





Born in Milan in 1909 to a Neapolitan family, Avolio De Martino trained at the Academy of Fine Arts and then at the Royal School of Architecture in Naples, graduating in 1933. After working briefly as an assistant to De Renzi, he decided to devote himself exclusively to his professional career. He was involved with the work on the Mostra d'Oltremare and on building the National Fascist Party's branch headquarters (1937–39), now much altered, and the Albergo delle Masse, which no longer exists.

There were, obviously, far more professional opportunities during the post-war period. His early works include the Palazzina Lancellotti (1947–49) at the top of Via Orazio, which still owes a great deal to Rationalism. Again on Via Orazio he built a residential edifice for the Lauro, Cafiero and Fiorentino company and the Villa Orazio residential park. His other work during the 1950s consisted of office buildings, like the SME-ENEL building on Via Bracco (1950–55), immediately dubbed "the first skyscraper in Naples," the Suditalia building on Via De Gasperi (1957–59) and the RAI Center on Viale Marconi (1958–63), which was among his most successful works, designed with input from Mario De Renzi.

His best-known works include the "curtain wall" building on Via Partenope (1953–58), in which his approach to each of the two elevations was completely different. The more classical façade on Via Chiatamone is clad in Trani marble, and the one on the seafront features masonry pilasters, and wide apertures with mirror glass windows and aluminum frames, designed to reflect the sea in different lights, but somewhat at odds with the context. Of his work during the 1980s, his contribution to the Centro Direzionale civic center in Naples is worthy of note.

Avolio De Martino died in 2006, and while, unlike many, he did not pursue an academic career, he was undoubtedly one of the most prolific architects of the second half of the twentieth-century. His references included the work of Le Corbusier and Wright, which he translated into a personal vocabulary in an ongoing dialogue with the most orthodox Rationalism: "I have always thought of myself as a modern architect, but also a moderate one," he said.

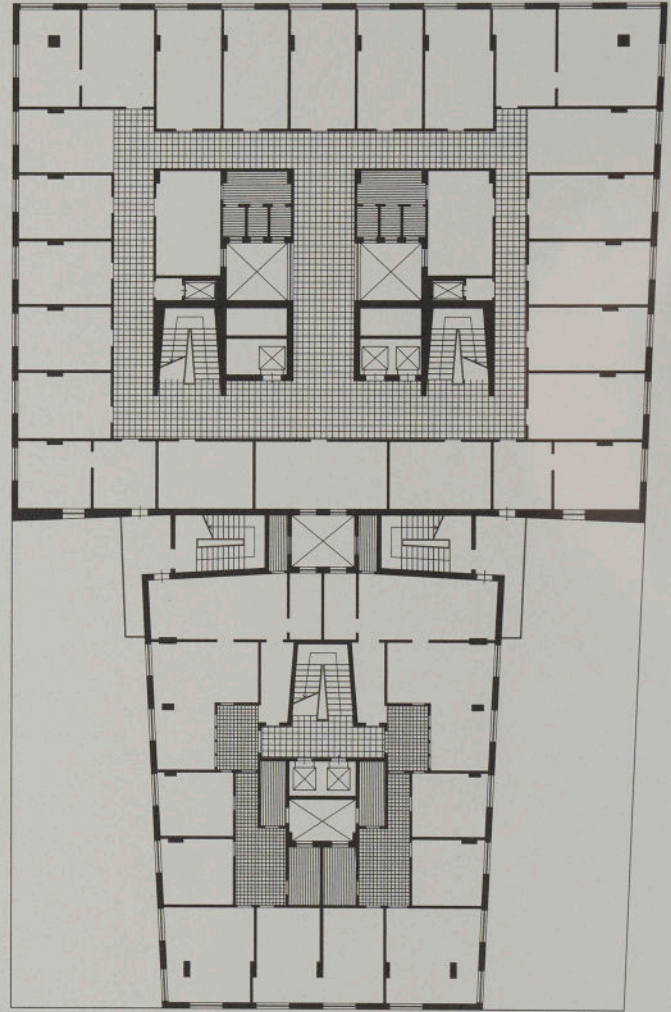
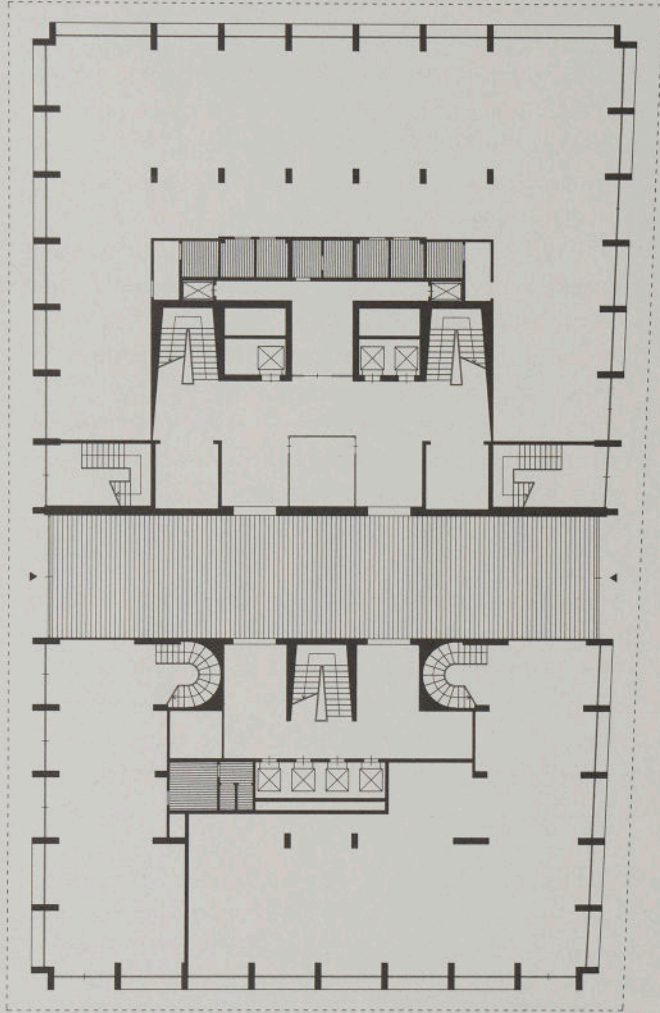
Built to Luigi Cosenza's 1964 plan for Via Marittima, the Suditalia office block stands on the corner lot between Via De Gasperi and Via Marchese Campodisola, one of a succession of office blocks realized after World War II.

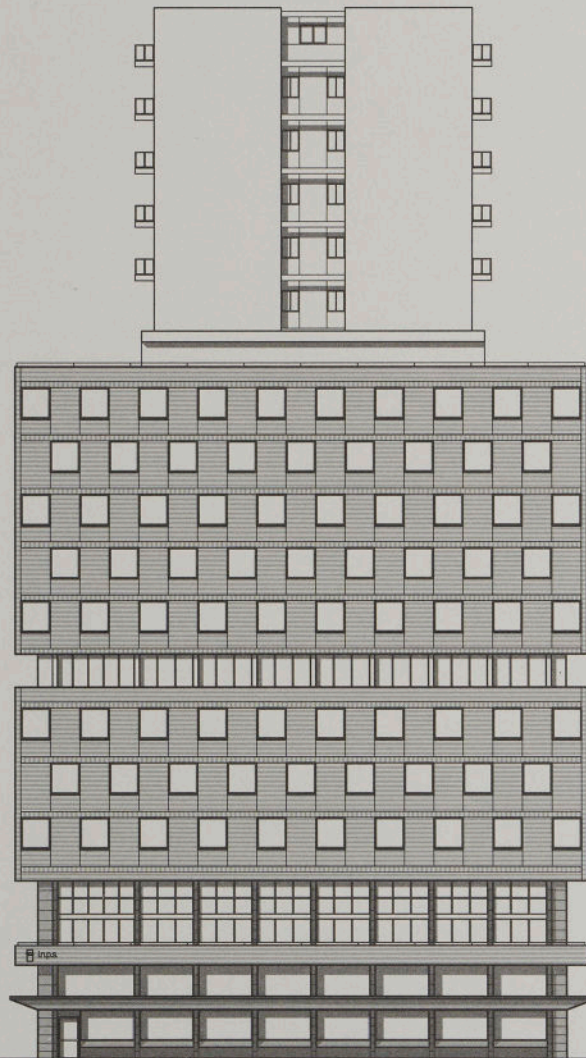
Built between 1957 and 1959 by Renato Avolio De Martino, it is quite extensive in size and was intended by the author to be split into separate sections. The first seven floors comprise the base of the building, which occupies the entire lot. This is then split into one section that includes the ground floor and a raised floor, followed by a continuous solid strip, corresponding to the balcony railings on the third floor. This strip is aligned with the upper volume, which starts on the fifth floor, while the elevations of the first four floors are set back and largely glazed. The last three floors of the bottom section are contained in a compact masonry-clad volume, with square apertures, staggered between the floors. The distinctive volumes of two sections arranged in a T-shape stand out above the bottom one: a shorter, five-storey volume on the Via Marchese Campodisola side, and a taller, eleven-storey one on the Via Augusto Witting side. Both of the upper parts of the building are "detached" from the lower part by an intermediate floor of the elevation being set back. They then continue with the same wall surface and the same staggering of the vertical alignment of the square windows.

The ground floor, giving access to the stairs and lifts, is conceived as a transit area, with a corridor that should have constituted a passage between Via De Gasperi and the small triangular square to the rear of the building, now Via Conte Olivares. There were shops and offices, with wide glazed apertures articulated by pilotis along the perimeter of the ground floor of the edifice. The structural and linguistic solutions adopted are drawn from other works by Avolio De Martino, such as the SME-ENEL building, also built in Naples between 1950 and 1953.

The edifice was not highly rated by the critics, but was immortalized in atmospheric film sequences shot on the roof of the building, and testifies to its author's considerable skill in calibrating the project so as to diminish the impact of its not-inconsiderable volume. The articulation of the volumes and elevations makes for elements of undoubted interest, ensuring that the building is perhaps one of the most faithful to Cosenza's unrealized plan.



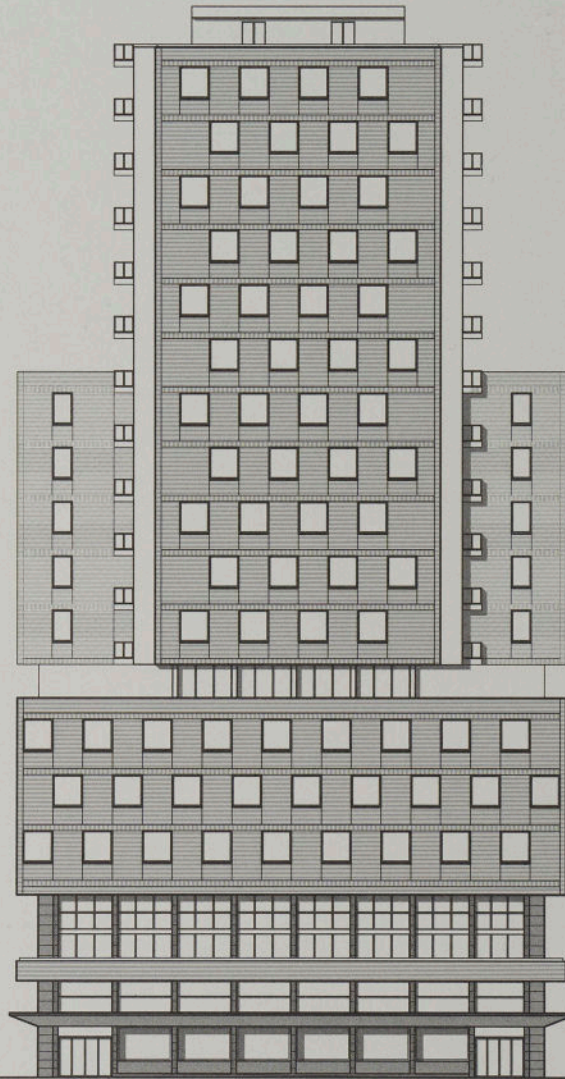


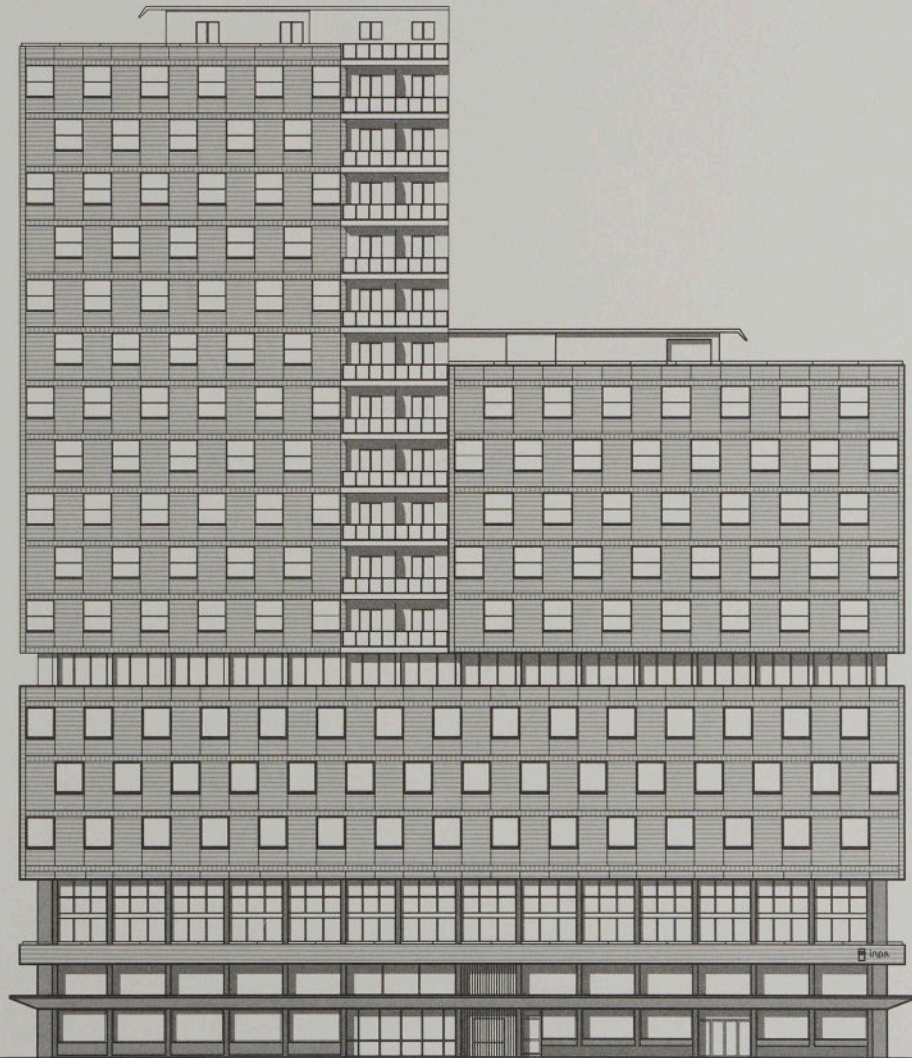


East elevation

0 5 10







South elevation

0 5 10