



MILAN

CRISTINA CELESTINO, GUEST

PORTRAIT

The architect and interior designer Cristina Celestino has created a unique world of colourful fantasy and metaphysical shapes developed with analytical rigour.

A creative personality with a penchant for drawing
Born in 1980, Cristina Celestino spent her childhood in Pordenone, in the heart of the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region, from where she gets her sense of humility and simplicity. Hers was a rural upbringing, with nothing to suggest the career she would eventually follow. A Friulana through and through, Cristina is proud of her humble, hardworking parents. She grew up alongside her sister, and was obsessed with drawing and colours. A creative, solitary type, she studied architecture history at the prestigious IUAV in Venice and dreamed of becoming a historian. Her teachers recognized a certain gift and encouraged her to pursue a more audacious course of study: architecture and design, taught without distinction between the two practices.

Her first job at Sawaya & Moroni

Diploma in hand, she traded Venice for Florence, where she wrote her thesis, before heading to Rome. Finally, she took the train back up to Milan, alighting at Stazione Centrale as in a film. The year was 2011. Her first job was at Sawaya & Moroni. William Sawaya, an architect and designer who combines the avant-garde with radicality, formed a partnership with the entrepreneur Paolo Moroni. Together, the pair have undertaken major architectural projects all over the world, as well as collaborating with Zaha Hadid, Ron Arad, Daniel Libeskind and Dominique Perrault.

Founding her own brand

That same year, 2011, Cristina Celestino founded her own design brand, Attico Design. Two years later, she took the even bolder step of setting up under her own name. But she was no longer some unknown beginner. Her work had been spotted by others, notably by Fendi Casa, the decoration and furnishings branch of the famous fashion house in Rome, who would propel her to Design Miami in 2016 with The Happy Room, an interior design project that she put together from top to bottom. Stepping into her decor was like entering another world.

Projects for the annual Design Week

Gifted with a keen sense of observation and a capacity to play with geometries and to juggle the aesthetic canons of several eras, Cristina Celestino has created a unique world of colourful fantasy and metaphysical shapes developed with analytical rigour. As an interior designer and decorator, she turns her hand to everything, with the exception of bathrooms and kitchens. Designing a saucepan or a remote control is not really in her vocabulary. Dressing like she designs, with considered style, Cristina Celestino is a wife and mother as well as a CEO; she is kind, full of smiles, sometimes betraying a hint of cult Italian actress Lucia Bosè. Each project she develops for Milan's annual Design Week takes her to every corner of the city. It's an opportunity to indulge her inner urban explorer and delve into the city's architectural and decorative geography, visiting places often closed to the public, or even forgotten or ignored. Reflecting upon these sites with her cinematographic eye, she projects them into another dimension – personal, playful and always highly original. For Design Week 2022, she spruced up the historic interior of Radaelli florists, originally designed by the architect Guglielmo Ulrich in 1945. And in 2023, she furnished the venerable tennis club Bonacossa, a sports complex designed by the architect Giovanni Muzio in 1923.

MY CITY

“I either walk or take the tram. I love the old orange trams. Their slowness. They’re rolling industrial monuments in their own right.” *Cristina Celestino*

Moving to Milan

Following my studies in Venice, where I lived in the student neighbourhood of Campo San Giacomo dell’Orto for two years, and then in Florence and Rome, where I had an apartment in Parioli in a building designed by the Roman architect Mario Ridolfi, I arrived in Milan in 2011. My first address was on Piazza Aquileia in Zona Solari. Then I moved to Via Marcona in Zona Tortona. Now I live on Viale Romagna, where I have both my home and my agency, which employs six people.

Discovering Milan by tram

I really like the lively working-class neighbourhood of Città Studi. I can’t stand the metro, so I either walk or take the tram. I know line 5 by heart. I love the old orange trams. Their slowness. They’re rolling industrial monuments in their own right. I have this little ritual on board where I sit at the back, which is mainly glazed, like a panopticon, and I watch the city unfold at its own particular pace. I’ll quite often get off on the spur of the moment to get a better look at a building or a streetlamp I glimpsed. For the Salone del Mobile 2019, I refitted a tram carriage that was in use in Brera, taking as my theme the city on the move. I called it Tram Corallo in memory of a cinema that’s now gone.

A multifaceted city

I love Milan, it’s a city on a human scale, full of positivity. I feel at ease here. It’s a multifaceted city, with clear architectural identities. There’s a juxtaposition of energies and silences, an urban environment that veers from the Berlinesque to complete calm. Via dei Giardini, for example, a green oasis just off the chaotic Via Manzoni, and my favourite neighbourhood. All that said, I don’t really like the Lambrate neighbourhood and I confess that I just don’t get Piazza Gae Aulenti.

Each building is creatively stimulating

Whenever I walk I’m always scanning the facades, the colours, the lobbies of buildings, the doorways, the balconies. Whether it’s a late 19th-century building or one from the 1950s, its materials are a creative stimulus for me, particularly when I find out it’s the work of such and such an architect, and yet a complete break with their usual style. Then there’s those strange details, stripped of all beauty, mysterious even, which feed my imagination and which I can reinterpret unconsciously.