



# TORINO PUTS ITS BACKBONE INTO A POST-INDUSTRIAL FUTURE





**Following a master plan adopted over a decade ago, Italy's motor city is remaking itself by redeveloping the railway lands bisecting the city and the industrial sites that grew up alongside them**

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At a time when the world is going urban, it's not that surprising cities everywhere are busy reinventing themselves. Big and small, young and old, rich and poor, cities are no longer just economic, social and cultural engines; they are where we create our futures.

There's no better example than Torino, northern Italy's former industrial powerhouse, which is now remaking itself. The transition got a huge kick-start when the city landed the 2006 Olympic Winter Games, but it hasn't always been easy. And it's far from over. One quickly realizes that it's as much about altering perceptions, emotions and mindsets as about revitalizing the economy and the public realm. Named World Design Capital in 2008, Torino – the first city to be so designated – has mounted an impressive program of exhibits, conferences, festivals, and so on that celebrate the city as a centre of art and architecture, shedding forever its image as a factory town.

Every aspect of the built environment does double, even triple, duty. This entails both practical and symbolic purposes. In Torino, the Spina Centrale (Central Spine) comes closest to embodying the image and substance of the new city. Extending 12 kilometres on a north-south axis, the two-million-square-metre strip of land – roughly the size of 400 football fields – once sliced the city in half. Until recently, this was railway land. The tracks now run through a subterranean tunnel, and Porta Susa, the new central railway and subway station, will also be underground.

Above ground, the Spina comprises a series of projects, including a major six-lane roadway with bicycle paths and commercial, corporate and cultural buildings, as well as an ambitious program of public art. In their own way, these uses sum up the new city even as they help make it possible. They are both form and content.

**OPPOSITE** Burying 12 kilometres of rail lines has opened up two million square metres in the inner city. The map shows the rail lines, the new subway and the four areas under development.

**ABOVE** A view of Spina 3, where land once occupied by a steel mill and a tire plant is being redeveloped for homes, commercial and research centres, and a 400,000-square-metre park.



**RIGHT** A prominent symbol of the 2006 Winter Olympics in Torino, the red arch supports a footbridge leading over the railway yards from the Olympic Village (now being transformed for business and residential uses) to the famous Lingotto building. Another symbol of the new Torino, the colossal ex-factory was transformed by Renzo Piano and others into a hotel, shopping mall and convention centre.

**BELOW** Spina 1 marks the beginning of a grand boulevard that accommodates six lanes of traffic, pedestrian walkways and bicycle paths. One of the plan's prime components was the incorporation of art. Under the curation of Rudi Fuchs, commissions were awarded to several prominent artists. Mario Merz's *Fontana Igloo* occupies a prominent position in the boulevard's median.



In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when Torino was a one-company town run by car manufacturer Fiat, pushing a railway through the city centre made sense. What was good for Fiat was good for Torino. As recently as the 1960s, 125,000 of Torino's nearly one million inhabitants worked for Fiat. Now that's down to 30,000. Even the company's celebrated Lingotto factory complex (built in the first quarter of the past century and abandoned in the early '80s) has been converted, by Renzo Piano, among others, into a hotel, shopping mall and convention centre. This part of Torino, once on the outskirts of town, now belongs to the larger city. It also marks the beginning of the Spina, which, in addition to the land occupied by the railroad, encompasses many old industrial structures.

Divided into four main sections, the Spina will provide for many new amenities. From the start, the emphasis has been on public uses. Even the six-lane roadway is bordered on both sides by nine-metre-wide tree-lined sidewalks. A number of artworks have been planned or already installed by such internationally respected artists as Mario Merz, Per Kirkeby, Jannis Kounellis, Giovanni Anselmo and Michelangelo Pistoletto. Merz's stone igloo has already emerged as an icon of the new Torino. It sits surrounded by water, fountains and light standards, in the middle of the city's recently completed grand boulevard in Spina 1.

The Merz is one of 11 pieces included in the Railway Junction Artists program, organized by well-known critic and curator Rudi Fuchs, formerly a director of the prestigious Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam.

Along the stretch of the boulevard between Spina 1 and Porta Susa, two new buildings of the Politecnico di Torino straddle the road, signalling a radical change. In fact, the school is undergoing a major expansion. On 170,000 square metres of land formerly occupied by the railway's repair yards, the Politecnico is building new classrooms, lecture halls and laboratories. The expanded premises will also include Italy's first faculty of automobile engineering, yet another sign of the new Torino: the city that once manufactured cars will now design and research them.

At the northern end of Spina 2, the underground station at Porta Susa – one of the city's most significant projects – is well under way. The enormous glass dome that will cover the facility has yet to appear, but meanwhile a scheme worthy of an Egyptian pharaoh is taking shape.







WELL UNDER WAY, THE CENTRAL SPINE DEVELOPMENT HAS CREATED NEW PARKS AND RESIDENTIAL AREAS, CENTRES FOR BUSINESS AND COMMERCE, A MULTI-LANE BOULEVARD, AND A LOCUS FOR ART



**TOP LEFT** Doubling in size, the Politecnico di Torino occupies former railway repair yards. Two huge new buildings designed by Studio Valle straddle the new six-lane boulevard.

**TOP RIGHT** The former car manufacturing town is ramping up for a lead role in automotive design and engineering. Major construction under way at the Politecnico, shown in the background, includes a new faculty of automobile engineering.

**ABOVE** The boulevard, with adjacent green space and bicycle and pedestrian paths, was installed at ground level over the railway corridor. Urban design elements, including the signature lamp standards, were designed by Gregotti Associati.

**LEFT** Under construction at the northern end of Spina 2, the Porta Susa station will become the heart of Torino's transit system. Both the high-speed railway and Line 1 of the new subway will pass through it. When finished, it will be capped with an enormous glass dome, as well as a commercial and an office tower.



The enormous station, with platforms almost half a kilometre long, lies at the heart of Torino's new transit system. Once complete, Porta Susa will become the city's main station, accommodating both high-speed trains and the new subway system. The station will provide direct, rapid service to Milano, Lyon and Paris. For a city that only opened its first subway in 2006 after 30 years of talk, it's clear that the transition from car culture has moved at a remarkable speed. With the opening of the Porta Nuova section of the metro in October 2007, the subway now runs a total of 9.6 kilometres, spread over 14 stations.

About a kilometre and a half from Porta Susa is Spina 3. This is the site of a new business complex, as well as an enormous environmental research facility with a green roof so large it's called Environment Park. Running along both sides of the Dora River, a 400,000 square-metre post-industrial green space is in the making, designed by a competition-winning group that includes Peter Latz, famed designer of Duisberg Park in the former East Germany. Memories of the city's industrial past are preserved in such elements as Michelin's monumental cooling tower, and columns that supported a car factory. Among the most poetic projects of Torino's urban transformation is Chiesa del Santo Volto, by Swiss architect Mario Botta. Located in Spina 3, this extraordinary (and very un-churchlike) building sits on the site of an old Fiat steel mill. On every side, there are remnants of the city's industrial heritage. Yet with its brick towers, Botta's landmark enters into a dialogue with Torino's past even as it supplants it. Completed in 2006, the church is set off by a 55-metre bell tower constructed from an old smokestack.







"WHAT WE ARE SEEING IS THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE CITY," SAYS MAYOR SERGIO CHIAMPARINO

**OPPOSITE TOP** Santo Volto, a church designed by Mario Botta, occupies the former home of a steel mill, and is flanked by a 55-metre-high bell tower constructed from an old smokestack.

**MIDDLE** In the new 400,000-square-metre park under development in Spina 3, such ex-industrial artifacts as the Michelin evaporation tower have been conserved.

**BOTTOM** The Environmental Park research facility, capped with an immense green roof, is situated near a residential area in Spina 3.

**ABOVE** A new multi-level commercial centre in Spina 3, containing both office and retail spaces, incorporates a courtyard with dynamic circulation.

Spina 4, though not expected to be complete until 2015, will encompass social housing, industrial retrofitting, a new park and a transportation hub.

Since Torino adopted its master plan, devised by Gregotti Associati in 1995, the Spina has become an urban reality. It both leads the changes remaking the face of the city, and makes them possible. While Torino may still be incomplete, there can be no doubt where it is headed. Though cities have limited revenue-generating powers under the Italian political system, Torino has managed to grow strong. "What we are seeing is the transformation of the city," says the city's popular mayor, Sergio Chiamparino. "By burying the railroad, we can capture the value of the new surface land."

His reference to value goes beyond the price of real estate. That's part of his thinking, of course, but he understands that more than economics lies at the heart of his city's rebirth. The most important aspect of the change embodied in the Spina is how it enables the Torinese themselves to see their city in new ways. The mayor likes to tell of an afternoon several years ago when he bumped into a childhood friend out photographing the city. As Chiamparino recalls the episode, it was as if she was seeing Torino for the first time. And he says, smiling, she clearly liked what she saw. **AZ**