



## **Chris Bangle Associates – PRESS KIT 2021**

### **THE BORGATA**

The Borgata Gorrea in Clavesana, a small village in the Langhe wine district not too far from Turin, is home and studio of Chris Bangle and his wife Catherine. The Borgata is surrounded by the welcoming culture of great food and wine set in the beautiful countryside, a great spot for inspirations of all sorts. The Alps between Italy and France around the commanding Monviso to the west and those of the Alpi Marittime to the southwest make up Chris Bangle Associates panorama. There are four principal buildings that form the south side of this Borgata (an Italian type of house collective that is too small to be a village but more than what would belong to a single farm). Chris and Catherine started the construction in 2006 and are now working on building number four (number one is the house, two is the guesthouse, three is the current studio).

As a Studio-Design Residency in-becoming, the Borgata has a past, a busy present, and a vibrant future. Chris Bangle Associates s.r.l. was conceived here and is now evolving and growing in parallel with the progress of the works of construction. The unique local context, the size of the barns and stalls and the professional resources both in Clavesana and in nearby Turin are the basis of the Borgata as a unique place for creativity and innovation.

The Borgata is also a place of experimentation, be it a round Ping-Pong Table for five players or a new way to cast concrete ceilings using a cloth technique reminiscent of GINA. "I am a big believer in not submitting to compromise (sets of truncated solutions no one is happy with) but rather accepting priorities (sets of objectives everyone agrees upon); it allows one to see the problems in a new light. That approach is crucial to another of the CBA philosophies: that "A or B" choice-situations should become "A AND B...and while you are at it throw in C and D too!" solutions. The Borgata has many examples where the logical compromise would have been to leave out a feature; instead we directed our energies at re-envisioning the problem to create encompassing solutions", Chris Bangle explains.

**A selection of CBA Icons – Projects developed by Chris Bangle and his team at the Borgata, as a proof of how being brave and creative is not only a statement, but a constant practical work**

### **BIG RED BENCH**

Art should involve the people who look at it and change how they see the world. The big red bench in the vineyard of the Borgata, overlooking the Alps, does just that. The idea is not a new one, but the context is. Together with his artist-collaborator and farmer friend Francesco Ferrero, Chris Bangle fabricated the bench over a spring and installed it in the summer with the help of the local farmers. The change of perspective given by the size of the bench make people feel like small children again, and marvel at the beauty of the landscape with a new eye. It has become a favorite landmark for visitors in the village to stroll down to after enjoying a local "Piemontese Lunch".

Chris Bangle: "It is a great lesson in the use of Contextual Innovation; I think we are so obsessed with discovering only the "new-in-all-senses" innovations that we sometimes deny ourselves the enjoyment of the "well known-but-not-in-this-context".

### **[STILE] LIBERTY-TREE!**

Chris and co-artist Francesco Ferrero have recently finished a large installation piece on the south side of the house: a metal and colored-polycarbonate construct that resembles both a tree and a colossal lampshade of the Art Nouveau era (known as "Stile Liberty" in Italian). It is about 4.3 meters in height and the same in diameter and weighs over a ton; the square-steel "trunks" are painted two shades of sunset - a warm pale orange and a light blue violet. It is a good example of Chris's philosophy to never accept an "A or B" compromise when with a little imagination and a re-think of your preconceptions one can achieve "A AND B...and C and D too! The goal was to have a shade tree above ground and a garage below; no real tree of these dimensions would have roots shallow enough to allow it. The mix of semi-transparent and translucent panels means it is bright underneath yet not hot, and the benefit of the colored panels is evident as the sun passes - spots of joyous color move across the grass, the house, and anyone enjoying life under its dome!

### **ROUND PING PONG TABLE**

Many clients came to Italy to do workshops at the Borgata this year and the same sunny weather of the Langhe



that is just right for growing grapes also encourages the occasional break to play ping pong. Chris Bangle: "We needed a round presentation/eating table for the workshop members and it seemed logical to combine all the uses into one. It is three meters in diameter, painted green and divided into five parts by standard nets; the cut off part of the plywood panels when making the top became the legs - no waste at all. The rules we apply are still evolving with the mix of players - some sets of 5 people want to play stringently in alternating fashion and others are content to have fun as a group (of 5 or more!) colleagues just batting the ball here and there. It turns out to be a friendlier shape to play on than the stiff and static rectangular form; it's great for chasing each other around the circle in a moving match!"

### **PARALLELOGRAM ARCHES**

To divide the large terrace of building number two into usable sections for workshop groups and entertaining and provide some shadow in summer, a set of stone arches that divide the space have been built. The parallelogram shape of the pillars is as unusual as functional; from the outside the arcade seems to fill the space but when seen from the desks in the office, the pillars are at their thinnest and do not interfere with the view.

«In truth this is the same technique we used to design the front pillars of a car to reduce their visual obstruction», Chris says. In the future they may serve as the base of a second story for the Studio; in the near-term the final arch will continue all the way down to the level of the pool; for now it has been left in an unfinished state which looks too much like a real ruin to be taken as a new construction. Following the philosophy of "mocking-up everything first", master bricklayer Pino took Chris's simple paper model and simulated the entire arcade in wire mesh over rebar before he built them out of the bricks and stones of the old walls.

### **SCALA CIUCCA**

Reconstructing around an old stone building sometimes causes changes in the plans. As the house evolved the main stairs in the Borgata residence suddenly became "impossible" to design; the space was too low to use a spiral and too tight to solve with straight or "L" shaped stairs. Architect Paolo Ornato solved the problem by designing an "S" shaped stairs on the spot with the help of Pino the bricklayer. Paolo drew the stairs on the floor full scale as Pino added his suggestions and called the dimensions up to his assistant who converted it into a CAD rendering. Chris Bangle: "I tweaked with it a bit and Pino began to lay out the curved and tapering walls using sticks and strings as he always has. The result is not only functional but is beautifully original ("Ciucco" means "drunk" in Italian; the meandering form and twisted walls create a rhythmic perspective!). It is also engagingly authentic; allowing Pino to interpret the idea his way ensured that the subtle traces of time-honored craftsman tradition are there to be enjoyed. This manner of "Mock-up to Reference-Image to FreeHand for the Workman" process-philosophy is one I think should be carried into the industrial world if we want to make the contributions of our cultures and our employees relevant in the future".

### **THEATRE FACADE**

Chris and Catherine Bangle's house in the Borgata is in a converted brick barn, the south side of which faces the small village nearby. Because of the attention to energy efficiency the re-construction was made with 80 cm thick walls for the most part. To the west the beautiful view of the mountains required deep angled facets following the major sight lines; from the kitchen sink there is no wall thickness at all to be perceived. The deep facets are useful but not traditional, fortunately the nearest neighbors on the west side are quite a distance away and from there the house appears more as a "barn with holes" - as in fact they usually are. But to the south this extreme shape would have stood out from the typical look of the houses seen from the village. To hide the west side completely from their view, the south wall was extended in a knife-edge an extra meter into space; when seen from an angle the whole wall seems to be surprisingly nothing but a dimensionless "theatrical facade" - another stimulus to rethink the conventions and habits that compromise life. This extension not only hides but helps; it makes a great wind break for the kitchen door. Chris Bangle: "We placed most of the few windows in that "facade" wall at normal depths to maintain the appearance of normalcy. The only window we could not do that for was the kitchen window (my wife needed to reach the handle to open it!) so to alleviate the great depth of the "hole" it was set into we lined the thick recess with mirrors. Now the outside truly does come into the interior and the sunlight warms us in winter like it does on a ski slope (in the summer the sun is too high to reflect). Even the colored light from the "[Stile]Liberty-Tree!" bounces off the mirrors, around the kitchen and onto our faces like small spots of happiness!"



## **OBLIX**

OblOx is one of the latest Icons of the Borgata and originates from Chris Bangles intention to re-create a feeling that for him speaks volumes of his experience in Europe: that of sitting in the recess of a thick wall in a fortress or a castle—a space that was once used to ward, then to sew, read or contemplate the landscape. The inspiration came from places such as the Reggia di Caserta, where the monumental mullioned windows that illuminate the interiors are furnished with stone benches carved from the volumes of the walls themselves. Not having been a castle, the architecture of the Borgata did not possess the characteristics for building such a volume, and Chris chose to create a structure on purpose, reproducing the canonical proportions of a castle recess but using his own unique approach in the construction. The new structure is cantilevered from the façade of the ancient barn and twists towards the valley. Many options were explored when thinking of the retaining structure, including a series of caryatids, but the decision was made to create a conical half-arch vaulting into space, yet firmly anchored by a retaining steel ring wedged into the wall. Traditional static materials like stone become dynamic elements of potential energy as they take on an unusual shape that leans over the space below. The construction of OblOx was executed by the same team of builders that have worked on the whole Borgata; operating under the mandate to re-think every dogma of their trade and create no two arches in the same way.

The window is a porthole, the third window of a circular shape at the Borgata, particularly appreciated by CBA team for the positive and friendly effect that roundness has on people's wellbeing. When seen from inside the studio, OblOx is a recess of the 21st century, covered in traditional materials that communicate strength and continuity, such as wood for the benches and ceramic for the sidewalls and the floor. OblOx is equipped with wifi connection and wall sockets, to allow occupants to work, read or of course to just look at the valley, the vineyards and the Alps in the background.

## **INVISIBLE SWIMMING POOL**

Seventy tons of water transfixed between the vineyards and the sky: a spectacular steel construct, imposing yet conceived to disappear amid the trees and vines, that reflect and multiply in its surfaces

The concept of the Invisible Swimming Pool was originated in the search for a non-compromise solution to a daunting set of problems: how to reconcile the steep hill of the Borgata and the surrounding geography with a 20 meters long lap pool? Clearly an attempt to position a "hole in the ground full of water" in a classic manner—as a narrow strip behind the house—would not benefit from the sun and vista. Backfilling the hill into a plateau to carve a pool out of was likewise untenable. The most courageous and spectacular solution the artist-designer discovered was also the most challenging: one would have to swim straight out from the hill, floating high above the trees. The resultant steel structure is in a T form with the short side flanking the main building and the long side "floating" nine meters over the vineyards. From the very beginning of its conception however, it was known that this dramatic design must somehow achieve a subtle and refined inclusion into its environs. To ensure the final construction would not look intrusive to neighbors on the hills above the Borgata, the concept embraced the ultimate impossibility of making it "invisible". In fact, by covering the external surfaces in mirroring panel, the pool blends into the surrounding nature, reflecting the different moments of the day, flow of seasons, and changing weather conditions.

To emphasize this effect, the interior of the pool is black while the front wall is transparent, both for a sense of infinity and a view from the vineyards to the Alps in the background. The materials used for the external surfaces have been defined after an extended research. The left side of the pool is covered in steel 12/10 panels with a specific super mirror finishing that maximizes the disappearing phenomenon and is effectively self-cleaning. Each panel is fixed to the structure with a system of joints conceived by Chris Bangle and his team to adapt to thermal expansions and shrinkages. The right side, hidden from the sight of neighbors, is where a connection to the turbulent GINA style is more evident, with a stretched plastic mirror film that reproduces dancing waves. The stone outline of the pool includes the Led lights that design the layout of the structure at night.

The structure was built using twelve tons of steel and by a 100% local labor. This approach is recurrent at CBA, operating as it is in the area of Clavesana by seeking mutual collaboration with the local community, making the most of human and professional relationships with all the members.

### **Numbers**

Length of long side: 20 meters

Width of short side: 8 meters

Width of long side: 2 meters

Height of main pillar: 9 meters

Water depth: 1,20 meters



Weight of steel structures: 12 tons  
Days of building: 70

### **BALAUSTRALÉPORELLO**

One of the key aspects of Chris Bangle's approach to design and architecture is respecting cultural contexts and the identity of a landscape without giving up the personal touch he brings to cutting edge technologies and futuristic visions. Balaustra Leporello is one of the latest work conceived under these premises. The name was chosen as an allusion to the folded paper book of the same name (which in turn is derived from the homonym Don Giovanni character). The reference point for this project was the classic baroque balustrade, widely diffused in Europe in its stone original versions and in molded concrete today. The Borgata is located in one of the most important areas of Piedmont Baroque, therefore the inspiration is also strongly connected to the local context and Chris Bangle's passion for that architectural period.

Consistent with the landscape and the Borgata reconstruction philosophy as a whole, the balustrade had to look traditional from far, without being a simple copy of the past and withstand obsolete limitations. At the same time to a nearby observer it must express the innovative character of Chris and the personality of the studio—as well as match the joyous spirit of the colorful “(Stile) Liberty Tree” it encompasses. The finished structure is a parapet with a visual reference to a cultural heritage but made with innovative methods and materials, which result in a more resistant and cost-effective solution compared to traditional constructions.

The balustrade is made up of two horizontal elements, the base and the upper part, built in steel, pre-filled with concrete and reinforcing rods. The curvaceous silhouette columns fit between them are laser cut in steel panels and accordion folded with an angle of 90 degrees. This specific tilt angle helps to create the visual illusion of roundness typical of the traditional columns. To enhance the optical effect of a classic balustrade, the main pillars between the sections are built with old repurposed red bricks.

Like many other works developed by Chris Bangle, there is a playful side in the balustrade as well; a reward to those who take a close look. Because the Balustrade Leporello was built after the construction of the terrace foundation, Chris and his team realized that the folding procedure left a few irregular spaces in some of the sections—another opportunity to invent a solution that both delights the eye and works technically. To this end a series of imaginary characters appear between the columns including an homage to Tim, the studio dog caught while stealing (and eating in its entirety) a tube of mayonnaise.

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