



# La Serenissima



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## by Park Associati

Client  
Morgan Stanley S.g.r.

Address  
Via Turati 25-27, Milan

Year  
Competition: 2008  
On Site: 2009-2010  
Realization: 2011-2012

Area  
sqm 6.700

Professional Service  
Concept  
Architectural Project  
Artistic Site Supervision

M&E - Civil Engineering  
Site Supervision  
**General Planning**

Project Management  
**ECHarris**

Landscape Project  
**Marco Bay**

General Contractor  
**Mangiavacchi e Pedercini**

Health & Safety  
**Pro.Je.Co Engineering**

LEED Certification  
**Habitech**



# Restoring the Modern

The practice's refurbishment project has lent a visibly new appearance to the former Campari building, now well-known as La Serenissima, and pays homage to the Soncini brothers' language, enhancing the unusual aesthetic of their work.

*Text and interview: Angelica di Virgilio*



**The former Campari building in Via Turati in Milan was designed in the 60s by Eugenio and Ermenegildo Soncini, belonging to the group of esteemed professionals who made significant contributions to design in Milan in the twentieth century.**

Since the beginning of the new millennium, the refurbishment of buildings built during the twentieth century which, similar to and even more than historical ones, are subject to the ravages of time, material wear-and-tear, the ageing of technologies, and the end of functional programmes, has taken an increasingly dominant role in building practice. Asked to identify the most suitable intervention strategies, architecture has also begun to tackling this completely new discipline.

When faced with potential renovation projects for property devoid of any meritorious character, a complete restyling has been favoured, while for buildings of proven value, a philological approach has been implemented, and the building's location and original aspect given priority.

**However, halfway between these two extremes, there are many buildings that, while not bearing an important 'signature', feature expressive, linguistic and cultural characteristics of great interest.** These are the works on which the debate regarding the balance between conservation and modernisation becomes ever more heated.

Once an expression of economic prosperity, the building had 'aged', and was entrusted to Park Associati, with the aim of preserving its historical value while combining the need for efficiency.



# XX Century Milan



**Walking down Via Filippo Turati in Milan means admiring the best of Milanese modernism, the expression of the city's productive middle class that turned Milan into the economic capital of Italy during the twentieth century. It means to condense fifty years of architectural evolution with just a glance; to catch architecture's debates, the search for an Italian modernity, and the establishment of the industry's power of communication in the transformations of the buildings. In other words, it means to relive a piece of Italian history through the façades lined up along the street.**

This historic walk begins with Giovanni Muzio who, in 1922, on the corner with Via Moscova, realised the controversial Ca' Brutta - a twentieth century manifesto. Its simplified decorative elements, comprising gables, pilasters and arches, conceal innovative and functional planimetric and plant system solutions that speak of a middle class still clinging to the stylistic elements of the past, yet not rejecting the 'comforts' of modern living.

It is the middle class that, in the same years, was addressed by Gio Ponti. Following his promotion of 'the Italian-style house' in the pages of Domus magazine, the architect put his signature to the first Montecatini building. Built in 1938 and expanded in 1952, the building is characterised by a smooth façade with no decorative characters other than the marble slabs; a style that opposes Muzio's work and is considered the foundation of modern workplace architecture. In this, Gio Ponti is hand in glove with Eugenio Soncini - a name profoundly linked with via Turati.

Together with his brother, Ermenegildo, Eugenio collaborated in 1954 with Luigi Mattioni on the realisation of the office and residential tower located in Piazza della Repubblica, and subsequently designed the Campari building a few metres away, which was inaugurated in 1968. If the verticality of the first building speaks of a city on the rise, the structural and expressive simplicity of the latter reflects the practical and rigorous character of Milanese entrepreneurship in those years.

Our architectural stroll could be completed by returning to Giovanni Muzio who, with his son Lorenzo, designed the other tower of Piazza della Repubblica in 1967, thus creating an ideal entrance gate to the city centre. However, the restyling of the Campari building by Park Associati and its rebirth as 'La Serenissima' opens a new phase in the history of both Via Turati and the city as a whole. It is the history of the Milan of the new millennium, that wants to go back to laying down the law in the field of economics, and, thus, architecture. This history is still being written and is still to be discovered, with a stroll.

# Eugenio and Ermenegildo Soncini

The Soncini's work speaks of the potential of new materials, of construction systems and of the choice and language affinities existing among the pioneers of those years of great experimentation at the time when almost everybody met around the MSA (Movimento Studi Architettura - Movement of Architectural Practices) or the Triennale. At the end of the 30s, Ermenegildo began working as part of Gio Ponti's 'entourage', before becoming his associate. With him, he tackled the beautiful extension project of Clinica Columbus, and some interventions in Piazza San Babila.



Torre Tirrena  
1956 / 1957

**This Protagonists of the cultured professionalism that helped transform Milan's fabric and skyline in the post-war period, Eugenio and Ermenegildo Soncini - the first an architect, the other an engineer - are the authors of highly-significant and highly-visible buildings in the city.**



Torre Breda  
1950 / 1955

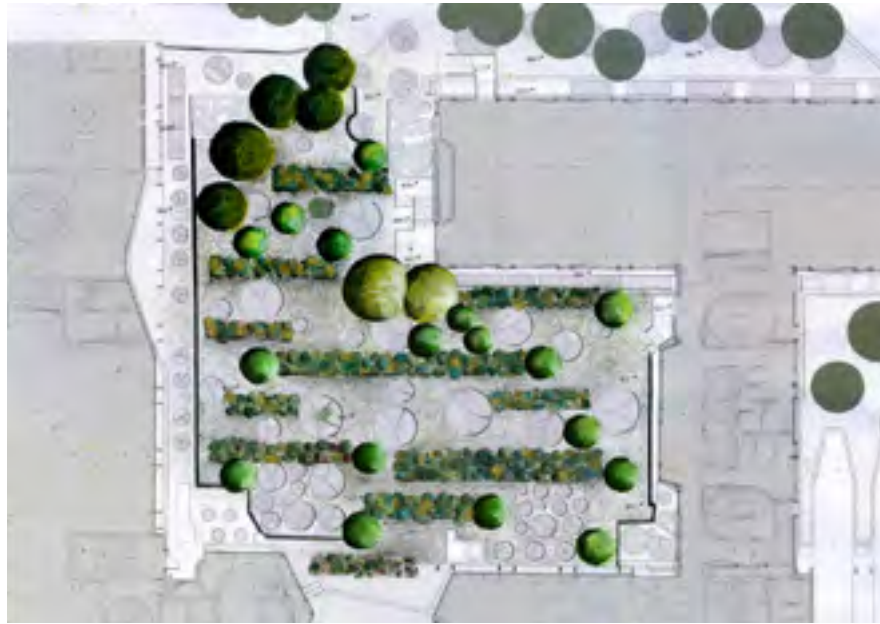
The two brothers then started a partnership and went on to put their signature to numerous high-level works, particularly buildings for offices and clinics like the sophisticated Capitanio (1949-1950) and Madonnina (1957-1959). These are the years of the SKF building (1948-1950) in Via Turati, the Breda Tower (with L. Mattioni, 1950-1955) in Piazza Repubblica, the Galbani headquarters (1954-1955) in Via Filzi - which all contributed to outlining the new city around the central station - and, just around the corner from Piazza San Babila, the Tirrenia Tower (1956) and the Palazzo delle Assicurazioni di Milano (1958-1965). Finally, La Serenissima, headquarters of the well-known company, Campari, which dates back to the 60s. Similar to the office buildings in Corso Europa by L. Caccia Dominioni, La Serenissima was seen as a new 'black warrior' ready to follow the idea of a workplace completely redesigned in terms of functional, technological and plant-engineering modernity, with its beautiful inner garden dedicated to Campari but also to the whole city.







# The secret garden



**“The garden of La Serenissima is definitely an abstract garden. I wanted to create a different, secret, and unexpected world within this architecture. A world that -glimpsed through the hallway that was left free by both the Soncini brothers and subsequently by the Park Associati upgrade- invited visitors to enter and discover the secret of its existence.”**

Upgrading La Serenissima did not end with the restyling of the façades, but also involved the complete recovery of the inner garden. Here Park Associati collaborated with landscape architect Marco Bay, who created a discerning project in keeping with La Serenissima's new image.

Covering about 3.000 sqm, the garden area has been redesigned using a dark-grey gravel surface that, as well as reducing maintenance costs, also evokes the colour of the building's structures. The dark surface of the garden is livened-up by the design of the grey grids of varying size, and by a series of green borders that create a new visual order and an innovative division of spaces. The result is a harmonious play between linearity and

circularity that emphasises the verticality of the façades.

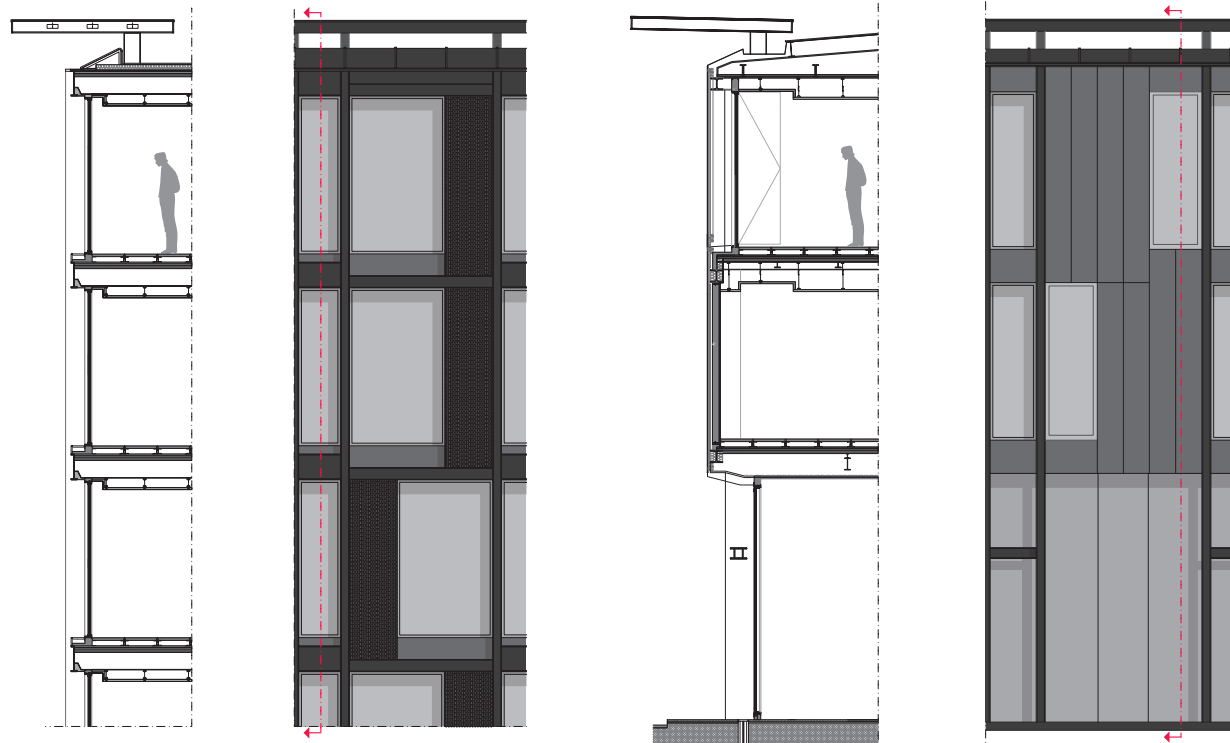
In addition to the pre-existing plants, Bay introduced new species such as *Bergenia crassifolia*, *Begonia grandis evansiana*, *Myrtus communis tarentina* and *Molinia caerulea*, 'Karl Foerster'. But the absolute star attraction is the *Cornus controversa* 'Variegata', whose several specimens feature bright foliage and stunning irregular branches that come into their own when the leaves fall.

These few species translate into a linear garden with varied shapes and colours that are highlighted with the seasonal changes: whitish and golden foliage and white and pink blooms alternate with the evergreens, creating a secret garden of essential beauty to be discovered.





# The new façade



The Campari building was extremely innovative, in terms of its structural framework made with twin steel pillars – it was one of the few buildings with a metallic skeleton at the time –, its internal flexibility, and the regular and essential pattern of its curtain wall made of polished pillars, smoked glass, and brown panels.



The renovation was completed in 2012, and there have been numerous outcomes. Annual energy consumption has dropped, which has enabled La Serenissima to obtain the LEED Gold certification; while the building's image has been enhanced thanks to a new three-dimensional character, lexical complexity, and plays of reflections.



The upgrading project drawn up by Park Associati sought to solve the complex's energy shortcomings. As well as contemplating new machinery, such as condensing boilers, highly energy-efficient refrigeration units, and electronic control stations, the project aimed to redesign the casing system. The first solution was to set the cladding back by about 35 cm from the original perimeter. Not only has this translated into an extra 360 sqm of space, reclaimed on the ground floor for commercial use, but it has also enabled the provision of the appropriate insulation systems. While the new design of the façade along Via Turati incorporates press-formed box elements, new thermally-cut aluminium fixtures and high performance glass and sandwich panels made of galvanized sheet and inner plasterboard with a mineral wool interlayer. These are alternately positioned and feature LED devices that turn into 'lanterns' at night and help give more complexity to the front of the building, which is also reinforced by the increased roofing overhang. For the low section in Via Cavalieri, originally intended for residential purposes, the project designed a glass façade, partly painted in grey, to follow the lines of Soncini's original design.





# Marco Bay, Landscape Architect



**ADV:** In the 1930s, in the pages of Corriere della Sera, Gio Ponti invited designers, builders, public administrators and citizens to embellish contemporary cities, Milan in particular, with greenery hidden gardens, planted terraces and lush vegetable gardens that would make the city a 'happier' place. As an architect, you decided to work with nature to take on this mission to spread 'happiness'. This is a complex task. What does it mean to design a garden in the city, what are the inspirations and problems?

**MB:** I like to define myself as an architect who designs with trees, and my job always aims to establish a dialogue with the nature of a specific place.

When I am asked to plan green areas in a city -where there is no natural landscape- on the one hand, I feel freer to experiment and create a scene from scratch, working with plants and species with no conditioning, but on the other, the built context becomes my interlocutor. In the city, nature is architecture, and this becomes the project's leading element.

**ADV:** Is this what happened with the garden designed inside the former Campari building?

**MB:** Here, more than elsewhere, I looked first of all at architecture. This is what gave me the stimulus for drawing and guiding my choices. La Serenissima's renovation building site had destroyed the pre-existing garden and the courtyard looked like a tabula rasa, with the exception of the seven specimens of Ginkgo Biloba and a magnolia that I decided to save because they were already large, and planting other trees of similar size in such a hanging garden would have been complicated. Therefore, apart from these few relics from the old garden, I was faced with a blank canvas.

The project was inspired by the architecture of the Soncini brothers and even more so by Filippo Pagliani and Michele Rossi who -showing great respect for the past- managed to give a contemporary appearance to the building. I looked at the design of the façade, its materials, its colours, and the other major pre-existing elements of the yard - the original aeration grills of the underlying garage. Immediately, I found their varied sizes and casual layout to be fantastic.

On the one hand, there was the geometric rigidity of the vertical façade, while on the other, the variety of the horizontal design; I devised the new garden working with these two elements.

**ADV:** Has the creation of a hanging garden above a basement garage affected your design choices?

**MB:** Naturally it has, even though I had half a metre of soil, which was sufficient to upgrade the yard and plant new species. I introduced new lines of vegetation against a background of gravel, mirroring the layout of the façade, and creating perspective axes and a new sense of space. I chose gravel because, in my opinion, it strengthens the design of the grills, while its dark colour recalls the colour of the façade and enhances the green of the new planting. The whole project therefore focuses on a play between plants and grids, a dialogue between the rational shape of the greenery and that of the varied grid system.

**ADV:** What is the characteristic feature of this garden?

**MB:** It's definitely the Cornus Controversa Variegata that I really wanted because it would brighten the space. The client was hesitant about choosing this plant because it is not an evergreen. I insisted because I believe the plant has its charm in winter too. It has an extraordinary architectural structure that is highlighted once its leaves have fallen. The building's façade is characterised by few elements, so the garden is also based on a few essential signs, the Cornus being one of them. I wanted to avoid creating a sample collection of plants because this would have caused the scene to lose its power.

**ADV:** To quote a landscape architect much loved by you, Geoffrey Jellicoe, what deep meaning does this place hide?

**MB:** I think it's surprise. In my opinion, nature -be it spontaneous or arranged by man- should always have this power. The power to arouse the thrill of surprise and seclusion. And I believe that the garden of La Serenissima manages to do this. Perhaps what excites the most is the deep bond between the courtyard and the surrounding architecture. Without that architecture, the garden would have lost points of reference; without greenery, the building would have appeared 'cold', too severe. The whole complex is unique; in my opinion there is no such example in Milan, and I have to thank Filippo and Michele for giving me the opportunity to work together in this extraordinary context.





Photos:  
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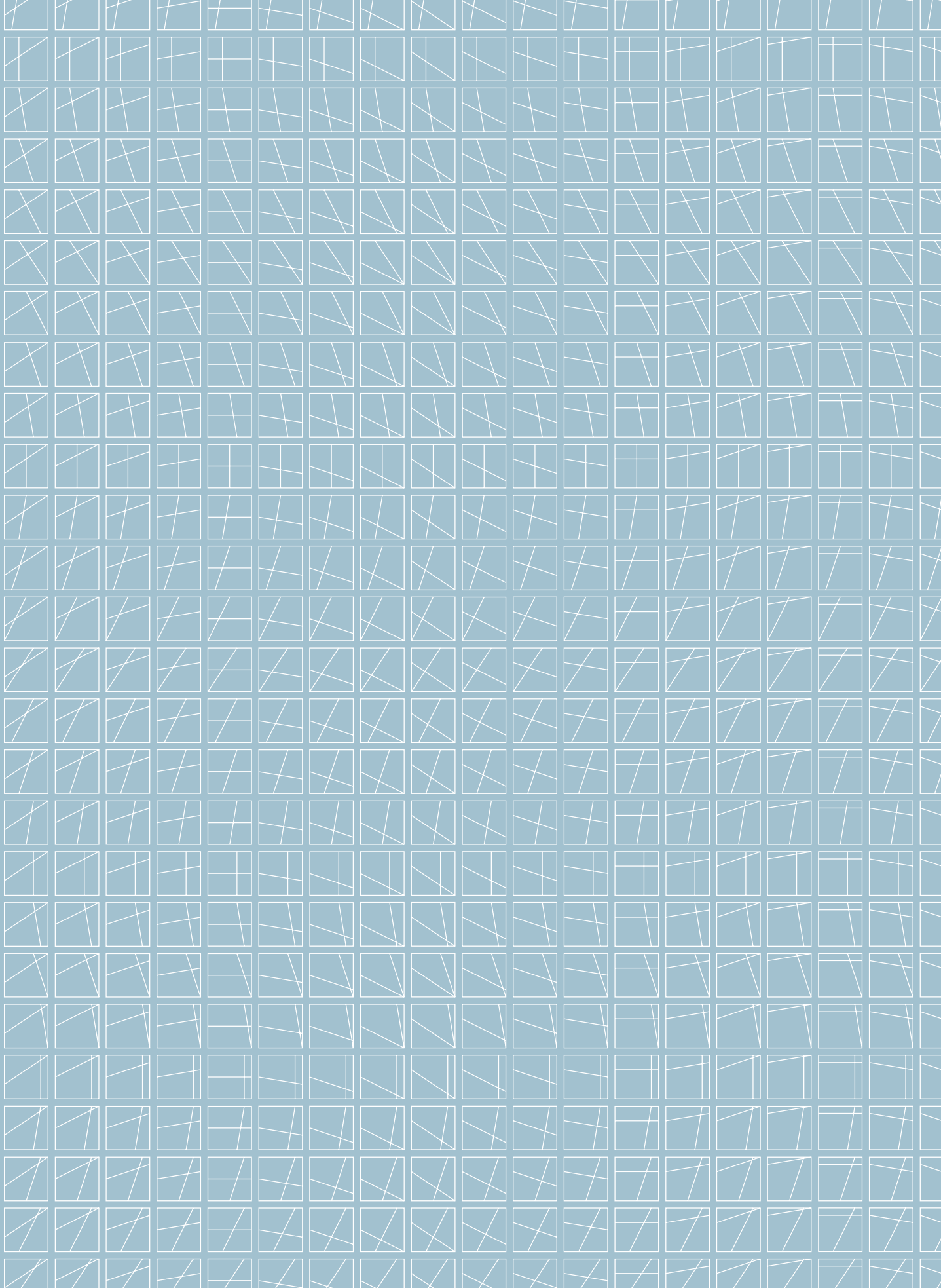
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