



Convento di San Francesco: when the building of the new allows history to be recovered

The dream of all architects came true with the restoration of the former Convento di San Francesco in Conegliano: being the first to excavate with times, equipment and resources quite different from those of the usual emergency operations to bring out testimonies of the past one after the other.

The construction of the new underground car park of the complex has in fact provided the conditions and the economic resources necessary to bring to light archaeological finds that had been hidden up to now, returning them to the community. The former convent, model for Italy and the world of high-quality restoration, hosted the "From Reversibility to Compatibility" scientific convention in 2003.

Location

- **location.** Former Convento di San Francesco, Conegliano (Treviso).
- **history of the building.** San Francesco Nuovo, one of the most outstanding monuments in the province of Treviso, dates back to the end of the XIV century in an area that today is subject to close archaeological restrictions in the old centre of the city, perched on the side of a hill in a densely inhabited district.
The complex originally comprised the large San Francesco church and two cloisters to which a wing for novitiates was added in the eighteenth century. In 1810 Napoleon's army demolished a part of it, with the church and the twin cloister of the one still in existence. In the later centuries the structures were used as barracks, a hospital and then various scholastic institutions.
- **State of affairs.** Before the restoration, the entire building was in an advanced state of decay with partial collapses of the roof in some areas.

Intervention

- **type of intervention.** Conservation restoration of the former Convento and the building of a new underground car park.
- **Duration of the intervention.** 2001 – 2004.
- **Customer.** Fondazione Cassamarca.
- **designers.** Recovery of the former Convento: Arrigo Rudi and pool of professional practitioners; creation of the new underground car park in the archaeological area: architect Michele Potocnick.
- **general contractor.** Dottor Group.
- **consulting and outside assistance.** Superintendence of the Environmental and Architectural Assets of the eastern Veneto and the Superintendence of Archaeological Assets of the Veneto.
- **objectives.** Housing a post-graduate studies centre.
- **site.** Choosing a location of the complex has required the creation of a minimum impact-building site of limited dimensions but completely adequate and in line with the functions required by the type of works projected.
The outstanding organisation has allowed the building works to be conducted apace with the delicate operations of archaeological surveys that took even longer on the grounds of the church.
- **historical surveys and laboratory analyses.** In addition to careful historical research one hundred and sixty stratigraphic samples on the plasterwork and 530 samples of *discialbo* (patina removal) were taken together with cleaning along the walls that have brought many frescoes of different ages to light that were hitherto unknown.
- **Structural/architectural interventions.** The interventions on the former convent have entailed the total redoing of the roofs, including the wooden bearing structures made with new and additional elements. The floor slabs have been updated for the new loads with the addition and repair of the beams and use of techniques of consolidation that are completely reversible. These include the application of continuous steel elements, both at the top and for the floor slabs in addition to the insertion of the T-shape iron core for static strengthening. The works have also seen the emptying and cleaning of the cloister vaults and the consolidation of said vaults and the masonry through the injection of suitable compounds, as well as the localised interventions with the *scuci-cuci* technique (literally, a technique of unstitching/stitching). Use-specific technological systems have been designed and implemented.

- **artistic operations.** The frescoes and the murals discovered after the *discialbo* (patina removal) have first been consolidated and then touched up with watercolour paints. In conclusion they have been protected with techniques and materials that are perfectly reversible with tried and tested efficacy.
- **Archaeological excavation.** Near the convent complex in order to make the underground car park to serve the former convent a six-metre deep excavation has been dug which was particularly complex because of the enormous volume in an area of great archaeological interest. To support the intervention, non-destructive survey techniques such as georadar and laser scanner were used
- **safety.** In the handling of the materials and equipment, methods were adopted such as providing for the needs of the sites, ensuring at the same time levels of accident prevention in the working areas. The complex and overlapping phases of the work in all the areas of the site have been planned with the maximum rigour and in maximum compliance with safety standards. In over 360,000 hours of work there have been no accidents.
- **documentation.** To document the work, over 6,000 photographs were taken and 100 hours of video footage were shot.
- **education on site.** The site of the former Convento di San Francesco has three summer camps for young students, an important opportunity for deepening the techniques of stratigraphic excavation and architectural and artistic restoration. Numerous training periods are available for students coming from various universities associated with the group.