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The construction of domes for Italian astronomical observatories in the 20th century: the case of A.Bombelli realizations

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Many of the architectures of the first and second half of the 20th century are characterized by technological innovations that modify the architectural lexicon, the appearance and functioning of the buildings and require a new organization of the design activity and the construction process. The evolution of observation instruments and the need to find places uncontaminated by urban light pollution led, during the 20th century, to the construction of new astronomical observatories. The contribution presents, through the documentation of case studies and unpublished archive materials, some realizations of A.Bombelli, a company specialized in metal constructions founded in Milan in 1889 and active, in the historic Lambrate site, since the 1920s. Throughout the years the company specializes in the construction of the structures of domes and solar towers, with different movement and opening systems, in perfect design and construction synergy with the needs of astronomers. Inside Bombelli's plant there was a specific building, called "Specole shed", which was dedicated exclusively to the assembly and testing of the mechanical efficiency and movement functioning of these technological systems.

Between 1919 and 1963, A.Bombelli built about 14 domes in Italy, many of which are still preserved and functioning in the main observatories (among these Brera, Merate, Capodimonte, Arcetri, Rome Monte Mario, Campo Imperatore, Monte Porzio Catone, Pino Torinese, Trieste, Castelgandolfo). The study intends to investigate some constructive-technological aspects relevant also for the protection and enhancement of this special architectural and cultural heritage of INAF.

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