

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## SCARPA

Rick Meghiddo · Wednesday, June 24th, 2020

What is the meaning of Carlo Scarpa's work in 2020? Was he an architect, a designer, or an artist? **The reinvention of a post-pandemic world will demand all of Scarpa's skills. As an architect, he was capable of creating spaces at a human scale integrated to both nature and a built context. As a designer, he invented solutions to multiple details, from hinges to handrails. As an artist, he had a feeling for multi-layered nuances, whether the material was concrete, plaster, or stone.**



Carlo Scarpa – © Archivio Scarpa

Carlo Scarpa (1906–1978) was born in Venice, spent his early childhood in Vicenza, and when he was thirteen, he moved back to Venice, where he spent the rest of his life. He studied architecture at the Academy of Fine Arts. Although he graduated, he refused to take the Italian Government's licensing exam.

His working method was quite peculiar. When he started a project, he set up a sheet of heavy paper on his drafting table and would not move it until he completed the project. He drew with color pencils schemes, scaled drawings, and wrote ideas and math calculations. He consulted with craftspeople face-to-face on building or manufacturing methods in steel, concrete, stone, brick, wood, and bronze.

The De Stijl movement had an early influence in his career, but he acknowledged the power that came from Frank Lloyd Wright's ideas of Organic Architecture.

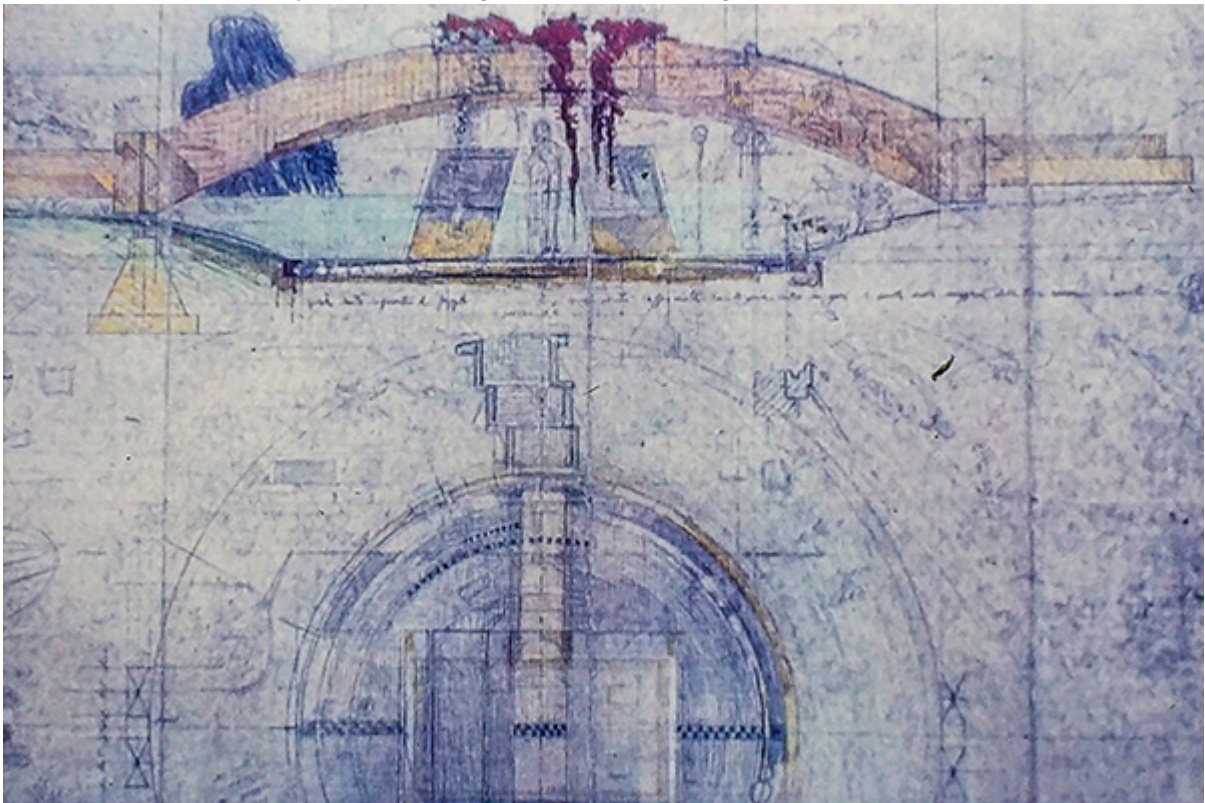


Brion Cemetery – drawing page

We were lucky to become aware of Scarpa early in our lives (see **Having Lunch with Carlo Scarpa** below.) Our first encounter with his work was by visiting the Olivetti Showroom and the Querini-Stampalia Foundation while we were students. Twenty years later, in 1996, we made a unique circuit to see and photograph some of his works in Venice, the Castelvechio Museum and the Banca Popolare in Verona, and the Canova Museum and the Brion Cemetery in the Treviso region. For more images, go to <https://archidocu.com/photography/scarpa>.



Treviso – Brion Cemetery – © R&R Meghiddo, 1996. All Rights Reserved.



Drawing by Carlo Scarpa





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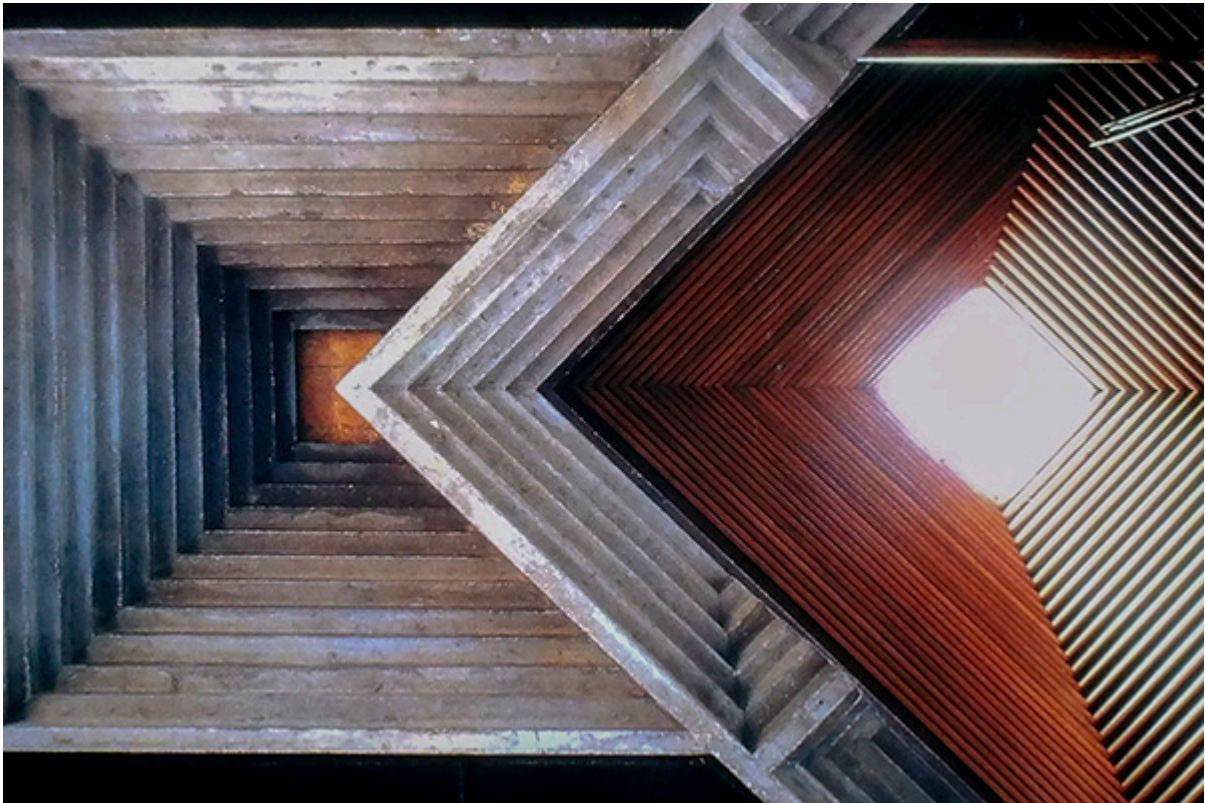


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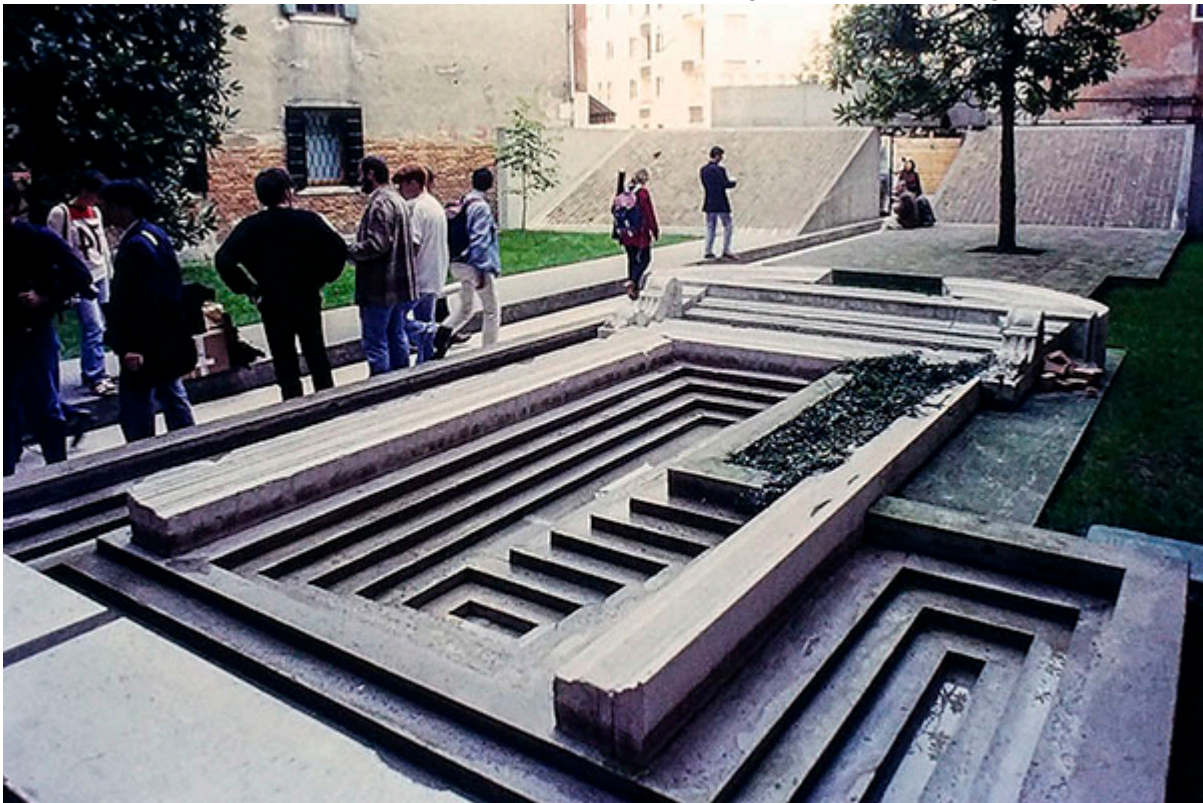


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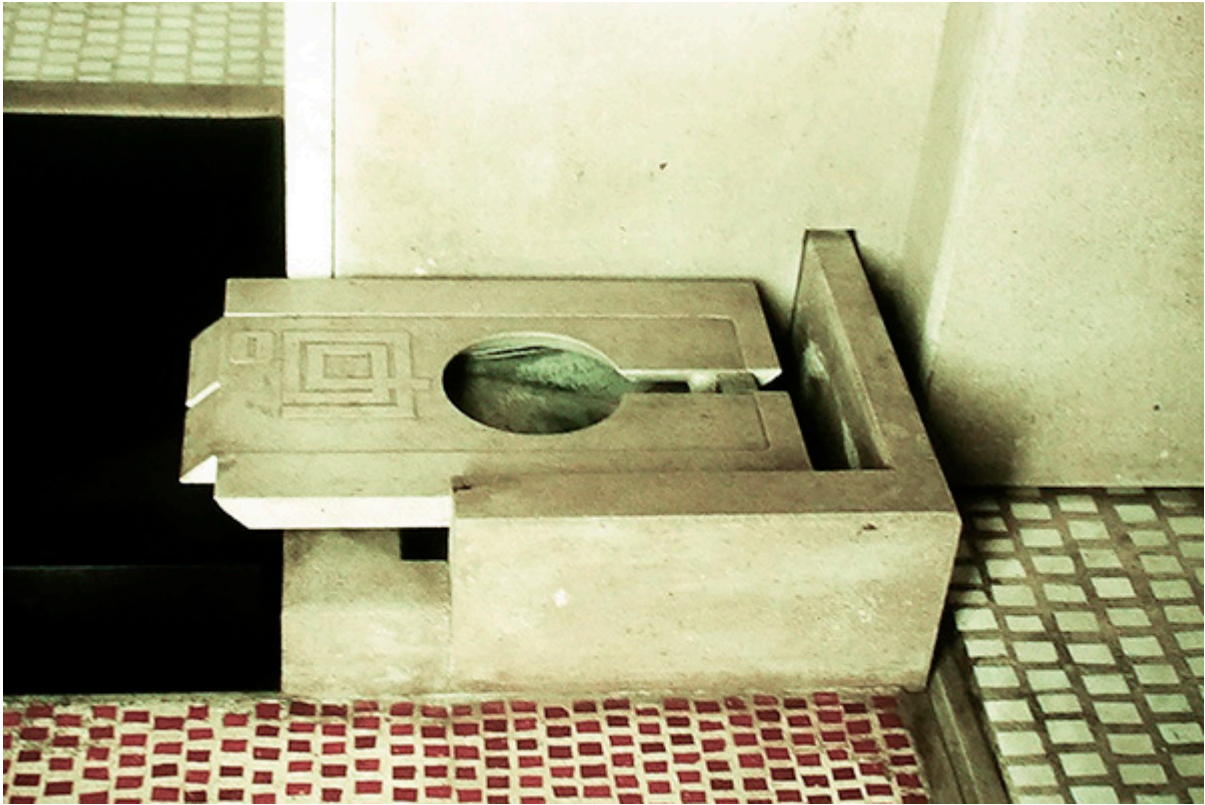


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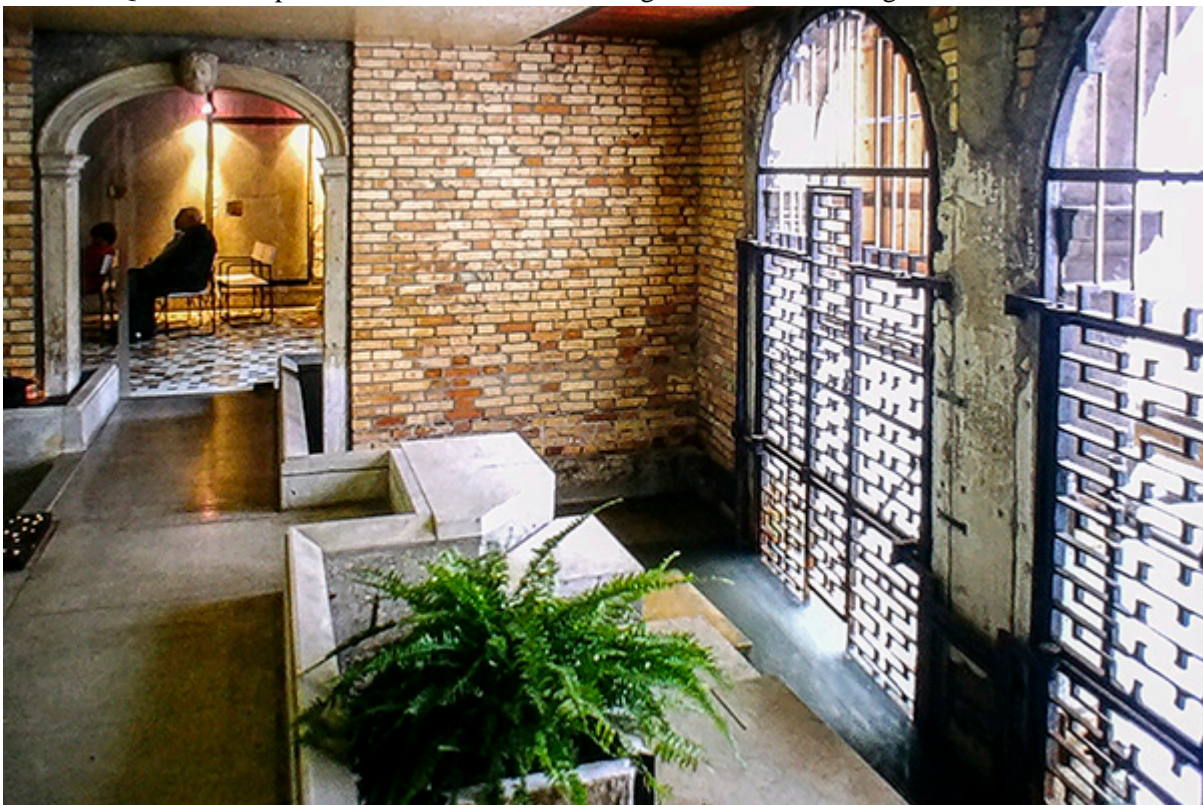


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### Having Lunch with Carlo Scarpa

We were third-year students of architecture when [Professor Bruno Zevi](#) invited us for lunch for the first time. At 1:00 PM, we pressed the button of *L'Architettura*'s doorbell. After a minute, the gate opened. Zevi himself came to greet us.



*“Buon giorno, avanti,”* he said. He kissed Ruth on both cheeks and shook my hand. “I have a surprise for you. Do you know who’s coming to have lunch with us?” Without waiting for our answer, he said “Carlo Scarpa.”

Ruth and I looked at each other. Zevi noticed that.

“Sorry, but who is Carlo Scarpa?” I said.

“What? Don’t you know who Carlo Scarpa is? It’s not possible,” he said. “He is the greatest living European architect.”

We didn’t know if he was exaggerating, or he meant it. Was he greater than Le Corbusier or Aalto?

“Sorry for our ignorance,” I said.

After a short while, Zevi’s wife, [Tullia Zevi](#), greeted us. Ten minutes later, the doorbell rang. “Must be the Scarpas,” Tullia said. “Excuse me.”

Carlo Scarpa kissed Tullia on both cheeks and then shook Zevi’s hand. Then Scapa’s wife kissed both of them. We were standing in the middle of the living room.

“Let me introduce you two young promising future architects from Israel,” Zevi said. “Ruth grew up in Romania, and Ricky grew up in Argentina.”

Scarpa seemed aloof. We shook hands with the Scarpa couple. He avoided eye contact, and I couldn’t tell if he was shy or arrogant. He was impeccably well dressed in a beige suit and a matching tie. His most distinguishable facial feature was his hook nose, over which sat a pair of thick-framed eyeglasses. His hair was tightly combed backward. He had a mustache and thin goatee beard that climbed along his jaw.

“How was your trip?” asked Zevi.

“Wright was a genius. No doubt about it,” he said.

“Why don’t you tell us while we sit at the table?” Tullia said.

The Zevis sat each at one end of the table. To Prof. Zevi’s right sat Mrs. Scarpa and Carlo Scarpa. To Zevi’s left sat Ruth and me. A servant wearing a white jacket offered a plate with antipasto, and then he poured red wine and mineral water into our glasses.

“So, you were going to tell us about your trip,” said Zevi.

“I have been working four years on the reconstruction of the Carlo Felice Theater in Genoa,” said Scarpa. “The design had to undergo many changes due to bureaucratic, technical, and financial constraints. I needed a break. Louis Kahn invited me to visit him, and I accepted. Traveling to Philadelphia gave me an excuse to extend my journey and fly to Chicago. I wanted to see some of Wright’s works there.”

“How did the meeting with Kahn go?” asked Zevi.

“Kahn is a poet and a craftsman. Those are rare combined qualities. He’s a thinker and an architect, but his work is ultimately a mix of poetry and craftsmanship. When I was at his studio, he was working at the Kimbell Art Museum project, the one to be built in Fort Worth, Texas. He showed me the plans and explained to me its main concepts. Then he showed me some sections. I looked at them together with the plans and pointing at one portion of the plan. I said to him: “you don’t have enough light here.” He looked at it in silence. He picked up a pencil, drew some changes over the copy, and wrote on it a couple of side notes.”

Scarpa talked to Zevi as if no one else around the table existed. We all listened.

“In Chicago, I visited the Unity Temple and the Robbie House. At the Robbie House, I asked to see a portion of the attic, not visible to the public. I looked at a small cube within the attic. It was at the exact same module as the rest of the house. Wright was perfectly consistent throughout.”

“What are you working on now?” asked Zevi.

“I’m still designing a few things for Castelveccchio; I’m doing a layout for a cemetery in Treviso; and I’m doing schematics for next year’s Venice Biennale: an installation and a monument to the *Woman of the Resistance*,” Scarpa said.

I jumped into the conversation: “How did you start as an architect?” I asked. “What were your goals in your early twenties?”

He finally looked at me in the eyes: “I was born in Venice, but I actually came to live in Venice when I was thirteen. I was surrounded by great art and great artisans. They were my teachers. I had a quest for quality because there are no compromises about quality in great art. I was then penniless, but I said to myself, ‘I’ve got to have the best pair of shoes in Venice.’ So, I cut from food and cigarettes and bought the best pair of shoes in Venice. The rest is history. I started by doing glasswork, I worked for other architects, and I started to do remodeling and exhibitions. The scale of the project didn’t matter to me. Art is art, it is, or it isn’t.”





Carlo Scarpa with Frank Lloyd Wright – © Archivio Scarpa



Carlo Scarpa with Louis Kahn

*In the work of Carlo Scarpa*

*“Beauty”*

*the first sense*

*Art*

*the first word*

*Then Wonder*

*Then the inner realization of “Form”*

*the sense of the wholeness of inseparable elements.*

*Design consults Nature*

*to give presence to the elements.*

*A work of art makes manifest the wholeness of “Form”*

*the symphony of the selected shapes of the elements.*

*In the elements*

*the joint inspires ornament, its celebration.*

*The detail is the adoration of Nature.*

**Louis I. Kahn**

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