inclusion of a servant's room also indicated an elevated status and quality of life for the new middle class, which had been made possible by fascism's unique economic policies. Poor teenage girls from rural backgrounds had an opportunity to move to the city to serve those more affluent middle-class families. These examples consolidated the role and importance of the new ruling middle class in actively abetting and maintaining the fascist *status quo* (Figure 7.2).

<sup>16</sup> This new individual was personified by Italo Balbo, a Fascist who had risen out of his modest middle class background into the highest ranks of the Party and who had recently become a household name with his double-crossing of the Atlantic by plane in 1933.

<sup>17</sup> Artworks include: *The Lovers*, a ceramic bas-relief by Lucio Fontana on the Saturday house for newlyweds, a fresco by Angelo del Bon and an equestrian statue for the villa-studio for an artist, a fresco by Marcello Nizzoli for the lakeside artist villa entitled *Sporty life by the Lake*.

<sup>18</sup> The architects were: Pagano, Renato Camus, G. Mazzoleni, G. Minoletti, Giancarlo Palanti and Franco Albini for the *Casa in struttura d'acciaio*; Fiocchi, Lancia, Marelli and Serafini for the *Casa di campagna*, and Luigi Piccinato for the *Casa Coloniale*.



Figure 7.2: Advertisements from *Domus* showing middle class commodities: His Master's Voice Radio, Fiat Ardita 'Goes out and conquers', Cova furniture, Algidus refrigerators, 4711 cologne, Cristallo Securit. From *Domus*: September 1933, xix; November 1936, n.p.; October 1933, iv; April 1933, 222. Copyright Editoriale Domus S.p.A. Rozzano, Milano, Italy.

Examples of homes for the lower middle classes were offered by Virgilio Vallot's *Casa Media* (Average Home) and Carlo Daneri and Luigi Vietti's *Abitazioni tipiche* (Typical Housing). The latter, a four-storey pavilion, presented an eighty square-metre apartment on each floor, planned in different ways to cater for: a bachelor, young families and a professional's apartment that included an office with living quarters above. These examples sit neatly in the middle, projecting the aspirations of the lower and working classes to move up, or reminding of achievements for those who had climbed there, thanks to the opportunities offered by the Corporative State. Finally, the working classes were given low-cost options that supposedly matched the refinement and dignity of their higher class equivalents in the *Villetta di costruzione economica* (Small Low-Cost Villa) and the *Casa di campagna in legno* (Timber Holiday House), as well as a range of six different apartment types in the *Gruppo di elementi di case popolari* (Elements of Worker Housing pavilion) by Enrico Griffini and Piero Bottoni. This would further drive home the regime's commitment to the lower classes, the *popolo*, with whom Mussolini kept daily

'contact' through live speeches, radio and newsreels (De Felice, 1999, pp.62–3) – these homes were, in a sense, his 'word made flesh'. In his speeches – e.g., 'Discorso agli operai di Milano' – he gave workers a sense of agency, glorifying their labour as contributing to the nation's greater good and aligning their role as producers with that of industrialists and employers (Gregor, 2005, p.136). Meanwhile the *Dopolavoro* looked after their social security and their leisure time.

The Triennale, therefore, could not avoid the question of public housing, which Ponti defined as 'a civil and social problem of great importance closely connected to both technical and economic problems' (Ponti, 1933c, p.361). That was not good enough for the provocative Bardi, for whom one *casa popolare* was insufficient. Polemically, he denounced the Triennale as an exhibition for 'the fat bourgeoisie who are the enemies of taste' (Bardi, 1933, p.6), without really looking at the wider efforts of both Ponti and Bottoni in the area of worker housing. However, the Elements of Worker Housing Pavilion he refers to had six different apartments, for use by anyone. Though sponsored by the *Istituto di Case Popolari* (State Housing

Agency), it included an exhibition area of master plans and projects for new developments targeted towards industrialists and *entrepreneurs* in order to incentivise private development (Ponti, 1933c, p.363). Bottoni himself even produced a short film emphasising the ‘functionality, independence, intimacy and hygiene’ of these salubrious, modern and light-filled homes that he designed.<sup>19</sup>

### The holiday homes of the *Mostra dell’Abitazione*

Unlike similar demonstration homes and villages in Germany (and for that matter those built in the United States either by industrialists or organisations such as Better Homes America), half of the examples at the Triennale were holiday homes (Błaszczuk, 2000, pp.179–80). Varying in size and type, they catered for all classes and professions, were designed for lakesides, seashores and mountains (for summer trekking or winter skiing), and ranged from the sumptuous Holiday House for an Artist by the Lake, designed by Terragni and an association of young architects known as the Como Group,<sup>20</sup> to the modest Cabin for Twelve Skiers, designed by Luigi Piccinato.

The peninsular geography of Italy meant that the seaside and other recreational landscapes like mountains and lakes were within easy reach of most. Those who could not afford to buy a holiday home rented, and those who could not afford to rent went on day trips with bicycles, trains or other means of transport. Children were regularly sent to state-subsidised ‘marine colonies’ for the summer; these were organised by the Opera Nazionale Balilla (Fascist Youth Organisation) as part of the policy to train and mould the next generation. Increased leisure time brought about by economic reform, the introduction of the *treno popolare* (essentially third-class carriages), which offered state-subsidised ticket discounts and a wider accessibility to vehicles thanks to thriving industry, meant that excursions and/or holiday homes

19 ‘Una giornata nella casa popolare’ was filmed just days before the demolition. Written and directed by Bottoni and using Triennale workers as actors, this 32-minute film depicted a ‘Day in the Life’ of the workers and how it had been improved compared to typical living conditions. Bottoni later showed it at a Popular Housing Conference in 1936, thus proving that the 1933 example had not done much to improve conditions. See [http://bottoni.dpa.polimi.it/fr\\_archiviopatr.htm](http://bottoni.dpa.polimi.it/fr_archiviopatr.htm) & [http://bottoni.dpa.polimi.it/Bottoni\\_opere/Film\\_giornata.htm](http://bottoni.dpa.polimi.it/Bottoni_opere/Film_giornata.htm) (accessed 1/1/13).

20 The members of the Como Group (*Gruppo comasco*) were: Mario Cereghini, Adolfo Dell’Acqua, Pietro Lingeri, Gabriele Giussani, Gianni Mantero, Oscar Ortelli and Carlo Ponci.

were becoming popular, in both senses of the word (Venè, 1988, pp.241–8).

Exposure to sun, air and nature was closely tied to the Modernist ideas of health and hygiene advocated

by other European architects, and also tied in with fascist propaganda around physical well-being and an assurance of the continuity of the race. This is summed up by Ponti, who began his description of the Triennale’s holiday villas thus:

■ We love greenery, the sun, air, water, light and movement more directly [than the previous generation] and with a greater confidence in body and in spirit. With hygiene, travel, running, sports, mountain climbing, sailing, driving, and with today’s lighter clothing we can receive a solar education to give life to our skin and our muscles. ♣

(Ponti, 1933b, p.292).

This also ties in with the discourse of class and consent, as it showed that Italy could shrug off the pre-existing notion that a holiday home by the sea was solely for the upper or educated classes. In other words, those pre-war *bourgeois* ruling classes made powerless and redundant by fascism, in order to make way for a new emergent group that would ensure the regime’s perpetuity. For Ponti and his contemporaries, the pre-war *bourgeoisie* had reduced the holiday home to a ‘ridiculous *villette*,’ made to look like a play castle with all manner of bas reliefs, family crests and saints in niches and, furthermore, designed by draftsmen and engineers lacking in aesthetic competence (Ponti, 1933b, p.291). He questioned the *bourgeoisie* as to whether they were not ashamed of masquerading as nobility in this way?

Ponti’s generation, disgusted by this older idea of the holiday home, demanded something more sincere. It demanded simple dwellings that ‘are what they are (which is very lovely)’; moreover, they should be built quickly, cost little and, most importantly, ‘serve our healthy desire for an independent life in contact with nature’ (Ponti, 1933b, p.292). Thus architects could address the social and economic problem of housing and thereby demonstrate to the public the diffusion of good taste (p.292). Ponti and Bardi agreed on both these points. Bardi declared the era of the private upper middle class villa to be finished. The architecture of the time consisted in worker housing, barracks, hospitals and Regime architecture such as the *Casa del Fascio*, the local Fascist Party Headquarters (Bardi, 1933, p.6). In sum, he denounced the *bourgeoisie*, supported the regime’s commitment to architecture for the

*popolo*, and confirmed the role of the architect in fascism's overall mission of social transformation.

Seven examples have been chosen for discussion below, so as to illustrate the pivotal role envisioned for housing among the three classes of fascist Italy, and how they assisted in building and maintaining consent. Two of these prototypes were built for the new ruling middle class, which had 'deposed' the *bourgeoisie* - the *Casa del Sabato per gli sposi* (Saturday House for Newly-Weds) by BBPR and Piero Portaluppi, and the *Casa di vacanze per un artista sul lago* (Artist's Holiday Villa by the Lake)

by Giuseppe Terragni and the Como Group. The other five examples of holiday homes – designed by Enrico Griffini, Piero Bottoni and Eugenio Faludi – responded to the aspirations of the lower middle classes who aimed to move up in society, or to the working classes, the *popolo*, who were meant to stay securely in their place albeit with an improved way of life.

### The Saturday house for newlyweds

The *Casa del Sabato per gli sposi*, or Saturday house for newlyweds (Figure 7.3), was a little 'love-hut'



Figure 7.3: BBPR with Piero Portaluppi, Saturday House for Newly-Weds. Interior views showing stained glass window, spiral stair, built-in bath and bedroom. Exterior views showing planar wall with *bas relief* and terrace. Plan. From *Domus*, August 1933, 419-11. Copyright Editoriale Domus S.p.A. Rozzano, Milano, Italy. Montage by author.

originally destined as a garden pavilion for the ample grounds of an old castle. It was designed by the young firm of BBPR (Gianluigi Banfi, Lodovico Barbiano di Belgiojoso, Enrico Peressutti, and Ernesto Nathan Rogers) in association with the well-respected Milanese architect and academic Portaluppi. Located just north of the Palazzo dell'Arte, its principal space was a bedroom complete with its own marble-lined pool, en-suite bathroom, remote-controlled windows and a feature wall of 'Miesian' smoked glass for privacy – an arrangement pioneered by German architects Hans and Wassili Luckhardt.<sup>21</sup>

The planning principle was strictly functional: the bedroom merged into a semi-circular living area giving out onto a terrace of equal size while a compact kitchen and servant's room with fold-down bed wrapped around the back. Dominating the living space was a 'Corbusian' spiral stair of sumptuous pink marble leading to a rooftop where a mechanical umbrella provided shade from the Mediterranean sun (Campiglio, 1995, p.72).<sup>22</sup> The villa was decorated with a stained-glass strip window of abstract, geometric forms by artist and designer Pietro Chiesa.<sup>23</sup> Entitled *Nostalgias of the Countryside* this stained glass was an allusion to the romanticised view of rural life constructed by Party propaganda to counteract the inevitable internal migration to the cities brought about by the mobility of the lower middle class and the increase in white collar jobs, particularly in the civil service (Chelz, 2011, p.226).<sup>24</sup> This strange juxtaposition of an old-fashioned rural myth on the one side, and a projection of the future on the other, was typical of the many interwoven contradictions of the fascist period, where party propaganda sent out different messages according to the audience (Castronovo, 1987, p.19).

On the villa's main planar wall was an erotic ceramic bas-relief entitled *The Lovers* by sculptor Lucio Fontana. It had what Pica described as a 'plastic' relationship to the architecture while making an obvious reference to the activities (sanctioned by marriage) that were occurring inside (Campiglio, 1995, pp.73–6). Alongside the specially executed artworks and the sumptuous

21 My thanks go to my colleague Dr. Astrid Roetzel for her assistance with the German translations of 'Die Mailänder Triennale. Internationale Ausstellung für Kunstgewerbe und Architektur', *Wasmuths Monatshefte für Baukunst*, 17 (1933), p. 295.

22 According to Campiglio these elements were direct references to Mies and Corbusier.

23 Chiesa was artistic director of the design firm Fontana Arte and worked closely with Ponti for many years. See Chelz (2011), p.215.

24 The window was a scaled-down version of a larger body work executed for luxury ocean liners.

travertine and marble were industrial linoleum floors, high-tech appliances and mass-produced furniture. Ponti describes the projected clients as an 'elegant couple' who desire a space that is 'flexible and relaxed' and at the same time 'intimate and refined' (Ponti, 1933d, p.410).

It was an idyllic domestic space 'merged with nature, like a light-filled nest bathed with affectionate shadows' (Ponti, 1933d, p.410) where young couples could procreate in peace while their children were either at a marine colony or doing gymnastics at their nearest *Casa Balilla* (Fascist Youth Organisation). The fact that it was a 'Saturday' house was also very significant. While this was time off, it was not identical to the more recent concept of the weekend, because this was time designated for party-related activities. Indeed, Saturdays exemplified the regime's systematic intrusion into private time, which contributed to the making of a fascist self (Griffin, 1998, n.p.; Venè, 1988, pp.163–7). This couple were like the Adam and Eve of the next generation of fascists, born into the new society and thus expected to be fully accepting of it.

### The artist's lakeside holiday villa

For the Triennale, Giuseppe Terragni headed a group of Como architects to design a lakeside holiday villa for an artist and his family, the *Casa di vacanze per un artista sul lago* (Figure 7.4).<sup>25</sup> This was located just north of Ponti's steel construction, the Torre Littoria. Terragni's villa was articulated through two double-storey volumes connected via a portico. It emphasised purity of space and connection with the exterior. Access to views and orientation towards the sun were paramount. The living spaces faced the lake to the south while the double-height studio, enclosed by a wall of glass bricks, faced north. The one constructed in Milan's park was built in lightweight-timber framing and therefore ephemeral, while the more permanent version, destined for an island site in Lake Como, was to be of reinforced concrete. Although one of the more bespoke examples, it juxtaposed off-the-shelf modern materials such as linoleum and glass bricks with more traditional materials such as marble flooring and brickwork.

Ponti described it as 'clearly avant-garde' and 'leaving aside any traditional element' (Ponti, 1933d, p.542). It was avant-garde in its approach to spatial division on the interior (sliding doors and walls, divider furniture) and on the exterior (more sliding windows, translucent materials, porticoes and balconies). The National Institute of Fascist Architects' journal *Architettura*,

25 The other members of the group were: Mario Cereghini, Adolfo Dell'Acqua, Pietro Lingeri, Gabriele Giussani, Gianni Mantero, Oscar Ortelli and Carlo Ponci.

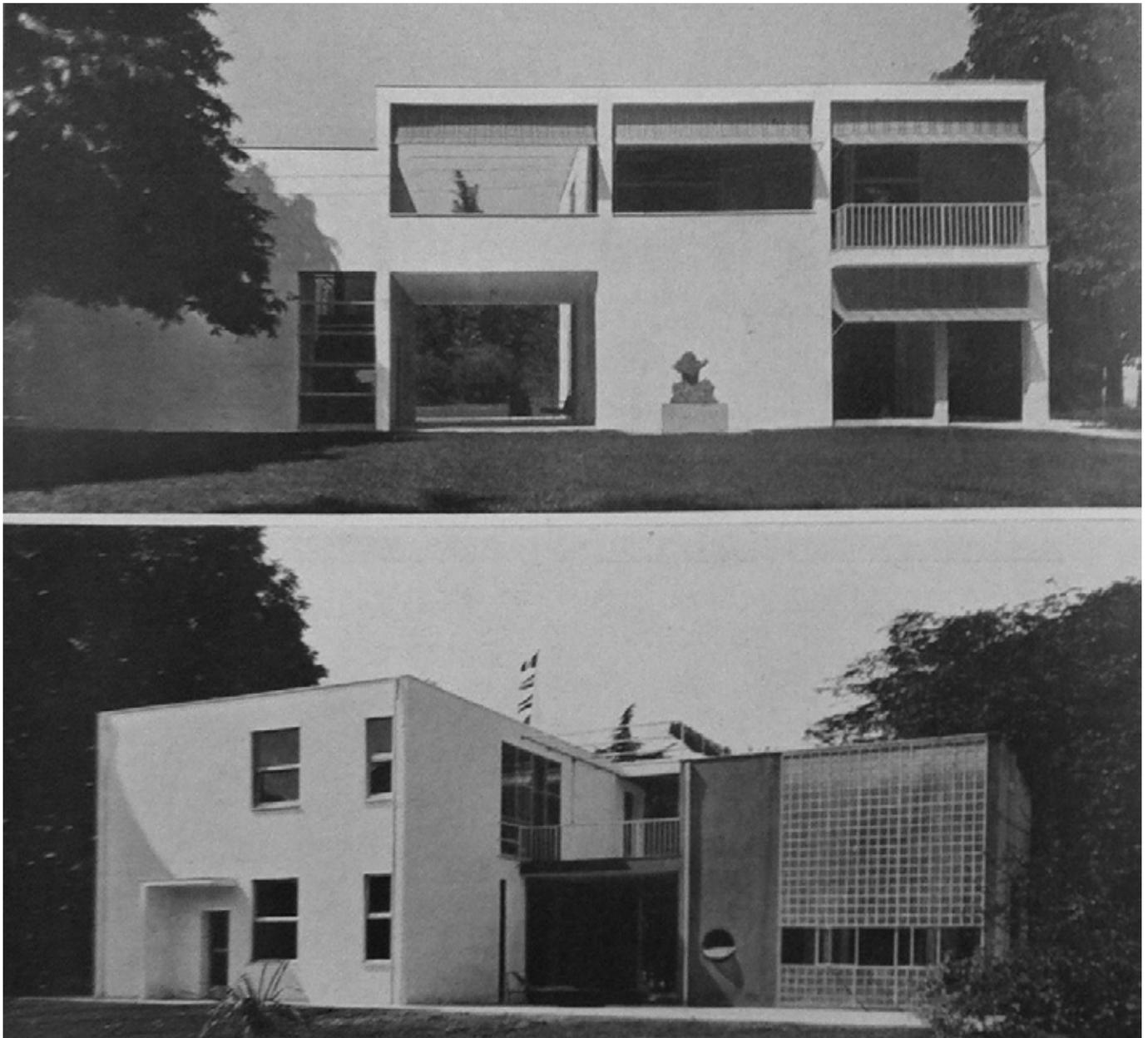


Figure 7.4: Giuseppe Terragni and the Como Group, Artist's Lakeside Villa. Photographs of front and back façades. From *Domus*, October 1933, 536. Copyright Editoriale Domus S.p.A. Rozzano, Milano, Italy.

however felt that the portico and the inclusion of a fresco by Marcello Nizzoli, were still appropriate for a more party-sanctioned architecture.<sup>26</sup> Entitled 'Sporty Life by the Lake,' the fresco was located under the portico, and showed in a classicizing manner three male and three female figures playing tennis and practising the high jump. Sport fed into the overall modernist ideal of health and outdoor living, but it was also an integral element of the fascist party's policies of social re-organisation especially in relation to youth.

The inclusion of two houses for artists – the other being the famous *Villa-studio per un artista* (Villa-Studio

for an Artist) by the team of Luigi Figini and Gino Pollini – highlighted the essential role artists played in communicating fascist ideals, as passionately expounded by Sironi in his *Manifesto of Mural Art* of 1933 (Sironi, 1933, pp.10–11). The *Villa-studio* was considered to be the architectural expression of the *Quadrante* programme, which called for Rationalist architecture to meet the challenge of reconciling the processes of modern (Northern) functionalism with the forms of traditional (Italian) classicism (Doordan, 1988, pp.116–19). Terragni's villa, like the *Casa del Sabato*, reaffirmed the position of the artist as a new and modern (fascist) professional who, alongside his family, was making his own contribution to a fascist future. Corporativism allowed for artists to syndicate with other professionals such as lawyers, architects and engineers, thus firmly establishing their position in society, and

<sup>26</sup> Artist, designer and architect Nizzoli is most famous for his work with Olivetti. His involvement with the Triennale began with the first Monza edition of 1923 and culminated in the famous Salone d'Onore of 1936.

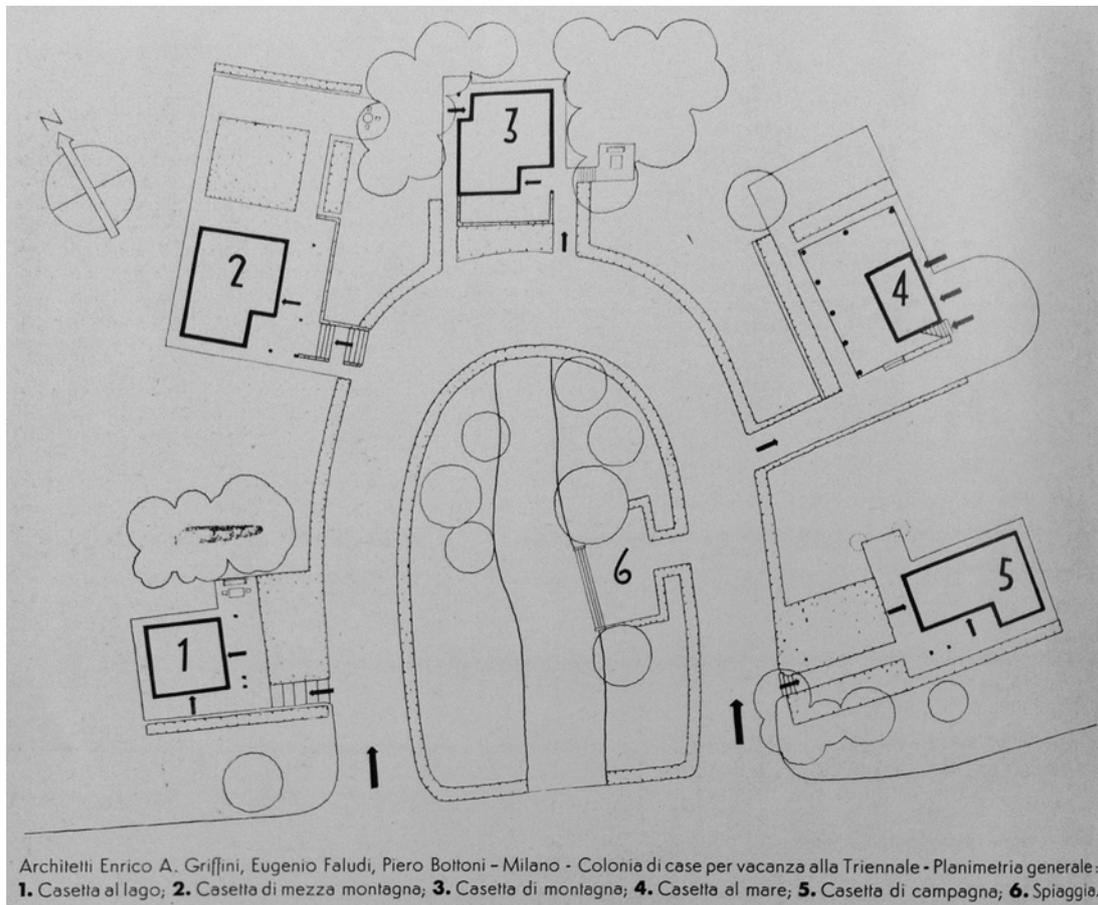


Figure 7.5: Plan of Layout of holiday villas showing horseshoe arrangement. Key: 1. Seaside/Lake Villa, 2. Mountain Villa, 3. Alpine Villa, 4. Beach Villa, 5. Country Villa, 6. Artificial Beach. From *Domus*, July 1933, 292. Copyright Editoriale Domus S.p.A. Rozzano, Milano, Italy.

acknowledging the role they played in communicating party ideals to a public audience through their art.

### Holiday homes

Nestled at the top of the Parco Sempione, just above the *Casa del Sabato*, this group of five modest villas (aptly named *cassette*, which literally means small, cute houses) was designed jointly by Enrico Griffini, Piero Bottoni and Eugenio Faludi (Figure 7.5). (Bottoni, whose long-time experience in designing social housing was already on display in the *Elementi di case popolari* pavilion in the park's south-east corner, had the opportunity to apply his expertise to holiday homes here.)<sup>27</sup> To reach this part of the exhibition, visitors turned left off the main path of the Triennale proper. There, they found five small houses, each meticulously landscaped. Laid out in a horseshoe shape, with an artificial beach at the centre, the arrangement was

<sup>27</sup> Bottoni, like many of his Rationalist colleagues – Alberto Sartoris, Adalberto Libera, Figini & Pollini – had a long-time interest in social housing and wrote numerous articles on the subject. He also presented papers at various planning and housing conferences, curated exhibitions of social housing both for the VI and VII Milan Triennales of 1936 and 1939, and continued with his activities and interest in this area in the post-war period.

not unlike a suburban *cul de sac* and thus befitting to the picturesque English landscaped garden style of the park's overall layout.

This villa grouping catered for the full range of recreational landscapes. There was one house for each of the following: the lakeside or seaside, lower mountains, an alpine setting, the beach, and the countryside. Their sizes ranged from the modest *Casetta al Lago* (Lake Villa 1), at 47.4 square metres, to the three-bedroom *Casetta di mezza montagna* (Lower Mountain House 2), at 92.7 square metres. By comparison, the Artist's Lakeside Villa was twice the size at approximately 200 square metres, while the *Casa del Sabato* – only accommodating a couple and their servant – was 68 square metres. Roughly the same size was the Alpine Holiday House 3, which boasted three bedrooms. Compared to the luxurious Saturday House and expansive Artist's Lakeside Villa, these homes were relatively cheap to purchase – from as little as the equivalent of £15,000 in the 1930s for the little Countryside House 5, and up to £35,000 for the two-level Beach Villa 4 (Venè, 1988, pp. 104–5, 111–15). The magazine *Domus* emphasised this as one of the many virtues of these homes, while the cost of the more bespoke examples was omitted.

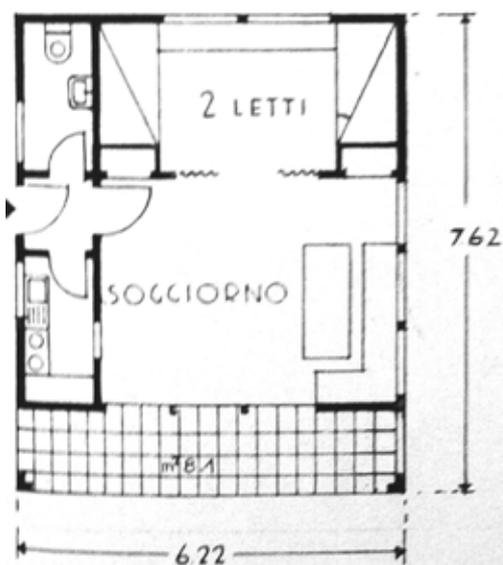
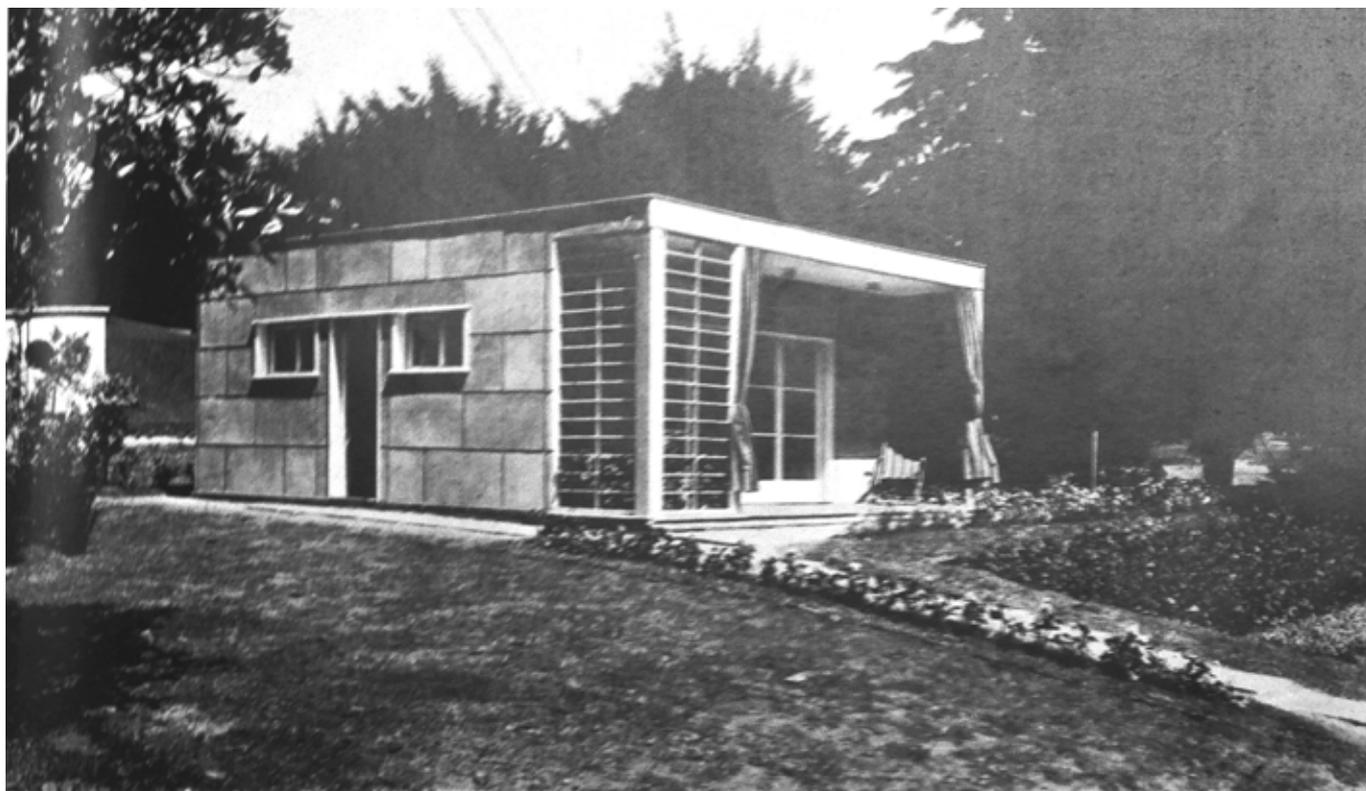


Figure 7.6: Enrico Griffini, Piero Bottoni and Eugenio Faludi, Seaside/Lake Villa I. Exterior photo, plan, interior view of sleeping area from living room with doorway to kitchen and bathroom on left. From *Domus*, July 1933, 293. Copyright Editoriale Domus S.p.A. Rozzano, Milano, Italy.

Driving their cost down was the fact that these villas could be built in a speedy 8–14 days. Like the Elements of Worker Housing pavilion, these villas demonstrated modernism in their efficient plans, which included adjoining terraces and living spaces oriented to daylight. Each boasted a separate kitchen and bathroom, which was a mark of civilisation (Venè, 1988, p. 16).<sup>28</sup> A high percentage of the urban lower classes had just moved

<sup>28</sup> This is also reflected in the proliferation of high-cost colour advertising for bathroom fixtures in *Domus* and other journals of the time.

to the city from peasant villages, and were accustomed to a single space for living and cooking, and since only twelve per cent of the urban apartments they moved into had running water and separate bathrooms, they had to accept shared facilities or public washrooms (Venè, 1988, p. 14, 19–20). As a way of keeping costs down even further, the architects employed simple construction methods like timber frame or masonry, which could in some cases be self-built. Only the occasional detailing disguised the fact that these villas were made entirely out of cheap, mass-produced

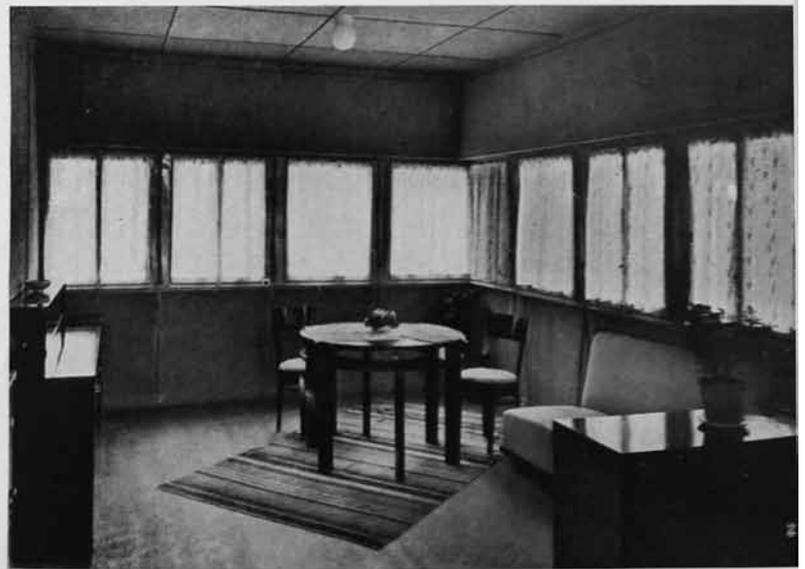
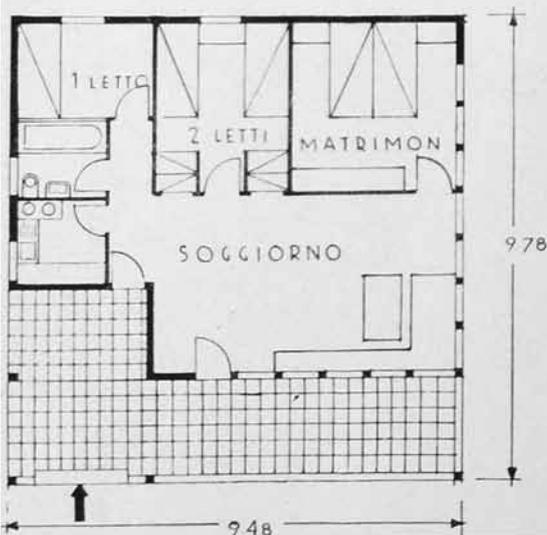


Figure 7.7. Enrico Griffini, Piero Bottoni and Eugenio Faludi, Mountain Villa 2. Exterior photo, plan, interior view of living areas with corner window. From *Domus*, July 1933, 294. Copyright Editoriale Domus S.p.A. Rozzano, Milano, Italy.

materials like fibre-cement, linoleum and rubber. German architects visiting the Triennale noted that the thorough attention given to standardisation, and the functionalist influence from beyond the Alps did not detract from their cosiness and friendly balance.

The first example encountered was the compact *Casetta al Lago* (Figure 7.6). At a very spare 47.4 square metres, this demountable home took only eight days to build. Intended for the lakeside, it could also be built at the seaside if desired. An accentuated feeling of space was created by using curtains to divide the living and sleeping areas so that light could stream in from three

directions. The cheerful façade and the semi-enclosed terrace bestowed a sense of both intimacy and openness at one and the same time.

The next two examples were *casette* for families holidaying in the mountains. The first – the *Casetta di mezza montagna* (Lower Mountain Holiday House 2) – was essentially a square plan with windows wrapped around its main corner and the terrace acting as both entry space and continuation of the living room (Figure 7.7). The second – the *Casetta di montagna* (Alpine Holiday House 3) – was laid out along a rectangle with a more distinct separation between the living and

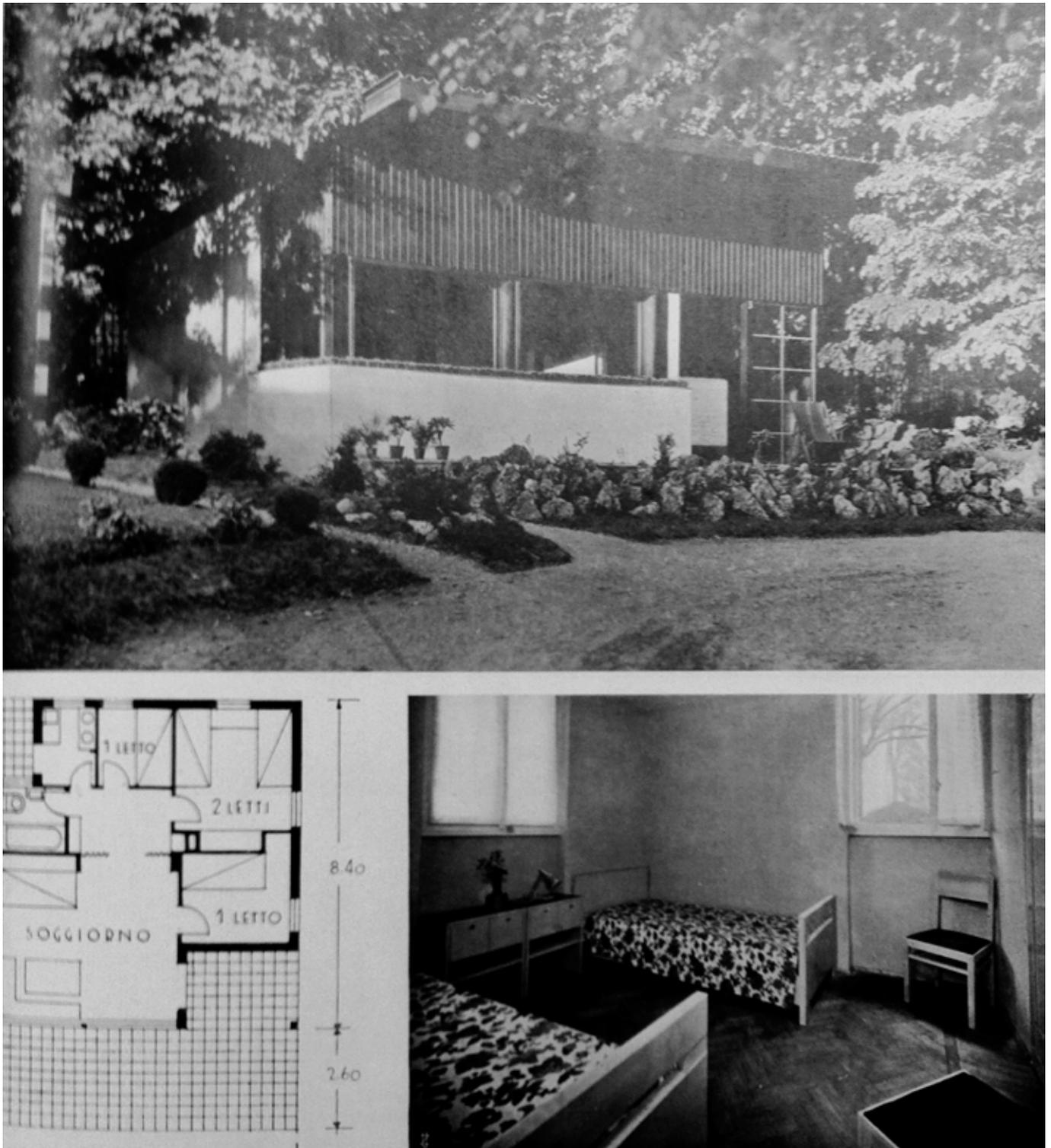


Figure 7.8. Enrico Griffini, Piero Bottoni and Eugenio Faludi, Alpine Villa 3. Exterior photo, plan, interior view of twin bedroom. From *Domus*, July 1933, 295. Copyright Editoriale Domus S.p.A. Rozzano, Milano, Italy.

sleeping areas (Figure 7.8). Though smaller by about 25 square metres, the latter actually appears more spacious with a generous 20 square metres of L-shaped terrace, which merges with the living room. It is also distinguished by its timber floors, sloping roof and heating (for climatic reasons), and the inclusion of a servants' room.

The *Casetta al mare*, or Beach Holiday House 4 (Figure 7.9), was arguably the most striking of the group and stood out for its modern, Corbusian form, and its

innovative construction system, featuring the use of steel and a proprietary panel system called *Magnesilite* (Morganti and Tosone, 2009, p.1069). Designed for a sunny seaside location and elevated on *pilotis*, this villa presented a dominant rectangular prism with a void carved out to form an elevated terrace under which the garage and servant's room were located. Again, new industrial materials such as rubber, linoleum and glass bricks were utilised alongside more recognisable Mediterranean elements like ceramic tiles, stucco

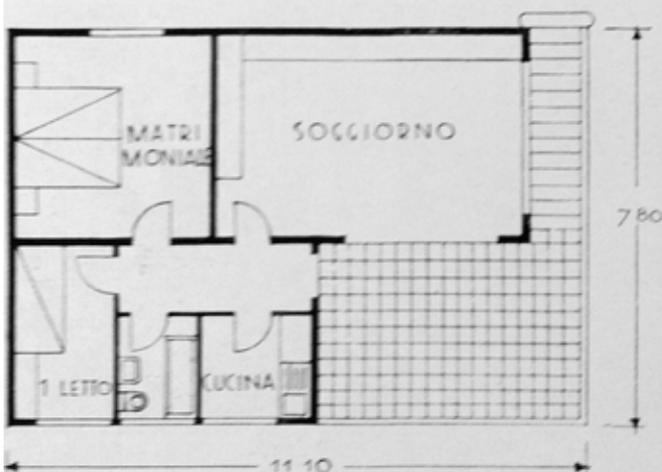


Figure 7.9: Enrico Griffini, Piero Bottoni and Eugenio Faludi, Beach Villa 4. Exterior photo, plan, interior view of living area showing extent of natural light. From *Domus*, July 1933, 296. Copyright Editoriale Domus S.p.A. Rozzano, Milano, Italy.

render and a timber pergola. But however modern it was, its plan was quite conventional, illustrating a clear separation between services, living area and bedrooms.

The *Casetta di campagna* (Country Holiday House 5) was intended for a rural setting (Figure 7.10). It had its more bespoke (and expensive) equivalents in the *Casa di campagna per un uomo di studio* (Country House for a Scholar) by Paniconi and Pediconi, and in the *Villa di Campagna* (Country Villa) by the Milanese group of Mino Fiocchi, Emilio Lancia, Michele Marelli and Giuseppe Serafini (Figure 7.11). Like the seaside villa, it took an elementary rectangular prism and carved out one corner to form a terrace, which was sheltered by a pergola. The terrace acts both as an entry point

to, and an extension of, the living area, placed at the centre of the plan with services on the left and bedrooms on the right. Here, the ceramic tile cladding and its simple, almost vernacular, form appears familiar, while the fluidity of the plan, the rubber flooring and the emphasis on light all makes it modern. Like the nostalgia induced by Chiesa's stained glass windows in the costlier villas, this home extolled the virtues of rural life and country living, which were also used to justify and promote the creation of new towns such as Sabaudia and Littoria.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> On the topic of Italian new towns, see Millon, 1978, pp. 326-41; Burdett, 1981; and Ghirardo, 1989.

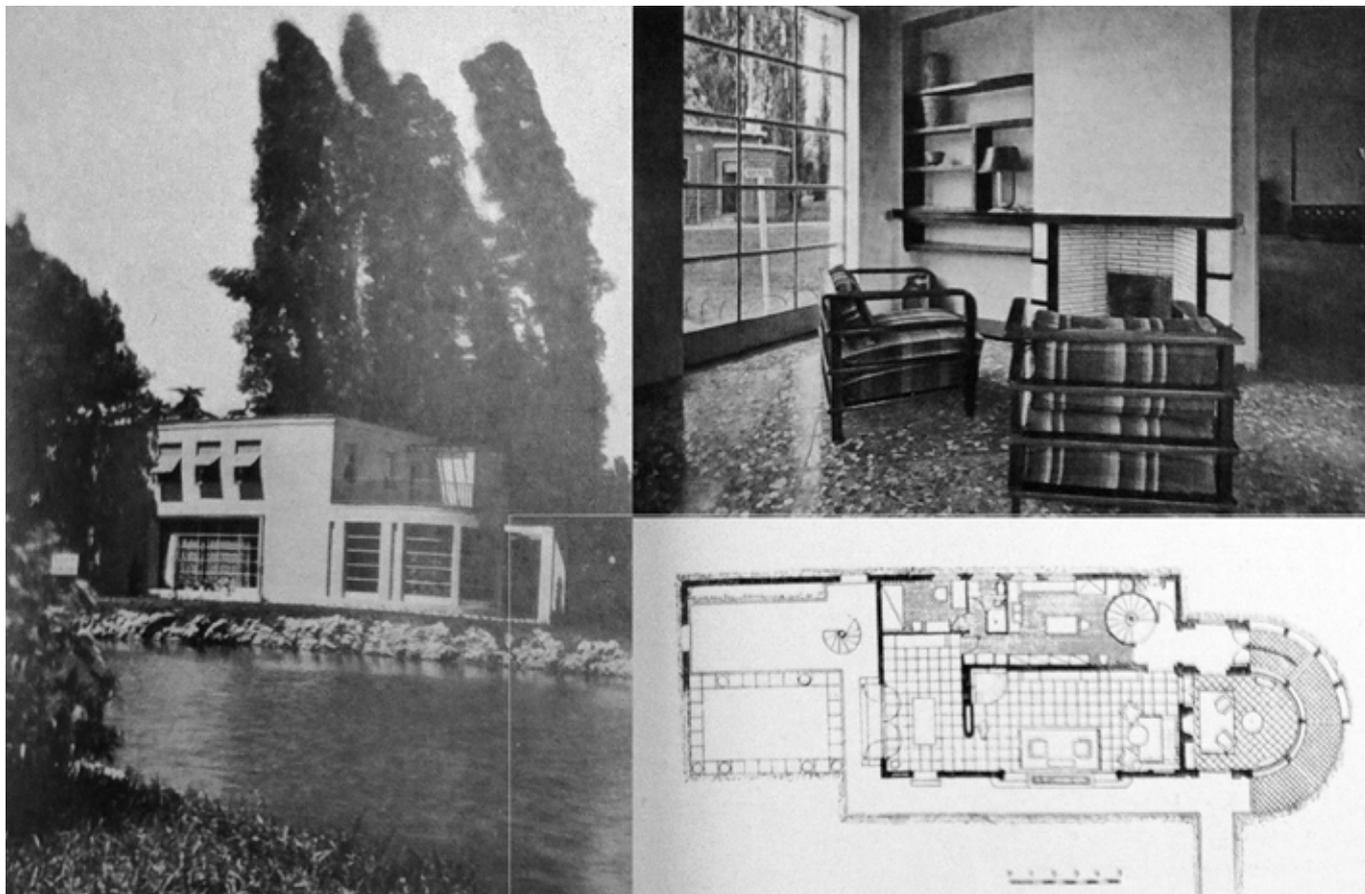


Figure 7.10: Enrico Griffini, Piero Bottoni and Eugenio Faludi, Country Villa 5. Exterior photo showing care in landscaping, plan, interior view of dining area with door to kitchen and bathroom on left. From *Domus*, July 1933, 297. Copyright Editoriale Domus S.p.A. Rozzano, Milano Italy. Montage by author.

Like the two examples that were discussed above (namely, the Saturday House and Artist's Lakeside Villa), these five villas (or *Casette*) presented a successful combination of traditional elements with modern approaches and technologies. They remained true to Rationalism and at the same time fulfilled their political function. While the Saturday House and Artist's Lakeside Villa acted as a kind of benchmark for the constructed discourse of the identity and culture of the new fascist ruling class, the central message of the five villas was to debunk the belief that holiday homes were only for that plutocratic *bourgeoisie* whose private interests had, before the revolution of fascism, been so well served by liberal democracy. This belief was to be replaced with a conviction that fascism allowed this privilege to be collectively enjoyed through the application of modern technology, the dedication of architects, and the advent of a new fascist society. This meant that holiday homes of varying size and cost, equal in dignity and efficiency to their more expensive counterparts, were now commercially and materially available. The intended protagonists of the new holiday homes were families bringing up the new generation of fascists, and who wanted to ensure that children had ample access to sun, air and greenery.

## Conclusion

The pavilions of the *Mostra dell'Abitazione* at the 5th Milan Triennale of 1933 did much more than showcase the virtues of modern architecture and industrial production. Each example represented four inter-related elements that were at the foundation of fascist Italy's constructed discourse of identity and culture. These were: 1) the technology, forms, materials and ideals of modernity; 2) the Mediterranean architectural tradition; 3) the socio-economic reforms of the fascist regime; and 4) the role of the middle classes in political life.

In various measures, these pavilions are all lost examples of Italian Rationalist architecture, which was known for its successful merging of modernist principles with the Mediterranean tradition. Efficient plans, access to natural light, simplified structure, and industrial materials such as steel, rubber and linoleum, all stood for the social and economic ideals of modernity, progress and health. These new materials sat happily alongside pergolas and terraces, as well as finishes of stucco, tile, brick and marble, which were more characteristic of nationalist identity and pride.

As domestic settings of middle-class life, these ideal housing prototypes acted as a lever for all

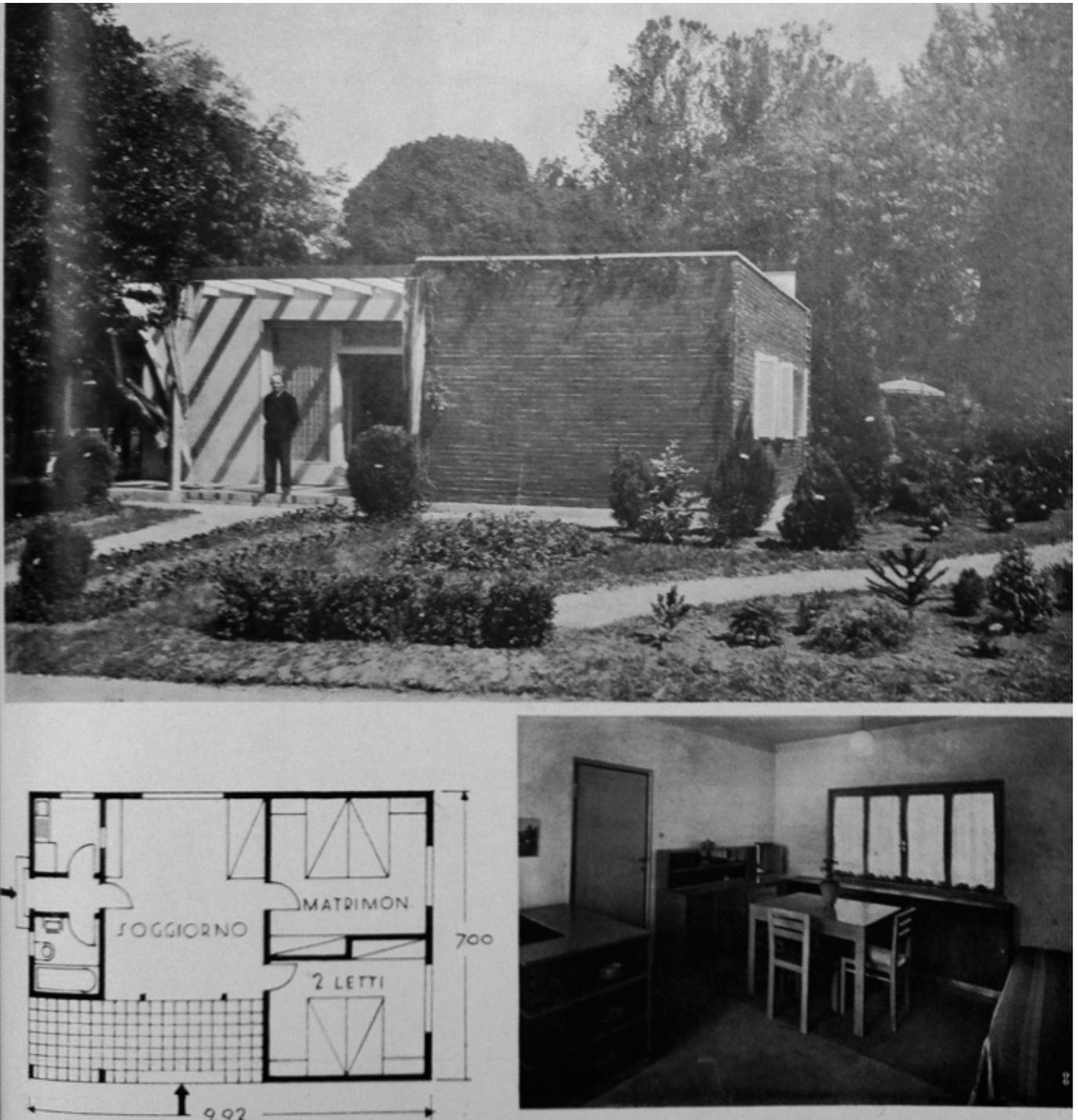


Figure 7.11: Mino Fiocchi, Emilio Lancia, Michele Marelli and Giuseppe Serafini Country Villa. From *Domus*, August 1933, 413 & 415. Exterior photograph showing bucolic setting, interior view of living room, ground floor plan. Copyright Editoriale Domus S.p.A. Rozzano, Milano, Italy. Montage by author.

echelons of society. They were manifestations of both a constructed discourse of a uniquely fascist socio-political identity and culture. These pavilions assumed the form and function of an idealised middle-class lifestyle and a consumer culture which lies at the heart of a decorative arts exhibition such as the Triennale. All this was made possible by the social, political and economic reform encapsulated in Corporativism or the Corporative State, and helped at the same time to mitigate any sense of the real loss of personal freedom.

The *Casa del Sabato* by BBPR and Portaluppi, and the Artist's Lakeside Villa by Giuseppe Terragni and the Como Group were cradles for a new ruling middle class that had 'deposed' the *bourgeoisie*. Here they played out their leisure time in clean, luxurious and modern homes that at the same time respected tradition and cemented their previously denied political role within the new Italian society. The five examples of holiday homes designed by Griffini, Bottoni and Faludi were aimed at the lower middle classes, with

their aspirations to move up, and at the working classes, the *popolo*, who were to stay securely in their place albeit with an improved way of life. With the opportunity to holiday in modest, efficient, light-filled villas, the aspirational middle classes were assured of the possibilities of social mobility and the positive effects of fascist reform alike. The lifestyle of the *popolo*, meanwhile, was vastly improved such that they could take a break from work and enjoy Mussolini's populism 'made flesh' in neat, attainable and dignified holiday homes.

Coming together at the Triennale, then, were the four cornerstones of Fascist society: Art, Industry, Family and the State. These were expressed architecturally through pavilions that spoke of Modernist ideals, Italian tradition, social mobility and economic reform. This was what made Italian architecture between the wars unique, and this is what made the 5<sup>th</sup> Milan Triennale such a politicised event. In sum, its villa pavilions made manifest at a 1:1 scale the role of architects – conscious members of the new ruling class – as arbiters and active protagonists in fascism's revolutionary mission to transform Italian society.

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