

## NOTABLE USERS

Giusto, Maggini, and Pagnano | Mimesi 62 Associated Architects | Florence, Italy

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# notable

## Mimesi 62: Constructing Poetry in Italy

right: Giuseppe Giusto,  
Antonella Maggini, and  
Domenico Pagnano of  
Mimesi 62 Associated Architects



Founded in 1996 by Giuseppe Giusto, Antonella Maggini, and Domenico Pagnano, Mimesi 62 Associated Architects is a multi-disciplinary design firm located in Florence, Italy. All three principals received their architecture degrees from the University of Florence, and Giusto has been an assistant teacher in the university's architecture department since 1999.

At Mimesi 62, Giusto, Maggini, and Pagnano design a diverse range of public and private spaces, including public works, public areas, squares, streets, and buildings. Mimesi 62 emphasizes flexibility, and adjusts its offerings to match the needs of clients.

In 2009, Mimesi 62 received first place in the International Ideas Competition for the "Recovery Plan PR8," or urban re-qualification of the PR8 area in Viareggio, Italy. In 2010, they achieved second place in the same competition for their work to revive the area between Piazza Martiri della Libertà and Piazza Garibaldi in Casciana Terme, Pisa. Mimesi 62 also garnered first place in the International Ideas Competition in 2003, 2004, and 2005. Past winners of this award include RIBA Gold Medal winner, Arata Isozaki, and Pritzker Prize winning architects, Jean Nouvel and Richard Rogers, among others.

The name "Mimesi" refers to the mimetic door of their first location at street number 62, in which the stone front mimicked the building's stone exterior. The word mimetic translates to "art's imitation of life." This celebratory idea guides the firm's work, which infuses spaces with subtle symbolism and metaphorical references. The firm is highly artistic. "We all aspired to become poets," says Pagnano. "One of the highlights of our careers was when alone, or in the company of other poets, we saw our poems become reality." With rich and layered details, Mimesi 62's architectural feats are physical

poems. As in the art of poetry, the multi-sensory effect of each space is essential to the design. The firm subscribes to the philosophy of Rudolph Steiner, who went beyond the basic five senses to classify twelve, including the sense of life, the sense of movement, the sense of balance, the sense of warmth, the sense of language, the sense of concept, and the sense of ego. Encompassing all twelve senses, Mimesi 62's designs are truly thought provoking.

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The team at Mimesi 62 sees architecture as a barometer of the cultural activity marking the progress of humankind. "We believe that architecture can be compared to one big building site—the site of humanity—and its role is to interpret and represent its evolution, its interruption, and subsequent discontinuity," says Maggini "Any progress is like a building's progress, whose result is a society slightly more evolved, that can slowly absorb new ways

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of living. We share Jean Nouvel's thought, when he writes that architecture's task is to create the cultural definition of the constructed space." Thus, architecture transcends the building itself to act as representative of a culture in constant flux.

### TIME TO MEANDER: THE NEW SQUARES OF VARLUNGO

In a poetic sense, the path in Piazza Varlungo sits at the confluence of memory and imagination; exploring this space is like taking a trip back in time. Traversing this pedestrian thoroughfare in Florence, one travels through the evolution of the city from its Roman core out to its 19th century avenues and



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beyond to the amorphous, and as yet uncategorized, outer reaches. As a "point of passage" between the city and its surrounding territory, Piazza Varlungo represents a symbolic gateway.

To reinvent the space, the team at Mimesi 62 took many factors into consideration. The team explains, "Investigating the memory of the place was an act of interpretative knowledge. The identification of "invariant" geometries, the conditioning of roadways as urban forms, the predominant plot of an agricultural structure, the original relational sense, the signs that have resisted change over time—they all were a source for our design choices." They uncovered the narrow old footpath, which had been widened in the 1930s to accommodate traffic. Since it then



...one travels through the evolution of the city.

became too small for vehicles, they diverted traffic elsewhere. The team created four squares at traditional meeting spots, all connected by a tree-lined walk dotted with resting areas and benches. Each square has its own unique vignette. In 2005, this act of urban renewal won first prize for Mimesi 62 in the International Ideas Competition.

### A SYMPHONY OF SHAPES: LAB CITY

In Misterbianco, a town in Catania, Sicily, Mimesi 62 designed The Laboratorio di Città (Lab City), a dramatic concert hall and art gallery. The firm won the 2003 International Ideas Competition for this work. It includes an auditorium that seats 600, an airy art gallery, and several music rehearsal rooms. Situated between the old town and the new suburbs in a low-density urban area, the space anchors and creates the area's new, artistic identity. Mimesi 62 created two "containers" to collect similar activities. The art gallery, media center, library, and Internet point are grouped, and the auditorium has corresponding music laboratories. Each container was designed for its specific purpose and even has its own independent access, yet both can dovetail well with each other. The expansive central outdoor space, which comprises the compositional and functional "fulcrum of the design," is both a meeting place and an outdoor extension of the practice rooms.

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The Laboratorio di Città (Lab City) is situated between the old town and the new suburbs of Misterbianco, a town in Catania, Sicily. Mimesi 62's dramatic concert hall anchors and creates the area's new, artistic identity.



The team explains the symbolism, "The building serves as a metaphor for the city in several ways. By identifying the stone borderlines that isolate buildings and internal spaces, we propose limits. By expressing the buildings unitarily through a container that is exclusive of architectural and multipurpose space and acts almost as a single-shaped slab, we evoke community." Misterbianco lies less than 50 kilometers from the legendary Mt. Etna and feels her presence acutely. Therefore, Mimesi 62 incorporated strong symbolism from



this iconic natural force into the design. They used horizontal lines to ground the design and echo the stout volcano. They chose lava for the paving material, and arranged stone slabs irregularly to create a main path that reflects lava flow.

To create this poetic language in all of their architecture, the team uses the Vectorworks® Architect software. "We love beautiful design, and Vectorworks Architect helps us achieve it. The powerful and affordable program is rigorous and elegant at the same time. Its strong artistic and pictorial capabilities—and above all its transparency—allow us to express ourselves better," say the principals.

Mimesi 62 continues to push the envelope with its designs. "Normally we would consider our best work to be the last project or the one that we are working on in that precise moment, since that work represents the sum of our experiences and is therefore the most mature. It is an emotional factor, even sentimental, that gives great importance to the work, and it is quite impossible for us to detach ourselves completely from some projects," explains Giusto. "We continue to pursue and reframe solutions and languages to keep them fresh." Using their unique language of architecture to construct new cultures, Mimesi 62 has created a poetry all its own.

### Mimesi 62 Associated Architects

Via A. Marchetti 18 a/e  
50131 Firenze  
Phone: +39 055 588399  
Fax: +39 055 588399  
info@mimesi62.it  
www.mimesi62.it

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www.vectorworks.net