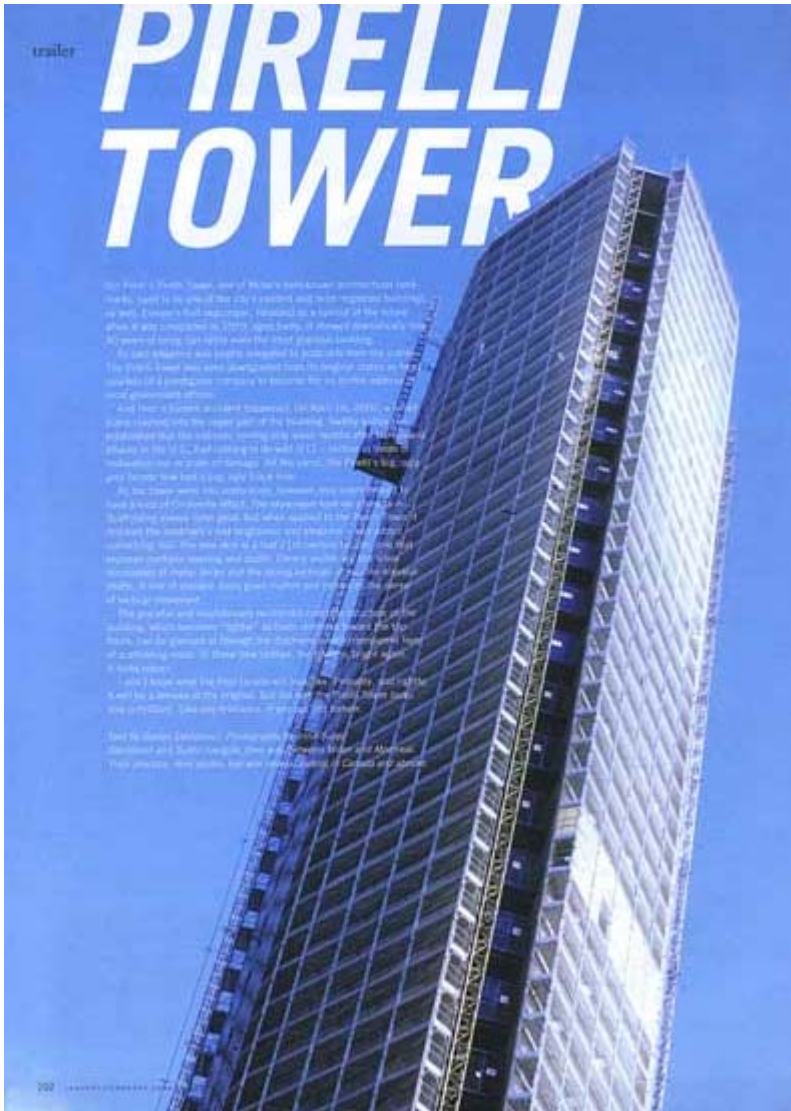


PIRELLI TOWER  
Azure, January-February 2004



Gio Ponti's Pirelli Tower is one of Milan's best known architectural landmarks; and it used to be one of the saddest and most neglected. The very first European skyscraper, heralded as a symbol of the future when built in 1961, aged badly. It was showing clearly how forty years of smog can disfigure even the most gracious building. Its past elegance was largely relegated to postcards from the sixties. Its once transparent façade got grey and dirty. It was even downgraded, from headquarters building of a flagship company, to anonymous host of local government offices. And then, a bizarre accident happened, as a small plane crashed into it in 2002 (nothing to do with 9/11 neither in motivation nor in damage scale). The big ugly grey façade got a big ugly black hole. But this event proved to have a kind of Cinderella-effect for the skyscraper.

As the tower went into restoration, it got a new skin – scaffolding.

Scaffolding always looks good; but when added to Pirelli Tower, it made it get back all its lost brightness and elegance; and added something more too.

Because this new skin is a real 21<sup>st</sup> century façade; one that explores multiple layering and depth.

They are the clear horizontals of the silver-metal decks and the strong verticals of the exterior elevator shafts.

The line of elevator doors, giving rhythm and enhancing the vertical movement.

The revolutionary and incredibly graceful reinforced concrete structure of the building, lighter as loads get smaller towards the top floors, guessed through the diaphanous, semi-transparent layer of scaffolding mesh.

In those new clothes the building is bright again. It looks reborn.

I don't know how the final façade will look like; probably, and rightly, it will just be a remake of the original one. But the way Pirelli Tower looks now is a miracle.

Like any miracle, it will not last forever.

Image of the Pirelli Tower with scaffoldings, end of 2003. Photo Irina Suteu.

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