

Healing the Neighborhood

La Botteghina dei saperi e dei sapori (The little shop of talents and tastes)

The *Botteghina dei Saperi e dei Sapori* is an old shop near my house in Monte San Quirico, near the bridge on the road next to an artist's shop. That road is always crowded in the morning. I pass by it when my dad drives me to school. It's a lovely place and I don't know why it was abandoned.

It's quite small and simple, a claret-coloured building with a glazed front door made of dark wood. In front there is a little bench that I think people used to sit on whenever the shop was too crowded. Above the door is a white sign with green edges that says *La Botteghina dei saperi e dei sapori*. The inscription is written in green. Two little windows over the sign, made in white wood, have been damaged by smog and by time. I've always seen them closed. The shop is connected to other houses, but stands out for its particular colour. To the right is a door covered by curtains that prevent people from seeing inside. Behind the building is the river Serchio, whose waters flow calmly and gently some days, bumpy and wild others. To get to the shop, coming from Lucca you cross the bridge, which offers an extraordinary landscape of birds flying into the sky and the waters of the river falling from a waterfall.

Around the place there are plants (jasmynes, I think) that make it look nicer. However, people used to park their bikes next to these plants, so most of them have been ruined. In Winter the leaves fall to the ground, to be swept away by the constant movement of vehicles going back and forth. But in Summer the jasmynes are blooming and full of white fragrant flowers. Just one thing that ruins this handsome paradise: its smelly smog.

It's a shame not to use a place like this, and instead leave it there, abandoned. It could be used in many ways even though it's small. I am sure that if we are ingenious we can convert it into a useful place for the community. I asked some people in the neighbourhood to tell me how they would restore it, and I heard many authentic and unique ideas. A little girl told me that she wanted it to become an arcade with computers, flippers, table hockey, billiards, and table football, since she doesn't have those kinds of things at home and would like to go there with her friends after school. An old lady told me she wanted it to become a tea-shop with tables and chairs, so that she could go there and drink a cup of tea while chatting with her friends or her husband. My parents told me that they'd love it to become a CD shop with music from the '80s, since music is their passion.

At the Liceo Scientifico A. Vallisneri, English professors Chiara Calabrese and Manuela Pucci asked their third-year students to imagine a way to heal their neighborhood. Here is the first of these innovative proposals. We hope to publish more of their proposals in upcoming months.



photo by Claudia Casoli

Collecting and gathering this information, I elaborated my own plan to restore the place. I thought about transforming it into a book and CD shop with tables, chairs and a mini-bar, so you could read a book while enjoying a cup of tea. This would fulfil the demands of the neighbourhood and convert it into a spot where people could talk, flirt, and have fun. However, another problem came into my mind. That is the fact that with coronavirus lots of restrictions and rules have to be respected. To be faithful to them, a precise and restricted number of people going inside would have to be imposed. An intelligent way to solve this issue could be reservations, namely a person calls the shop and reserves a table to study, drink a cup of tea, or read. The use of masks would always be required, except when eating, and people would have to maintain a safe distance of 1.5 meters. But I am sure this place, even with restrictions, would be a success.

I would restore it completely, starting from the inside. Since the space is small, there would be six or seven bookshelves divided into categories such as horror, fantasy, crime etc. The shelves would be put against the wall, one in front of the other. Then there would be a few tables arranged casually with three chairs at each table. Both the tables and the chairs would be made of white wood, while the bookshelves would be made of wood painted beige. The mini-bar and the cash machine would be against the wall. The bar would have a space for food, such as warm, soft croissants, biscuits, small cakes, and something salty such as pizza and focaccia. Behind it would be all the things required to prepare tea: teapot, cups, water heater, lemon, milk, and

tea bags, and also the machine for preparing coffee, cappuccino, etc. There would be a small marble counter for sugars and napkins. The floor would be parquet and the walls would be painted white and beige. Outside, the building would be painted in antique pink, with the front door in white wood. The sign could be renovated, painted white with a black background, and called *The neighbourhood shop*.

I think this amazing project can be realised in less than a year with the collaboration of all the people who live nearby, and with the collaboration of the town mayor. People would be very happy to convert an abandoned shop into something connected with culture, knowledge, interaction, and socialization.

– by Greta Moriconi