

ANDREA PALLADIO E LA VILLA VENETA DA PETRARCA A CARLO SCARPA

Vicenza, Museo Palladio, Palazzo Barbaran da Porto
5 marzo - 3 luglio 2005

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Comitato Nazionale per le celebrazioni del sesto centenario
dell'ingresso di Vicenza, città del Palladio, nella Repubblica Veneta (1404 -2004)

Centro Internazionale di Studi di Architettura Andrea Palladio

ANDREA PALLADIO E LA VILLA VENETA da Francesco Petrarca a Carlo Scarpa

con il sostegno di:

Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali

Regione del Veneto

Provincia di Vicenza

Comune di Vicenza

Camera di Commercio di Vicenza

Iniziativa nell'ambito del progetto

VICENZA SERENISSIMA. Una nuova architettura una nuova città (1404-1630)

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- 1. Exhibition Project**
- 2. Advisory Committee**
- 3. The Centro Internazionale di Studi di Architettura Andrea Palladio**

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ANDREA PALLADIO AND THE VENETO VILLA: From Petrarch to Carlo Scarpa

1. Exhibition Project

More than four thousand villas survive in the Veneto region, and are listed in the catalogue volumes published by the Ente Regionale per le Ville Venete. This fact establishes how massive a phenomenon villa building was in the areas of northern Italy which formed the mainland territories of the Venetian republic (actually considerably more extensive than the present day Veneto, as Venice also held the provinces of Brescia and Bergamo). The villas were both the country houses and the administrative and processing centres of the agricultural properties of the rich city dwellers whose estates constituted more than half of all the cultivable land of the Terraferma^{*}. The villa was architecturally important, visible from a distance, rising above the trees, modest houses and small country churches, distinguished by its pedimented portico or its dovecote tower. It was also the most prominent manifestation of a system of landownership and agricultural production which had a major role in the economic and social life of the time.

The exhibition *ANDREA PALLADIO AND THE VENETO VILLA: from Petrarch to Carlo Scarpa* (provisional title) will explore the long history of landowners' country residences in the Veneto, from the Fourteenth to the Twentieth Century, as well as the economic and social developments, and the cultural and artistic manifestations which accompanied the creation of the world of the villa.

An introductory section will be devoted to the **Roman villa** and the culture and aspirations associated with it. The Roman world created the agricultural treatises, the villa architecture and the "villa culture" which were studied and imitated from the time of Petrarch onwards. In this prelude to the exhibition will be exhibited wall paintings and mosaics showing villas, ancient representations of agricultural activity, manuscripts and Renaissance editions of ancient writers: Virgil and Pliny the Younger, Cato, Columella, Varro and (one can note the name) Palladius. The section will also include Renaissance drawings of surviving Roman villas, including Hadrian's villa, and the temple of Hercules at Tivoli, which Palladio mistook for an enormous villa.

The section devoted to the **medieval period**, will illustrate the theme of agriculture and the country life in the literature and art of the Trecento. Central to this section will be the beginning of the recovery, with **Petrarch**, of the literary celebration of the country life and the villa by Roman authors, including Virgil himself, of whose works Petrarch possessed a splendid manuscript, embellished with the famous miniature by Simone Martini. The country residences of the Trecento in the Veneto will also be evoked here, including the house Petrarch built for himself at Arquà Petrarca, Gothic in style, but antique in spirit, as one can see from the letters in which the great writer describes the house and its setting.

The **humanist idea of the villa** will be presented, from its cultural beginnings in the writings of Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472) to the first attempts to create an authentic modern version of the ancient villa, exemplified by the villa which Giuliano da Sangallo designed for Lorenzo de' Medici at **Poggio a Caiano** near Florence in the mid 1480's. The beginning of the introduction of Renaissance forms into country houses in the Veneto will be included here.

^{*} In the 'quartiere' of Mestrina (one of the four districts into which the *podesteria* - now province - of Treviso was divided) in 1542, for example, 68.1% of all the land belonged to private individuals (the rest was in the hands of religious and lay institutions). However 30.4% of all the land belonged to Venetian patricians (11.5%) and Terraferma nobles (18.9%), and if to these one adds the properties of Venetian citizens who were not patricians (8%), and of non-noble citizens of Treviso (17.1%), it appears that in this area a total of 55.5% of the land was in the hands of city dwellers, while a mere 12.6% at most was the property of permanent country residents (see Mauro Pitteri, *Mestrina. Proprietà, conduzione, colture nella prima metà del secolo XVI*, Treviso, 1994, pp. 51-61).

ANDREA PALLADIO E LA VILLA VENETA DA PETRARCA A CARLO SCARPA

Vicenza, Museo Palladio, Palazzo Barbaran da Porto 5 marzo - 3 luglio 2005

The section on **the new villa architecture of the Cinquecento** will display drawings, models and views of works by Bramante, Raphael (the villa Madama), Peruzzi and Antonio da Sangallo the Younger, and will trace the transference of modern (but also ancient) Roman ideas to Mantua (Giulio Romano's Palazzo Te), and to the Veneto itself, with the villas of Michele Sanmicheli, and the majestic villa Garzoni of Jacopo Sansovino at Pontecasale. A model and drawings will be exhibited of a particularly innovative villa, the impressive villa Giustinian at Roncade, near Venice, designed not by a Roman but by a Venetian architect. Attention will also be given to the efforts of cultural leaders in **Padua** – specifically **Pietro Bembo and Alvise Cornaro** - to recreate the culture of the ancient villa for themselves and their friends, not only as a way of life, but in terms of the architectural framework for that life, seen for instance in the additions which Cornaro commissioned from Falconetto to his own house in Padua, and at the villa dei Vescovi at Luvigliano, which Cornaro had built, almost certainly after designs by Falconetto. Alvise Cornaro's influential dedication to agricultural improvement and higher standards in domestic architecture will also be presented.

The humanist, antiquising ideal of a virtuous, pleasant and productive rural existence, is reflected in literary works like Bembo's *Gli Asolani* (1505), or Torquato Tasso's *Il buon padre di famiglia* (1583), and in innumerable works of art, from the landscapes and landscape backgrounds of the great Venetian painters, to the drawings and engravings of landscape specialists like Domenico and Giulio Campagnola, to the scenes of country life by Jacopo Bassano and his sons, and the fresco decorations (often celebrating the country side, and the owners themselves) which decorate the interior of many villas.

Manuscripts and printed books and works of art will illustrate this “**villa culture**”. The exhibition will not only explore villa architecture, but also the art which grew up around and in the villas. This art helps us to imagine villa and country life, the estate owners and their families, the hunt and the harvest, the country market, the pergolas and fountains of now lost gardens. But the **paintings representing the countryside** will be presented as works of art, reflecting a pictorial and literary culture, not as “documents”. The “real” life of the countryside is instead recorded in letting agreements, court proceedings, land surveys (examples will be exhibited). It appears too in ex-votos (a selection will be exhibited) which show the risks and dangers of the countryside: floods, the fall from a horse or scaffolding, the coach accident, the murderous attack of bandits.

Perhaps it is only the great Ruzante who speaks movingly of the sufferings and traumatic memories of war, devastation and famine of country people in the early decades of the Cinquecento. The paintings of Giorgione and Titian, Lotto and Bassano, Canaletto and Tiepolo, even when they incorporate real persons and real places, follow the artist's priorities, not those of the social historian. They embody a culture parallel to - but distinct from - the realities of the countryside, which painters and patrons usually preferred to idealize, or to adapt to the representation of mythological or biblical stories (like the many paintings showing villas and villa gardens in the background of representations of *Susanna and the Elders*).

At the centre of the exhibition will be the activity of **Andrea Palladio** (1508-1580) as a designer and builder of new types of country house, which had a lasting influence, not only in the Veneto, but throughout western Europe, and eventually in Russia and North America.

The rooms devoted to Palladio will be central to the story of the Veneto villa. It is there that the geographical nature of the territory will be presented, the character of early modern agriculture, the efforts to drain and irrigate, renew farm buildings, and rural infrastructures. The requisites of the owners will be shown: not only in relation to their houses, but to their barns, their dovecote towers, and the new, straight, tree-lined roads which they built to provide a fitting approach to their villas.

Palladio's drawings, early estate plans, and modern models will suggest how Palladio reformulated and reorganized all the familiar elements of rural building, skillfully integrating into his designs elements derived from the modern works of Raphael, Giulio Romano and Sanmicheli, and from his wide knowledge of ancient Roman architecture.

Palladio gave dignity (and a cool pleasant place to eat in summer) to his facades by adding logge or pedimented porticoes, following his idea of the ancient Roman house. At the sides of a centrally

ANDREA PALLADIO E LA VILLA VENETA DA PETRARCA A CARLO SCARPA

Vicenza, Museo Palladio, Palazzo Barbaran da Porto 5 marzo - 3 luglio 2005

placed hall he disposed rooms of different shapes and sizes, to serve differentiated functions. He removed open latrines from bedrooms and tucked them away under the stairs, with proper ventilation. Generally he defined optimum solutions without sacrificing variety and surprise, and fused the outbuildings and the owner's house into a single composition, so as to create a more impressive and unified effect. Above all he was able to exploit in practice Alberti's brilliant insight: that the architect can best experiment and realize good architecture in the country, because there he is not limited by pre-existing structures, or hemmed in by streets and neighbouring houses. With Palladio domestic architecture in the country becomes not a second best, but the real terrain on which an architect can experiment and innovate.

It will be stressed that when Palladio introduced new forms into country houses, he also had to be a resourceful inventor of structural techniques with which to realize them. Attention will be given to **the building site**: to materials and structural solutions, with the inclusion of mason's and builder's tools, bricks and cut stones from Palladio's villas, models of roof trusses, building accounts and contracts.

The long history of the villa in the Veneto after Palladio is rich and varied, and will be presented, like the earlier part of the exhibition, by juxtaposing models, architectural drawings, maps, views, and works of art which have as their subject matter villa owners, villas, villa life and the countryside. Scamozzi's great masterpiece, the Rocca Pisana, the work of Longhena, the new giant villas (Contarini at Piazzola sul Brenta, Pisani at Strà), the decorations of Tiepolo, the work of the neo-Palladians, of Jappelli, and at the end of the story, of that innovative Veneto traditionalist (or traditionalist innovator) Carlo Scarpa, will all find their place.

The exhibition will tell a story which has in part been told before (the exhibition committee will gratefully build on the contributions of Michelangelo Muraro, Lionello Puppi, Reinhard Bentmann and Michael Mueller, and James Ackerman, as well as the catalogue of the London Palladio exhibition of 1975), but never in such rich detail, with the help of many specialists, and never in an exhibition. The working group preparing the exhibition is composed of archivists, social and economic historians, historians of the land and the territory, of the fiscal and administrative policies of the Venetian state and of the society of the North East today, as well as historians of art and of architecture. Instead of separating the buildings and the architecture from fresco decoration, from the hunt, from land improvement and the paintings and poetry celebrating the countryside, all these themes will be intertwined, to evoke what was a single undivided reality: the culture and world of the Veneto villa.

ANDREA PALLADIO AND THE VENETO VILLA will be a celebration of the Veneto villa, but not an uncritical one. The world of the villas was not perfectly idyllic, while the formula "Veneto=Villas" is misleading, and in fact overlooks other aspects of the region's notable cultural and material achievements.

The exhibition will confirm, with a few key references (Burlington's villa at Chiswick, Cameron's work for Catherine the Great of Russia, Jefferson's house at Monticello) how important the Veneto villa has been for architecture (European architecture, American architecture, global architecture), often in a relationship of dialogue, rather than one of a simple one-way influence. It will be seen that the villa has always been very closely associated with the painting, culture and economic and social life of the Veneto, and with the structuring of its countryside. The exhibition will touch on themes - the relation of town to country, of place of residence to place of production - which are still of importance. In fact the workshops and factories which are at the base of the economic achievements of the North East in the last two decades, have grown, as the villas themselves did, in or around the farmhouses and the villages, with the positive result of raising the prosperity of the countryside without destroying its social cohesion. The negative consequences are all too visible, with extensive areas in which the rural character of the landscape has disappeared or been seriously damaged.

In showing how exceptional and far reaching in its consequences the "civilization of the villas" was, it will also become clear that the distinctiveness, culture and prosperity of the Veneto was the result of many factors. In the first place, the Venetian state itself, with its vocation for peace, talent for mediation and control, and its effective affirmation of the State's ownership of natural resources, above all water, and its right to regulate its use. And also the cities (which the villas fed, and where the

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Vicenza, Museo Palladio, Palazzo Barbaran da Porto 5 marzo - 3 luglio 2005

villa owners spent much of their time), and the structures of production and trade, whose ramifications reached far beyond the Veneto.

The exhibition – which relates not just to architecture, but to a whole way of organising production, a whole society, a whole culture – will be the focal point, and point of departure for an “**exhibition**”, **which will extend over much of the Veneto**: many villas will be opened, some will house small exhibitions. It is hoped that special transport will be provided from Vicenza and other centres to visit important country houses.

Everyone will take away their own conclusions from the exhibition in Vicenza. Two however can be anticipated here.

The first, is historical. The Veneto of the villas, was not an inevitable development, and was not directly paralleled elsewhere in Europe or even in Italy until the mid Seventeenth Century or later.

The Veneto villa emerged because of the presence of many factors: a growing demand for agricultural produce, the availability of suitable land for the intensive production of grain and wine; the demand and good prices for raw silk, produced mainly on villa estates; conditions of peace and relative rural security, guaranteed by the Venetian state; the presence of landowners with imprenditorial flair and commitment, who were ready to monitor their tenants performance and work and invest to increase production; good sense on the part of landowners, who in general did not force exploitation of tenants to the point of provoking rebellion or vendettas; and above all a culture which saw country life as less stressful and healthier than that in the city, and more conducive to the peace of the soul and the activities of the mind. (This of course was the flattering commonplace, repeated by Palladio and many others; in reality most villa owners were not scholars or philosophers – like Palladio’s friend and patron Daniele Barbaro - but simply liked increasing their income by having ditches dug and vines planted, and enjoyed hunting, fishing, and eating well, entertaining friends and patrons, and commanding in their own little world, without being too closely observed by neighbours and enemies, as in the city).

But even all this would not have led to the creation of the Veneto villa, if there had not also existed an appreciation of architecture, or, in other words, a sense of the added prestige, pleasure and convenience which rationally and artistically planned houses could give their owners. And here Palladio’s presence, and after his death, his example, was of central importance.

The second conclusion regards **the conservation and enjoyment of the villas**, an issue which the exhibition will consider. The Veneto villas were once the instrument of profit, pleasure and prestige for a limited number of families, who constituted, socially and economically, the urban elite of the time. Now many important villas belong to or are administered by local authorities (among Palladio’s villas, for instance, those of Caldogno, Quinto Vicentino, Vigardolo, Poiana Maggiore, Fratta Polesine). Other villas still in private hands, because of the public spirit of their owners, are regularly opened to the public. The villas are increasingly becoming part of local social and cultural life, as well as being attractive for leisurely tourists. Their gardens, courts and orchards (*broli*), where these survive, are potentially (and here and there have actually become) parks and green areas, safe from the encroachments of disorganised development and urbanization. **The case of the villa Caldogno**, which has recently been restored by the Comune, together with its barn^{*}, and where there discovered formal fishpond is in course of renovation, provides a model of how a local authority can preserve and enhance a historic villa and its surroundings: to the benefit of the local community, and of those who travel to enjoy the immense architectural, artistic and landscape patrimony represented by the Veneto villas.

Howard Burns

President of the Advisory Committee of the CISA A. Palladio

^{*} The ruinous condition of the part of the structure behind the portico, where the cows and the hayloft once were, has permitted the unobtrusive insertion of a fine and functional structure designed by Umberto Riva.

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Vicenza, Museo Palladio, Palazzo Barbaran da Porto 5 marzo - 3 luglio 2005

2. Advisory Committee

Howard Burns, *president* (Università IUAV di Venezia)
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Davide Banzato (Civici Musei di Padova)
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Lionello Puppi (Università di Venezia)
Fernando Rigon (Padova)
Gian Domenico Romanelli (Musei Civici Veneziani)
Gian Maria Varanini (Università di Verona)

3. The Centro Internazionale di Studi di Architettura Andrea Palladio

The Centro Internazionale di Studi di Architettura Andrea Palladio (Palladio Centre and Museum) in Vicenza, Italy is an independent Foundation, supported by the Veneto Regional Government and by the Italian state. It has an explicitly international character and is guided by a committee of leading architectural historians from numbers of countries. The Centre is active in promoting publications, conferences and exhibitions relating to aspects of architectural history; it is the only museum and research centre explicitly dedicated to architectural history which currently exists in Italy. The Centre is housed in one of the most beautiful of Palladio's palaces, where in the last five years we have organised major exhibitions, to which leading European and American museums have contributed with the loan of important works of art.

Main exhibitions 1999-2004

"PALLADIO AND NORTHERN EUROPE. Books, Travellers, Architects" (1999)
"JOHN SOANE ARCHITECT 1753-1837", in collaboration with Royal Academy of Arts, London (2000)
"CARLO SCARPA: Exhibitions and Museums 1944-1976 / Houses and Landscapes 1972-1978", in collaboration with Museo di Castelvecchio, Verona
"JOHN SOANE AND THE WOODEN BRIDGES OF SWITZERLAND: Architecture and Technical Innovation from Palladio to the Grubenmann Brothers", in collaboration with Archivio del Moderno, Mendrisio, and Sir John Soane's Museum, London (2002)
"VINCENZO SCAMOZZI 1548-1616" (2003)
"IN CIMA. GIUSEPPE TERRAGNI PER MARGHERITA SARFATTI: Architetture della memoria nel '900", in collaboration with Centro Studi Giuseppe Terragni, Como (2004)
"CARLO SCARPA NELLA FOTOGRAFIA: Racconti di architetture 1927-2004" (2004)