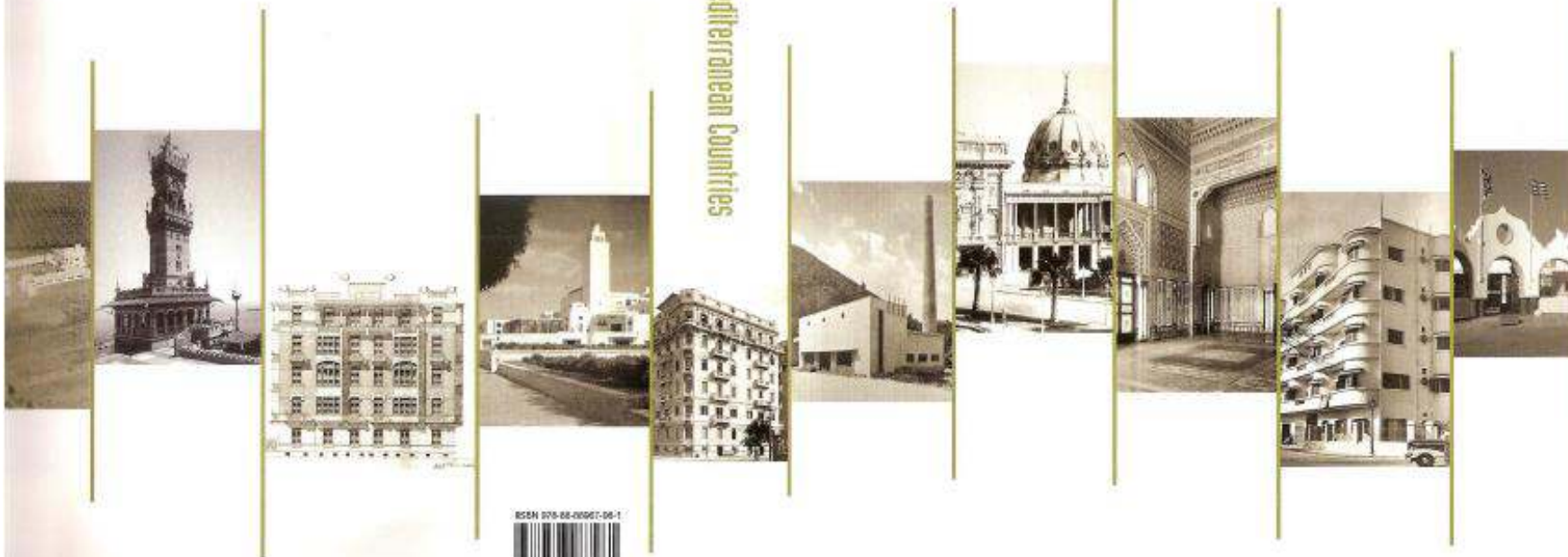


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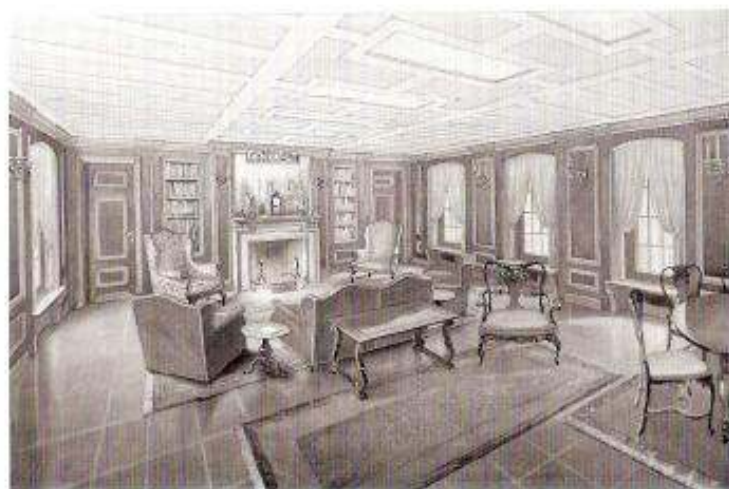


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P. Buffa, *Smoking Room* (Milan, Civica Raccolta delle Stampe A. Bernarelli, Fondo Quarti, MQ DIS. FS 1840) (All rights reserved)

A Royal Palace for the Sea: the Furnishings of the Yacht *El Mahrousa* (1951-1952)

Maria Forni

This contribution documents the renewal of the interior decoration of King Faruq's royal yacht, *El Mahrousa*, which was designed by the architect Paolo Buffa and built by the Quarti firm of Milan. On July 26, 1952 after the abdication of the last king of Egypt, the yacht took him from the port of Alexandria to Naples. It was confiscated and used as a presidential yacht under the name *Al Horreya*, and only later taken over by the navy as a training-ship in the port of Alexandria. Constructed in 1865 for the Khedive Isma'îl Pasha in the Samuda dockyards on the Thames, and radically transformed first in 1872 and then again in 1905.¹ It was brought to the Odero-Termi-Orlando dockyards at La Spezia for revamping and technological adaptation costing a total of two and a half million, a colossal commission that, in the years of post-war crisis, provided work for more than two years (1947-1950) to the workers in the Ligurian city.²

Fin de siècle warning signs. The collaboration between Paolo Buffa and Mario Quarti

The work of Paolo Buffa (1903-1970)³ has deep roots in the lively stream of culture and "know-how" that gave birth to an intense season of decorative arts in Milan between the end of the 19th and the

beginning of the 20th centuries. His father Giovanni was an imaginative interpreter of this cultural climate as a painter and designer of decorations in the atelier of art glass which he ran together with Beltrami, Cantinotti and Zuccaro. His teaching activity at the Scuola di Arti e Mestieri (School of Arts and Trades) of the Società Umanitaria (Humanitarian Society) in Milan - not only a "laboratory of work", but also a "laboratory of ideas"⁴ - was a complementary experience, which he shared with, among others, with Eugenio Quarti and Alessandro Mazzucotelli, his collaborator in several occasions. According to the requirements of the period, Paolo Buffa's formation proceeded along the parallel lines of courses at the Accademia di Brera (Brera Art Academy) and the Politecnico (Polytechnical University) of Milan, where he graduated in 1927. After a fundamentally important apprenticeship at the Ponti - Lancia studio, he collaborated (1928-35) with Antonio Cassi Ramelli (1905-1980), fellow student together with Mario Quarti (1901-74).⁵ With the curiosity of a witness sensitive to the evolution of contemporary taste, the architect elaborated a personal eclectic language in which nevertheless the Milanese matrix remains recognizable. His professional activity, marked by a conscious under-