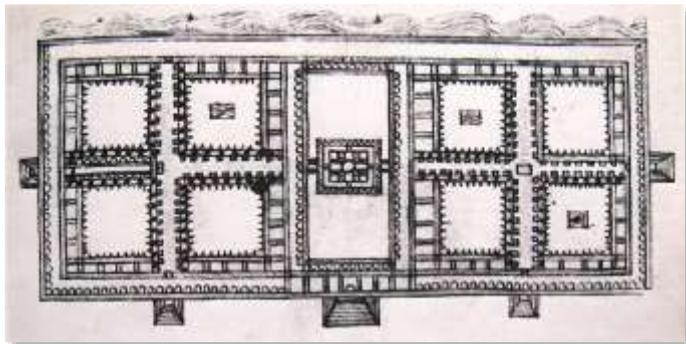


The University of Milan is located in the “Spedale dei Poveri” building, commissioned by Francesco Sforza and his wife Bianca Maria Visconti. The first brick was laid in 1456 and the first wing was already open in 1473, even though the whole complex could only be completed in the 1800s thanks to donations from the citizens of Milan and to the proceeds from a special Jubilee (the “Day of Pardon”) celebrated every two years during the Feast of the Annunciation, under whose protection the Hospital was placed. The project was initially entrusted to the architect Averlino, known as Filarete, and involved a modular plan inspired by the powerful symbol of the cross. The floor plan was organised into two crossings (one for men and the other for women) enclosed within a quadrangle, each



of which used to outline four square inner courtyards; these two large areas were connected by a rectangular courtyard with a church in the centre.

The original project underwent major alterations to adapt the architectural solutions to the rigours of the Lombard climate and to a series of delays caused by a chronic lack of funding for carrying out the work. The crossing structure of the two sides guaranteed a high number of spaces for patients.

The work on the right-hand Crossing, which was the first to be completed, began in 1459 and was finished in 1465 under Filarete’s guidance. There is evidence of patients being admitted from 1473 at the latest.



The Crossing’s wings were all equipped with 24 *acquaioli* (stone washbasins) fitted with metal bowls and buckets. The Crossing had a sewage system right from the outset and was also equipped with a sufficient number of toilets (one for every two beds), known as *necessaria* or *destri*, that used running rainwater, both vertically and horizontally, to ensure that they were kept constantly clean. The heating was provided by huge fireplaces. Beside each bed there



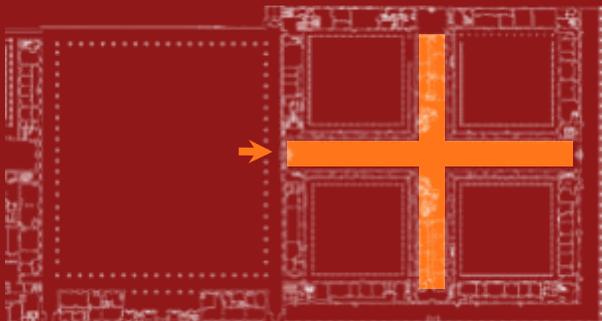
was a small wardrobe set into the wall that was fitted with a wooden **foldable desk** which could be used as a table, so patients could eat while sitting down. Duke Galeazzo Maria Sforza gave some feather mattresses for the beds in 1472, an extremely rare commodity at the time, but which were then replaced with wool ones. The covers were made of hide and the sick were provided with vests, shoes and **white caps**. When they were admitted, the sick were undressed, washed and checked with a fine comb to remove any potential parasites. The beds were heated during the winter and were remade twice a day, while the floors were also cleaned and the rooms were aired twice a day. During warmer summers, moist towels were hung halfway up the high ceiling to refresh and shade the rooms. By the 1490s, the Maggiore Hospital accommodated 1600 people, including patients and healthcare workers (doctors, surgeons and pharmacists), administrative staff (accountants and scribes), nursing staff (barbers, wet nurses, midwives and nurses) and service personnel (attendants, porters, barbers, bakers, tailors, cobblers, etc). In a bid to optimise space, new halls were created by adding mezzanine floors to the wings of the Crossings, which remained in use until the 19th



century. In 1773, the hospital had 21 wards (“rooms”) for a total of 1022 patients. For centuries, this architectural complex represented an example of an advanced hospital facility. It was used as a hospital up until the Second World War, when it was almost entirely destroyed by bombings. At the end of the war, the building was handed over to the University: the reconstruction work began in 1949 but it was not until 1958 that the University officially moved in. The restoration and renovation work recovered as much as possible of the original materials and a team of experts carefully matched the new with the old, including the architects:  
A. Annoni  
P. Portaluppi  
L. Grassi  
The latter was responsible for a large part of the restoration work of the fifteenth-century Crossing, which was performed with great scientific accuracy and a sensitivity towards spatial and aesthetic values, so it was restored to the public in such a way that it would retain the palpably austere atmosphere that these places were built to instil.



The Crossing is now a reading and study room for the Law and Humanities Library, focusing on legal subjects and, in particular, on Italian law. The hall houses a substantial number of Italian and international books and periodicals.



Via Festa del Perdono, 7  
20122 Milano  
9.00—18.45

Sources:

Francesca Vaglianti, *La Ca' Granda dei Milanesi*

Liliana Grassi, *La Ca' Granda. Storia e restauro*

Edited by Biblioteca di Studi giuridici e umanistici



Even in the '20s, the Ca' Granda building was still used as a hospital, as it would remain until the construction of the University in 1924, including the Faculties of Law, Literature and Philosophy, Medicine and Surgery, as well as Physics, Mathematics and Natural Sciences



The Allied bombings of August '43 caused a considerable part of the Ca' Granda buildings to collapse, including the Crossing



The restoration work of the fifteenth-century wing and, in particular, the four courtyards dragged on until 1984, when the Crossing was handed over to the University so it could house the Law and Humanities Library

# The Crossing: *necessaria*, foldable desks and white caps

