



Lorenzo Ciccarelli
Renzo Piano before Renzo Piano
Masters and Beginnings

Habitat

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THE BOOK

This book explores Renzo Piano's formative years, before the major achievement of the Centre Pompidou. The striking success of an architect little more than thirty years old in the famous 1971 international competition has long tended to eclipse his previous experience, which is fundamental to understanding the genesis not only of the Beaubourg but all Piano's subsequent work. The dense ramifications of his experience, spreading in many different directions, have now finally been retraced by Lorenzo Ciccarelli, the first scholar to have access to the archives of the Renzo Piano Foundation.

The chapters of the book seek 'to offer a coherent and many-sided understanding of the magmatic energy that drove Piano's remarkable works, while preserving the rhapsodic qualities of a true "portrait of the artist as a young man".' Immediately after graduating, Piano built a series of radical and innovative experimental structures, combining his mastery of prefabrication with an instinctive interest in industrial design. The roofs built out of pyramidal elements (1964-1965) and inflatable components (1966); a carpentry workshop (1965); a building to house his family's construction company (1966-1968); his shell structures (1966-1968); a detached house (1968-1969); his own office building at Erzelli (1968-1969); and the pavilion of Italian industry at the Osaka Expo (1969-1970): these were the prototypes in which Piano developed the design strategies and construction techniques that would characterise the Centre Pompidou and the celebrated masterpieces of later decades. They were constructional experiments that revealed the teachings the youthful Piano had absorbed from his masters in Italy (Franco Albini, Marco Zanuso, Giuseppe Ciribini) and abroad (Jean Prouvé, Louis Kahn, Zygmunt Makowski and Robert Le Ricolais). Piano had long sought out and frequented these masters, travelling indefatigably in those years between Europe and the United States.

The last part of the account deals with his partnership with Richard Rogers, the 'elder brother' who introduced Piano to the British context. Together with Rogers and Gianfranco Franchini, he devised the competition entry for the Centre Pompidou. The fascinating stories entwined in this book are an essential instrument for illuminating and reinterpreting the early years of one of the greatest architects of our time with previously unpublished archival materials.

THE AUTHOR

Lorenzo Ciccarelli (Jesi, 1987) holds a BSc degree from the Università Politecnica delle Marche and a PhD from the Università di Roma 'Tor Vergata'. He is currently adjunct professor of Architectural History at the Università degli Studi in Florence and since 2013 has worked with the Renzo Piano Foundation. His studies are devoted to the often ignored or misunderstood ties between Italian architecture and European and North American architecture of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. He has given papers on these subjects to international conferences in Chicago and Paris, and published essays in 'Architettura Viva', 'Construction History', 'Rassegna di Architettura e Urbanistica' and 'L'industria delle costruzioni'. For Quodlibet, he recently published the *Guida all'architettura nelle Marche 1900-2015*.