



Images by Kate Wickers unless otherwise indicated

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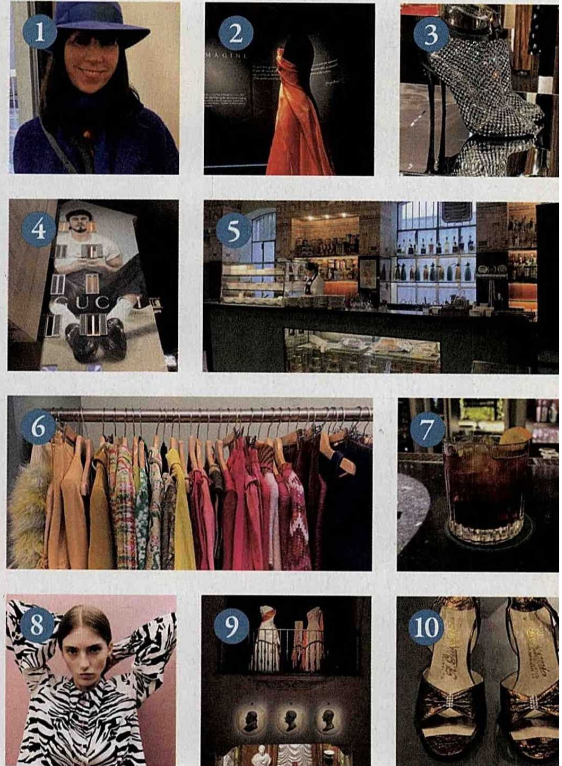
36 ITALIA! June/July 2025



Kate Wickers takes us on a tour of Milan's fashion district and shows us something for everyone, whether you're a buyer or a browser

Fabulous and fast-moving, Milan's fashion district, known as the Quadrilatero d'Oro (golden quadrangle), is an area of both pure indulgence and serious retail business. The name loosely refers to four adjoining streets that are home to many of the world's fashion titans. For a first-time visitor, the scene can be a little intimidating, particularly if you've not got cash to splash. However, a fashion-focused visit doesn't have to break the bank. It costs nothing just to look around and soak up the atmosphere. There are tours to take, museums to explore, and shops to browse (as the latter is the number one Milanese pastime, this is perfectly acceptable). In the words of Donatella Versace, "Fashion is about dreaming and making other people dream." So, if your dream is to own a pair of jewel-encrusted Armani stilettos, à la Lady Gaga, or even just to see them, you've come to the right city. ➤

Discover our Milan fashion Top 10



June/July 2025 ITALIA! 37

DISCOVER ITALIA!

WHERE TO STAY



Portrait Milano



Junior suite

PORTRAIT MILANO

A member of Leading Hotels of the World

Corso Venezia, 11
www.lungarnocollection.com/
portrait-milano

Portrait Milano opened in December 2022 and is now the benchmark for a stylish stay in Milan, with elegant suites of burgundy and cream colour schemes complementing bespoke polished walnut carpentry. A luxurious spa opened in early 2024. Even if you're not staying here, don't miss a signature dish (try the white parmesan-infused pasta) at restaurant '10_11'.

FURTHER INFORMATION

► To book a tour with Tours by Locals go to www.tourbylocals.com. Cost is dependent on group size.

GETTING THERE

► BY AIR

There are plenty of flights throughout the week to Milan Malpensa from Bristol, Edinburgh, London (Gatwick, Heathrow and Stansted) and Manchester. You can even fly direct there from the USA – from Atlanta, Chicago and New York. The airport is 50km from the city, but there's a half-hourly train service that runs directly from the terminal to Milan's central station, costing a fraction of the price of an airport taxi. Linate airport, just 7km from the city centre, handles some flights from London. Milan Bergamo is a little further away.

► BY TRAIN

Paris to Milan takes 10 hours 40 minutes. The full journey from London takes just over 12 hours.

1 The world's most beautiful shopping centre

STEPPING INTO THE Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II, the world's most beautiful shopping centre and a major historical landmark in its own right, is a breath-taking experience. This soaring, four-storey arcade was constructed from iron and glass in 1865 and built in the shape of a cross as a nod to Milan's famous Duomo next door – though the gallery has a cathedral-like quality of its own. It's here that you'll find the original Prada Store (look for 'Fratelli Prada' etched into the glass door), with its original wooden cabinets that hold the current collection and a selection of pristine vintage handbags that have never been used. The gallery is also home to Borsalino, Italy's most famous hat store, named for master hatter Giuseppe Borsalino, who opened his first shop here in 1857. Humphrey Bogart wore a Borsalino in the unforgettable last scene of *Casablanca* and they are still popular today with Hollywood A-listers such as Denzel Washington and Leonardo DiCaprio.
www.yesmilano.it/esplora/luoghi/galleria-vittorio-emanuele-ii



Dome of the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II



Our writer in a Borsalino felt hat



2 Chart Giorgio Armani's rise at the Armani Silos



See iconic designs at the Armani Silos

OF ALL THE FAMOUS DESIGNERS who began their careers in Milan, Giorgio Armani is considered the pre-eminent godfather of fashion. Armani Silos is a slick museum that charts his rise as a designer from 1975 to his present-day global empire. (Fun fact: Armani began his fashion career in the 1950s working in La Rinascente department store as a window dresser.) Here you'll also find an ever-changing programme of fashion-related exhibitions, often showcasing the work of photographers, such as Aldo Fallai, who was a long-time collaborator with Armani. However, the real highlight of the visit is the permanent collection, in which Armani's glamorous, luminous designs shimmer with sequins and exquisite embroidery.
www.armanisilos.com

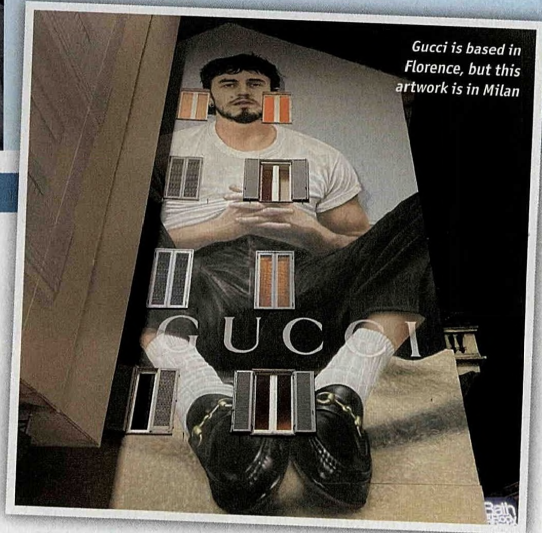


Armani store window

Prada's flagship store

3 Visit the flagship stores of the fashion titans who started out here

WITHIN THE QUADRILATERO D'ORO, it's the glittering flagship stores that shine brightest. These include those of Armani, Dolce & Gabbana, Prada, Moschino, Versace, Valentino, Fendi, Bottega Veneta, Missoni and Ferragamo, who all began here. Even if you've not got the money for a Fendi sheepskin handbag (a cool £2,950), it's still fun to explore these hallowed, modish halls. They really are more like art galleries than stores. Unlike in London or Paris, you'll rarely find bouncers on the door or snooty sales staff within. The Milanese, though stylish, aren't at all showy, so sales staff work on the premise that you can't always tell who will buy. Walk in with confidence and enjoy!



Gucci is based in Florence, but this artwork is in Milan

4 Take a guided tour of the city

'STORIES OF THE FASHION CAPITAL' is a 45-minute self-guided tour, costing just £3, that takes you on a whirlwind journey from medieval Brera to today's fashion capital, via the battles that have been fought between the luxury fashion houses here. (Historically, the biggest rivalry was between Armani and Versace.) It's a great introduction to the city, but for a more intimate view you could take a tour with Tours by Locals, led by a guide who grew up here. During a typical fashion-focused two-and-a-half hour tour, you'll discover both the iconic and hidden sides of the fashion district. Who knew, for example, that you could gaze into the private courtyard gardens of the Versace headquarters? www.voicemap.me/tour/milan/stories-of-the-fashion-capital-milan

5 Pose like a fashionista at the Prada Foundation's Bar Luce by Wes Anderson



Pausa caffè



Book a table or take an espresso at the bar

THE PRADA FOUNDATION, which opened in 2015, is perhaps the best example of how a designer has given back to the city where their fortune was made. Housed in a former rum factory, there are multiple exhibitions spaces, but Bar Luce is the biggest draw, designed by film director Wes Anderson (who has a history of working with Prada). Resembling a traditional 1950s Milanese café, it has all the hallmarks of Anderson's style in muted green Formica tables and a pale pink, speckled terrazzo floor, retro fixtures and fittings, and bow-tied waiters in crisp white shirts. Understandably it attracts many a fashionista looking for the perfect 'model' shot for Instagram, so it's another great people-watching spot. For a table you'll have to reserve, but, in true Italian style, you can choose to stand while enjoying an espresso, and feel like an extra in one of Anderson's films. www.fondazioneprada.org

DISCOVER ITALIA!

6 Go on a vintage fashion treasure hunt

MILAN HAS A THRIVING PRE-LOVED and vintage fashion scene, but you'll have to go a little beyond the 'golden quad' to find the best of it. Madame Pauline Vintage on Foro Buonaparte has an immaculately colour-coded collection of vintage dresses, shoes and accessories, ranging from Missoni dresses and Chanel handbags to costume jewellery for under €30. Via Gian Giacomo is famous for its cluster of vintage shops, from high-end to those that require a rummage. Head to shops such as Cavalli e Nastri and Bivio Milano, where you're almost guaranteed to find something special (Armani blazer for the bargain price of €95 anyone?), proving that Milan doesn't have to be about spending a fortune. www.madamepaulinevintage.it www.cavallienastri.com



Find vintage and pre-loved



The best bargains are often away from the 'golden quad'

7 Sip a drink with fashion royalty

MILAN PROVIDES GREAT people-watching opportunities, nowhere more so than at 5-star luxury hotel Portrait Milano, located at the centre of the fashion district. Once a seminary, dating from 1565, it's still owned by the church but is leased and run by fashion royalty, the Ferragamo Group. Salvatore Ferragamo began his shoe-making business in 1927 and many of the hotel's walls are covered in black and white photographs, featuring Audrey Hepburn, Sophia Loren, Jackie Onassis and Marilyn Monroe, all posing in Ferragamo's stylish footwear. The designer's sketches are also dotted around, appearing more like plans for futuristic skyscrapers than women's shoes. Enjoy a cocktail at the swish bar of the restaurant 10_12 (drink a Negroni as this is the birthplace of Campari) and take style notes from the elegant Milanese around you. www.lungarnocollection.com/portrait-milano



Lobby of the Portrait Milano



Negroni

8 Seek out sustainable brands



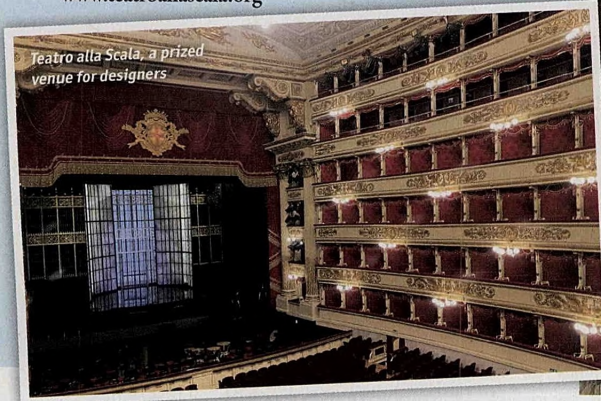
Image © Vernisse

Vernisse upcycles vintage garments

ALBEIT UNDER CONSIDERABLE PRESSURE, many of the world's best-known designers have made sustainability their focus in recent years, but there are newer designers with a conscience coming through that have always had this idea at the core of their business. Candiani is known for its commitment to sustainability in using organic cotton and recycled leather, and for its tireless efforts to develop groundbreaking technologies that return natural raw materials to nature by being fully biodegradable. Herth is another one worthy of your cash as they use low-impact materials and work with Italian artisans. As is Vernisse, a contemporary luxury brand that upcycles vintage garments. Newest on the scene is SO-LE Studio, the brainchild of Salvatore Ferragamo's great-granddaughter, Maria Sole Ferragamo, who uses leather offcuts from the fashion industry and brass to create exquisite jewellery. www.vernisse.it www.so-le-studio.com

9 Discover that fashion isn't just about what you wear

DURING FASHION WEEK, many top designers hire out the city's grandest buildings for their shows, and La Scala theatre – considered to be the heartbeat of the city, where music, theatre, and fashion meet – is the most prized venue. World famous for its opera season, the theatre opened in 1777 and has six tiers of private boxes, now with rich red velvet interiors, that were once individually decorated by their owners as an expression of how fashionable they were. You'll find a permanent collection of impressive opera memorabilia, including a selection of gowns made for renowned opera singers such as Maria Callas. www.teatroallascala.org



Teatro alla Scala, a prized venue for designers



The permanent costume exhibition at La Scala

10 Have a fashion history lesson at Palazzo Morando

THE CIVIC COLLECTION of fashion, from the 16th century to the modern day, is housed in the stunning Palazzo Morando, which dates from the 18th century, and was bequeathed to the city by Countess Baglioni in 1945. Getting a peep inside this typical Milanese noble house, with its many artworks and frescoed ceilings, is a bonus. In four rooms, there's a small but seminal display of Milanese fashion, which changes regularly as the collection is far greater than the exhibition space. Particularly poignant are the garments designed by long-forgotten pioneering women, such as Gigliola Curiel, who helped put Milan on the fashion map. On display is a little black dress with bolero-style cape that was part of a ready-to-wear-line she designed for New York department store Bergdorf Goodman, which shone a global spotlight on Italian fashion post-war. www.comune.milano.it/web/palazzo-morando



Vintage shoes at Palazzo Morando



Vintage dress



Magazine cover from 1925

Marcello Dudovich, manifesto La Rinascente, 1925.

And the palazzo is as impressive as its collection



June/July 2025 ITALIA! 41