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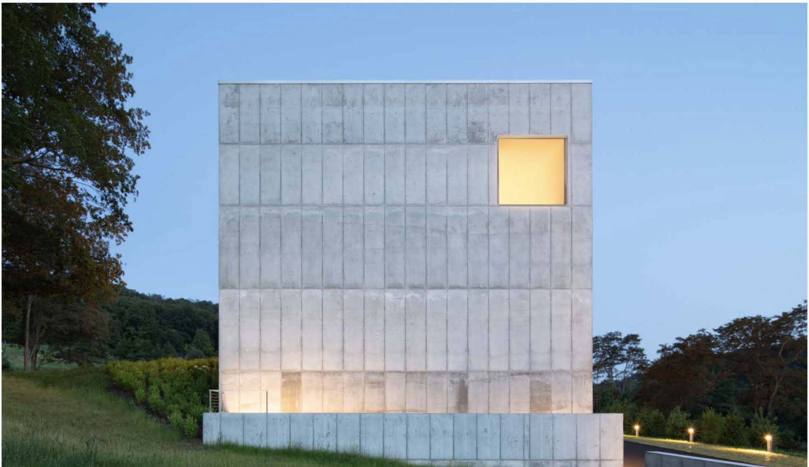
Magazzino unveils the Robert Olnick Pavilion, designed by Alberto Campo Baeza and Miguel Quismondo

By Emily Conklin • September 14, 2023 • Architecture, East, Editor's Picks, News



Spanish architects Alberto Campo Baeza and Miguel Quismondo, have completed a new pavilion for Magazzino Italian Art. (William Mulvihill/Courtesy MQ Architecture)

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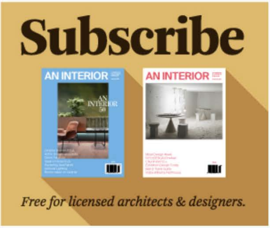
It began its life as a computer chip warehouse facility off of Route 9 in Cold Spring, New York, a small town with a Metro-North train station and a few restaurants on its main street. *Magazzino* means “warehouse” in Italian, playing off this industrial past of the site, but the Magazzino Italian Art museum has been committed to refined elegance since it first opened its doors. What may have once seemed like an odd geographic choice for a hyper-niche collection of nation- and movement-specific artwork was actually just one of several arts institutions that began the Hudson Valley’s art destination explosion. This week, the museum shows just how far they’ve come with the Robert Olnick Pavilion, the latest addition to their growing campus.

First opening its doors in 2017, it housed a collection of midcentury Italian art (notably collections of Arte Povera), many pieces which had never been seen before in the United States. All are from the collection of Nancy Olnick and Giorgio Spanu. (The pavilion is named for Olnick’s father, Robert.) Yet while the arts institution often hosts film screenings, live music and community dinners, the primacy of the permanent collection—in the somewhat compact digs of the *magazzino*—never allowed for more dynamic programming. The small internal courtyard nestled between the taller concrete wing and the low-slung white mass was never quite enough. The long-awaited unveiling of the Robert Olnick Pavilion just up the hill set out to change that.



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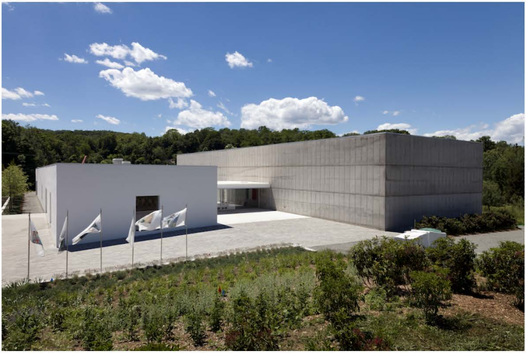

Magazzino Italian Art's permanent collection space opened in 2017 (Marco Anelli ©2017/Courtesy of Magazzino Italian Art, New York)

Designed by Spanish architects Alberto Campo Baeza and Miguel Quismondo, this new pavilion is a stylistic twin to the main concrete form that began the transformation of the highway-adjacent grounds. Olnick and Spanu have been patrons of the architects for some time: Campo Baeza designed their home in Garrison, which completed in 2008, and Quismondo designed the original Magazzino building.

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The addition turns the Magazzino into a proper "campus." The building's opening celebration, held last Sunday, was met with the same reliable pomp and luxe of any Magazzino event: This is an institution that will never serve you coffee in a paper cup, and has a fleet of glassware specific to whites, reds, and bubbles.

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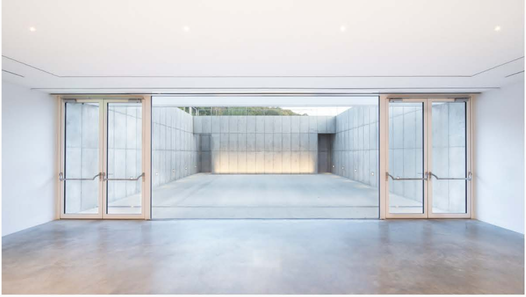
The new pavilion is a stylistic twin to the main building. (Marco Anelli/Courtesy Magazzino Italian Art)

As such, it's no surprise that the new pavilion sports a five-star Italian restaurant led by chef Luca Galli, whose morning cafe program shares space with a design shop. The cafe is without a doubt the most public-facing aspect of the museum. One can saunter in directly from the hilly grounds behind both galleries, either from the barns which are home to adorable Sardinian donkeys, (the baby, Dolce, is featured prominently on the museum's Instagram) or via the lush kitchen garden planted for the purposes of the restaurant programming, supported by larger, offsite plots.

The cafe is the most public-facing aspect of the museum (William Mulvihill/Courtesy MQ Architecture)

In stark contrast to its surrounding Hudson Valley environs, the new pavilion is faced in the same cast-in-place concrete as its predecessor and is defined by the same orthogonal formwork. Engineered in collaboration with local Cold Spring builders, the form is stark but not monolithic: Each panel ranges from 4- to 8-feet high, in a staggered pattern which draws the eye upwards. The surface is also textured and at times even pockmarked, showing the imperfections of a rough and ready element with minimal aesthetic treatment. The effects come from the material itself.



The first floor galleries connect to a front court (William Mulvihill/Courtesy MQ Architecture)

Inside, the gallerists' interest in pristine, white-cube space is upheld, differing from the original Magazzino in notable ways: There is no central courtyard, and there are multiple levels to the space. A central stair and elevator brings viewers up and down the three floors of new galleries, but a stair inset in the front exterior court also facilitates circulation.

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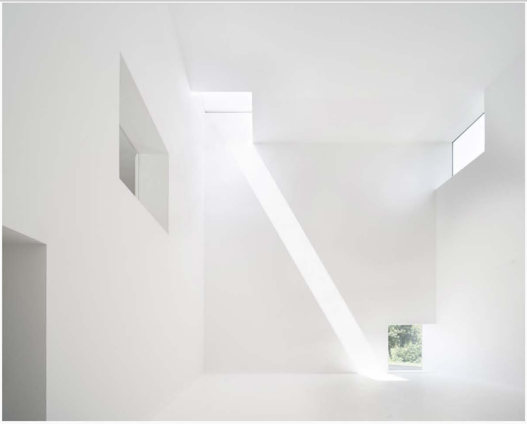
The Campo Baeza–designed "isotropic room," however, is the most purely "architectural" accomplishment here. While Campo Baeza pronounced it a crowning accomplishment of his career—its cubic form, 10 meters on a side, is punctuated with small square windows—it felt a bit like the white cubes we're all familiar with. The equally white, contiguous floor gives the space a feeling of endlessness. Without a throng of partygoers, it might deliver a sense of floating if you found yourself there alone. The monumental works hung here by Ettore Spalletti are meditative, but the opening event wasn't conducive to performing the internal, soul-searching work



The Campo Baeza–designed "isotropic room" measures 10 meters on a side and is punctuated with small square windows. (William Mulvihill/Courtesy MQ Architecture)

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Magazzino has closed an important programmatic gap with the new Olnick Pavilion: There is now a proper sense of a campus, space for temporary exhibitions, and a world-class bespoke gallery space. Plus, there is a restaurant and cafe that will no doubt benefit the local community.

Still, emissions responsibility wasn't mentioned during the opening events. The use of concrete, given cement's carbon intensity, may not benefit our global community. Cities continue to pour it with abandon, even though there are less extractive (but more expensive) variants available. But its use at Magazzino is merely a drop in the barrel of a mixer truck. Here, the material works to offer permanence: With proper care, the box could be operational for centuries. The most sustainable building is no new building at all, so we can instead imagine what artworks might its cubic meters host in 2223.

Alberto Campo Baeza Art Museums Concrete Magazzino