



Carmelo Zappulla – External Reference

Carmelo Zappulla, Italian-born architect (1978), is founder and managing director of the Barcelona-based architecture studio External Reference, which develops international work at different scales: exhibition spaces, architecture, urban, interior and product design.

Graduated with honours and special mention from the University of Palermo, and with a PhD (European Mention) with honours from the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya, Zappulla, always interested in research linked to new technologies and materials, has in recent years adopted for his studio a "cradle to cradle" approach, where architecture is composed of elements compatible with a circular economy and which allow for their complete reuse. At the helm of External Reference, the architect has developed his interest in innovation applied to design using the latest computational and parametric tools. His research into geometric patterns and complex morphologies has allowed him to explore new formal repertoires and constructive solutions in the world of digital fabrication that have been applied in the academy and in the numerous innovative projects carried out in more than 15 years of the studio's activity.

The firm, thanks to the dedication of its founder, has built an extensive network of collaboration with international professionals, which allows it to promote the integration of craftsmanship and advanced digital technologies, all over the world.

His latest project is “**Escaleras y Mirador Vela**”, a new balcony to the Mediterranean and a spectacular viewing platform on the Barceloneta sea front. The project is the culmination of Passeig del Mare Nostrum with a walkable architectural façade consisting of a staircase and an elevated walkway located at +9.30 meters.

Among the numerous international projects carried out and built by the studio are the exhibition design of the **Spanish Pavilion at EXPO Dubai 2020**, in a joint venture with Onionlab and coordinated by Acción Cultural Española (AC/E); an installation at Expo Dubai 2020 in collaboration with Rami Al Ali for the **MENASA** platform, which aims to make the craft heritage of the United Arab Emirates visible through the union with new technologies applied to product design; the new concept and interior design for the executive floors of **Sberbank's** headquarters in Moscow; the **Moritz Store** and **Casa Moritz** gastronomic spaces, the **Alkimia** restaurant in Barcelona, best restaurant design in the world according to the INARCH and SBID Awards.

Among the projects dedicated to retail **WOW**, a new concept store, unique and singular, of more than 5.000m² in Madrid's Gran Vía. Located in a renovated historic building, WOW surprises with its eight floors dedicated to fashion, retail and restaurants, completely different from each other, and offers a theatrical, immersive and dynamic setting. The innovative project



represents a great experiential platform for digital natives and traditional leading brands, which express all their brand appeal thanks to this new *phygital* space. With the fusion of physical and digital experience at its core, WOW promises a constant user experience through experiential design.

External Reference collaborate with the London firm "**Presented by**" - of which Zappulla is also Chief Creative Officer - for which unique and multi-awarded spaces have been created in Doha, Dubai, Paris, London and Manchester; the suggestive flagship building "**The Clockwork**" and different shops for the brand "**24Kilates**" in Bangkok; or the modern building for "**Jané Winestore**" in Tarragona.

Zappulla, awarded in 2011 with the **New Italian Blood** as "best Italian architect under 36 years old", with External Reference received in 2019 at the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, the Architecture Master Prize for small companies in the category of Multidisciplinary Interior Design.

In 2022, with the exhibition design project for the Spanish Pavilion at EXPO Dubai 2020, they won the **BEST ACTIVITY/INTERACTIVE** pavilion award from **EXHIBITOR Magazine's World Expo Award** and the **Bronze Award for the Exhibition Design in a Self-built pavilion** from **BIE - Bureau International des Expositions**.

Their projects have also received: 1st Prize in 2A Europe Architecture Award (Interior Architecture category, 2018), 1st Prize InArch best Author Restaurant (2017), 1st Prize SBID International Design Award (Restaurant Design, 2017), 1st Prize Exhibit Design Awards of EXHIBITOR magazine (2014), and 2nd Prize European 8 (2006).

In the field of academic work, Zappulla is currently director of the Master in Experiential Design at **LCI Barcelona** and professor of architectural design at **IAAC Barcelona** (Institute for Advanced Architecture of Catalunya); for 7 years he was director of the Master in Interior Architecture at **IED** (Istituto Europeo di Design). He regularly collaborates with international schools and institutions of architecture, including Strathclyde University, WSA (The Welsh School of Architecture), Cardiff University Department of Architecture, Strelka Institute. He is also a member of Giras-Tec, an international research group in architecture and society at the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya.

His works have been exhibited at the Venice Biennale, during the XII International Architecture Exhibition, at the MAXXI museum in Rome, at the EME3 International Architecture Festival in Barcelona and at the prestigious EUROPAN 8 competition in Oslo.

His publications include scientific articles published by Routledge and projects in magazines such as "Future", "Blueprint", "Materia", "Frame", "Dezeen", "Domus", in well-known Italian and Spanish newspapers such as "Il Sole 24 ore" and "La Vanguardia", in the books "Architect's Notebook" and "Architectural process 2014" by Damdi Publishing. In 2022 his first monograph will be published by Actar Publishers.



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