



B&B ITALIA OFFICES

1971 – 1973 Novedrate, Italy

This small building was designed and built during the same years as the Centre Pompidou (1971-77), serving as a small-scale dress rehearsal for it. The headquarters of the B&B Italia offices at Novedrate, near Como, share with the great Parisian museum the structure made from prefabricated components, the open plan, the expressive and playful use of color, the positioning of the ducting on the exterior, surrounding the building like a second envelope and intersecting with the structure.

Renzo Piano received the commission from Piero Busnelli (1927-2014), one of the founders of Italian design. In 1966 Busnelli founded C&B with Cesare Cassina, one of the first companies fully devoted to the production of design objects. In the early seventies, Busnelli took over all the company's shares. It became B&B and, impressed by the design for the Centre Pompidou, he appointed Piano to design and build the company premises.

The building is at the front of the industrial complex. A slender suspended walkway covered with glazed panels connects it to the production departments. The building, with a square plan, is raised off the ground and attached to the structure consisting of 20 parallel portals, each with a span of 40 meters, in tubular steel painted blue. This made it possible to place the system ducting outside – with yellow for ventilation ducts and red for liquids – and to create ventilated cavities beneath the building and between the two roofs. The plan is completely unobstructed. It can be organized with the utmost flexibility to suit changing working conditions by using movable partitions.

The modular structure of the building means it can be expanded simply by adding portals to the structure and prefabricated panels for the curtain walls. Renzo Piano had already experimented with this design idea in structures made of prefabricated elements during the sixties, and it would again be a feature of the Centre Pompidou and his free-form housing in Cusago (1972-74). In the mid-nineties the B&B Italia offices were reorganized to cope with the new needs, and the building has lost nothing of its riveting novelty.