

## project

client Aermont London

## designer

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## project information

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local architect

CSPE

developer

MTDM Manifattura Tabacchi Development Management Srl

## showstoppers

- 8 public squares
- 100.000 m2 total
- 15 buildings
- 15.000 m2 new build
- 1 central square building
- 1 theater
- workspaces for modern craftsmanship
- pilimoda fashion school
- residences
- the student hotel

## INTRODUCTION

Concrete reveal their visionary masterplan concept for the abandoned 1930s edifice, Manifattura Tabacchi, in Florence. Paying homage to ‘the cradle of the Renaissance’ – and with respect for Florentines, past and present – they will transform the former tobacco factory into a cultural and creative hub of activity, complete with living spaces and hotels. Quietly ushering in an artisanal revival, Concrete’s ambitious blueprint proposes a ‘village’ for the makers and shakers of tomorrow; a veritable boost for the ‘hidden’ neighbourhood above Parco delle Cascine; and a vibrant new heart for the Tuscan capital.

## CONCEPT

In typical fashion, Concrete approached the project from a rare perspective. Instead of focusing on the existing buildings on the vast industrial site, they looked instead at how they could create ‘life’ there. Taking a future-forward approach and drawing inspiration from Florence’s heritage and the history of the Manifattura Tabacchi, they reimagined the complex with a two-fold concept in mind:

### The interactive square

The starting point was the piazza. For centuries, the square was the point of convergence in an Italian town or city. People would head here daily to trade their wares, buy cuts of meat, wine and spices or haggle over handmade goods. Others would work on the square or simply socialise around the fountain with their fellow city dwellers – or those from beyond the city’s boundaries. In short: life revolved around this public space.

On the ground floor of the buildings surrounding the square, taverne, trattoria and artisans in workshops would do a flourishing trade. Not only did they earn their living from the square, but they helped it thrive.

On the second floor were the offices of the city administration and lawyers who supported the sellers and artisans below. Finally, people lived on the floors above. Thus, the square was constantly ‘alive’. Somewhere, there would always be a candle burning into the early hours of the morning.

However, modernisation of cities towards the end of the 19th-century – followed swiftly by the invention of the car and the advent of motorways in the 1950s and 60s – meant everything changed. Squares lost their role in the city. And more recently, the digital revolution has created a further shift: shopping and socialising is now also done online, causing a new disconnect.

To truly bring Manifattura Tabacchi to life with something happening 24 hours a day, seven days a week, it was essential to recreate a piazza aesthetic at the heart of the concept.

### The convergence of tradition and technology

Florence is, of course, renowned worldwide for its rich arts and crafts heritage and as a tour de force of commerce. Ancient professions have been passed down from generation to generation amongst the Florentines: bookbinding, shoemaking, leather-making and garment-making, amongst them. They have kept the city alive. But there is also a danger that this very same heritage and traditional way of doing things is stifling their progression.

Galvanised by the history of the Manifattura Tabacchi as a place where things were made, Concrete aspires to stimulate the new generation of artists, artisans and apprentices to fuse their centuries-old tradition with emerging technologies. In short: to discover new ways of working.

## WALKTROUGH

### **A village for the makers and shakers of tomorrow**

Concrete began by recreating “Piazza Centrale”, a piazza in the heart of the monumental complex with a carefully orchestrated assemblage of functions harmonised under one glass and steel roof. This allows the area to be activated all year round and is the only new structure to augment, never overshadow, the existing architecture.

The primary focus of the square will be an outdoors food hall on the ground-floor. Surrounded on three sides by artisanal and fashion stores, it will be bolstered by the presence of the iconic Polimoda fashion institute, ranked amongst the top ten in the world.

Acting like a mezzanine, the roof of the lower central building is designated for co-working spaces. The first-floor area connects to high-ceilinged ateliers and communal equipment rooms (think: shared laser cutters and 3D printers), housed in wings on both sides. This layout is duplicated on the second floor.

A key element of this vibrant hub is a large-scale event space that will host fashion shows, gigs, conventions, and so forth. Strategic programming will ensure it attracts different audiences with different interests from the city – and beyond – guaranteeing a constant turnover of fresh blood, bringing with them new ideas and energy.

This square is where locals and visitors to Florence can find creative inspiration, seek out meaningful collaborations, marvel at contemporary artisans at work, explore fashion trends from students of the Polimoda – or simply fuel up on espresso, breakfast, lunch or dinner in a cutting-edge environment.

### **A village that never sleeps**

Concrete have infused their design for the entire complex with a multi-functional, multi-layered aesthetic to actively inspire interaction. It should be energised day and night: on different floors, and in different areas. Just like a piazza.

Surrounding and synergising the square will be a street dedicated to large-scale artisanal works and installations; Polimoda fashion institute; a brewery; a 4 or 5-star hotel with a swimming pool and garden; a luxury student hotel; residences; serviced apartments, gardens; a more traditional Italian square; and a theatre and open-air cinema. Concrete have also masterplanned a new mixed-use building for the site – reflecting the existing architectural style. Unusually, while Concrete start work on the first buildings, a programme of temporary events will be activated in the repurposed square, both indoors and out. Think: pop-up events, artists-in-residence, workshops, art markets, bar, and so forth.

The first phase of the project will begin in the summer of 2018. Work will be carried out in carefully planned stages, with the Manifattura Tabacchi becoming more and more occupied over time.

Completion of the redevelopment is slated for winter 2022.

## **A connected village**

Interaction is integral to the concept as a whole. Not only within the 'village' but with the neighbourhood and city of Florence. With that in mind, Concrete devised a plan to facilitate all kinds of connections.

First, they looked at the so-called 'dead spaces' between the buildings where they could enhance interconnections and arranged the layout so that everyone crossing the site would have to pass through the central square.

Secondly, they're opening up seven entry points around the site so pedestrians and cyclists can enter from all sides, with additional access for cars. Currently, there is only one main entrance into the Manifattura Tabacchi (on the Via delle Cascine).

Further plans include a thoroughfare with a dedicated bike lane so that people can cut through the complex from the northern Novoli quartiere on their way to the Parco delle Cascine, and Università degli Studi di Firenze. An important route, it will be expanded with new bridges over the Mugnone river and Macinante canal, and also serve as a main entrance into the complex. A new tram route is also being built along the old railway tracks that run parallel to the canal, with connections to the city's airport and historic centre.

## **Birrificio**

South of the central square, a brewery will occupy the former generator house, a small building overlooking old railway tracks currently being dismantled and redeveloped into a new tram line (opening 2022). Tuscany is, of course, famous for its wines, but Concrete wanted to add something a little unexpected and tap into the burgeoning craft beer movement. Patrons of the Birrificio will be able to relax in the intimate beer garden and find shade from the sun under a lush pergola – clever reuse of a steel structure from one of the three buildings being broken down on the site.

## **Makers Street**

A dedicated street, just north of the central square, for large-scale works and installations that will be created and displayed indoors and outdoors: artisan activities will spill out onto the passage from large industrial ateliers on either side.

## **Piazza Dell'orologio**

'Clock Square' will be a traditional Italian piazza in the east of the complex. Dominated by a large clock – specially created by a local artist – this will be the most formal square in the Manifattura Tabacchi. Embracing the existing rationalist architecture of its surroundings – a colonnade and curved forms – the paved space will be kept a little empty so it can be easily adapted to large-scale events. A freestanding pavilion will house a coffee kiosk and info hub displaying the history of the tobacco factory. During the redevelopment, the square will be used for pop-up events; Polimoda will also have a temporary school here.

## **Puccini's Garden**

Plans are to create a cultural enclave, tucked away in the north-east corner of the complex. Pièce de résistance is the historical Teatro Puccini. The theatre originally provided after-work entertainment for factory staff and their families. Now it offers regular activities for the neighbourhood: programming will be ramped up both during and after the redevelopment. A new movable wall placed at the back of the theatre will open up the theatre to the garden and allow performances to take place both indoors or outdoors – and will also function as a screen for open-air cinema. A couple of large elm trees will be preserved in the garden to add character and shade on warm days. A new residential building is also being constructed on this site. Mirroring the profile and architectural style of the existing buildings, it will lend symmetry and synergy to the square.

## **Residences**

A curved monumental block sited at the east boundary of the complex – and formerly used as offices, lodgings and maternity rooms, with an adjoining sales depot – will be transformed into residences. At its heart is the iconic portal to the Manifattura Tabbachi, leading from the Via Delle Cascine. This imposing entrance will also function as a communal space for those living there.

## **Residential Garden**

Just south of the central square, a green communal space will foster informal interaction, further stimulated by the creation of entrances to the apartments from the garden. An existing overhang will give each a front porch where residents can sit, enjoy the view, and converse with their neighbours.

## **Grand Hotel**

West of the central square – beyond the main thoroughfare – a former raw tobacco warehouse will be converted into an exclusive 4 or 5-star hotel. A secluded inner courtyard with a bar, café and greenery will create a peaceful enclave, away from the hustle and bustle. While a garden terrace at the back of the hotel, overlooking the Parco delle Cascine, will offer al fresco dining and reclining on huge steps, seamlessly augmenting the existing architecture. The garden will also feature a small swimming pool. Overhangs on the first floor will afford some of the rooms private balconies with views over the park or inner courtyard. And business travellers will be able to make use of meeting rooms and programme events here. Serviced apartments will occupy the second floor.

## **Student Hotel**

This vibrant young brand reimagines hotels as boundary-blurring spaces where students, travellers, mobile professionals and creative nomads can interact in co-living and co-working spaces. In other words: a perfect partner to harmonise with Concrete's concept for the Manifattura Tabacchi. Not only will it help accommodate students at the Polimoda but will draw young visitors to Florence, ensuring a constant flux right up to the far west boundary of the complex.

## **ABOUT THE CLIENT**

Aermont is an independent asset management business focused on real estate and real estate related investment activities. We take a proactive operator-oriented approach, emphasising large complex investments that offer long-term value creation opportunities for the associated assets and businesses. To date, Aermont serves as investment advisor to three pan-European investment funds. Aermont's responsibilities relate to advising on the origination, execution, financing, asset management, operations and disposal of the funds' investments.

## **ABOUT MANIFATTURA TABACCHI**

Designed by Giovanni Bartoli and Pier Luigi Nervi, and built between 1932-1940, the Manifattura Tabacchi is an impressive example of Rationalism. This Italian movement, which emerged in the 1920s-30s, is characterised by simple, sober forms – structures of concrete, glass and steel – that follow function. Northwest of the centre and close to the city's largest park, Parco delle Cascine – plus Università degli Studi di Firenze – the vast trapezoidal complex is bound by the Mugnone river to the north, the Macinante canal to the south, and Via delle Cascine to the east. The industrial site consists of 15 buildings spread across 100,000 m<sup>2</sup>, much of which will be preserved and revered in Concrete's ambitious plans.

## **ABOUT CONCRETE**

Since 1997 concrete develops concepts in architecture, interior design, urban development and brand development. We work with a team of 50 multidisciplinary creatives for corporations and institutions. Next to Manifattura Tabacchi, Projects include URBUS USA, citizenM hotels worldwide, W Hotels in London and Verbier, Zoku Lofts, Mongkok Skypark, Castell D'emporda, Supperclub worldwide, Rituals stores worldwide and we're currently working on W Hotel in Mumbai, Virgin Cruises, W Hotel in Osaka, Andaz Munchen, masterplan for Scitech Scity in New Jersey and more.

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