

Sight, camera, attraction

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Christina Pfeiffer finds celluloid bliss at an Italian temple to cinema.

The bright red lounge looks inviting. It's tempting but after flying for more than 20 hours from Sydney, lying down would be the easiest way to give in to jet lag.

Falling asleep while watching Clark Gable on the big screen isn't really such a bad idea but I only have a couple of hours to look through Turin's massive Museo Nazionale del Cinema (National Museum of Cinema) and I'm keen to see it all.

The red lounges are in the enormous Temple Hall, the heart of the museum, surrounded by 10 chapels dedicated to the cult of cinema. Among them are a bubbling laboratory representing special effects, a walk-in fridge full of lavatories where the audience sits on mock toilet seats while watching Monty Python clips (it's meant to represent the absurd), a room of angled mirrors bringing animation to life and a Gothic room devoted to horror.

The National Museum of Cinema is one serious shrine to film. Displays are presented artistically with five levels of interactive multimedia collections using a combination of old props and modern technology.

All this is housed in the 19th-century Mole Antonelliana skyscraper. The building was commissioned in 1863 by the city's Jewish community as a synagogue but stood mostly empty until Swiss architect Francois Confino transformed it into a museum in 2000.

A central feature is the glass-walled lift that rises to an outdoor observation platform offering majestic views of the Alps and the city.

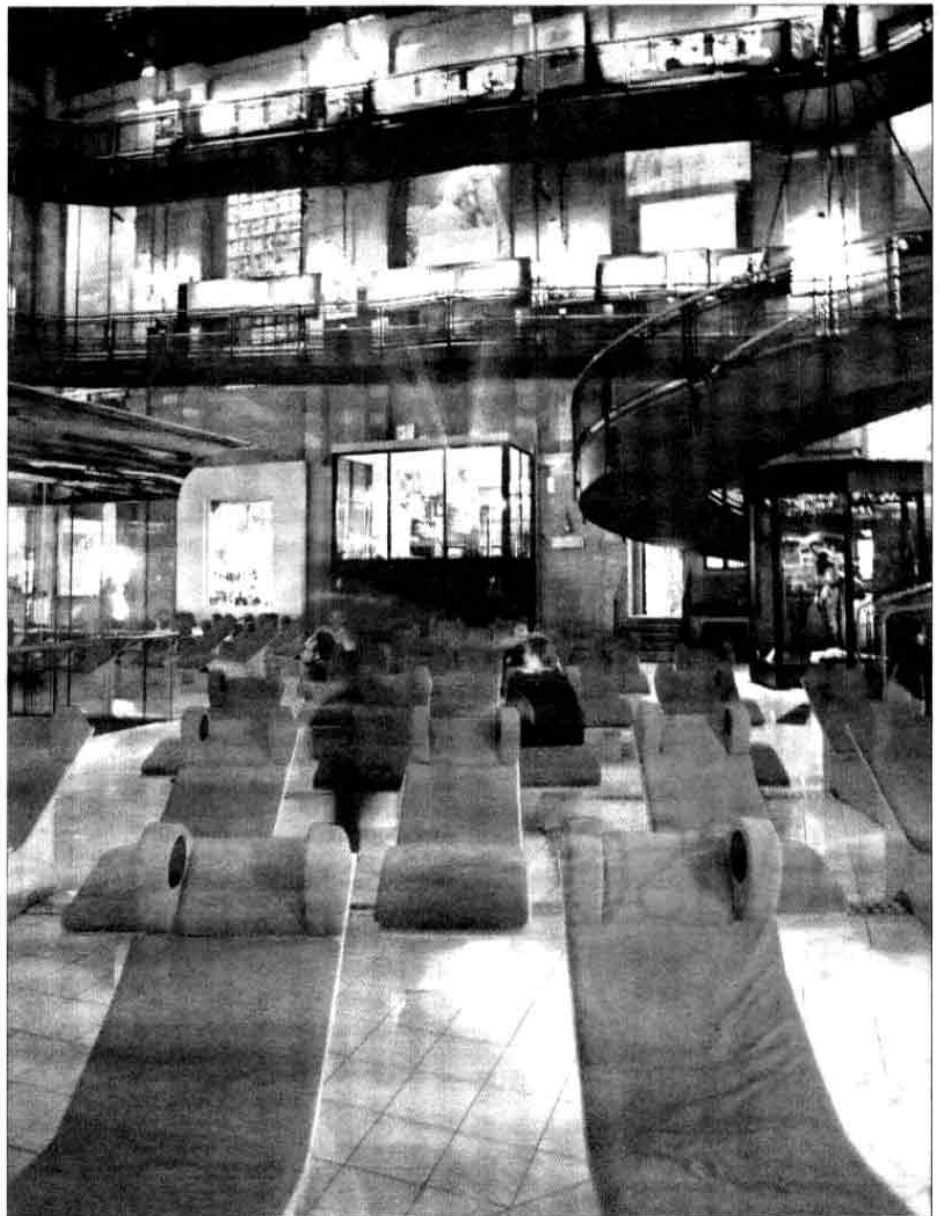
From original scripts of *The Godfather* and *Citizen Kane* to Fellini's hat and scarf to Charlie Chaplin's bowler, the dress Joan Crawford wore in *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* and Darth Vader's mask, the displays are varied and unique.

One section is dedicated to cinema technology, with 3500 items dating from the late 18th and early 19th centuries, including magic lanterns, optical boxes and a rare collection of 200 historical documents about the development and circulation of optical shows.

Another section of the museum shows the history of photography through 130,000 photographic records and 1800 pieces of old photographic equipment. Another floor has more than 300,000 movie posters, playbills and historic advertising material promoting cinema, dating from the first pre-cinematographic shows to films that would appeal to today's teenagers.

Among the rare items at the museum are two original Cinematographe Lumiere posters advertising the birth of cinema.

Pictures of famous actors and directors adorn the walls. And there are posters from some of Hollywood's greatest golden oldies,



Magic ... (clockwise from above) inside the museum; costumes; and stars. Photos: Christina Pfeiffer

including *Sunset Boulevard*, *Citizen Kane*, *Stagecoach*, *The Lady From Shanghai* and *Singin' In The Rain*.

Recent acquisitions include costumes from *Lawrence Of Arabia*, set sketches from *Gone With The Wind* and *Doctor Zhivago* and a set of 100 storyboards and drawings from Charlie Chaplin's works.

It's not surprising to find such a comprehensive shrine to cinema in Turin,

which was the heart of Italy's movie-making industry until the 1930s, when Mussolini moved all film production to Rome.

Finally, in the Love And Death temple, I give in to the temptation of lying on a red heart-shaped bed while watching scenes of death and passion projected overhead, and fade out.

The writer was the guest of Etihad Airways and the Italian Government Tourist Office.