



Work start date. 13/12/2007

Work end date. 25/03/2009

Palazzo Grassi SpA has called upon Tadao Ando Architect & Associates of Osaka to design the project for the restoration of the Punta della Dogana complex. It has appointed Dottor Group as general contractor responsible for managing the complex conversion of the historic landmark into the new contemporary arts centre exhibiting works from the Pinault collection. The detailed carefully-planned phases of the project will be carried out paying particular attention to delivery so as to return the historic complex to the city in its prestigious new form as swiftly as possible.

- **Location.** Punta della Dogana, Venice.
- **Type of work.** Architectural and functional renovation and restoration.
- **Customer.** Palazzo Grassi Spa.
- **Designer.** Tadao Ando Architect & Associates.
- **General contractor.** Dottor Group.
- **Safety Coordinator.** Celio Fullin, Engineer.
- **Goals.** Work is aimed at renovating the complex, which is quite rundown in parts, so as to prepare it to host the new Contemporary Arts Centre.
- **Structural/Architectural and Artistic Work.** The project foresees a modern, attentive and intelligent restoration, based on in-depth philological research and not limited to simple preservation. In particular, the work, when possible, is aimed at restoring ancient forms, which have now been completely lost, and at restoring the original morphology of the warehouses' bearing structures.

- History of the Complex.

The original Punta della Dogana complex was built on the muddy lands on the western tip of the Dorsoduro district, where the waters of the Canal Grande and of Canal Giudecca meet. A commercially strategic vantage point that forever sealed the fate of these lands. The first constructions date back to 1313, when Doge Raniero Zen gave the land to a group of friars so that they could build a monastery nearby. The area where the current complex stands had to be later reclaimed in order to build the warehouses where salt from around the Adriatic Sea was stored. In the early days of its history (between the fifth and tenth centuries), Venice only exploited salterns within its territories, but by the twelfth century salt was being collected from as far away as Chioggia and Istria. The war against Chioggia forced the populace to travel to the boundaries of the Adriatic Sea, to the coasts of Monte Gargano in Apulia, to Sicily, to Sardinia, and even to Cyprus and Libya.

Punta della Dogana in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries

More and more salt warehouses were rapidly being built over the years. At the beginning of the fifteenth century, more warehouses for the Customhouse and goods coming in from the sea were built in the same area. In those days, goods coming in by land were taken to the Rialto. It has been estimated that by the mid-sixteenth century there were already 22 warehouses. In the sixteenth century the complex was renamed Punta della Dogana (Customhouse Point) and it was already a perfect example of great logistical organization. Big vessels would moor in the Canal Giudecca and unload their goods into the building through large openings; there, goods were stored and were cleared through Customs. Finally, a series of smaller vessels moored in the Canal Grande took care of moving the goods. To prevent the weight of the goods and salt reserves from damaging the walls, warehouses were emptied uniformly. We know that a lot of maintenance work was done on the structures, especially reinforcing the walls against the strong pressure exerted by salt reserves. Also, roofs were restored very carefully to prevent leaks. The new maritime Customs was repeatedly altered between 1525 and 1586.



First restorations

At the beginning of the seventeenth century the warehouses were no longer devoted to salt, and became the sole property of the Customhouse. In the mid-seventeenth century, while the Basilica della Salute was being built, Fedel Iseppo Benoni was in charge of major restoration and renovation works on the complex. Thanks to his planning and work, the building took on its current form: a complex of warehouses crowned by a tower bearing the Palla d'Oro. The Palla d'Oro is a golden bronze sphere held up by two Atlases. It represents the world and bears the statue of "Fortuna", which rotates indicating the direction of the wind. The bronze was sculpted by Bernardo Falcone. More work on Punta

della Dogana dates back to the nineteenth century. We know for a fact that in 1835, during the second Austrian Rule, the facades of the warehouses were rebuilt. The design of the facades matched the Benoni tower, so the whole complex took on a stylistically uniform look. Restoration works continued throughout the years without much care to preserving the original structure. Expanding the construction was even considered, although it was never actually carried through. By the end of the nineteenth century the great central hall was created by demolishing the wall dividing two warehouses and erecting four lateral walls and a series of pillars bearing the roof and its great skylights. A few trusses (rooms 4 and 5), dating back to the seventeenth century, were rebuilt.

Punta della Dogana today

In the twentieth century, through to our present day, the complex, which had always been property of the State, stopped operating for the Customhouse and its premises were assigned to various institutions and associations. Small-scale yet numerous jobs occasionally involved erecting partition walls and the use of reinforced concrete. Speaking of the new restoration, Japanese architect Tadao Ando stated: "This building has floated on water since the fifteenth century and my goal is to make it float on water towards the future; it is a very ancient building and studying its history so as to preserve its original structure while innovating it for the future has been a hard job. I shall use materials from the twentieth century such as reinforced concrete, which will be included within the framework of a series of structures dating back to the fifteenth century".

- The Works

"The Punta della Dogana complex is characterized by a simple and rational structure. Its body forms a triangle, shaped like the tip of Dorsoduro Island, while its interiors are made up of several long rectangles, with a series of parallel walls. With the utmost respect for this symbolic establishment, all partitions added during previous restorations will be carefully removed, so as to restore the complex to its original forms. Exposing its brick walls and trusses will give the complex back its energy and bring its old maritime traditions back to life. At the centre of the complex, a square space occupies two rows, the result of a previous restoration. As an exception, we shall keep this structure since it creates a "concrete box" insert, which transforms the space considerably. Blending old and new elements, the complex will bring the past, present and future to life. Our renovation will approach the exterior of the complex by carefully restoring the original facades, except for the openings, which will be completely replaced. The design of the new doors and windows, despite modern elements like steel and glass, is based on traditional Venetian craftsmanship. A pair of concrete columns stand near the entrance, created with the conversion of an opening onto Campo della Salute already existing. This piece of architecture is a monument to the rebirth of Punta della Dogana: an ancient crossroads for maritime trade, and now for contemporary art."

- The Designer: Tadao Ando.

Tadao Ando is one of the world's most famous and highly regarded architects. Born in Osaka in 1941, at the age of twenty, having been self-taught, he decided to study architecture. During several trips all over the world, he saw the work of his architects of reference at first hand: Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, Alvar Aalto, Frank Lloyd Wright and Louis Kahn. At the end of the 1960s, he founded the studio Tadao Ando Architects & Associates. He was awarded the Annual Prize by the Architectural Institute of Japan in 1979 for the Azuma house. In 1988, he designed the "Church of Light" in Osaka. In 1989, he completed a series of works including the Chapel on the Water at Tomamu, and in the same year, was awarded the Gold Medal from the French Academy of Architecture. In 1992, he designed the Japanese Pavilion at Expo '92 in Seville and the Naoshima Contemporary Art Museum in Kagawa. In 1996 he was awarded the Pritzker prize for architecture (equivalent to the Nobel prize). In 2000, he built "Fabbrica" the Benetton research and communication centre in Treviso, and in 2001 designed the Giorgio Armani theatre in Milan. On the other hand, the renovation plan for Palazzo Grassi in Venice is from 2006. He has been a visiting professor at Yale, Harvard and Columbia University and is a lecturer at the University of Tokyo.