‘Why Italy now?’ might well be your immediate response to this issue of *AD*. Given even the most peremptory flick through, though, all your prejudices should be dissipated. Luigi Prestinenza Puglisi has put together a publication that is entirely compelling in its content. It delivers a portrait of a country that is currently unmatchable in terms of the architectural spectrum it offers. Who could be more different than its three leading figures: Renzo Piano, Massimiliano Fuksas and Antonio Citterio? It is a culture that is redolent of sophisticated elegance, as demonstrated by the polished work of Citterio in Milan or the perfected precision of Maria Giuseppina Grasso Cannizzo’s interior spaces in Sicily, while simultaneously being one that seems to thrive on debate and even adversity, and is characterised in these pages by its polarity and an emerging generation of *radicali*. The protagonists of the Italian architectural scene all provide a definiteness of purpose, contributing their own unique visions. Within a few pages, the serious contextual thought of Stefano Boeri’s architectural projects are juxtaposed with the *joie de vivre* of Italo Rota’s colourful spaces and the dramatic glacial fins of Mario Cucinella’s Sino Italian Ecological and Energy Efficient Building (SIEEB) in Beijing.

What is apparent from this title of *AD* is that Italy can offer the rest of the world more than just good-quality design, which it rightly has a reputation for. As an architectural culture, it has never lost its critical edge or its understanding that as a profession that shapes the built environment it should be held to account by its peers (as demonstrated by its prolific architectural media). In a globalised, consumer-led world where image and getting the job can be everything and the editorial content of leading magazines is heavily influenced by the products that are advertised within their pages, Italy provides an important counterpoint. Architecture is passionately discussed, and fought over, even to a debilitating extent within recent years, but it is not taken lightly as a new intervention in the natural landscape or historic context.

Italy is home to two of the most prestigious events in the international architecture and design calendar – the Venice Architecture Biennale and the Milan Furniture Fair. In this capacity it has done more than its fair share as a good host, deflecting attention back on its star-struck guests from abroad. What this volume does is put the emphasis squarely back on Italian architects and their work. It has a beguilingly simple structure, organising the architects according to generation and then providing further critical perspectives at the back of the issue. This clarity of form should not be mistaken as oversimplification in itself. It is a means of giving expression to what is often a complex situation, described with such insight by Prestinenza himself in his introduction. ☀

Helen Castle

*Dante O Benini & Partners Architects, New Torno Internazionale Headquarters, Milan, 2003*

Benini & Partners’ new building in Milan is emblematic of a new wave of Italian architecture that is set to change the existing urban fabric. In Milan, the likes of Renzo Piano, Massimiliano Fuksas, Mario Cucinella, Norman Foster, Zaha Hadid, Daniel Libeskind and Arata Isozaki are engaged on sizable public and private projects. The same process of renewal is also under way in Rome, Turin, Naples and Genoa. A younger generation of architects is also benefiting from the positive impact of this new cultural climate, where local municipalities are proving more receptive to commissioning innovative new buildings.