



**“The brilliant imagination of Giuseppe Capponi designed and built this harmonious, luminous building, the last dream of his poet’s heart,”** reads the dedication placed at the main entrance of the Botany Building, now home to the Department of Environmental Biology.

Designed between 1933 and 1935 by Capponi on commission from Marcello Piacentini, and originally conceived as the Institute of Botany

and Pharmaceutical Chemistry, the building consists of a slightly curved central body and two front wings on the right and left that enclose a courtyard. At the center stands the entrance core, marked by two towers with glazed corners. The interior staircase follows the verticality of the central part of the structure, where the glass surfaces become denser.

One of the most significant design elements is the use of iron and glass, employed by the architect to define the central body of the building. These materials represent a new architectural solution, used not only for structural and technological reasons, but also as a deliberate aesthetic choice. In doing so, Capponi introduced a modern system to enhance the building’s passive energy efficiency through solar greenhouses and ventilation shafts located in the wind towers, which frame the rear entrance. This system encouraged ventilation through passive cooling and air renewal in the surrounding spaces. Furthermore, according to the original plan, incoming air from outside was intended to be purified by the plants housed within the greenhouses.

The predominantly horizontal development of the volumes, the solution of the two central glass towers, the large ribbon windows, and the transparent base of the rear façade (where the greenhouses are concentrated) suggest an almost “industrial” architecture, a truly innovative element within the Roman architectural landscape. Among the buildings of the university campus, this one most explicitly reveals its lineage from the European rationalist vocabulary.

A distinctive feature of the project is the space dedicated to the library. Covering approximately 500 m<sup>2</sup>, it is organised into clearly defined areas: the botanical library, the periodicals reading room, and offices. The Library of the current Department of Environmental Biology has occupied these rooms on the first floor since around 1938.

During the 1960s, following the relocation of the Institute of Pharmaceutical Chemistry to a new site and the subsequent renovation, the building underwent several major internal layout changes that partly altered the use of space — yet without compromising the formal structure of Capponi’s original design. (*Tiziana Babusci*)

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