



## THE NEW CENTRE COURT IN FORO ITALICO

Seats: **10,500**  
 Structure: **rectangular building**  
 Ground surface: **clay**  
 Materials used: **cement, steel, glass**  
 Price of the work: approximately **28,400,000 €**  
 Ownership: **Coni Serviz**

World Tennis Championship  
 (Italy)

APRIL 27TH, 2010 WAS AN IMPORTANT DATE FOR TENNIS IN ITALY. IT COINCIDED, WITH THE INAUGURATION OF THE NEW CENTRE TENNIS COURT IN FORO ITALICO, WHICH HOSTED THE LXXV EDITION OF INTERNATIONAL TENNIS BNL IN ROME, ITALY. THIS EVENT WAS STAGED IN A MORE MODERN AND SPACIOUS STADIUM THAN THE ONE FROM THE PREVIOUS YEAR. IT HAS 10,500 SEATS, AND A COMPLETELY RENOVATED STRUCTURE, MADE OF CEMENT, STEEL AND GLASS WHICH WE WENT TO VISIT.

### AN EXCEPTIONAL GUIDE

The overview of the Centre Court stands is fantastic. "And this is not by chance!" **Giancarlo Venelli** says while we admire the structure during a sunny day in April. But let's start at the beginning. To uncover the full story we went to Rome accompanied by Mr. Venelli, who is an internationally renowned expert on the subject and who oversaw the design of the stands. He is the President of Metaltecnica Venelli, the company located in Como that made these stands. Before we met him, we did some digging and found out that this gentleman with graying hair, blue eyes and ready wit has worked with some of the biggest names in the world of architecture: **Gae Aulenti and Arata Isozaki**, just to name a few.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF COLORS

"Let's go back to talking about the Centre Court" urges Mr. Venelli, who seemed almost embarrassed by our admiration. "Look at the stands. – He tells me – Note how the glare forms around the perimeter and how it does not disturb the eye. This is all due to color!" We let our guide point out that the stands are all in gray. "Of course" answers our expert. "That's the secret. You see, so far I developed a theory about designing a seat. It has to be monochrome or it has to be made up of varying shades of the same color. What is the benefit of a single color? You see, regardless of color choice, monochrome seats allow the stands to look identical. The design is not interrupted by using different colors. The eye of the beholder is able to fully perceive the lines of the structure because it is not "disturbed" by different colors. If the architecture has a certain look, it must be visible. If you cannot visualize the turns and curves, you will not appreciate where you are. Spectators who arrive early will not get bored if they can understand the layout while they wait. It is not true that people do not appreciate these things. They do all right; we just need to give them the opportunity to do so."

### A LONG STORY

The concept that Mr Venelli has developed is more than acceptable, but it is important to clarify that it is the result of a lot of research. "When I looked at the seats for the 1990 Olympic Stadium in Rome - says our expert - a project that started with scratch, from the demolition of the old building to the

creation of a new one, I took care of the choreographic speech of the area. For the stands, which comprised of about 80,000 seats, I used a single blue water color, that worked perfectly. It was a very special moment because that work was done during the 1990 World Cup. The eyes of the world were fixed on this stadium, but the result was ... Well it is not for me to say. Since then I've always done things according to my way of viewing the architecture".

#### LET'S TALK ABOUT THE STRUCTURE

"Now talking about tennis"Mr. Venelli urges with the enthusiasm that only people that truly love their work have. "The one at Foro Italico was a great moment because I had to work on a structure that was very interesting from an architectural point of view. We were dealing with a court that had one third of its volume below the ground level. In fact, it is a structure that precisely for this reason is also less invasive than the surrounding environment. I had free rein, and I had all the facts. At least half of all the most important Italian structures that are owned by Coni, were supervised by me. I must say that at the end of the work there have been only positive comments because we succeeded on basing everything on a single gray color. Five shades of gray, starting from slate gray for the lower stand levels and then lighter shades as we climb up to the top level which is the final outline of the stand perimeter. Clear, clear up to remember the sky when it is blue".

#### THE REASON FOR THE CHOICE

The monochrome theory is very interesting and what Giancarlo Venelli told us allows us to see the stands from a different perspective. Before we left, we asked him a final question: why did you choose a gray color? "Because gray goes with everything!" He answers us amused. "I'm not joking. It is true. People have to bring color to the stands, not the seats. If one day this building is used for a concert, even a lady with a bright dress will have the right impact. The stands have to be neutral, it must be inviting. A lady wearing red and who sits on a red or blue seat, will not look flattering. I have made a lot of facilities for outdoor performances and I've always used colors that can make the spectators stand out". But apart from the stands, what do the athletes think of this court? **Andreas Seppi** told livetennis. "The Centre is one of the most beautiful courts. Very cosy, people are very close. It is really beautiful". And what do the spectators think? On the same website, someone said: "I can confirm that the building is really well designed for tennis. Even in the higher levels you feel very close to the red court due to the considerable slope of the stands". At this point, we can only say: congratulations, it is a success!







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