

**Italian Photographers focusing their Cameras
On Eritrea's Architecture**



By: Billion Temesghen

The past couple of weeks two renowned Italian photographers came to Eritrea to capture the picturesque scenes that are hard to miss. From the beautiful architecture of Asmara and the ancient port of Massawa, to the astonishing endowments of the natural islands and the history behind every stride stretched nationwide.

Welcome to Eritrea. Can you please introduce yourself to our readers?

Hello! I am Luisa Porta and I am from Torino. I have been taking photos forever but in the past four years it became my job. I specialize in photography of architectures, especially interior designs, and if I get the chance I do voyage reportages. However, nothing thrills me more

than taking photos of architectures. I could have also done *still-life* but taking photos of architecture never stops impressing me... 'Photography of Precision', that is what architecture photography means to me. Daniele and I have been collaborating for a year and on this specific task we are working on the 30s and 40s architectonic period, that of Italian Rationalism. The task brought us to Asmara, Eritrea, and so here we are!

As excited as you are about your photography, how do people receive your works? Does the 'Photography of Precision' impress the public too?

I believe so. People's taste palate can differ but I am sure the number of architecture photography admirers is not any less than that of other styles. Additionally, Daniele and I realized that there are eras whose architectonic currents haven't been documented yet. The period of 1930s- 1940s is one of them; at least not completely documented. Under the same theme, for example, we went to Sicily taking shots of all rationalistic buildings built between 1935 and 1940. Most of these buildings are unknown to Italy and the rest of the world. Not even many Sicilians are aware of them. So, it is exceptionally exciting for us that we are able to explore and document this specific architectonic period.

Asmara was built during the Fascist era and most of you Italians are antifascists; any sense of contrast there?

Antifascist, definitely. But we need to recognize that there was an exceedingly precise line of creativity and knowledge that gave life to an architectural structure as rare and as scenic as Asmara. That historic period, therefore, should definitely be recognized with a specific note.

What do you think of Asmara?

Asmara has been a delightful surprise to me. Eritrea is the 9th African country between the Northern, Southern and Central Africa that I have visited. Prior to my arrival, I must say, I wasn't expecting much more than an ordinary African city like all the others I have

visited. But, I ended up being in awe by one of the most splendid urban and modernist cities. The way Eritreans maintain their city is beyond explainable and the respect that they have for these buildings, roads, parks and more shows that the community is highly enlightened. I am impressed. Furthermore, as an Italian I feel a connection.

How is it, collaborating with your project partner Danielle?

Impressive because our joint effort is not egoistic. I say this because normally photographers don't want to share images nor ideas. However, Daniele and I have similar technics and taste, but at the same time noticeably different in details. Therefore, our work combined is complementary. Our team is progressive in terms of sharing ideas. Once we finish taking photos and look over them it is a normal occurrence that Daniele's images complement my line and mine complements his. And when we combine our photos we are able to tell consistent and full rounded stories.

What would you say by way of summarizing your ten-day stay?

It has been an exceptional stay and I feel particularly accomplished if I am to speak at a professional level. There are so many recollections that I'll carry in my memory. The Fiat building, its history and the Sei Cento cars as well as the Alfa Romeo and Lancia. We took particular photos of Fiat because we want to present it to our friends in several branches of Fiat in Italy. We want to show the imaginable. We are sure they'll be stunned as much as we were. What I liked most are the houses and their interior designs. It is so impressive that nothing has changed despite people living in them. Again, I want to thank the community for being so diligent in preserving Asmara and I wish for the international community to discover Eritrea.

DANIELE RATTI

Would you please tell us about yourself?

I heard about Eritrea eight years ago. I never knew about it before, an amazing country with beautiful architecture and islands. So, I wanted

to do some works. The first project we came up with was about countries which are Ex- Italian colonies in Africa, Albania and China. The project was to take pictures of the Italian architecture around the world. I came back in 2014 and worked on many projects which weren't completed at the time. We are back here again for the same reason, the aim is to let everyone know about the astonishing beauty of this country. After we finish taking photos of the buildings, we would like to publish a book about the country.



You are also an architect?

Even so, I am more passionate about the camera. I started taking photos when I was 15 years old, and now, after 30 years, my passion turned to be a profession. Just a year ago, I started working with Luisa Porta and we have worked in various projects including in Lebanon, Cecily, and now Eritrea.

What is taking architectural pictures around the world like?

We try to find places that aren't known by many. For instance, photographers may go to New- York and take pictures of sky scrapers which many people are familiar with. However, what we want is to let the people know that there are beautiful places that many people don't know about yet. As a task it is not difficult, but we have to be open minded sometimes. We have to be happy and ready to learn new things about the world. When we first wanted to come to Eritrea, people who did not know about, it criticized us for wanting to come to Eritrea. And because they don't know how beautiful and peaceful Eritrea is, we wanted to show them by taking photos of the beautiful scenarios of Eritrea.

The dazzling historical buildings, for example, are stunning beyond words, I doubt that there is a building that can be compared to the *Fiat Taglerio* anywhere in the world. If you ask what we do with our photos, I would say that we are telling stories.

Can architecture tell stories?

Definitely. Let's take the Villa Roma building. It is the first villa ever made in Asmara. The building holds a great history of the Italians and Eritreans. So every single architecture in the country has stories to tell.

How is Eritrea treating you?

Fantastic. We went to the beautiful islands and enjoyed the sun. I don't feel like I am in Africa. I am perfectly safe when I am out in the middle of the night to take pictures. Unlike other African countries where theft is in high rate, here people are friendly and when we tell them our project they come to us with ideas and tips. The Eritrean people see you taking pictures in the middle of the night and start up very enjoyable conversations and we all become friends. We have enjoyed our time here. It has been great.

How did you know about Eritrea for the first time?

I completely didn't know about the country at first. But a friend of mine mentioned that they wanted to go to the Dahlak Islands. So I wanted to go with them and I joined them in 2010. After arriving at

the airport at 5 am, on the way to our hotel, we passed by Fiat Taglerio and I just fell in love with the city. I love Asmara, a beautiful modernist city built in 20 years. Its striking architecture, picturesque churches and mosques, the lights and neat roads, it is just so wonderful. Not only have I fell in love with the country, but I also managed to build friendships with many people. I got in touch with Lucca who is producing handmade sunglasses, *LGR*, taking after the business of his grandfather *BINI GLASSES* established here in Asmara. It is a small company but a significant one in Italy. My connections with Eritrea, its people and inhabitants have made my journeys to Eritrea exceedingly remarkable.