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Auditorium BCC, in "Hinge" (Hong Kong)  
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[project file - italy]

# THIS JUST IN

## Auditorium BCC San Cataldo, Sicily, Italy Fabbricanove

Photography by Filippo Romano



The beauty of Sicily is legendary. San Cataldo is an ancient town in the hinterland of the island, with a historical centre of characteristic streets, low-rise masonry buildings, and public piazzas. The Banca di Credito Cooperativo (BCC) needed a new space to conduct important business meetings in, but it also desired to give something to the community here. A multifunction space for public events, gatherings, exhibitions... a cultural place. Why not combine uses and resources and do both at the same time?

Florentine architectural studio Fabbricanove was commissioned to realise the project in the heart of the city centre, which required easing the new facility into a building fabric that was centuries old and very dense. Sensitivity would be the most important item expected of the designers.

The bulk of the programme is taken up by an auditorium that occupies two storeys of the mass. It is a conventional proscenium space with a balcony for extra seating. It can be used for bank meetings or presentations, and for public lectures, conventions, films, discussions and so on. Squeezing such a large voidal space into the confines of the modest palazzo onsite would take

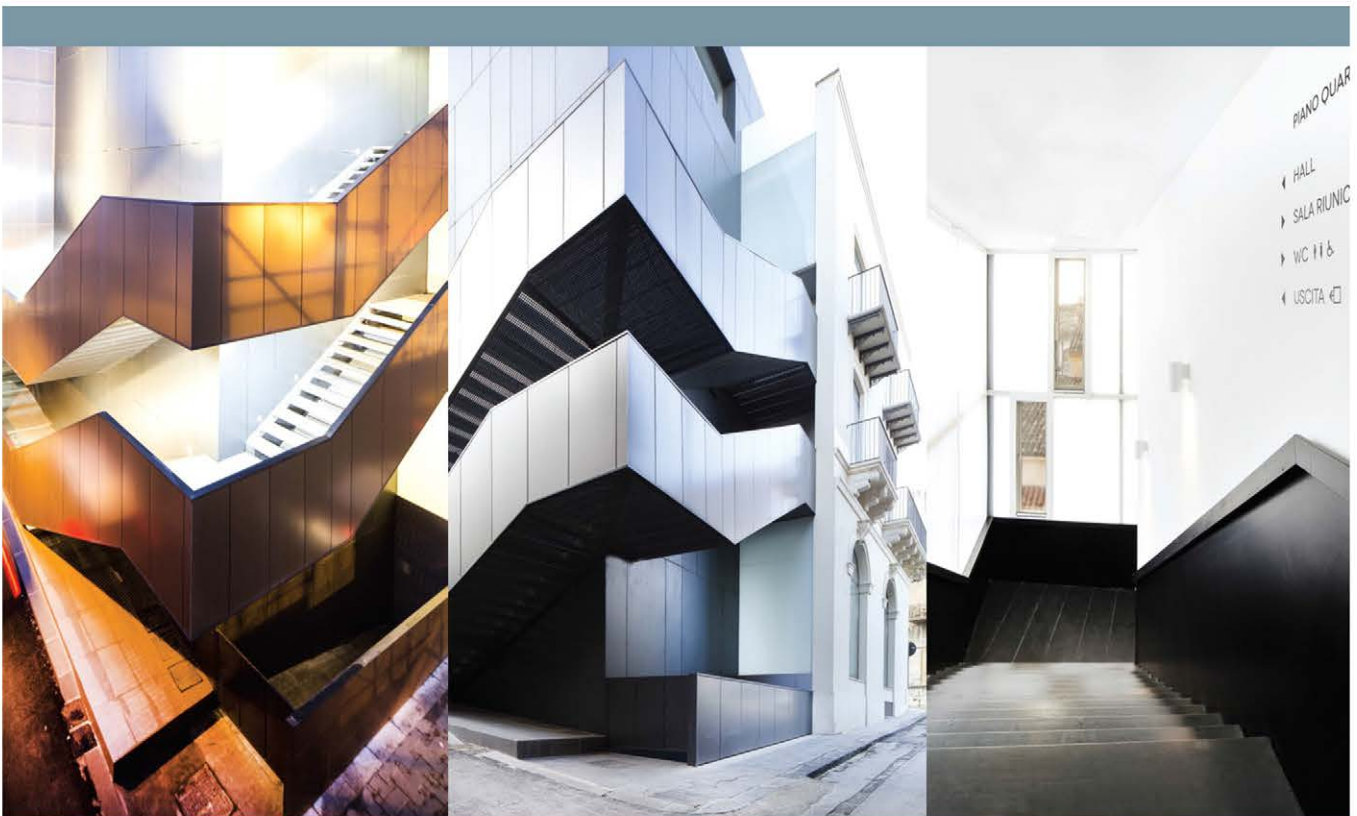
some clever space management, not to mention structural ingenuity. The answer is a monolithically expressed dark volume clad in grey anthracite that 'invades' the polite white shell of the original building. The street facade is left largely intact, the better to hold the constant, party wall plane of the urban street edge (and conform to building codes), but behind it, visible from the side and rear, is a black panelled box holding the new space. From the front lobby, a dark-toned staircase begins the ascent to the auditorium, winding around it as it goes. The partial views of the black monolith that are available from the main street in front suggest a marriage of old and new. It flirts with violence, this union, but thanks in part to the complementary hues of the materials – black and white – and the obvious contrast in language – historical decoration vis-a-vis modern minimalism – the conflation of the two seems to work. The external wall panels of the new volume are sliced with vertical slots that provide ventilation as they pattern the surfaces.

With ground level serving as entry lobby, and the two intermediary levels as auditorium seating, the top floor is left for a bank meeting room and a roof terrace between the new monolith and the old cornice in front.





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The structural solution here was not simple. Essentially gutting the original volume, the new monolith inserts its own steel system, and the 'gap' between this and the original perimeter walls that remain produced a space in which to place the circulation system of staircases and lifts.

The Auditorium BCC won't please every single citizen of San Cataldo, but even in its boldness, it represents a respect for the old context of the town. There will always be a need for updating architectural and urban situations, and there are various ways to do it. But Fabbrianove has demonstrated that to be thoroughly in our time doesn't mean we have to forget the past, or abuse it. The new construction plays its part more forcefully by letting the older building keep the principal urban role.

