L’Ospedale Maggiore, now the State University of Milan
This monumental hospital building, popularly called Ca’ Granda (great house) by the inhabitants of Milan, was established in 1456 by Francesco Sforza, Duke of Milan, and his wife Bianca Maria to gather in one large building the many small hospitals that had been built in various parts of the city since ancient times. The project was assigned to Tuscany born Antonio Averlino, called Filarete (1400-1469), who described it in detail in his famous “Treaty of Architecture”, and envisaged the construction of two large four-sided buildings separated by a large main courtyard, surrounded by a four-sided portico on two floors. Two-floor porticoes also surrounded the four minor courtyards in which each four-sided building was divided, like a cross. The project of the building which, with its surface area of 43,000 square metres is, together with the Duomo (Cathedral), one of the immediately recognizable elements in the city map, was carried out in various stages, following bequests and donations, but especially the popular contribution of a special jubilee called the Day of Pardon and celebrated on the 25 March of each odd year with a generous distribution of indulgences. The first stage of the works, followed by Filarete until his death in 1469, continued with Milan born Guiniforte Solari and then with Giovanni Antonio Amadeo. The ground floor was built under the supervision of the former, while Solari built the second floor, decorated with windows composed of two lancets with a mullion dividing them, contrasting with the round arches of the floor below.

The second stage of the works began in 1624 (17th century). The main courtyard, inherited by Filarete, was finished based on the designs of Giovanni Battista Pessina, soon supported by Francesco Maria Richini, Fabio Mangone and Giovanni Battista Crespi. The baroque front and the church of SS. Annunziata were built. On the front along Via Festa del Perdono Richini re-utilized the windows with two lancets and on the inside presented again the stone decorations made by Giovanni Antonio Amadeo which had belonged to the portico wing that had been demolished to build the new large courtyard.

The third stage included the years from 1797 to 1804, during which the three internal courtyards of the second quadrilateral were built and the left part of the wide façade was completed. The hospital functions were then passed onto the halls of nearby Policlinico and, in 1939, to the Niguarda Hospital; so that the Ca’ Granda was adapted to become the headquarters of the Dean’s office of the State University. The left wing of the building, built in the late 1700s, features a sober Neoclassical design. The enormous front, some 283 metres long, is marked by three volumes that precede the two side quadrilaterals and the main courtyard in between. The right wing, dating back to the 15th century, is fully covered by red brick and consists of the portico built by Filarete which stands on a tall base, and of the upper floor built by Solari, pierced by elegant windows with two lancets, underlined by a continuous fascia with rich earthenware decorations.
The main body, dating back to the 17th century, follows on the design of the 15th-century building and features the grand Baroque gate by Richini, flanked by niches with the statues of Saint Charles and Saint Ambrose. The grand main courtyard is surrounded by a four-sided portico, on top of which stands the ethereal open gallery. In the side of the courtyard opposite the entrance there is the small church of SS. Annunziata, built in the 17th century by architects Richini, Pessina and Mangone. The four small courtyards of the Filarete building in the right wing were long ago restored. The first, built by Solari in 1467 and called in the past “the grocery”, is a four-sided portico with an open gallery on top standing on elegant marble columns. It is followed by a second courtyard called “the women’s Baths” (1473), and by a third courtyard, called “the Giazzeria” (Ice-House) (1468). The last of the four small courtyards is called “the Woodshed”. In August 1943 the aerial bombings by the allied army totally destroyed the side along the Naviglio canal (today via Francesco Sforza), of the courtyard built by Richini and other parts of the complex. The current situation is the result of the significant restoration started in 1953 on the project of architects Piero Portaluppi and Liliana Grassi, who worked by combining with careful direction and composition invention various types of actions. The anastylosis procedure (the reconstruction of a building using original elements taken from its ruins) was accompanied by a compositional language which, without giving up its contemporary character, worked in tune with the concept of “environmental pre-existence” defined by Ernesto Rogers.
Ingresso/Entrance of Università degli Studi di Milano - Via Festa del Perdono, 7

Portico d’ingresso/Entrance portico Cortile d’Onore
1° piano/1st floor - Loggiato Ovest

Cortile d’Onore
1° piano/1st floor - Loggiato Ovest (sede delle/site of Design Island)

Scalone d'Onore

Portico del Richini (esterno/external view)

Portico del Richini (interno/internal view)