

## Ca' Granda

Shortly after assuming the lordship of Milan, in 1451 Francesco Sforza ordered the building of Ca' Granda, which was part of a larger project that he had entrusted to Pietro Averlino, a Florentine architect known as Filarete.

Filarete was commissioned to design an "ideal city." Though the utopian vision was never fully realized, it was fully described in Filarete's Treatise on Architecture, which sets out in words and images a vision of the city and of numerous places and buildings, many of them of his own design.

In Book XI of the Treatise we find plans for Ospedale Maggiore, a revolutionary undertaking for its time, both for its concept of sanitation and health and for its spacious design that earned the building its new name: "Ca' Granda" [the Great House].

Built a few steps from San Nazaro, in front of the now-disappeared Fossa Interna, an inner canal from which water was drawn by means of a sophisticated hydraulic system, the edifice consists of a large central porticoed entrance courtyard flanked by two gigantic lateral buildings in which patients were housed. Each building follows a square plan and consists of wards (now classrooms) lining the corridors that make up the sides of the building and enclose an inner space that is divided into four separate porticoed courtyards by two more corridors that intersect perpendicularly in the middle to form a cross.

In this hospital (a university since 1958 when it became the seat of Università degli Studi di Milano), Leonardo da Vinci performed numerous autopsies thanks to which he was able to produce extraordinary anatomical studies of such accuracy that they seem to belong to the modern age. The high precision of the drawings, the impeccable descriptions of the organs, and the beauty with which they are rendered are simply accentuated by comparison with images produced using the latest endoscopic techniques. It is thanks to anatomical studies that he would later give form to the most famous smile in art history on the face of the Mona Lisa.

**Via Festa del Perdono 7**

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