

## ITALY



**NO PENNY ARCADE**  
Inside the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II luxury shopping arcade, main; the Fondazione Prada, left

# How Milan became a cool place to mingle

### LA DOLCE VITA

*Italy's city of fashion is less aloof than it used to be – and a lot more fun.*

*Julia Buckley revels in a style renaissance*

**R**ound two of drinks at Milan's most exclusive bar, 1930, and I've ordered the Fu-Go. I'd been hankering after the Marilyn Monroe – served in a champagne bottle with a spray of Chanel No5 – or the Cheesecake, a real dessert stewed in gin. But Marco, the oh so attentive bartender, recommends something else.

"I think it'll go well with the last one," he says. "And I think you'll like the presentation."

Five minutes later, I'm watching Marco shake ever more fantastical drinks, when there's a tap on my shoulder, and I'm handed my cocktail – plus a gold helium balloon.

Famboyant drinks at a "secret" speakeasy that's near-impossible to get into – so far, so run of the hipster mill. Yet what makes 1930 different from its relatives around the world is that its notoriously stringent entry policy doesn't depend on how modelesque you look, how patiently you queue, or

how well you schmooze the doorman. Here, they personally select their clientele to create a community. To my left is a 50-something couple; to my right, a Barcelonan bartender.

Downstairs is a group of raucous young men. Nobody's glammed up. The only criterion, Marco tells me, is that you must seem willing to mingle.

Milan has always cultivated an air of exclusivity, what with La Scala, the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II (its gilded shopping arcade) and the designer-stuffed Quadrilatero d'Oro shopping zone, where the air hangs heavy with money. But in recent years, a new scene has sprung up – and, fittingly for a city that thrived on industry and saw entrepreneurs outrank the aristocracy, it's much more democratic.

Improbably, it was the fashion industry that kicked off accessible luxury. First they opened cafés, so we could taste Armani for the price of an espresso; then hotels. But then they pivoted. Miuccia Prada converted an



**GLASS ACTS**  
From left to right: 1930; on the catwalk; a Wes Anderson exhibit



old distillery south of the city centre into a gallery; in 2018, she filled its 190ft tower with her personal collection. Works by Damien Hirst and Jeff Koons battle for attention with sprawling views of the city – from the gleaming skyscrapers of the modern Porta Nuova area to the Duomo's gothic florets. The café, a retro heaven of candy colours and Formica tables, was designed by film director Wes Anderson, who curated the current exhibition – 538 items from Vienna's Kunsthistorisches and Naturhistorisches Museums, loosely grouped by madcap themes such as "wood", "green" and "infant royalty". It runs until January 13.

Prada isn't the only brand offering art to all. Armani has the Armani Silos, a somewhat navel-gazing exhibition of the brand's biggest hits in the trendy Via Tortona area, southwest of the centre, where old factories have been transformed into

design HQs by the likes of architect Matteo Thun. In the north is Pirelli HangarBicocca, a gallery of monumental proportions in a former tyre factory where there's still a rubbery pong in the air. Back near Via Tortona, the Fendi headquarters sit above an underground mazelike installation, *Labirinto*, by sculptor Arnaldo Pomodoro.

Even the sumptuous Galleria – one of Italy's most recognisable buildings – is getting on board. While tourists swarm in the centre to stamp on a mosaic bull's balls (a good luck ritual), I dip through a nondescript door and take a marble-lined lift to the sixth floor and the Osservatorio Prada – Miuccia's photography gallery, suspended over the famous glass-domed roof.



### In the designer-stuffed Quadrilatero d'Oro shops, the air hangs heavy with money

The view, though, has nothing on that of my hotel, Galleria Vik Milano. The first European outpost of the South American jet set's favourite chain, which opened last month, its 89 rooms stalk along one wing of the Galleria.

Here, too, art is everything – a cast of Rodin's *The Thinker* sits brooding in the lobby, works by the likes of Mario Schifano and Julian Lennon adorn the restaurant, and every room is themed by a different artist. On my balcony I find myself right below the colossal caryatids propping up the Galleria. It's a spectacular new angle on one of Italy's signature sights.



### ESSENTIALS

◆ Galleria Vik Milano (0039 02 8905 8297; [galleriavikmilano.com](http://galleriavikmilano.com)) offers rooms from €324 (£275) per night.  
◆ Return flights with British Airways (ba.com) from London Heathrow to Milan Malpensa or Heathrow and London City to Malpensa and Linate (closer to the city centre) cost from £48.

Milan will always have fashion at its centre, of course, but the scene has expanded, swapping glitzy Via Monte Napoleone for residential areas beyond the tram-ringed centre of town. Near Via Tortona, I find myself outside a drab block of flats, looking for the showroom of former Kenzo artistic director Antonio Marras. I must have made a mistake, I think – until I'm buzzed in through a wisteria-draped courtyard to Circolo Marras. This isn't just a shop, the staff are at pains to say, but a cultural space, where book launches take place between the clothes rails.

But it's perhaps the nightlife that has seen the biggest change – and again, it has moved outside the city centre. At Ceresio 7, a rooftop restaurant-with-pools from fashion brand DSquared2, my cocktail comes with Milan's best bar snacks: arancini, salmon tartare and mortadella-stuffed focaccia. On Via Tortona is gin distillery

The Botanical Club. The bar is topped in chrome and smothered in foliage, bottles of gin stacked overhead. The G&T is spectacular, the bar snacks are home-made wontons, and the menu is raw fish – the yellowtail marinated in mezcal and yuzu is particularly good.

It's the Botanical Club crew who insist I visit their chums at 1930. It's fearfully hard to get into – normally you have to turn up at sister bar Mag Café in the boozey Navigli district and look friendly enough to be invited. Or you can score the (secret) address if you befriend their mates.

And so it is that I roll up at another nondescript apartment block in east Milan, tell the guy in what appears to be the takeaway shop next door that Marco's friend sent me, and get waved through into a 19th-century drawing room – and beyond that, the bar. I am, officially, mingle-worthy. But then, so is Milan.