



VITAE  
Image Credit: Carlo Ratti Associati

## VITAE in Milan: A Vertical Vineyard Creates a New Model of Biophilic Infill

By Tim Beatley

The design firm Carlo Ratti Associati (CRA) has recently won the “Reinventing Cities” design competition with a visionary project that will help Milan move further in the direction of being a biophilic city model. The winning design, called VITAE (meaning “life” in Latin or “vine” in Italian), will house offices and a research center and much more, including hydroponic producing greenhouses, and most dramatically an urban vineyard attached to the structure.

Biophilia is at the heart of this design. VITAE’s 200-meter long vineyard wraps spectacularly around the side of the structure and serves to extend the pedestrian realm vertically, creating a green pedestrian pathway that encircles the

building ending up on the rooftop. The idea is that these spaces would be open to the public, essentially providing an extension of the public streets and plaza below, allowing a pedestrian to climb to the sky.

The project architect for CRA, Saverio Panata, recently described some of the things he sees as especially innovative about the project. One such feature is the vertical pathway: this “Green Spiral path,” as Panata tells me, “symbolizes the DNA double helix and the encounter between research and biophilia.”

The experience is one of moving through nature, walking under vine-covered pergolas, responding, Panata says, to our human desire to immerse

ourselves in the natural world. There will also be a greenhouse on the ground level adjacent to a public square where the public pathway up and around the building begins, as well as green terraces on every floor.

There are other notable new urban buildings that are planning such vertical pedestrian extensions. BIG’s new [Spiral Tower](#), under construction in New York City, is one case in point, with connected terraces circling up and around the building and offering at least the possibility that these spaces may serve as an extension to the High Line that ends across the street. Undoubtedly, cities will increasingly find creative ways to at once expand civic and public spaces in the vertical realm and

to ensure that such spaces are natureful and biodiverse.

VITAE also brings to mind the [Jean Vollum Natural Capital Center](#), the Portland, Oregon offices of the environmental nonprofit Ecotrust. This restored 1895 warehouse had so many sustainable features that when it opened nearly two decades ago Ecotrust developed a “[field guide](#)” to the building, and encouraged visitors to “hike the building.” Guided by icons on a map of the building, visitors could start at ground level by visiting the extensive bioswale and move up and through the building. The hike ends up at the ecoroof on its third level, where you could see, among other things, FSC-certified patio decking and good views of the surrounding neighborhood. One of my favorite features of



the Ecotrust Building is the water fountain displaying a map of the watershed. I like the idea that every sip of water might be a chance to celebrate and reflect on the sustainable source of that water. This feature seemed also to capture well the larger educational value of these kinds of building “hikes.” I always like the idea that we might

encourage “hiking a building” and it seems this is a growing trend—there will likely be more nature along the way as we leave ground level and move skyward.

Walking through the city will now partly be about climbing, it seems, through and under a green canopy, with the chance of enjoying unique vistas and perspectives on city. The project will include other green features, including collection and reuse of rainwater and greywater, and construction utilizing wood in the upper floors. Construction on the project is to start in late 2019. Once completed, this structure will likely become as iconic as Stefano Boeri’s *Bosco Verticale* and may similarly set in motion the design of vineyard towers in cities around the world. This would be a very good result.

### Resources

Ecotrust. *Jean Vollum Natural Capital Center, Field Guide*. [http://archive.ecotrust.org/ncc/NCC\\_Field\\_Guide.pdf](http://archive.ecotrust.org/ncc/NCC_Field_Guide.pdf)

Ecotrust. National Capital Center. <https://ecotrust.org/project/natural-capital-center>.

*The Spiral*. <https://www.thespiralny.com>



Above: VITAE Piazza  
Below: VITAE’s 200-meter long vineyard.  
Image Credits: Carlo Ratti Associati