

A week in the Diary of Claudio Silvestrin

FINANCIAL TIMES

In 2013 the Financial Times approached Claudio Silvestrin to contribute to their section titled: 'Diary of a Somebody'. This section asked professionals highly regarded in their field to write a diary of their day to day activities during a period of five days.

The following pages are a reproduction of Claudio's diary for the Financial Times that went from September 24 to September 30, 2013.

Claudio Silvestrin – Day I

Between keeping tabs on projects from Mayfair to Milan, the Italian architect whips up a superb spaghetti carbonara



Giuliana Salmaso



Giotto Silvestrin

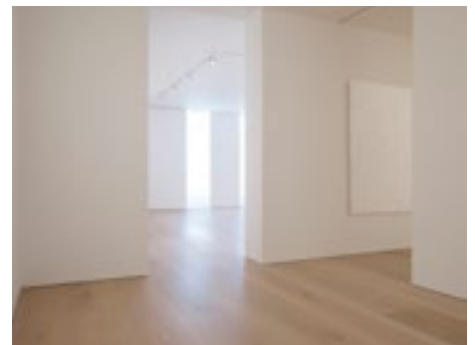
September 24 2013

Waking up at 7am, my partner Giuliana Salmaso and I wait in bed for Giotto, our four-year-old son. He joins us, happy as ever, for our morning hug; I'm not sure if there is a better way to start the day. Breakfast is fruit and eggs, but more importantly, it is reading a short story to Giotto. I love our little routines.

While driving Giotto to his Montessori nursery in Highgate, we chat about different building materials: I believe that "digital kids" need to compensate for the weaknesses of the digital age. Back in Hoxton, I drop the car at home and catch a taxi to Mayfair to pay a visit to the Victoria Miro gallery on St George Street – this Saturday is the big opening event, and so I am making sure that my design for the new interior is as close as possible to perfection. To design is great, but to see one's design constructed faithfully is even greater. On site I spot a few issues, but I know Victoria and Warren Miro are going to get it right.

Back in the taxi I check the drawings sent to me by Mariachiara, my associate from the Milan office. I comment back with sketches on my iPad. What an amazing invention; it is wonderful to be able to draw ideas directly onto the screen – I couldn't live without it. I walk back to the office by Regent's Canal to meet Sanya, my financial director, who I haven't seen for quite a while. Then I meet Fabrizio, my associate in London, and Petra, another member of the team, for my favourite part of the working day: design meetings.

Last week was terrific but exhausting, involving a trip to New York for a new project and opening events for the Giada boutique in Montenapoleone, Milan, where we have created the interior. Inevitably, this week is proving to be less intense. Several of my appointments are cancelled: I was due to show the Giada boutique to Giorgio Armani, Antonio Marras and Nicola Di Battista (the new editor of Italian architecture and design magazine Domus), among others. Looking on the bright side (as I always do), everything is rescheduled for October.



Victoria Miro Gallery, Mayfair, London



Claudio Silvestrin Architects London Office



Giada Boutique, Milan

I have lunch at home with the beautiful Giuliana. Our apartment is serene and it inspires reflective conversations. I cook spaghetti alla carbonara (without the cream): Kamut pasta, organic eggs, Parmesan and oil from Tuscany. We drink some Sagrantino wine. Italian cuisine consists of few ingredients, but those ingredients must be of excellent quality and the cook must be in love with the food – no question about it. Both the oil and the wine were in fact carefully selected over the summer, during our holiday in Tuscany and Umbria – where one can be ecstatic not only about the food, but also the landscape, the ancient Etruscan culture and the extraordinary Renaissance art of Filippo Brunelleschi and Piero della Francesca.

In the afternoon I head to Oblix, my latest London restaurant project on the 32nd floor of The Shard to meet my friend Alessandro, who is the excellent sommelier at Oblix, Zuma and Roka. We share a bottle of Amarone amid the fantastic surroundings as I learn about good wine and wine cellars. I have recently been asked to design one, so the more I know the better.

As I make my way to Heathrow, I deal with today's emails. Having nourished my body and mind, now it is time to nourish my soul, so on the flight to Bologna, I read observations and thoughts on the art of Walter De Maria and James Turrell – two of the most amazing and profound artists of today, in my opinion. A quote captures my attention before I drift off to sleep: "Water flows, but so too does the cliff; it flows ... like water and the history of men ... like my own inevitable ageing and eventual return to dust".



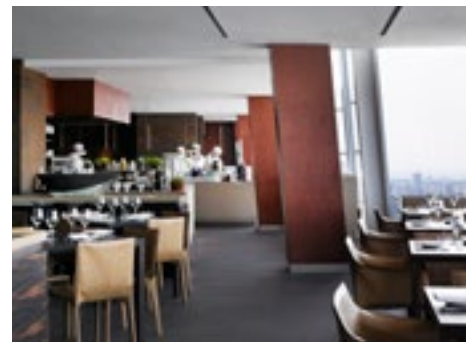
Giorgio Armani & Claudio Silvestrin



Apartment S, London



Flagellation of Christ, Piero della Francesca



Oblix Restaurant, The Shard, London



Skyspace, James Turrell

Claudio Silvestrin – Day 2

A design exhibition in Bologna, dinner in Milan and an unexpected request from Kanye West – it's all in a day's work for the Italian architect



Detail of egg in Piero della Francesca's Brera Madonna



Le Giare for Ceramica Cielo

September 25 2013

Breakfast in hotels is not the most wonderful experience, so I make it as quick as possible. It's 9am and I need to get to Cersaie (the International Exhibition of Ceramic Tile and Bathroom Furnishings), which is a short taxi ride away. The manufacturer Ceramica Cielo is showcasing Le Giare, a bathroom collection I've designed for the brand. My inspiration for this collection is the shape of the egg – simple yet timeless. The bathtub is being presented for the first time.

I get to the stand, where Alessio Coramusi and Roberto Basso, the two founders of Ceramica Cielo, welcome me enthusiastically. They show me the bathtub – it's beautiful. I have been invited mainly to meet journalists and bathroom-furniture dealers; there will be lots of handshakes.

My friend and fellow architect Marco Casamonti is also there. It is always so good to see him – what an exceptional person – and he promises to show me around the Antinori Winery, which he designed, next time I'm in Florence. I add it to my to-do list. Vittorio Radice of the Florentine department store La Rinascente has asked that Giuliana and I devise a new roof extension for the shop. It is in the historical centre and Vittorio thinks our design is wonderful – but, needless to say, controversial. A meeting with the planning authorities is scheduled for next year. If the design is not approved, I will have two reasons to go to Florence. Apparently, one can taste as many different wines as one wishes at the winery...

At the stand I am interviewed by Giulia Guzzini of Domus and by Gilda Bojardi, editor of Interni magazine. The exhibition turns out to be a seven-hour tour de force without lunch, but luckily espressos are delivered to us regularly.

When I say arrivederci to Alessio and Roberto, they tell me that Le Giare is going to be presented in Moscow and St Petersburg next spring. I am invited and they also want me



Antinori Winery, Florence



Claudio Silvestrin Giuliana Salmaso for La Rinascente, Florence



Le Giare for Ceramica Cielo

to give a lecture when I'm there – excellent news. In the queue to get a taxi, I notice the warmth of the sun and it doesn't feel like autumn has arrived. I call Giuliana and she tells me that Giotto is asking about me. He's wondering why I work so much and I'm not home for dinner – it breaks my heart. I'm so glad I won't be travelling next week so that I can spend time with him. I love having him on my lap watching Kung Fu Panda and Pinocchio while I sketch on my iPad.

The train journey gives me the opportunity to catch up with emails and I revise the drawings sent from my Milan and London offices. Once in Milan, I go straight to the hotel: a quick shower, more emails and I'm out of the door again. Tonight I'm having dinner at Il Salumaio restaurant in Montenapoleone, which is a good thing as now I'm starving. The evening has been organised by Silvia Negri Firman and Federica Fratoni of Negri Firman, my press office in Milan. Fashion designer Antonio Marras couldn't make it, but I'm glad to see Renato Preti from Discipline Design and his wife Giorgiana again. Umberto Angeloni, CEO of Caruso, and Alessandra Alla from his PR office, architecture critic Susanna Legrenzi and artist Felice Limosani also join us. Our evening is delightful: interesting people, good food and lively conversation. While I have my sorbetto, my mobile suddenly starts ringing. It's Laura, Kanye West's PA. He'd like to set up a phone call with me and we agree on tomorrow. This phone call was very unexpected as nobody ever calls me in the evening, with the exception of Giuliana or Max and Maya, my two teenagers. I don't want to be a boring and apprehensive father, so I let them call or text me whenever they want or need me. I hope to see them this weekend.

Back at the hotel I spend a few more minutes checking drawings and I send back my comments. I read two more pages of Walter De Maria's *The Lightning Field* and fall asleep – what a relief.



Claudio Silvestrin Architects Office, Milan



Kung Fu Panda



Claudio Silvestrin & Kanye West



Maya, Max, Giotto, Giuliana & Claudio



The Lightning Field, Walter De Maria

Claudio Silvestrin – Day 3

The sunset-dappled façade of Milan's Duomo gives the Italian architect a moment's calm amid a busy day of design



Rocca Sinibalda castle, Rome



Foro Romano, Rome

September 26 2013

Today's hotel breakfast is wonderful, as I receive two texts that lift my spirits. Giulia from the Milan office has a passion for photography and this week she is near Rome, shooting our interior of the Peruzzi Castle. This project, completed only recently, was commissioned by two professors from La Sapienza university and took nine years of my life. Perseverance has paid off: it is an extraordinary place. Giulia's message reads: "The space is highly spiritual, the most contemplative place I've ever experienced." This year the teams from my two offices and I are going to enjoy our Christmas lunch at the castle followed by a visit to the Foro Romano, the archaeological site of what used to be Europe's capital – not bad.

The second message is from Marianna, a friend and client. It reads: "I visited the Giada boutique yesterday. You always make me dream, please don't ever change."

On the way to Caffè Cova on Via Montenapoleone, I quickly stop at the Ferrari shop and Hoepli children's bookstore to buy Giotto some gifts. I meet the excellent architecture critic Luca Molinari at the café. He has green tea; I drink an espresso and some water. The conversation is very pleasant and I show him the Giada boutique, which is just a minute away. Unexpectedly, I bump into Ms Li, one of Giada's directors, who is delighted with the store.

I have lunch with Mariachiara at an informal restaurant near the Church of Sant'Ambrogio: a salad for her and fusilli pasta with ragù for me, but strictly no wine – I had one glass too many of Brunello di Montalcino last night. Like me, Mariachiara is a perfectionist; arguing with contractors and engineers is exhausting and clients are a piece of cake in comparison. I tell her about Giulia and Marianna's text messages to cheer her along. She and I spend the afternoon having design meetings and a video call with the London office.

As arranged, Kanye West calls me at 5pm sharp. He has a



Marianna & Fabio Parisini, Paris



Giada Boutique, Milan



Ms Li, Mr Zhao and their Milan Giada team in Milan

project for me in San Francisco; it just so happens he is in Milan next week, so we agree to meet to discuss his brief. Kanye's intelligence is definitely not ordinary. Giuliana read the book by his mother about his upbringing – she says there is so much to learn from it.

After the call, Mariachiara and I catch the metro to Piazza del Duomo to meet some potential new clients. While I step up towards the exit of the station, I slowly see the blue sky and the pinkish façade of the cathedral lit by the colours of a beautiful September sunset: the emotion is sublime. If you can look at only the upper part of the cathedral and the sky, ignoring the people and the busy square, you can enjoy the silence, experiencing the stillness of the mind for a few seconds.

Stefano Carmi is an architect I met during my 10-year collaboration with Armani. He left the fashion world to become the head architect of Benetton's gastronomic business. He thinks I am the right person to design the immense atrium of the food hall in Galleria Vittorio Emanuele. The location is superb: four storeys facing the Duomo. We also meet the marketing officer Ezio Balarini and they tell me how impressed they were with my design of the Princi cafés in Milan and in London's Soho. I really hope we win the contract because this is an opportunity to show, once again, that my architecture is accessible to everyone.

I have supper at my mother's; she is 83 but her cooking is still authentic. I forgot to tell her I had pasta with ragù for lunch, and of course, she has cooked tagliatelle with ragù to make me happy – she knows it is one of my favourite dishes. Never mind, it is worth it. In fact, her version is far better than anything you could have in any restaurant.

Back at the hotel I read another passage by Walter De Maria: "The Lightning Field stands somewhere between a modernity that seeks to look from on high and a premodernity that seeks to look to the heights. Disenchanted modernity ascends in order to look down and see this world more clearly, while premodernity ascends in order to look up and see the other world more closely. [...] But The Lightning Field promises no ascent. Instead, it brings us to stand on the earth under the sky: it makes us earthlings and leads us to the ground, but a ground that does not exist without the extraterrestrial, the sky overhead."



Kanye West & Claudio Silvestrin, New York



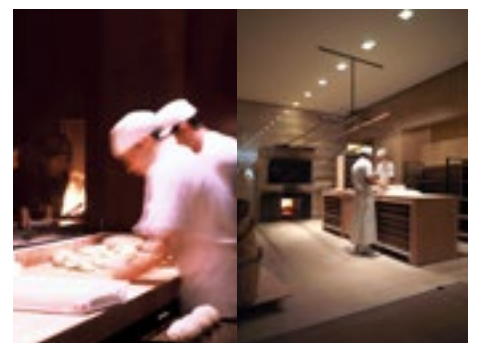
Church of Sant'Ambrogio, Milan



Duomo, Milan



Galleria Vittorio Emanuele, Milan



Princi Bakery XXV Aprile, Milan (L). Piazza Duomo, Milan (R)

Claudio Silvestrin – Day 4

It's a day of design work on new projects in London, New York and Florence before the Italian architect heads home to Hoxton



Claudio & Giuseppe Silvestrin



Rainer Becker & Claudio Silvestrin at Oblix Restaurant

September 27 2013

I have breakfast with my brother Giuseppe at Sant'Ambroeus, a historical Milanese café right off Via Montenapoleone. Giuseppe is an event designer and fashion events are his forte. As Milan Fashion Week is now over, we can finally see each other. We always start our conversations by talking about work, but the main subject remains our mother.

Next I meet the charming Renato Preti, who is the founder of Discipline, a furniture company manufacturing interesting products made from natural materials, which is my philosophy precisely. His collection doesn't include stone objects, so this is where I come in; I have a very positive feeling that I may become part of his next catalogue. Another reason we meet is that he has some chairs I think might work at one of my current projects: Roka, the Japanese restaurant in London. I plan to propose them to my client Rainer Becker, who, having been pleased with the design of Oblix at The Shard, has asked me to design this new restaurant.

Petra sends me the final renderings for Roka and the first design presentation for tomorrow's meeting with Giacomo Moncalvo and Maurizio Raviolo of Ca'puccino, the café chain with seven branches in Italy and two in London. Giacomo wants to open a new one in New York. The visuals look good. I also tell Mariachiara about a new idea I had when I woke up this morning, which relates to the project in Piazza del Duomo – it's bold, but feasible.

Time flies and we are so absorbed in design issues we forget about lunch. It's nearly 3pm and architect Marco Casamonti is on his way to the Giada boutique, as is Giulio Cappellini, the legendary architect and furniture entrepreneur. I rush to the store (I hate being late) and to my surprise, I see Gilda Bojardi, editor-in-chief of Interni, the international magazine of interiors and contemporary design; she says she wanted to surprise me. Three minutes later, Giulio and Marco also arrive. While leading the tour, I



Roka Restaurant, London



Giada Boutique, Milan



Giulio Cappellini

intentionally gently touch the ragged stone, water jets, cast bronze, natural leather curtains and, of course, the quality fabrics of the womenswear collection. High-quality fabrics bond well with high-quality architecture: they complement each other. They all agree that space is about architecture, rather than interior design. Gilda asks me to send her professional photos of it so that she can publish them on the Interni website as soon as possible.

As Gilda and Marco leave, Giulio and I decide to go for coffee at Caffè Cova. I am pleased that one of the topics of our discussion is Fronzoni, an architect and my teacher, whom Giulio met just before he passed away. Giulio is also keen to add one of my chairs to his collection, which is wonderful.

In a taxi to the airport I see an email from Victoria Miro. Both she and Warren are delighted with her new Mayfair gallery – nice. While waiting to board, I deal with more emails. As my teacher Crispin Osborn of the Architectural Association used to say: “Never a dull moment!” On the plane I read about the American artist James Turrell, whose work with light defies disenchantment; invisible light becomes visible before your very eyes, and you see the immaterial materialise.

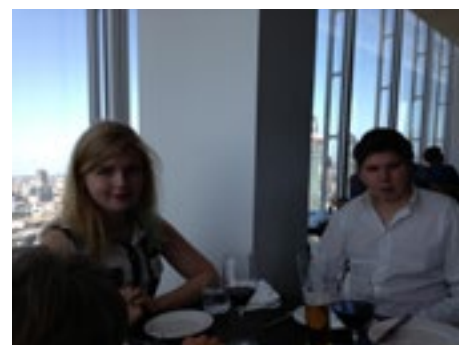
In the taxi home I call Max and Maya. Max is happy to stay at college in Oxfordshire this weekend, but Maya is going to come and visit so that she can join us for Yayoi Kusama’s inaugural exhibition at the Victoria Miro gallery on Saturday – she is crazy about art. It’s lovely to arrive home and hug Giuliana and Giotto. He is very excited about the little Ferrari I bought him in Milan – when you put pressure on the trunk, you hear the aggressive sound of a Ferrari engine. After dinner, I read Giotto a bedtime story by Richard Scarry before he falls fast asleep. While Giuliana is at her computer, I organise Friday’s work with the calm and profound music of Arvo Pärt playing in the background; he is my favourite contemporary composer.



AG Fronzoni



Richard Scarry



Max & Maya Silvestrin



Yayoi Kusama installation view



Arvo Pärt

Claudio Silvestrin – Day 5

Could this be the best Italian food in London? The Italian architect thinks so



Claudio Silvestrin Architects Office, view from Regent's Canal, London



Idea for New York restaurant sketch, USA

September 30 2013

I'm up at 6am going through the hundred points on my to-do list with a fresh mind. My office is a five-minute walk from home and strolling along the canal is always very relaxing; I intentionally chose to have both my office and apartment facing calm water. I arrive at 10am and have a video call with Giacomo and Maurizio of Ca'puccino, who are at the Milan office with Mariachiara. The presentation about the project in New York goes very well; it is so rewarding to hear enthusiasm in the client's voice when we go through a concept. Fifteen minutes after we say goodbye, Giacomo texts me: "Sono al settimo cielo" (I'm in seventh heaven).

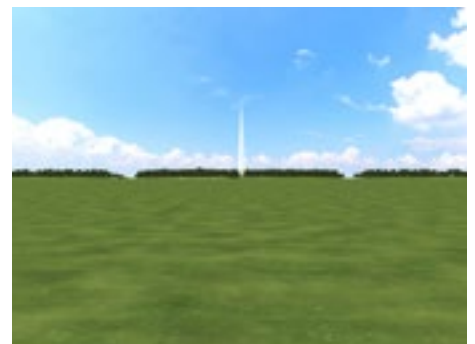
I have lunch at home with Giotto – spaghetti – before heading back to the office for a long meeting with Moana, my efficient PA. We need to plan my two weeks in America in October when I'm teaching at the University of Architecture in Washington, catching up with the Ca'puccino team in New York and meeting Kanye West in San Francisco.

Giuliana and Giotto arrive at the office and he plays on the iPad while I have a design meeting on the challenging and exciting refurbishment of Illum (the Copenhagen department store) with Giuliana and Marco, our architecture assistant. Good news arrives from Minotti Cucine, the Italian kitchen company – my recent design for its Pietra stone kitchen has won an award from a Japanese institution, though it's not yet official. Possibly even better news comes from the project manager of a fashion mall in Turin: the project, which had been on hold for almost two years due to the economic uncertainties across Italy, is now progressing. Kanye's PA also calls to confirm our appointment for next Tuesday in Milan – I can't wait.

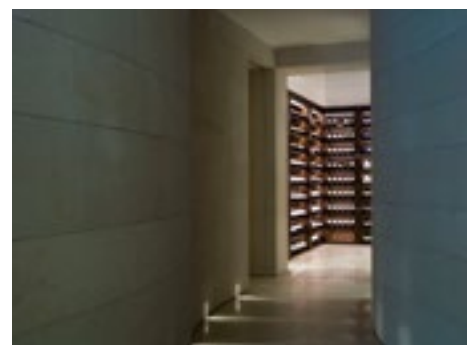
Fabrizio and I catch a taxi to L'Anima restaurant in Shoreditch to meet Peter Marano, the owner, Francesco Mazzei, the chef, and project manager Jim Horan. My design for the restaurant dates back to 2007, yet it still



Pietra Kitchen, Minotti



Fashion Mall, Turin



L'Anima Restaurant, London

looks as if it was only recently completed. The look is formal but modern with a timeless style, and the food is, in my opinion, the best Italian cuisine you can find in London. Today's meeting is about L'Anima Café, which is intended to offer similar food at very reasonable prices next door to the main restaurant. Our original concept, which was positively received last spring, is now being challenged. I have to explain my reasons for every choice and show flexibility; compromises are fine, as long as the integrity of the original design is preserved. Once the site meeting is over, we all have a long, relaxing aperitif at the bar; the culatello and fritto misto nibbles are delicious.

It is nearly 9pm when I get home, right on time to read Giotto a bedtime story. I promise him that we're going to spend most of the weekend together. The second stage of the Ca'puccino project in New York officially starts on Monday, but I cannot refrain from creative thinking, so I go back to sketching on the iPad for a while to a soundtrack of Arvo Pärt. I go to bed exhausted; I have no energy left for James Turrell tonight.

On Saturday morning Giuliana and I take Giotto to his Mandarin school; he started learning the language when he was three. My daughter Maya joins us for lunch at home, and we spend most of the afternoon playing with Giotto and his toy cars before heading to the new Victoria Miro Gallery in Mayfair for its inaugural exhibition. On the way there, we stop to get Victoria some white flowers. Both she and Warren are very happy with the exhibition space I have designed and compliments flow. Afterwards, we walk to Soho, where Maya is joining friends, and stop for pizza (Giotto's favourite meal) at Princi, the bakery/café I designed on Wardour Street.

Sunday morning flies by; playing with Giotto is physically tiring but it makes him very happy. We are having lunch with our long-time friends, artists Jake Tilson and Jennifer Lee. I choose to go to Oblix in The Shard – they love my design, the view and the food. The atmosphere is so good we make it a three-hour lunch. For dinner, it's only Maya and me, which gives us a good opportunity to talk privately about her university choice, direction of study and her gap year. I read Giotto a bedtime story and finish the weekend with some sketching and creative thinking on the iPad.



L'Anima Cafe, London. Due 2014



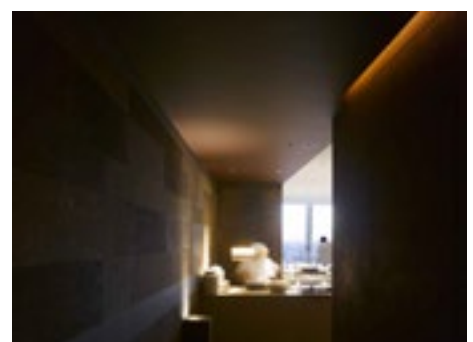
Claudio & Giotto Silvestrin



Giotto Silvestrin



Princi Bakery, London



Oblix Restaurant at the Shard, London



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