

# Ivrea Industrial City Of The 20th Century

## PART II

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### ICONIC PRODUCTS

In 1950, the creation of the Lettera 22 typewriter became a symbol of the prestige of Made in Italy in the world. The portable and lightweight Olivetti **Lettera 22 typewriter**, which measured 8.3 x 29.8 x 32.4 cm and weighed less than nine pounds, came in various colors. The Lettera 22 typewriter represented a shift to contemplative writing. Unlike its predecessor, the Olivetti M1, the Lettera 22 became an iconic symbol of Italian style and functionality. The Lettera 22 is often compared to current MacBook laptops, as Steve Jobs frequently stated that he drew inspiration from Olivetti's style and Italian designers when creating Apple. This typewriter won the prestigious Compasso d'Oro Industrial Design award in 1954 and was hailed



as the best-designed object of the century by the Illinois Institute of Technology. The Lettera 22 is exhibited in renowned museums worldwide, including New York City's MoMA. The Lettera 22 was designed to cater to a diverse audience, including workers, teachers, and secretarial staff. However, its appealing look and features became popular among artists, musicians, and writers. The Lettera 22's success ultimately led to the development of the Lettera 32, another iconic typewriter. This typewriter was favored by numerous acclaimed authors throughout the century, including Thomas Pynchon, Bob Dylan, Sylvia Plath, Cormac McCarthy, and Leonard Cohen. Cormac McCarthy used an Olivetti Lettera 32 typewriter to write over 5 million words. In 2009, one of his Lettera 32 typewriters was auctioned for \$254,500, significantly surpassing its estimated value of \$20,000.



In the 1930s and 1940s, Olivetti expanded into teleprinters, calculators, and office equipment. By the 1950s, they ventured into electronics,



establishing a competitive edge against American giants like IBM and HP. Adriano Olivetti revolutionized information technology with the **Divisumma 24** (1956), the first electromechanical calculator capable of performing all arithmetic operations and capable of printing the results, that propelled Olivetti to global prominence.

In 1959, Olivetti collaborated with engineer Mario Tchou to conduct research on electronic machines, resulting in the creation of the **Elea 9003**, one of the first transistorized mainframes. In 1964, a collaboration between Olivetti and Fairchild Semiconductor resulted in the creation of the first transistor calculator, the **Programma 101**. This innovative device was used in the Apollo program, marking a significant milestone in technological history. Olivetti's Programma 101 wasn't just a calculator but also a precursor to the modern personal computer, representing the first of its kind in Europe when introduced in 1965. Olivetti's dedication to efficiency, usability, and intelligent design played a vital role in PC innovation. Within just two decades, Olivetti established itself as the only Italian company manufacturing personal computers, further solidifying its role in the evolution of the PC.



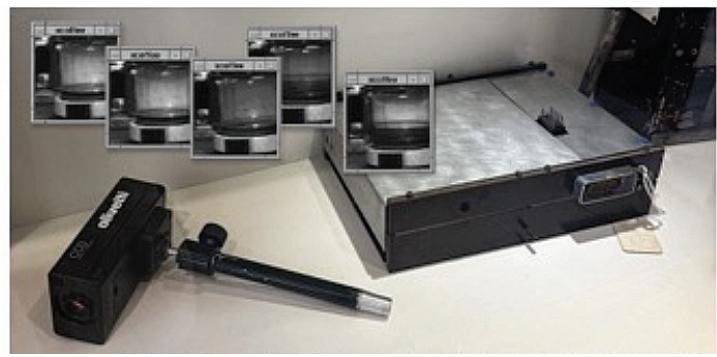
NASA used Olivetti's Programma 101 for the 1969 Apollo 11 moon landing.

This small-sized desktop calculator had significant computing power and was extremely popular, selling over 40,000 units, including purchases by NASA for the Apollo 11 mission. Programma 101's reliability, speed, and programming capabilities were vital in calculating

the lunar module's fuel consumption and trajectory. Since 1976, The 101 Program has been on display at the Smithsonian Museum in Washington as one of the symbols of space achievement.



In 1968, Olivetti collaborated with designer Ettore Sottsass Jr. to create the Valentine typewriter, a symbol of Pop Art in design. Advertisements for the Valentine featured people using the typewriter at the beach. In the 1970s, electronic devices began replacing typewriters, and Olivetti's attempt at personal computers was unsuccessful despite introducing one of the first models. Some speculate that external forces, including alleged illicit activities by foreign powers, contributed to Olivetti's downfall in computing. This speculation is fueled by the car accident death of Mario Tchou, Olivetti's chief computer programmer. Carlo De Benedetti, the company's last independent president, believed Tchou was assassinated by American secret agents wary of Italy's technological advancements. However, it's more likely that northern industrial groups were hesitant to invest in the electronics sector. Regardless of the cause, Olivetti's computing failure contributed to the company's downturn and Ivrea's decline. This unfortunate turn of events shifted the innovation spotlight from Europe to the US, giving an edge to American companies and placing European firms a step behind in computing advancements.



Olivetti developed the first webcam in 1991.

## THE STORY OF THE OLIVETTI COMPANY - 1960 - TODAY

After Adriano Olivetti's sudden death on February 27, 1960, due to a heart attack, his brother Roberto Olivetti took over the company. However, Roberto lacked the same vision as his brother, worsened by the ill-advised acquisition of the US typewriter company Underwood. Olivetti's profits fell despite awards and international

acclaim, leading to gradual insolvency. In 1964, Italian banks and industrial concerns rescued the company, and Bruno Visentini became the president, ending the Olivetti family's direct management of the corporation. Olivetti sold its electronics division to General Electric in 1964 as a condition set by bankers for securing new loans but continued to develop new computing products independently. The Programma 101, a programmable calculator, was one such innovation. Olivetti was a significant player in the computer industry during the 1970s and 1980s. They released the M20 and M24, popular personal computers and a clone of the IBM PC. Olivetti became Europe's most prominent office machine manufacturer and the second-largest PC vendor after IBM.

In 1978, Olivetti brought electronic daisywheel printers to market, revolutionizing typewriters. As the 1970s transitioned into the 1980s, cities such as Ivrea suffered from economic downturns, similar to Rust Belt towns in the US. This decline resulted from recurring recessions, which led to cost-cutting measures in various industries. Companies like Olivetti outsourced labor to cheaper countries, resulting in the mass layoff of workers. This situation created an existential crisis for the concept of the company town.

Olivetti became a key distributor in Europe by partnering with AT&T in 1983. However, while AT&T thrived, Olivetti's profits and market share declined. Olivetti continued to release PC-compatible machines in the 1980s and 1990s, exploring the laptop market. In 1986, Olivetti acquired Triumph-Adler, capturing 50% of the European typewriter market.

In the 1990s, Olivetti nearly collapsed due to competition from US vendors and cheap Taiwanese manufacturers. Digital Equipment Corporation invested in Olivetti in 1992 but sold its stake after two years due to financial difficulties. The company experienced restructuring and sold off branches, resulting in job losses. In 1994, Olivetti stopped producing typewriters as personal computers and word-processing software gained popularity.

In 1995, Olivetti launched the Envision, a multimedia PC for the living room, but it was unsuccessful. In 1997, Olivetti sold its PC business to Wang Laboratories Inc and shifted its focus to the telecommunications industry. It established Omnitel, a cellular phone company, in 1995, which became Europe's third-largest mobile phone operator with 6.2 million subscribers. In 1999, Olivetti gained control of Telecom Italia and entered the fixed-line telephone sector through Infostrada, gaining over 900,000 customers.

Olivetti bought 55% of Telecom Italia in 1999. The merger was completed in 2003, with Telecom Italia focusing on expanding internationally in Internet

and broadband services. Olivetti's subsidiary, Tecnost S.p.A., became a holding company for their telecommunications activities.

The merger between Olivetti and Telecom Italia encountered challenges due to complex ownership structures and significant debt. However, Telecom Italia invested €200 million in Olivetti, revitalizing its presence in the information technology sector. Olivetti is now a Telecom Italia (TIM Group) subsidiary specializing in selling tablets and IT services. With revenues below €230 million in 2014 and only 582 employees, Olivetti focuses on the Internet of Things (IoT), Artificial Intelligence (AI), and Big Data. They concentrate on "Smart City" and "Smart Industry" solutions, utilizing 5G technology to drive digital transformation and support business growth in today's dynamic market.



## INNOVATIVE ARCHITECTURE

The Olivetti Community in the industrial city of Ivrea embodies a unique social reform project initiated by Adriano Olivetti. This initiative aimed to integrate development, fairness, and justice across the city's production plants, residential areas, and social services, reflecting Olivetti's commitment to holistic urban planning and societal well-being. Adriano Olivetti revolutionized Ivrea in the 1930s, transforming the city's landscape with structures that embodied Italian Modernism and rationalism. These buildings, designed by renowned architects and urban planners, reflect Ivrea's architectural heritage and its impact on city planning. This unique social reform project, established by Adriano Olivetti, aimed to combine development, fairness, and justice within the city's production plants, homes, and social services. Olivetti's approach aimed to harmonize nature and functionality, creating an inviting and dynamic workplace conducive to social interaction, relaxation, and cultural enrichment. These structures have preserved their original designs and outdoor spaces, maintaining their historical significance. While

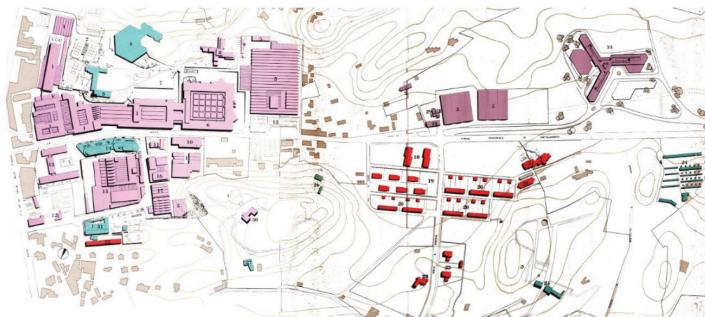


Church of San Bernardino

mostly privately owned, the vast area showcases the industrial city of Ivrea. These buildings continue to be used today, showcasing the social, cultural, industrial, and urban changes that have shaped this exceptional model.

The industrial city is characterized by the proximity of production sites, the Church of San Bernardino, and the convent where Camillo Olivetti moved with his family in 1907. The Church of San Bernardino, dating back to the 1400s, is still owned by the Olivetti family and contains sixteenth-century frescoes by Gian Martino Spanzotti. Although the church is situated on the edge of the UNESCO site, it is not among the registered buildings.

### MAP OF THE INDUSTRIAL CITY OF IVREA



The Olivetti Community, comprising eighteen buildings, embodies Olivetti's innovative approach to factory culture and community involvement, resulting in an unprecedented city-planning endeavor in Italy. Reflecting the principles of Olivetti's Community Movement theory, the city's design integrates manufacturing facilities, administrative buildings, social services, and residential areas. Led by Adriano Olivetti, son of founder Camillo Olivetti, the Olivetti Company envisioned a model similar to Apple Inc. today, revolutionizing the global office landscape through a blend of technology, design, and functionality. Adriano, unlike traditional businesspeople, was politically inclined and embraced humanism. He prioritized city planning and enlisted renowned Italian architects and urban planners to guide city expansion, industry architecture, and societal needs. The Community Movement fostered a shared vision of harmonious relationships between workers and businesses, highlighting careful planning and the significance of culture in modernization efforts.

### THE STRUCTURES

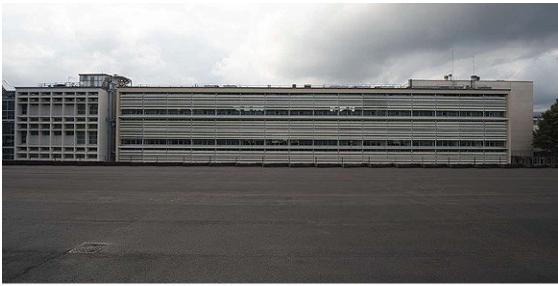


Camillo Olivetti's small **red-brick factory** began producing typewriters on October 29, 1908. The initial capital was 350,000 lire, with Camillo's share of 200,000 lire representing the building's value. The building, constructed at the end of the nineteenth century, was designed by Camillo in the style of early industrial workshops, following the closed workshop paradigm.



Between 1934 and 1958, Olivetti's workshops grew significantly, leading to the nickname "glass factory" for their headquarters. Four factories were constructed in a linear fashion, with each one connected to the next. The original 1908 red brick factory is linked to the 1936 extension, which in turn connects to the 1949 extension and finally to the 1958 addition. These factories prioritized human well-being with low windows and open spaces. The buildings reflected the architectural style of their respective time periods and embodied Adriano's belief in natural light. The "glass factory" showcased a functional and harmonious facade, representing a shift in industrial urban planning. It offered transparency, allowing visibility of activities from inside and outside, exemplifying a harmonious production site within the community.

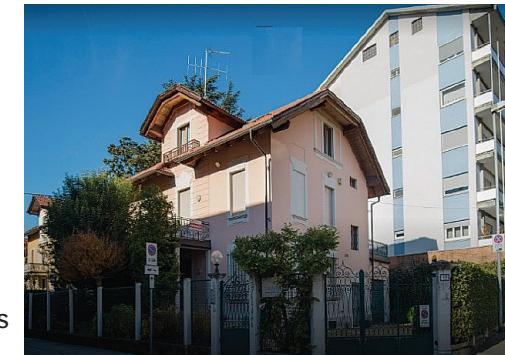




The Old Carpentry shop, with its colorful brise-soleil façade (sun-breaking front)

Before Google existed, Olivetti set the standard for employee welfare. Camillo initiated Borgo Olivetti, providing housing for workers during the factory's expansion in the 1920s, addressing urban planning and living conditions. Olivetti believed in the impact of work surroundings on social existence and efficiency. They set up the village near their Ivrea offices. The village included houses with vegetable gardens to promote self-reliance. It also offered kindergartens and health and social services. These structures served the dual purpose of meeting the company's operational needs while also aiming to enhance employee living conditions. The comprehensive program offered employees loans to facilitate their access to home ownership. Olivetti designed various residential buildings following the principles of Modernism. These included executive single-family houses, 4-apartment houses, an 18-apartment building, and the exquisite Villa Capellaro.

**The Olivetti Study and Experience Centre**, designed by Eduardo Vittoria (1951-1954), boasts



striking glazed blue brick-covered walls in contrast with white horizontal beams and vertical pillars. Four asymmetric wings surround a central block featuring a rhomboid staircase lit by a glass skylight. Initially hosting training courses for Olivetti's mechanical designers, it now serves as the new head office of Olivetti's headquarters in Ivrea.

**The Olivetti Nursery School**, constructed between 1939 and 1941, was designed with child-friendly elements such as vibrant facades, large windows, and outdoor play areas. These features encouraged learning through exploration and interaction, fostering cognitive development and creativity in early childhood education. Adriano Olivetti's company provided free daycare for employees' children and offered 10 months of maternity leave. Olivetti believed in the importance of social structures, particularly in nurturing and educating children, which was reflected in the design and purpose of the school.



Today, the Nursery in Borgo Olivetti continues to serve as a children's facility managed by the Municipality of Ivrea.



**The Olivetti Social Services building** was a social center with a library and social spaces. Its ship-like appearance and rooftop solarium created an open and harmonious atmosphere, promoting unity and togetherness through its hexagonal features.

The building served various functions, ranging from a company canteen to spaces for reading, cultural gatherings, and relaxation. Its design integrated outdoor spaces and greenery, enhancing the overall experience by connecting with the interiors through large windows.

The buildings designed by architects such as Luigi Figini, Gino Pollini, and Le Corbusier were not just ordinary structures. These spacious palaces had glass walls, concrete roofs, and glazed brick tiles.



Eduardo Vittoria was responsible for designing the roof of the **H Workshop**. In this project, he successfully combined functionality and beauty by incorporating twenty square skylights into the roof, allowing employees to work under natural light with fresh air.

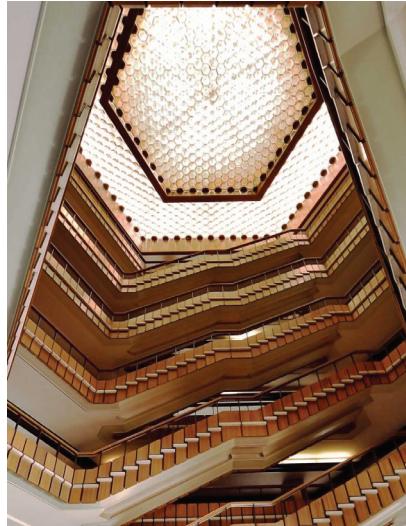
Nowadays, the H Workshop is used for events and shows. It is also home to "Boogie-woogie," a mural by Renato Guttuso created in 1945 for the Olivetti showroom in Rome.



### The Office Building

(Palazzo Uffici 1955) is Olivetti's main office, housing administration, management, and marketing departments. Its impressive features exude grandeur, including a grand staircase adorned with a Murano glass roof, marble sculptures, and high-quality finishes reflecting the late 1950s international style.

Olivetti also constructed housing and hotels, including the Talponia and Hotel La Serra. The Talponia, also known as "Molehill," was built in 1968 to accommodate temporary Olivetti employees in Ivrea. This unique underground housing estate was built with a crescent-shaped block carved into a hillside, featuring glass domes resembling mole hills and furniture designed by the architects.



The building has a walkable paved roof and a glass facade segmented into rectangles by dark gray metal framing.



**Hotel La Serra**, constructed by Olivetti in the 1970s and influenced by postmodernism, features an irregular series of stacked, graduated floors intended to resemble a typewriter from the outside. Initially designed for brief business stays, the hotel embodies efficiency with its modular furniture and curtain-separated bedrooms. The interior gives off a ship cabin vibe, with oval porthole-like windows. The hotel initially housed 55 small rooms, commercial galleries, a swimming pool, and

a conference center. It's part of the larger La Serra complex, which also includes a cultural center with an auditorium, cinema, hotel, and restaurant. Its unique design even influenced the apartments in Star Wars' Andor.



The construction of the industrial city concluded with the completion of the Nuovo Palazzo Uffici (New Office Building) in the late 1980s. The New Olivetti Office Building, designed by architect Gino Valle from 1985 to 1988, consists of five blocks long and a structure six floors high that form a wide curve set back from the road, connecting with the Olivetti Office Building. With this structure, the company reaffirmed Ivrea's position as its management hub during a period of strong manufacturing growth, during which it expanded its international presence.

### THE OLIVETTI LEGACY

Adriano Olivetti's ideals of corporate responsibility and community impact endure, questioning the role of business in society. In today's era of technological disruption, his lessons of innovation, work-life balance, and prioritizing more than just profit remain relevant. Olivetti and Ivrea's story advocates for a humane and sustainable future, promoting a holistic vision of progress that values labor, design, and community. Today, Ivrea attracts visitors who are fascinated by its industrial heritage, impressive architecture, and rich history. Today, the Industrial City imagined by Adriano Olivetti no longer exists, and many of the buildings originally used for production have been altered by companies that have inherited the company's properties, but not always in ways that respect their architectural value. Although the town's population has declined, its ties to Olivetti's legacy remain strong. Recovering from Olivetti's decline has been difficult, leading the city to return to its smaller, more provincial roots.

The connection between Olivetti and the town of Ivrea has existed for over a century. Although Adriano passed away more than fifty years ago, his name and story are now being remembered more than ever. The innovative spirit and dedication to the well-being of workers that characterized Olivetti's legacy continue to influence the local way of life and community initiatives. Ivrea serves as a poignant reminder of a unique and fleeting era of corporate idealism that seamlessly integrated business, politics, architecture, and everyday life in the city. It illustrates how manufacturing, civil society, and culture can be harmoniously interconnected to generate positive social impact. □