

VILLA POJANA

Palladio, the Pojana family and the culture of Venetian villas



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1. VILLA POJANA

THE ISTITUTO REGIONALE VILLE VENETE

The Istituto Regionale Ville Venete is the organisation responsible for safeguarding, protecting and promoting one of the most representative aspects of Venetian heritage: the villas built between town and countryside as an expression of culture, territorial governance and historical memory. As the successor to the former Ente per le Ville Venete, the Institute maintains the same objective, focusing on the Venetian villas in order to preserve them and promote public awareness and understanding of them. It is within this context that Villa Pojana, owned by the Institute, is situated; the Institute oversees its conservation and ensures it is fully accessible as a public asset. Restoring Villa Pojana to the public means making its richness accessible: the story of the family who commissioned it, Andrea Palladio's design, the transformations it has undergone over time, and its connection to the agricultural landscape and the wider history of the Venetian Villas. For this reason, conservation goes hand in hand with ongoing work in the fields of study, restoration, research and cultural mediation, aimed at making the villa increasingly accessible, understandable and vibrant. Guided tours, information resources, in-depth activities and initiatives to promote the site all contribute to making Villa Pojana not merely a monument to be preserved, but a place to be explored and culturally experienced. From this perspective, the villa presents itself to visitors as both a testament to the past and a space open to discovery, participation and the sharing of heritage.

Through its stewardship of Villa Pojana, the Istituto Regionale Ville Venete thus renews its mission: to preserve the memory of the Venetian Villas and return it to the community as an experience of knowledge, beauty and awareness.



VILLA POJANA ACCESS PORTAL



1. VILLA POJANA

FOREWORD

Pojana is not merely one of Andrea Palladio's most fascinating works: it bears witness to a period in which the landscape, economy and culture of the Venetian mainland underwent a profound transformation.

Between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Republic of Venice turned its attention increasingly towards the inland countryside, promoting land reclamation, hydraulic works and land reform. It was against this backdrop that the culture of the Venetian villas took shape, destined to leave a lasting mark on the landscape and on the relationship between architecture, agricultural production and social status.

The villas were not merely country residences, but the centres of large agricultural estates, places of administration, prestige and governance of the territory. Villa Pojana, too, was built against this backdrop. Its patron, Bonifacio Pojana, a member of a family with centuries of roots in the Vicenza area, entrusted Andrea Palladio with the task of designing a residence capable of expressing authority, restraint and cultural ambition.

The result was a building of extraordinary originality, austere and monumental, organised according to a rigorous compositional logic and enriched by a decorative cycle that transforms the interiors into a narrative of myths, virtues and references to classical culture.

This guide takes visitors on a journey of discovery through the villa, the family who commissioned it and the world that made its creation possible, offering a journey through architecture, the local area and memory.

2. THE AREA BEFORE THE VILLA

MEDIEVAL VENETO

In the Middle Ages, the Veneto region was criss-crossed by a dense network of towns, castles, rural villages and transport routes linking the hinterland to the Venetian lagoon. Following the fall of the Roman Empire, the region underwent centuries of profound transformation, marked by barbarian invasions, the Lombard presence and, subsequently, Carolingian influence. Over this long period, the territory gradually reorganised itself around new centres of power, both religious and military, which helped to shape the region's landscape and settlement pattern.

Between the 12th and 14th centuries, the main urban centres acquired increasing political and economic importance. Cities such as Vicenza, Verona, Padua and Treviso developed as autonomous communes, sustained by the productivity of the surrounding countryside and the vibrancy of trade. Around the major centres lay a territory organised into parishes, manors and small rural settlements, which formed the economic basis of the entire region. It was precisely during these centuries that an increasingly close balance between town and countryside became established, a balance destined to influence the history of the Veneto for a long time to come.

The Veneto's geographical position facilitated trade between the Alpine region, the Po Valley and the Adriatic. However, this picture was also marked by recurring conflicts between rival towns and by the ambitions of the great noble families, who sought to impose their control over the region.

It was against this backdrop that the political, social and territorial structures took shape which would define the Veneto in the centuries to come, paving the way for the Renaissance.



2. THE AREA BEFORE THE VILLA

THE BERICA RIVIERA

The Riviera Berica is the strip of land that stretches along the eastern slope of the Berici Hills, between Vicenza and the southern plain. Since ancient times, it has served as an important corridor linking the city with the territories opening out towards the Adige and the lower plain. Its location, halfway between the hills and the plain, made it an area of transit, trade and control, where trade routes, agricultural activities and political interests converged.

In the Middle Ages, this landscape was characterised by cultivated fields, small villages, watercourses and agricultural estates belonging to noble families, religious institutions and local communities. The fertility of the soil and the availability of water favoured the cultivation of cereals, vines and fruit trees, providing essential resources for the rural economy. Alongside agricultural activities, the area was also marked by the presence of parish churches, oratories and small settlements, which shaped the religious and social life of the countryside.

The presence of the Berici Hills also provided strategic vantage points for controlling the main routes. For this reason, the area saw the construction of fortifications, towers and castles. In this area, therefore, the landscape was not merely a natural space, but a man-made environment where defensive needs, agricultural work and the organisation of power were intertwined. Over the centuries, it became an area increasingly favoured by aristocratic families from Vicenza, who owned land and country residences there.



2. THE AREA BEFORE THE VILLA

THE POJANA AREA

The Pojana area is situated in the southern Vicenza plain, in a favourable location amongst some of the main towns of western Veneto. Since the Middle Ages, this area has been strongly oriented towards agriculture, thanks to the flat terrain, the fertility of the soil and the presence of watercourses used for irrigation and drainage. These conditions made the area particularly well-suited to cultivation and the development of large rural estates.

The local communities lived mainly from agriculture and livestock farming. Fields, roads, ditches, rows of crops and scattered settlements made up a productive landscape, shaped over time by human labour and closely linked to the rhythms of the seasons and the management of the land.

Pojana also occupied a strategic position along the routes linking Vicenza, Verona and Padua. This facilitated trade, but also made the area significant from a military perspective, contributing to the consolidation of the presence of aristocratic families interested in controlling land, resources and transport routes.

Pojana's evolution thus reflects the broader history of the Venetian plain: an environment transformed by water management, agricultural organisation and the nobility's control of the territory. It was within this context that the Pojana villa would later be built, a monumental symbol of the long-standing relationship between land, power and representation.



VILLA POJANA AND THE LANDSCAPE



2. THE AREA BEFORE THE VILLA

THE MEDIEVAL CASTLE

Before the construction of the great Renaissance residences, the main symbol of power in the area was the castle. These structures did not merely serve a military purpose, but also represented the administrative and political centre of the seigneurial estates. Defence, the management of the lands, and the control of resources and rural communities were organised around the castle: it was the heart of local power.

In Pojana, too, there was a medieval fortification linked to the family that controlled the territory. It would have comprised walls, defensive towers and rooms intended both as the lord's residence and for agricultural and administrative activities. Its presence bears witness to the strategic importance of this location, linked to agricultural production and its position along the main routes through the Vicenza plain.

During the period of conflict between municipalities and feudal lords, castles played an essential role in defending the countryside and controlling the territory. However, as Venetian rule over the mainland became established, many lost their original function: some were abandoned, others converted. In Pojana too, this transition marked the decline of medieval defensive architecture and the dawn of the era of the villas, symbols of prestige, representation and the governance of the land.



2. THE AREA BEFORE THE VILLA

THE POJANA FAMILY AND THE WARS BETWEEN THE LORDSHIPS

The Pojana family belonged to the Vicenza nobility and became closely associated with the territory they administered. Like many noble houses of the time, they were drawn into the political events that unfolded in the Veneto region between the 13th and 15th centuries, when control over the land, agricultural resources and transport routes was closely linked to the prestige and survival of the ruling families.

In a context marked by the ambitions of the Scaligeri, Visconti and Carraresi families, wars and shifting alliances affected not only the major cities but also smaller towns and the countryside. Control of castles, roads and cultivated land was, in fact, of strategic importance, and the ability to adapt to political changes became crucial to the survival of these families.

The Pojana family gradually consolidated their presence in the region, maintaining a significant role in local economic and political life. Their history bears witness to the link between the history of the great families and that of the rural communities under their administration. From this long continuity of presence and deep roots in the region arose, in the mid-sixteenth century, the desire to express their status through a new form of residence: the villa.



2. THE AREA BEFORE THE VILLA

THE SCALIGERI, VISCONTI AND CARRARESI FAMILIES

Between the 13th and 14th centuries, the Veneto region was the scene of rivalry between some of the most powerful dynasties in northern Italy. The Scaligeri of Verona, the Visconti of Milan and the Carraresi of Padua sought to extend their influence through alliances, conquests and military campaigns.

Vicenza and its territory often found themselves at the centre of these disputes. Control of the city was, in fact, a strategic objective for anyone wishing to dominate the region's main transport routes.

The Scaligeri succeeded in establishing their rule for several decades, strengthening the city's defensive and administrative structures. Subsequently, the Visconti expanded their presence in the region, whilst the Carraresi attempted to counter their expansion amidst an unstable and ever-changing political landscape.

The constant wars caused economic damage and uncertainty, but also helped to redefine the territorial balance of power in the Veneto. By the end of the 14th century, no single lordship had managed to prevail definitively, thus paving the way for Venetian intervention.



2. THE AREA BEFORE THE VILLA

THE BIRTH OF THE STATE FROM THE EARTH

Between the end of the 14th century and the beginning of the 15th century, the Republic of Venice embarked on a vast policy of expansion into the hinterland. The aim was to ensure the security of trade routes and to create a stable territorial buffer to protect the lagoon and its economic interests.

With the acquisition of cities such as Vicenza, Padua and Verona, what came to be known as the 'Stato da Terra' (the Mainland State) was established – that is, the collection of mainland territories under Venetian rule. This new political order brought greater stability following decades of conflict between rival lordships.

Venice retained many of the local institutions but introduced an administrative system capable of ensuring order, control and continuity of government. The noble families of the mainland retained an important role in the management of the territory, collaborating with the authority of the Serenissima.

The relative peace guaranteed by Venetian rule fostered agricultural, commercial and cultural development in the countryside, creating the conditions for the subsequent Renaissance flourishing.



2. THE AREA BEFORE THE VILLA

TOWARDS THE RENAISSANCE

During the 15th century, the Veneto region experienced a period of economic growth and profound cultural transformation. The political stability guaranteed by the Republic of Venice enabled the local elite to invest in agricultural activities, public works and new ways of demonstrating social prestige.

The countryside underwent land reclamation projects, improvements to agricultural land and innovations in estate management. Noble families began to view the countryside not merely as a source of income, but also as a space to be enhanced through increasingly refined and prestigious residences.

The ideas of Humanism and the Renaissance, disseminated from the major Italian cultural centres, also reached the Venetian mainland. An interest in classical antiquity, the pursuit of harmony and a new conception of the relationship between man and nature profoundly influenced art, architecture and the landscape.

It was in this climate of renewal that the conditions matured which would lead, in the following century, to the construction of the great Venetian villas: symbols of the new Renaissance society and of the prosperity of the countryside under the rule of the Serenissima.



COAT OF ARMS OF THE POJANA FAMILY



3. THE POJANA FAMILY

THE FAMILY'S ORIGINS

The history of the Pojana family has its roots in the Vicenza region of the Middle Ages, when control of the territory was entrusted to noble families linked to castles, the management of the countryside and the defence of local communities. The family's name derives from its place of origin, in accordance with a widespread custom amongst medieval aristocratic families, who associated their identity with the territory they administered.

The earliest documentary evidence attests to the presence of the da Poiana family as early as the central centuries of the Middle Ages, embedded within the complex system of feudal relations that characterised the Vicenza region. Their position was enhanced by the strategic location of the Pojana area, situated along key routes linking Vicenza, Verona and Padua.

Like many families of the Venetian rural nobility, the Pojanas gradually built up their prestige through land ownership, military service and alliances with other influential families. Over the centuries, the family consolidated its presence in the region, weathering the political upheavals that marked the transition from the communal era to Venetian rule.

The family's medieval origins form the foundation of a long family history which would culminate, during the Renaissance, in the construction of the Palladian villa.



3. THE POJANA FAMILY

THE NOBILES OF POJANA

In medieval documents, members of the family are often referred to by the Latin expression **nobiles de Poiana**, meaning ‘nobles of Pojana’. This designation was not merely an honorary title, but attested to the recognition of a privileged social status within Vicenza society.

Belonging to the nobility entailed rights, responsibilities and prestige. The nobles took part in local political life, managed estates, held military posts and contributed to the defence of the territory. Their authority stemmed both from their landholdings and from their ability to maintain relations with the city’s institutions and the main regional powers.

Over the centuries, the Pojana family succeeded in consolidating this role, adapting to the political changes that affected the Veneto region. From the conflicts between communes and feudal lords to the rise of the Republic of Venice, members of the family maintained a prominent position in local society.

The designation ‘nobiles da Poiana’ therefore attests not only to the family’s geographical origins, but also to the recognition of a social standing built up over time through service, wealth and deep roots in the local area.



3. THE POJANA FAMILY

CASTELLANI AND MEN-AT-ARMS

In the Middle Ages, the prestige of noble families was closely linked to their ability to defend their territory. For a long time, the Pojana family served as castellans and men-at-arms, dedicated to protecting their lands and taking part in the military campaigns that affected the Veneto region.

The castle formed the centre of the lord's power. It was from here that estates were administered, economic activities organised and the defence of the community coordinated. In the event of war, it became a strategic stronghold for controlling the routes of communication and protecting the population.

Being men-at-arms also meant taking a direct part in the conflicts that characterised the political life of the era. Noble families provided knights, squires and military contingents to the lords or cities with whom they were allied. The valour demonstrated in battle helped to enhance the family's prestige and strengthen its political ties.

As Venetian rule over the mainland became more firmly established, the military role of the nobility lost some of its central importance. The ancient ideal of the knight gradually gave way to that of the landowner and administrator, a figure destined to characterise the Venetian nobility of the modern age.



ENTRANCE



3. THE POJANA FAMILY

THE PROPERTY NETWORK

The strength of the Pojana family stemmed not only from its noble prestige, but also from the extent of its landholdings. Over the centuries, the family built up a network of estates comprising agricultural land, rural buildings, water rights and other resources essential to the local economy.

Land was the main source of wealth. The cultivated fields produced cereals, wine and other goods necessary for the sustenance of the communities and for trade. Through rents, concessions and relationships with the peasants, the landowners played an important economic and social role.

The extent of their holdings also enabled them to consolidate their control over the territory. Relations with neighbouring families, religious institutions and the city authorities helped to create a dense network of interests that strengthened the family's position.

This economic foundation proved decisive in the centuries that followed, when the Venetian nobility invested increasingly in the countryside and in the development of their estates, transforming them into symbols of prestige, stability and modernity.



3. THE POJANA FAMILY

BONIFACIO POJANA

Among the family's most illustrious members, Bonifacio Pojana stands out as a leading figure of the Renaissance period, which marked the family's heyday. A cultured man who was well-integrated into 16th-century Venetian society, Bonifacio embodied the model of the noble landowner who combined family tradition with new cultural ambitions.

Thanks to the wealth accumulated and the prestige earned by the family, Bonifacio was able to embark on a major prestige project destined to leave a lasting mark on the local area. It was, in fact, he who commissioned the construction of the villa that still bears the Pojana name today.

The decision to entrust the project to Andrea Palladio reflects the desire to express, through architecture, the prestige achieved by the family. The villa was intended not merely as a residence, but also as a statement of social identity, culture and connection to the land.

Bonifacio thus marks the transition from the medieval nobility of castle lords and men-at-arms to the Renaissance nobility of landowners, patrons and key figures in villa culture.



3. THE POJANA FAMILY

SOCIAL MOBILITY

The history of the Pojana family is a significant example of social advancement within the Venetian nobility. Starting from a role linked to the administration and defence of the medieval territory, the family gradually succeeded in consolidating its prestige through land ownership, alliances and service to the institutions.

Coming under the rule of the Venetian Republic opened up new opportunities. The political stability and economic development of the mainland favoured families capable of investing in the countryside and managing their resources effectively.

During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Pojanas expanded their wealth and strengthened their position in Vicenza society. This increased economic prosperity translated into greater public visibility and the opportunity to undertake prestigious projects.

The construction of the Palladian villa represented the culmination of this journey: a masterpiece capable of transforming the family's economic and social success into a tangible and enduring legacy.

3. THE POJANA FAMILY

THE COAT OF ARMS

The coat of arms was one of the most important elements of a noble family's identity. Through symbols, colours and heraldic figures, each family conveyed its history, prestige and role in society.

The Pojana family also had their own coat of arms, which was used in official documents, on buildings, in decorations and on ceremonial objects. The coat of arms served a practical function of identification, but above all it was a sign of belonging and family continuity.

In the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, heraldry constituted a veritable visual language, understandable to all those who belonged to the world of the nobility. Through its coat of arms, a family asserted its authority and claimed its place within the social hierarchy.

The presence of the Pojana coat of arms in the villa and in the historical records that have come down to us serves as a reminder of the strong sense of identity that characterised the family and their desire to pass on its memory to future generations.



Puliana, Pogliana, Pogiana, Pojana, Polana

Legend has it that Pulianus lived there for centuries and that the name of the village is a result of his name. The village is located in the area of the ancient city of Pulianus, which was founded by the Pulianus family. The village is located in the area of the ancient city of Pulianus, which was founded by the Pulianus family.

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THE COAT OF ARMS



3. THE POJANA FAMILY

THE GOOSE OF POJANA

Among the most distinctive elements associated with the family is the figure of the goose, an animal linked to the Pojana family's heraldic and symbolic tradition. Its presence in the coat of arms and in the family's imagery has helped to make the family instantly recognisable over the centuries.

In European culture, the goose held multiple meanings. It could represent vigilance, loyalty and the ability to protect – qualities particularly valued in the medieval world. Famous is the tale of the geese of the Capitoline Hill which, according to Roman tradition, saved the city by warning the defenders of the enemy's arrival.

For the Pojana family, this animal became a true symbol of identity, distinguishing the family within the Venetian nobility. Its image was reproduced in coats of arms, decorations and official representations, contributing to the construction of the family's legacy.

Even today, the goose remains one of the most intriguing and recognisable elements of the Pojana family's history: a symbol linking the family's medieval origins to its long historical and cultural legacy.



4. ANDREA PALLADIO

FROM STONEMASON TO ARCHITECT

Andrea Palladio, born in Padua in 1508 as Andrea di Pietro della Gondola, is regarded as one of the most important architects in Western history. His personal and professional journey is an extraordinary tale of talent, study and determination, which transformed a young craftsman into one of the leading figures of Renaissance architecture.

Having moved to Vicenza whilst still a young man, Andrea began working as an apprentice stonemason in a workshop specialising in stonework. This experience enabled him to gain first-hand knowledge of materials, building techniques and site work – elements that would profoundly shape his approach to design. Unlike many artists of his time, who came from cultured or affluent backgrounds, Palladio built his education on the practical experience of craftsmanship, developing on the job a technical sensitivity that would remain central to his entire body of work.

In the years that followed, his talent caught the attention of some of the most influential figures in Vicenza's cultural circles. Thanks to his encounter with Gian Giorgio Trissino, Andrea was able to broaden his intellectual horizons, delving into the humanities, mathematics and classical architecture. It was at this point that Andrea di Pietro began to transform into Palladio: no longer merely a craftsman, but a designer, scholar and interpreter of a new architectural language, destined to influence Europe for centuries to come.



4. ANDREA PALLADIO

GIAN GIORGIO TRISSINO

His meeting with Gian Giorgio Trissino marked a decisive turning point in Andrea Palladio's life. Born in Vicenza in 1478, Trissino was a nobleman, scholar and one of the most influential humanists of his time. A man of vast learning, he frequented the leading Italian courts and maintained relationships with artists and intellectuals of great renown. His interest in classical antiquity, literature and the arts made him a central figure in Vicenza's cultural circles in the early sixteenth century.

It was probably whilst overseeing some work at the villa in Cricoli that Trissino first noticed the abilities of the young Andrea. Recognising his talent, he decided to support his education, introducing him to a world of learning that had hitherto been beyond his experience: humanist culture, architectural theory, mathematics and knowledge of antiquity. According to tradition, it was Trissino himself who bestowed upon him the name 'Palladio', inspired by the figure of Pallas Athena, goddess of wisdom. The new name symbolically marked the transition from craftsman to man of letters, and thus Andrea's entry into a broader intellectual sphere.

His relationship with Trissino proved decisive not only for Palladio's theoretical education, but also for his social and professional success. Thanks to the support of his patron from Vicenza, the young architect was able to travel, study and engage with the models of antiquity and the Renaissance. Without this encounter, Palladio's story – and perhaps that of European architecture – would have taken a very different course.



4. ANDREA PALLADIO

TRIP TO ROME

One of the most important aspects of Palladio's education was his travels to Rome. From the 1540s onwards, the architect visited the city on several occasions, initially accompanied by Trissino and later on his own. For a Renaissance man, Rome was much more than a place of study: it was the place where antiquity revealed itself in all its grandeur, offering a unique heritage of buildings, ruins and artefacts from the classical world.

Palladio carefully observed temples, theatres, thermal baths, bridges, arches and basilicas, studying their proportions, construction techniques and spatial organisation. He did not merely admire the ruins, but analysed them rigorously, producing extremely accurate surveys, measurements and drawings. This systematic work enabled him to gain a thorough understanding of the principles governing Roman architecture and to build up a repertoire of forms and solutions to be reinterpreted in his own design practice.

His travels in Rome had a decisive influence on his work. The knowledge he acquired became the theoretical and practical foundation for all his projects, from villas and palaces to churches and public buildings. Through Rome, Palladio did not merely discover antiquity: he found the language with which he would be able to translate it into modern architecture.



A GAME BASED ON THE PALLADIAN SYSTEM



4. ANDREA PALLADIO

THE REDISCOVERY OF THE ANCIENT

The Renaissance was characterised by a profound interest in the classical world, which was regarded as a model of artistic, cultural and moral perfection. Palladio played a full part in this process of rediscovery, developing an extraordinary knowledge of ancient architecture. For him, however, antiquity was not merely a repertoire of forms to be passively imitated, but a source of universal principles to be understood and reinterpreted.

Proportion, symmetry, balance and harmony became the cornerstones of his approach to design. Through direct observation of Roman buildings and the study of classical texts, Palladio developed a architectural language based on clear rules and a rigorous compositional order. Of particular importance was his reading of Vitruvius, author of **De Architectura**, the treatise which served as the principal theoretical reference for architects during the Renaissance. From the combination of studying monuments and reflecting on the texts, Palladio developed a vision of architecture as a discipline capable of uniting mathematics, functionality and beauty.

This ability to transform the past into a model for the present made his architecture extraordinarily modern. His works are not copies of antiquity, but new creations that translate classical ideals into the needs of sixteenth-century society. In this balance between memory and innovation lies one of the deepest reasons for Palladio's greatness.



4. ANDREA PALLADIO

THE FOUR BOOKS

In 1570, Palladio published **The Four Books on Architecture** in Venice, the work that would ensure the international dissemination of his ideas. The treatise is one of the most influential texts in the history of architecture and constitutes the most comprehensive synthesis of his experience as a scholar, designer and interpreter of antiquity.

In the four volumes, Palladio set out the principles of design, the architectural orders, building techniques and numerous examples drawn from both Roman antiquity and his own works. The text was accompanied by a wealth of engravings, which made the concepts presented immediately comprehensible and provided models that could be readily used by architects, builders and clients. The treatise was not intended solely for scholars, but as a practical tool capable of disseminating an architectural language based on rationality, proportion and harmony.

Thanks to the printing press, Palladio's ideas quickly spread beyond Italy's borders and reached much of Europe. The Four Books made a decisive contribution to the success of Palladianism, transforming the work of the Vicenza-born architect into a benchmark for architectural culture in the centuries that followed.



4. ANDREA PALLADIO

PALLADIO AND THE VICENZA AREA

The Vicenza area served as Palladio's main creative workshop. It was here that the architect developed most of his most important works, experimenting with innovative solutions and defining the architectural language that would make his name famous. Vicenza offered particularly favourable conditions: a cultured and wealthy aristocracy, willing to invest in both urban and rural residences, and a prosperous countryside at the heart of the economic transformations promoted by the Republic of Venice.

Throughout his career, Palladio designed city palaces, country villas, public buildings and religious structures, making a decisive contribution to redefining the region's architectural identity. His most famous project in the city was the transformation of the Palazzo della Ragione into the Basilica Palladiana, which was destined to become the very symbol of Vicenza. But alongside his urban works, it was above all the network of villas scattered across the countryside that bore witness to the deep connection between his work and the Vicenza landscape.

The concentration of Palladian buildings in the Vicenza area still makes this region one of the most important cultural landscapes of the European Renaissance. Here, more than anywhere else, it is possible to understand how Palladio's architecture arose from an ongoing dialogue between town and countryside, between noble patrons, agricultural organisation and a humanistic vision of the region.



4. ANDREA PALLADIO

THE POJANA CONSTRUCTION SITE

Among the numerous villas designed by Palladio, Villa Pojana holds a special place due to the originality of its architectural solutions and the role it plays in the history of the family who commissioned it. Construction began around the mid-16th century at the behest of Bonifacio Pojana, at a time when the family was enjoying great social and economic success and was keen to translate its prestige and deep roots in the local area into architecture.

As with any major Renaissance undertaking, the building site involved specialist tradespeople – bricklayers, stonemasons, carpenters and decorators – who were called upon to transform the design into a building capable of fulfilling both practical and symbolic requirements. The villa was, in fact, conceived as a centre for representing the family and for the administration of the agricultural estate, and every part of it was intended to reflect this dual function. The building site was therefore the place where the technical expertise of the craftsmen, the architect's vision and the client's ambitions came together.

The case of Villa Pojana illustrates the complexity of the process leading to the construction of a Palladian villa: a work born of the balance between humanist culture, the organisation of labour and control over the land, in which architecture became an instrument of governance, representation and family memory.



EXTERIOR OF VILLA POJANA



4. ANDREA PALLADIO

A REVOLUTIONARY PROJECT

Villa Pojana stands out amongst Palladio's works for a number of features that make it particularly innovative. Unlike many other villas designed by the architect, the building features a sober and compact façade, lacking the traditional temple-style pronaos that would go on to become one of the most recognisable elements of his architectural language. This choice lends the villa a austere and original character, focusing attention not so much on the external visual impact as on the quality of the interior spaces and the overall order of the design.

The heart of the building lies, in fact, in the rigorous geometric organisation of its rooms. Palladio developed a system based on extremely precise proportional relationships, capable of creating a balance between monumentality, clear spatial layout and functionality. The villa thus embodies a new conception of the noble residence: no longer tied to defensive needs, but conceived as a centre for agricultural administration, a venue for reception and a symbol of a new rural civilisation.

For these reasons, Villa Pojana can be considered a revolutionary design. In it, Palladio experiments with an original solution, capable of offering a personal interpretation of the needs of the Venetian nobility of the sixteenth century and providing a new architectural response to the relationship between the villa, the landscape and the organisation of the estate.



4. ANDREA PALLADIO

THE PALLADIAN LEGACY

On his death in 1580, Palladio left behind an architectural and cultural legacy that was to influence the world for centuries. His ideas continued to spread through his buildings, his drawings and, above all, through **The Four Books on Architecture**, which made his architectural language accessible to generations of architects and clients.

Between the 17th and 18th centuries, the Palladian style became established in numerous European countries, finding particular favour in England. From there, his architectural language also reached North America, influencing aristocratic residences, public buildings and even the institutional architecture of the United States. The strength of his legacy lies in his ability to combine beauty, functionality and rationality, offering an architectural model that is at once elegant, clear and adaptable to different contexts.

Villa Pojana, like the other Palladian villas in the Veneto, remains a living testament to this extraordinary legacy to this day. Through his buildings, Palladio continues to speak to contemporary generations, confirming his status as one of the most influential architects in history and one of the leading figures in European culture.



5. BUILDING A VILLA

WHY BUILD A VILLA?

During the 16th century, the construction of a villa represented, for many families of the Venetian nobility, the culmination of a long process of economic and social advancement. For the Pojana family, as for numerous other families in the Venetian mainland, the villa became a tangible symbol of the prestige achieved after centuries of presence and deep-rooted ties to the local area. It was not merely a matter of building a country residence, but of giving architectural form to a new aristocratic identity, founded on the wealth of the land, political stability and Renaissance culture.

The transition from medieval to Renaissance society profoundly transformed the way in which the nobility conceived of its role. Whilst in the Middle Ages power was expressed through castles, fortifications and defensive structures, in the sixteenth century it found a new form of expression in the villa: an open, orderly and harmonious building, capable of demonstrating wealth, culture and the ability to govern. The stability guaranteed by the Republic of Venice fostered this change, increasingly directing investment towards the management of agricultural estates and control of the territory. For Bonifacio Pojana, entrusting the design of his new residence to Andrea Palladio therefore meant much more than simply commissioning a building of high quality. It was a choice that signalled his membership of that new, cultured and ambitious elite which was transforming the face of the Venetian countryside, making the villa the symbol of a new balance between power, economy and representation.

5. BUILDING A VILLA

LA FUNZIONE AGRICOLA

Although Palladian villas are now admired above all for their architectural beauty, their original function was closely linked to agriculture. The villa was, in fact, the administrative and productive centre of a vast estate: a place from which the cultivation of the fields, the harvesting of produce, the management of rents and relations with peasants and labourers were organised. The stately residence was therefore also the economic heart of the estate.

In the 16th century, the Venetian countryside produced cereals, wine, vegetables and fodder intended both for local consumption and for trade. The sound management of agricultural resources was one of the main sources of wealth for the noble families of the mainland, who invested in the land not only as an asset but as a productive system to be managed with care and consistency.

Villa Pojana, too, was built within this context. Whilst distinguished by the quality of its architectural design, it had to meet practical requirements linked to the management of the estate. It is in this balance between practical function and aesthetic value that one of the most original aspects of Palladian architecture lies: beauty is not at odds with utility, but accompanies it and makes it part of a broader economic and cultural order.



DETAIL OF A PAINTED GROTESQUE



VIEW FROM THE GREAT HALL



5. BUILDING A VILLA

THE REPRESENTATIVE FUNCTION

Alongside its agricultural and economic role, the villa also served a fundamental representative function. Each building was designed to convey the prestige, culture, and social status of its owner, transforming architecture into a means of asserting personal and family identity. By building a villa, the nobility of the Venetian mainland expressed both their ability to manage the land and their connection to the values of humanist culture.

Guests arriving at the residence were meant to immediately perceive the importance of the owning family. Harmonious proportions, the quality of the decorations, the arrangement of the spaces, and the relationship with the surrounding landscape all contributed to an image of order, balance, and authority. The villa was not simply a residence, but a true architectural statement, making the prestige of the family visible.

In the case of the Pojana family, the villa represented the culmination of a family history that had begun centuries earlier with the medieval castellans. Their former military prestige was now transformed into cultural and economic prestige: the residence became a place where the wealth generated by the land, the memory of the family, and the language of art came together in a new form, designed to endure over time.



5. BUILDING A VILLA

GEOMETRY AND PROPORTIONS

One of the most innovative aspects of Andrea Palladio's architecture is his use of geometry and proportion. For Palladio, the beauty of a building did not depend on the richness of its decoration, but on the harmony between its different parts. His studies of classical antiquity and his observation of Roman architecture convinced him that a building should be governed by precise mathematical relationships, capable of creating balance, clarity, and visual coherence.

Each room was designed according to carefully calculated proportions: rooms, corridors, openings, and reception spaces were arranged according to rigorous geometric principles, resulting in buildings that were both functional and harmonious. This attention to proportion was not limited to the exterior appearance of the villa, but shaped the very structure of the design, determining the relationship between volumes, the sequence of rooms, and the overall perception of space.

Villa Pojana is one of the most significant examples of this architectural approach. The organisation of its interiors reveals a careful study of proportions, intended to create an ordered sequence of spaces that interact harmoniously with one another. Behind the villa's apparent simplicity lies a complex design process, based on the belief that mathematics and architecture were complementary tools in the pursuit of beauty.



5. BUILDING A VILLA

MATERIALS AND CONSTRUCTION

The construction of a Renaissance villa required complex organisation and the involvement of many different skills. The building site was a place where architectural design, craftsmanship, and technical expertise came together to transform an idea into architecture. Nothing was left to chance: every stage of construction had to be carefully coordinated, from laying the foundations to completing the decorative elements.

Most of the materials came from the surrounding area. Local Vicenza stone was used for structural and ornamental elements, while bricks, timber, and lime formed the basis of the construction. The choice of materials depended on local availability, as well as on the requirements of the project and the quality needed for each part of the building. Construction could continue for years and required a precise sequence of operations: masonry, roofing, flooring, plasterwork, and decoration all had to proceed in accordance with the overall design.

In the case of Villa Pojana, Palladio's design required particular care in executing its proportions and architectural details. Every element had to contribute to the overall harmony of the building. A Renaissance construction site was therefore much more than simply a place where a building was erected: it was a space where ideas, technical knowledge, and craftsmanship took tangible form, creating a work of architecture designed to endure over time.



5. BUILDING A VILLA

THE CRAFTSMEN

Behind every villa lay the work of dozens of skilled craftsmen. Masons, stonemasons, carpenters, blacksmiths, plasterers, painters, and labourers worked together to bring the project to life, contributing skills that were often passed down from generation to generation. The quality of a building depended not only on the talent of the architect and the wishes of the patron, but also on the craftsmen's ability to transform the design into a solid, harmonious, and enduring structure. Andrea Palladio understood the value of these workers very well. His own training, which began as a stonemason, had taught him the importance of precision in execution, knowledge of materials, and collaboration among the different trades involved in the construction process. Each profession had a specific role: masons built the load-bearing structures, carpenters constructed scaffolding and roofs, stonemasons shaped the stone, while craftsmen and decorators completed the finishing elements. The villa we admire today is therefore the result of a collective effort. Behind the name of Palladio and that of the family who commissioned the building stood a community of men whose knowledge and skill helped transform a design on paper into a reality destined to endure for centuries. Through their work, they gave form not only to a building, but also to a new way of inhabiting and representing the land: the Renaissance villa, a symbol of Venetian civilisation and its extraordinary cultural flourishing.



ENTRANCE AND TICKET OFFICE



6. VISITING VILLA POJANA

THE ENTRANCE

The first room on the tour of the piano nobile of Villa Pojana is located in the left wing of the residence, within the section attributed to Francesco Muttoni and dating to 1741. This room, which serves as the first reception area along the visitor route, bears witness to a later phase in the villa's history, linked to the eighteenth-century alterations that enlarged the building and partially reshaped its original layout.

The room features a raised coffered ceiling whose design clearly reflects eighteenth-century decorative taste, introducing visitors to a setting in which the restraint of Palladian architecture is interwoven with the transformations that took place over time.

Today, this room houses the villa's ticket office and bookshop. From here, visitors can also access two smaller, undecorated rooms, currently used for educational activities and storage. Despite their simplicity, these spaces reveal the functional character of a part of the villa which, although secondary to the formal reception rooms, contributes to our understanding of its long architectural history.

6. VISITING VILLA POJANA

THE GRAND STAIRCASE

One of the most striking aspects of Villa Pojana is the skilfully orchestrated relationship between its interior spaces and exterior appearance, expressed above all through the monumental entrance staircase and the main façade. The façade is severe and restrained in character, almost entirely free of decorative excess, while at the same time reflecting Palladio's pursuit of a balance founded on the clarity of proportions. The focal point of the façade is the central loggia, which projects slightly forward and is reached by a broad staircase leading solemnly to the piano nobile. The staircase serves not only a practical function but also has a distinct scenic and representative role: it guides visitors in a measured ascent towards the heart of the residence, transforming the entrance into a true moment of transition, almost a ritual passage into the space of the noble dwelling. The façade is enlivened above all by the Serlian opening of the loggia, one of the most original features of the entire villa. Here Palladio employs the celebrated motif of a central arched opening flanked by two trabeated openings, reinterpreting it with remarkable creative freedom. Above the Serlian opening is a double archivolt pierced by five oculi, a solution of rare expressive power that gives the façade its unmistakable character. This balance between geometric rigour and formal invention reveals one of the finest qualities of Villa Pojana's architecture: a residence that rejects ostentation, entrusting its nobility instead to proportion, light, and the power of form.



THE FAÇADE

6. VISITING VILLA POJANA

THE LOGGIA

As Palladio recalls in *The Four Books of Architecture*, Villa Pojana was conceived as a place that was “beautiful, delightful and convenient”, set within an elaborate system of gardens, courtyards, orchards and fishponds, designed not only to meet practical needs but also to display the prestige of the family who commissioned it. Even today, the entrance retains something of that original magnificence: ascending the imposing staircase, visitors reach the loggia, the true ceremonial heart of the villa and the solemn threshold to the piano nobile. On either side stand two seventeenth-century statues by the sculptor Albanese, depicting Jupiter Pluvius and Neptune, deities associated respectively with rain and fertility. Their presence in Venetian villas evokes the theme of water, alluding to the prosperity of the land and the skilful management of its resources. The loggia is decorated with a cycle of frescoes attributed to Giambattista Zelotti, painted around 1558. At the centre is blindfolded Fortune, dispensing honours and riches, while the allegorical figures of Virtue and Prudence triumph over the Vices, as part of an iconographic programme intended to celebrate both the moral elevation and the social standing of the Pojana family. Above the entrance, the bust of Bonifacio Pojana and the family coat of arms are prominently displayed, accompanied by military trophies recalling the family’s chivalric origins. On the opposite wall is the coat of arms of his wife, Piera Porto, a member of the noble Vicentine Da Porto family: the two bolts of silk depicted in the emblem allude to the mercantile activity that contributed to the family’s economic prosperity and social advancement.

6. VISITING VILLA POJANA

JUPITER PLUVIUS

Positioned beside the grand staircase of Villa Pojana, the statue of Jupiter Pluvius introduces visitors to a symbolic dimension closely connected with the very meaning of the Venetian villa. The work, attributed to Girolamo Albanese and dated 1658, depicts Jupiter in his aspect associated with rain and atmospheric phenomena: not merely the ruler of the gods in the classical tradition, therefore, but the deity who governs the sky and, through it, the fertility of the land. In the context of a country residence, such a presence has a significance that extends far beyond mere ornament. Rain, essential to the fertility of the fields and the prosperity of the harvest, was perceived as a sign of abundance and of balance between nature and human activity. The figure of Jupiter Pluvius thus alludes to landed wealth, the fertility of the territory, and the owner's ability to manage his estates wisely, according to an ideal of order, measure, and good governance. Placed along the main approach to the villa, the statue plays a central role in its celebratory programme. Even before crossing the threshold of the piano nobile, visitors are greeted by an image evoking divine protection over the agricultural landscape and, at the same time, the prestige of the family. Jupiter Pluvius thus forms part of the cultured visual language of the residence, where architecture, sculpture, and symbolism combine to present the villa not merely as a dwelling, but as an organising centre of the surrounding territory and a visible expression of aristocratic authority.

6. VISITING VILLA POJANA

NEPTUNE

The statue of Neptune, positioned beside the staircase, is attributed to Girolamo Albanese and dated to 1658. As the god of the sea and waters, Neptune is evoked here not so much in his specifically maritime mythological role, but rather as a personification of power and dominion over the element of water. In the world of Venetian country residences, water was a precious resource, closely connected with the fertility of the fields, irrigation, and the presence of fishponds, canals and orchards, as well as with the very idea of prosperity and wealth. The figure of Neptune, standing guard over the ascent towards the loggia, therefore evokes the orderly control of natural resources and alludes to a landscape shaped by human intervention, in which nature is governed and made productive. His presence also lends distinction to the entrance of the villa through a cultured visual language based on the revival of classical mythology as a means of self-representation for the patrons. In this sense, Neptune is not merely a decorative statue, but an eloquent symbol of the prestige of the Pojana family and of their desire to place their residence within a framework of values combining antiquarian culture, control of the land and the celebration of aristocratic status. Through this figure, too, the ascent to the villa becomes a path of gradual elevation, introducing visitors to the symbolic and representative world of the Palladian residence.

6. VISITING VILLA POJANA

VIRTUE AND FORTUNE IN THE LOGGIA

On the ceiling of the entrance loggia is one of the most significant elements of the residence's decorative programme: the allegory of Fortune, accompanied by personifications of Virtue and Prudence, forming a composition of strong moral and celebratory significance. At the centre of the vault appears the blindfolded goddess, dispensing honours, riches and signs of worldly favour: her presence evokes the changeable and unpredictable nature that Humanist culture attributed to fortune, capable of raising or overturning the destiny of humankind. Alongside this image, however, a more complex message unfolds. In the lateral lunettes, Virtue and Prudence triumph over the Vices, giving form to a genuine moral discourse in which fortune is not presented as an independent or arbitrary good, but as a gift that acquires value only when governed by righteousness, discernment and honour. In this sense, the decoration of the loggia does more than embellish the entrance to the villa: it introduces visitors to the system of values that the patrons sought to display—social prestige, the strength of the family line, and adherence to an ideal of discipline and measure. The painted decoration interacts with the bust of Bonifacio Pojana, the family coats of arms and the military trophies. The entrance to the villa thus becomes a symbolic journey: even before entering the interior rooms, visitors are introduced to a visual language that celebrates the nobility of the family not only through wealth, but above all through its moral legitimacy.+



DETAIL OF A FRESCO

6. VISITING VILLA POJANA

GIAMBATTISTA ZELOTTI

Among the leading figures of sixteenth-century Venetian painting, Giambattista Zelotti occupies a prominent place because of his close connection with the world of Palladian villas. Born in Verona in 1526, he trained in an artistic environment closely associated with Paolo Veronese. He worked on numerous projects throughout the Veneto, making a decisive contribution to the development of the visual culture that accompanied the great flourishing of the mainland villa. His name is associated with some of the most celebrated residences designed by Andrea Palladio, where painted decoration was not merely ornamental but an integral part of the architectural design. At Villa Pojana, Zelotti is associated with the frescoes of the entrance loggia. These works clearly reveal one of the painter's most characteristic qualities: his ability to translate a sophisticated iconographic programme into clear and solemn forms, intended both to enhance the prestige of the patrons and to express the values they wished to represent. Zelotti's painting is distinguished by the luminosity of its colours, the balance of its figures and a measured narrative quality that harmonises perfectly with the clarity of Palladian architecture. In the Venetian villas, his work helped transform spaces into settings for representation, where myth, ancient history, allegory and the celebration of the family merged into a coherent visual narrative. At Villa Pojana too, his work contributes to the dialogue between architecture and painting that represents one of the highest achievements of Renaissance Venetian villa culture.



6. VISITING VILLA POJANA

THE GREAT HALL

Located at the centre of the villa, the Great Hall forms the symbolic and ceremonial heart of Villa Pojana. It is here that Palladian architecture most clearly demonstrates its ability to translate ideas of authority, measure and control into space. The central position of the room is not merely functional but profoundly conceptual: the entire structure of the residence is organised around this space, according to a rigorous system of symmetries and visual axes that reflects the order desired by the patron. The Great Hall is the space in which the villa most clearly declares its role as an aristocratic residence and, at the same time, as the ideal centre of the agricultural estate. The scale of the room, its central position and the visual continuity created by the alignment of the doors in all four directions give the hall an almost theatrical authority: from here, the eye takes in the building and perceives its perfect organisation, as though the house itself were arranged around the figure of the dominus. This idea of centrality is reinforced by the decorative programme of the vault, where paintings attributed to Giambattista Zelotti celebrate time, the seasons and the fertility of the land through the Council of the Gods. The presence of Jupiter, Mercury, Proserpina, Bacchus and Ceres places the hall within a symbolic world in which the villa appears as a place of balance between nature and human governance, between agricultural prosperity and civic order. In this sense, the Great Hall represents the fullest expression of Bonifacio Pojana's power and identity: a measured form of authority, founded on discipline, the wealth of the land and the ability to give architectural form to an ideal of harmony and control.



THE GREAT HALL



DETAIL OF THE VENTILATION SHAFT



6. VISITING VILLA POJANA

THE VENTILATION SHAFT

At the centre of the Great Hall is one of the most distinctive features of Villa Pojana: the ventilation shaft, an opening set into the floor to provide ventilation and encourage the circulation of air from the lower levels. Originally, therefore, it served a practical purpose, contributing to the comfort of the rooms and the quality of life within the residence. However, as is often the case in Palladian architecture, even a functional device is here incorporated into a broader and more sophisticated system of meanings. The position of the ventilation shaft at the exact intersection of the villa's axes makes it the ideal centre of the building. The symmetry of the spaces is organised around it, and from this point radiates the precise arrangement of rooms that allows the eye to look through the house in all four directions. It is therefore not merely a technical device, but a true symbol of centrality: a focal point from which the order of the entire building becomes perceptible, together with the presence of the dominus who governs that order. The star carved into the perforated stone makes this feature even more eloquent, providing a clear reference to the heraldry of the Pojana family. The ventilation shaft thus also takes on the significance of a dynastic emblem, placed at the very heart of the villa as a seal of the patronage and authority of its owners. Utility and representation, technology and symbolism therefore come together in this feature: the opening that allows air to circulate becomes, at the same time, the visible centre of a house designed to express order, prestige and mastery over space.

6. VISITING VILLA POJANA

THE SQUARE ROOM

This room introduces some of the key themes for understanding Villa Pojana, offering visitors an initial overview of its architecture, decoration and interpretive resources. Behind you is an interactive touchscreen station designed to guide your visit through five thematic sections dedicated to the villa: from the work of Andrea Palladio to its decorative programme, and from the history of the Pojana family to the residence's most representative spaces. The room is known as the Square Room, a reference to its distinctive geometric form, but also as the Room of Apollo and Diana, after the subject depicted in the fresco at the centre of the ceiling. The reference to these two mythological deities places the room within the sophisticated allegorical language that characterises much of the villa's decoration, where classical mythology becomes a means of representation and an expression of prestige. By observing the alignment of the doors, visitors can also appreciate one of the most refined perspective effects of Palladian architecture: the sequence of rooms arranged along a continuous visual axis enhances the perception of space and gives the villa the sense of order and harmony that is one of the defining features of its design. Finally, to your right is a tactile model of the villa with a cutaway view of the interior, designed to provide a more inclusive visitor experience and to allow the structure of the building, the arrangement of its rooms and the architectural solutions devised by Palladio to be explored through touch as well.

6. VISITING VILLA POJANA

APOLLO

In the classical figurative tradition, Apollo is the god of light, music, the arts and the harmonious order that governs the cosmos. His image, often associated with the sun, evokes a principle of measure and balance that regulates both natural and human time, making him an emblematic presence in decorative cycles inspired by the ancient world. The twin brother of Diana, Apollo forms her natural counterpart: the goddess's lunar, woodland and chthonic dimension is complemented by his solar, luminous and rational sphere. The relationship between the two defines a complementary polarity — night and day, instinct and measure, nature and harmony — that enjoyed widespread popularity in the artistic culture of the Renaissance and the age of the Venetian villa. At Villa Pojana, the presence of Apollo belongs within this symbolic framework: he is not only the god of the arts, but also a figure capable of evoking order, balance and the passage of time, in dialogue with Diana and with the sophisticated system of allusions to nature and the seasons that runs throughout the decorative programme of the residence.

6. VISITING VILLA POJANA

DIANA

In the classical figurative tradition, Diana is not only the goddess of hunting and the woodlands, but also a deity who presides over the rhythms of nature: the moon, the changing seasons, the fertility of the fields, and the cycle of sowing and harvesting upon which agricultural life depends. Although distinct from the specifically agrarian deities, her image evokes a natural world that is both fertile and wild, governed by a cyclical order. Her mythological identity is defined in relation to Apollo, her twin brother and god of light, with whom she forms an emblematic polarity: night and day, measure and mystery, the woodland realm and solar harmony. At Villa Pojana, this mythological language forms part of the residence's broader decorative programme, in which the ancient deities contribute to a sophisticated system of allusions to nature, time and the order of the cosmos. From this perspective, Diana becomes a figure capable of connecting the landscape, the cycle of the seasons and the symbolic world of Venetian villa culture.



APOLLO AND DIANA



6. VISITING VILLA POJANA

THE PERSPECTIVES

Within the tradition of the Venetian villas, Andrea Palladio developed an architectural vision based on balance, proportion and a close relationship with the landscape. The villa was not simply a country residence, but a complex designed to unite the life of a noble family with the management of its agricultural estate. Within this vision, perspective plays a fundamental role: it guides the eye, organises space and establishes a relationship between the building, the countryside and the horizon. Palladio conceived the villa as a visual as well as a functional centre. Axes of symmetry govern the approach, the internal layout and the opening of the building towards its surroundings. The façades, inspired by classical architecture, become theatrical backdrops, while loggias, porticoes and windows frame the landscape, transforming it into a “constructed view”. The Venetian countryside is therefore not simply a backdrop, but an integral part of the design. Perspective is also a means of social representation: the order of the architecture communicates prestige, control over the land and harmony. In its sobriety, Villa Pojana clearly illustrates some of the fundamental principles of Palladio’s architectural language: clarity of design, rigorous symmetry and a sense of monumentality achieved not through decoration, but through the power of proportion. Palladio’s Venetian villas thus express a new concept of landscape: a space ordered by reason, where beauty, function and the representation of power merge in perfect balance.

6. VISITING VILLA POJANA

THE ROOM OF THE EMPERORS

In the Room of the Emperors at Villa Pojana, the painted figures of the Roman emperors are among the most spectacular and significant elements of the entire decorative scheme. Arranged along the walls within illusionistic niches framed by painted Ionic columns, these figures resemble large bronze statues, creating, from a distance, the impression of standing before a gallery of sculptures rather than a cycle of paintings. These figures evoke the world of ancient Rome, regarded as a model of authority, military discipline and political greatness. The room thus becomes a space of celebration, where references to the imperial age help construct a precise image of the patron, Bonifacio Pojana: a cultivated man associated with the values of strength, honour and prestige, who entrusted art with the task of expressing his family's status. The emperors, painted in bronze-toned monochrome, are set within a rigorous and solemn architectural setting, where the regular rhythm of columns and niches transforms the room into a kind of ideal architecture. Visitors are thus drawn into a sophisticated play of visual illusion: what appears to be sculpted is in fact painted, and the entire room takes on the character of a grand ceremonial space inspired by classical antiquity. These figures also interact with the scenes on the vault, depicting Olympus and the exploits of Julius Caesar. Together, emperors, deities and military triumphs form a unified decorative programme designed to celebrate the glory of ancient Rome and, through it, the prestige of the Pojana family.



THE ROOM OF THE EMPERORS

6. VISITING VILLA POJANA

THE ROMAN EMPERORS

In the Room of the Emperors at Villa Pojana, the figures of the Roman emperors are among the most striking elements of the entire decorative scheme. Painted along the walls within illusionistic niches framed by fictive Ionic columns, the emperors appear as large bronze statues, creating the effect of a true gallery of sculptures. This choice is not merely decorative, but evokes the prestige of ancient Rome as a model of power, discipline and political greatness. The presence of the emperors therefore transforms the room into a celebratory space designed to evoke the authority and symbolic significance of the Roman world. At the same time, these images help exalt the figure of the patron, Bonifacio Pojana, presenting him as a cultivated man closely associated with ideals of strength, honour and prestige. The bronze-toned monochrome enhances the illusion of sculpture and forms part of a rigorous setting in which painting and architecture seem to merge. The walls thus acquire a solemn and ordered rhythm that heightens the monumental character of the room. The figures of the emperors also interact with the scenes painted on the vault, devoted to Olympus and the exploits of Julius Caesar. Together, these elements form a unified iconographic programme inspired by the glory of ancient Rome. The room thus becomes not only a ceremonial space, but also a setting rich in political and cultural meaning, designed to celebrate the prestige of the Pojana family through the language of classical antiquity.

6. VISITING VILLA POJANA

THE GROTESQUE ROOM

Alongside the more solemn spaces of Villa Pojana, the Grotesque Room offers a more secluded, elegant and intimate atmosphere, yet one that is no less refined. Here, the decoration does not aim for the monumentality of the Room of the Emperors, but rather for the lightness and imaginative quality of the grotesque style, which was highly appreciated during the Renaissance. The walls are adorned with delicate decorative motifs against a light background, where animals, plants, objects, small winged putti and fantastical figures intertwine in a composition rich in grace and invention. This decorative repertoire was inspired by the rediscovery of ancient Roman painting, which came to light at the end of the fifteenth century in the underground chambers of Nero's Domus Aurea in Rome. At Villa Pojana, the grotesques are interpreted with particular elegance by Bernardino India, the artist responsible for the villa's decorations. In this small room, painting creates a delicate and precious world of ornamental inventions, unexpected combinations and references to the natural world. The lunettes also feature bucolic landscapes with ancient ruins and views of cities, visually expanding the space and inviting the eye to wander between reality and imagination. This room reveals another aspect of sixteenth-century Venetian villa culture: not only the celebration of family prestige, but also a delight in ornament, a fascination with antiquity and a desire to transform each room into a different visual experience. In the Grotesque Room, painting thus becomes an exercise in imagination and refinement, still capable today of surprising visitors with its grace and inventive freedom.



THE GROTESQUE ROOM

6. VISITING VILLA POJANA

BERNARDINO INDIA

Bernardino India was one of the painters who contributed to the decoration of Villa Pojana in the second half of the sixteenth century, complementing Andrea Palladio's architectural design with an elegant and sophisticated pictorial language. Born in Verona in 1528, India was an artist associated with Mannerist culture, active mainly in Verona and throughout the Veneto region. His speciality was fresco decoration, particularly grotesques, a repertoire of fantastical motifs inspired by the painting of ancient Rome: small animals, hybrid figures, plant motifs, imaginary architecture and ornamental inventions. At Villa Pojana, his contribution is particularly important in the villa's more refined and intimate spaces, where painting not only celebrates the prestige of the patron but also creates an atmosphere of wonder and lightness. India collaborated with other artists working at the villa, including Anselmo Canera and Bartolomeo Ridolfi, helping to create a unified decorative programme inspired by the classical world and the representation of power. His painting is distinguished by the elegance of its lines, its ornamental imagination and its ability to transform walls and vaults into lively, precious surfaces rich in invention. Through the work of Bernardino India, Villa Pojana thus reveals the most sophisticated and refined side of Renaissance decoration: an art that does more than embellish its spaces, transforming them into a visual and cultural experience.

6. VISITING VILLA POJANA

EPHESIAN DIANA

Among the most striking images preserved at Villa Pojana is the figure of the Ephesian Fate, a fascinating presence that combines echoes of the classical world, symbols of fertility and references to human destiny. Her image recalls the celebrated Artemis of Ephesus, the ancient goddess associated with nature, fertility and the protection of life.

In Renaissance culture, figures such as this did not serve a merely decorative purpose, but helped create a sophisticated and allusive visual language capable of evoking the ancient world and its symbolic meanings. The Ephesian Fate seems to merge two traditions: on the one hand, the model of the mother goddess, giver and protector of life; on the other, that of the Fates, the deities who govern the thread of life and human destiny. The result is an image rich in meaning, evoking birth, continuity, time and the order of the world.

As part of the villa's decorative programme, this figure fits naturally within the cultural world envisioned by Bonifacio Pojana, where references to classical antiquity become a means of expressing prestige, learning and authority. In these rooms, painting does more than embellish the surroundings: it invites guests to interpret symbols, recognise myths and grasp learned allusions. The Ephesian Fate thus embodies an important aspect of the decoration of Villa Pojana: a taste for refined, enigmatic images steeped in the memory of antiquity, which continue to fascinate visitors today.

6. VISITING VILLA POJANA

THE FATES

The Fates are figures from ancient mythology associated with human destiny. According to Roman tradition, they were three goddesses who governed the course of each individual's life: one spun the thread of existence, another measured it and determined its length, while the last cut it, marking the end of life. For this reason, the Fates embody time, necessity and the limits shared by all human beings. Within the context of a Renaissance villa such as Villa Pojana, their presence also takes on symbolic and cultural significance. The reference to classical mythology serves not merely a decorative purpose, but reflects the patron's desire to present himself as a cultivated man, capable of engaging with the language of antiquity. The Fates thus introduce a profound theme: the relationship between human life and the higher order that governs the world. Alongside emperors, deities and allegorical figures, they enrich the villa's decorative programme with a reference to destiny and the passage of time. Their image should therefore be understood not simply as ornament, but as part of a broader narrative in which art, myth and the memory of classical antiquity come together to celebrate the prestige and culture of the Pojana family.



6. VISITING VILLA POJANA

THE NEW WORLD

At Villa Pojana there are clear references to the “New World”, which should not be understood as a precise geographical representation of the Americas, but rather as an expression of the Renaissance fascination with what was distant, exotic and newly discovered. In the second half of the sixteenth century, the known world was suddenly expanding: new lands, new peoples, new animals and new images were entering the European imagination, inspiring wonder and a desire for knowledge. This cultural climate is also reflected indirectly in the villa’s decoration, particularly through a fascination with the marvellous, the unusual and the diversity of the natural world. The grotesques, fantastical animals, ornamental inventions and wealth of references to nature create an open visual universe in which the ancient world and the discovery of the new seem to coexist. Renaissance visitors were thus invited to see the villa not only as a noble residence, but also as a place of culture, capable of bringing together memories of classical antiquity and contemporary influences. In this sense, the “New World” at Villa Pojana becomes above all an idea: the representation of an expanding horizon, of a broader and more surprising reality that art seeks to evoke through images rich in imagination, symbols and allusions.



DETAIL OF A GROTESQUE



6. VISITING VILLA POJANA

THE STOVE ROOM

From the second half of the fifteenth century onwards, the Republic of Venice increasingly turned its attention towards its mainland territories, beginning the process of building what became known as the *Stato da Terra*, or Mainland State. At a time marked by conflicts with neighbouring lordships, such as the Carraresi, Visconti and Scaligeri, control of the territory became a fundamental political and economic priority. Venice identified agriculture as a strategic resource for consolidating its rule and revitalising its economy. For this reason, major land reclamation projects were undertaken. These involved not only draining marshes, but also transforming the landscape through canals, embankments and new systems of water management, making previously marginal land suitable for cultivation. In this context, Villa Pojana was not merely a prestigious country residence, but also the centre of a large agricultural estate, from which the management of the land, the harvesting of produce and the daily work of many people were organised. The grains and containers displayed in the room's showcase illustrate this practical dimension of the villa: not only a place of art and prestige, but also the heart of a productive system that helped shape the Venetian landscape and its history.



6. VISITING VILLA POJANA

END OF THE VISIT

Our visit to Villa Pojana brings to a close a journey through one of the most fascinating examples of Palladian villa architecture in the Veneto. Here, architecture, painting and landscape come together to tell us not only about the taste and ambitions of a sixteenth-century noble family, but also about an entire way of living, governing and shaping the land. We have seen how the villa served both as a prestigious residence and as the centre of a large agricultural estate; how its frescoed rooms, with their emperors, allegories and references to the classical world, were designed to impress guests and celebrate the culture of the patron; and how even its more intimate spaces, decorated with grotesques and ornamental inventions, contributed to creating a sophisticated, refined world rich in meaning. Villa Pojana thus offers us a vivid image of a civilisation in which art, power and the cultivation of the land were deeply interconnected. As we leave these rooms, we are left with the sense of having experienced not merely a historic residence, but a place that still tells the story of the great age of the Venetian villa and of the enduring dialogue between beauty, memory and landscape.



7. THE VILLA AND THE LAND

VENETIAN LAND RECLAMATION

The construction of Venetian villas was closely linked to the transformation of the land promoted by the Republic of Venice between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries. To increase agricultural productivity and strengthen the economic resources of the Mainland State, the Venetian Republic encouraged numerous land reclamation and water-management projects designed to make vast areas of the plain suitable for cultivation. Much of the Veneto was characterised by waterlogged areas, seasonal flooding and land that was difficult to cultivate. Through the construction of canals, ditches, embankments and drainage systems, areas that had once been marginal were gradually reclaimed for agriculture. Land reclamation was not merely a technical undertaking, but a genuine project for transforming the landscape: controlling water meant increasing production, encouraging settlement and enhancing the economic value of landed estates. The area around Pojana was also affected by these processes. Water management helped shape the countryside that still characterises much of the Vicenza plain today. In this context, the villa became the centre from which a landscape profoundly shaped by human intervention was managed and administered. The prosperity of the Venetian countryside was therefore the result of a long collective effort that transformed the natural environment and created the conditions for the economic and social development of the early modern period.



7. THE VILLA AND THE LAND

WATER AND THE LANDSCAPE

Water is one of the elements that has most profoundly influenced the history and landscape of the Venetian plain. For centuries, rivers, streams, irrigation channels, canals and ditches shaped the land, determining where people could settle, cultivate crops and make use of natural resources. For rural communities, water was indispensable: it was used to irrigate fields, power mills, provide water for livestock and support numerous productive activities. At the same time, however, it could also become a threat when flooding caused damage to crops and settlements. For this reason, water management required constant maintenance. Canals and ditches had to be cleaned regularly, embankments inspected and hydraulic works kept in good condition. Landowners and local communities often worked together to carry out these tasks, aware that the prosperity of the countryside depended largely on maintaining a balance between water and land. In the Venetian landscape, water was not merely a functional element, but also contributed to the visual order of the territory. Fields, rows of trees, roads and waterways formed an organised system, reflecting human intervention in the natural environment. Palladian villas blended harmoniously into this setting, engaging with the surrounding landscape and becoming landmarks within a carefully shaped countryside.



7. THE VILLA AND THE LAND

THE COUNTRY GENTLEMAN

As Venetian rule over the mainland became firmly established, a new social figure emerged: the country gentleman. No longer the warrior or medieval castellan, he was a landowner, estate manager and man of culture, capable of combining the economic management of his property with an ideal of life based on a balance between activity, study and a close relationship with nature. Venetian and Vicentine nobles increasingly invested in mainland estates, which were regarded as a stable source of income and prestige. The villa became a place where they could spend part of the year, oversee the activities of the estate and receive guests. Landowners were expected to understand the management of the fields, the progress of crops and the work of the peasants, while also cultivating literary, artistic and political interests, in keeping with the Renaissance ideal of the cultivated man. Humanist ideas helped promote country life as an environment conducive to reflection and moderation. The villa thus became the symbol of an ideal harmony between economy, culture and landscape. Bonifacio Pojana, like many other landowners of his time, embodied this new figure, playing a central role in the transformation of the Venetian countryside and in the new relationship between the nobility, the land and architecture.



7. THE VILLA AND THE LAND

AGRICULTURAL ORGANISATION

Behind the elegance of the villas lay a complex agricultural organisation, essential to ensuring the productivity of the estates. Each property was managed according to precise principles designed to obtain the greatest possible yield from the available land and to coordinate labour, cultivation and the storage of harvests efficiently. Day-to-day management was often entrusted to estate stewards or administrators, who were responsible for supervising the work of the peasants, overseeing crops and managing financial matters. They acted as the link between the landowner and the rural world, ensuring the orderly operation of the agricultural estate. Properties included cultivated fields, meadows, vegetable gardens, stables, storehouses and facilities for preserving produce, all organised according to the rhythm of the seasons and the needs of production. Within this system, the villa played a central role. As well as being the owner's residence, it often housed archives, administrative offices and spaces devoted to managing the estate. The efficiency of this system of land management contributed to the economic growth of the Venetian mainland, transforming large areas of countryside into highly productive farmland and increasing the prosperity of landowning families.



THE GRANARY



7. THE VILLA AND THE LAND

CEREALS AND CROPS

Agriculture was the main source of wealth in the Venetian countryside. Crops were diversified and adapted to the characteristics of the land, ensuring both the subsistence of local communities and an income for landowners. Cereals lay at the heart of the agricultural system: wheat, rye and millet formed the basis of the diet and occupied extensive areas of cultivated land. Alongside cereals, vineyards, fruit trees, vegetables and fodder crops for livestock were also cultivated. During the early modern period, new species from other continents gradually became widespread, but for a long time the productive structure of the countryside remained firmly rooted in traditional crops and in the seasonal rhythms that governed their cultivation. Managing the fields required practical skills handed down over generations. Crop rotation, soil care and water management were essential for ensuring regular harvests and reducing the risk of famine. The wealth of landowning families depended to a large extent on their ability to organise these activities efficiently, transforming the countryside into a stable, productive and lasting resource.



7. THE VILLA AND THE LAND

THE WORKERS

Life on the great agricultural estates was made possible by the daily work of a large number of people. Farmers, farm labourers, wage workers and craftsmen made up the largest part of the rural population and played an essential role in the countryside economy. Without their constant contribution, no villa could have sustained the productivity of the land on which its prosperity depended. Agricultural activities required continuous work throughout the year: from preparing the soil to sowing, from maintaining canals to harvesting produce, each season involved specific tasks that were often demanding and repetitive. Many workers lived on the estates themselves, in rural dwellings scattered across the land. Their days were governed by natural rhythms and the needs of cultivation, and the family often formed the main working unit, involving men, women and children. Alongside the farmers were skilled workers such as carpenters, blacksmiths, masons, millers and other craftsmen essential to the operation of the agricultural estate. The history of the villas, often told through the names of their owners or architects, cannot be fully understood without recognising the role of these people, whose daily labour helped create and sustain the wealth of the Venetian rural landscape.



7. THE VILLA AND THE LAND

HISTORICAL MAPS

Historical maps are a valuable source for understanding the evolution of the landscape and agricultural estates. Through surveys, drawings and cadastral records, it is possible to reconstruct the appearance of the countryside in past centuries and trace changes in the landscape, crops and infrastructure that organised its space. From the early modern period onwards, landowners and public authorities increasingly commissioned detailed maps of estates. These documents made it possible to identify boundaries, fields, waterways, roads, buildings and agricultural structures, providing an essential tool for managing properties. Maps, however, served more than a practical purpose: measuring, drawing and describing the land also meant asserting ownership, planning its use and controlling its development. In the case of Venetian villas, historical maps allow us to observe the relationship between the main residence and the surrounding agricultural system. Fields, ditches, roads and structures appear organised according to principles that reflect the economic and administrative needs of the period. Today, these documents provide essential evidence for reconstructing the history of the landscape and understanding the role played by villas in transforming the countryside.



7. THE VILLA AND THE LAND

THE VILLA AS AN AGRICULTURAL ESTATE

For its contemporaries, a villa was not merely an elegant residence, but a fully functioning agricultural estate. Its main purpose was to organise and make productive use of the resources of the land, providing both income and prestige for the owning family. The villa was the decision-making centre of the estate: from here, the land was managed, production was supervised and seasonal activities were planned. Around the main building stood a range of complementary structures – storehouses, granaries, stables, rural dwellings and spaces for processing agricultural produce – which made the operation of the estate possible. The rationality that characterises Palladian architecture also reflects this economic dimension: buildings were designed to be functional, efficient and closely connected to the practical requirements of estate management. Villa Pojana, like many other villas on the Venetian mainland, therefore represents the meeting point between agricultural enterprise and humanist culture, between working the land and the pursuit of beauty. Understanding the villa as an agricultural estate means grasping its original significance: not simply a noble residence, but the vital centre of a productive system that shaped the landscape for centuries and contributed to the prosperity of the Veneto.



INTERIOR OF VILLA POJANA



8. THE BASEMENT

ORDER AND NECESSITY

Throughout the history of the house, the basement played an essential role in the organisation of daily life. Although removed from the reception rooms and the more visible aspects of family life, it performed indispensable functions: storing provisions, preserving food, keeping tools and everyday materials, and protecting goods and resources from waste, theft and deterioration. Far from being merely a secondary space, the basement was therefore a vital service area, closely connected with the domestic economy and the family's livelihood. Its importance arose first and foremost from practical necessity. At a time before electric refrigeration and modern preservation systems, it was essential to have cool spaces, protected from light and with relatively stable temperatures. Thanks to its partially or fully underground position, the basement provided ideal conditions for storing food, drink and products intended to last over time, becoming a valuable reserve during the winter months or in periods of hardship. Products intended for frequent use were kept in the most accessible areas, while those meant for long-term storage were placed in more sheltered corners. The basement thus reflected the overall organisation of the household: careful management ensured efficiency, economy and security, transforming a hidden space into one of the cornerstones of domestic life.



8. THE BASEMENT

PRESERVING FOOD

For centuries, one of the main functions of the basement was food preservation. Before the introduction of modern refrigeration, having food available throughout the year depended on the ability to store and manage supplies properly. Cooler than the upper floors and less exposed to light, the basement slowed the deterioration of food and provided suitable conditions for its preservation. Among the products most commonly stored were root vegetables such as potatoes, onions, carrots and turnips, often kept in wooden crates or containers filled with dry sand to protect them from excessive moisture. Fruit, too, could be preserved for long periods if properly ventilated. Meat and cured meats were preserved using traditional methods such as salting, smoking and drying, while hams and sausages were kept in rooms where temperature and humidity provided suitable conditions for proper curing. The basement was also an ideal place for storing wine, oil, vinegar and preserves. Bottles and demijohns were arranged in niches or racks, while fruit, vegetables and sauces prepared during periods of abundance were stored in carefully sealed jars and containers. Managing these supplies required constant attention: products had to be checked regularly, spoiled food removed and stocks rotated to prevent waste. Preserving food was not merely an economic necessity, but a genuine strategy for survival and the careful management of household resources.



8. THE BASEMENT

THE PANTRY

Within the basement, one of the most important spaces was the pantry, where food supplies were stored and organised. It could occupy a dedicated room or an area fitted with shelves and storage surfaces, designed to provide easy access to provisions while ensuring that they were properly preserved. The pantry was the quiet centre of the household economy: an orderly, carefully controlled and constantly replenished space on which the stability of the household largely depended. The shelves held flour, cereals, dried pulses, sugar, salt and other foods suitable for long-term storage, kept in wooden, ceramic or metal containers to protect them from moisture and pests. Alongside these were jams, pickled foods, dried products and homemade preserves, often prepared from the seasonal harvest and intended to provide supplies for the months ahead. In farming households, a significant part of the annual produce was set aside for the pantry, helping to ensure continuity and self-sufficiency in food supplies. The pantry was organised according to strict principles: supplies were arranged so that older products would be consumed first, reducing waste and keeping the system of provision efficient. Managing the pantry required care, experience and foresight, and responsibility for it was therefore often entrusted to specific members of the household. A well-stocked pantry was regarded as a sign of security and good management, capable of sustaining the household in times of famine, poor harvests or disruptions to trade.



8. THE BASEMENT

SECURITY SYSTEMS

In addition to storing food and materials, the basement also played an important role in terms of security. Accumulated provisions, working tools, wine, preserves and sometimes even small valuables represented tangible assets that needed to be carefully protected. In periods marked by economic instability, conflict or frequent theft, safeguarding these resources meant protecting the family's well-being and ensuring its survival. The solutions adopted varied over time, but they all had the same objective: to restrict access by outsiders and preserve the integrity of the stores. Basement doors were often made of solid wood and reinforced with metal fittings; windows, where present, were small or protected by iron grilles. In many houses there were only a few access points, making them easy to control, while more secluded rooms could be used to store particularly valuable goods. Security, however, also concerned another, less visible but equally important aspect: protecting food from mice, insects and damp. For this reason, closed containers, shelves raised above floor level, insulation systems and regular cleaning of the rooms were used. Routine inspection of the provisions was an integral part of these precautions.



INTERIOR DETAIL



INFILL ON THE FAÇADE



9. FROM THE TWENTIETH CENTURY TO THE PRESENT DAY

THE DECLINE OF THE VILLA

Villa Pojana remained in the hands of the family that had commissioned it until the end of the eighteenth century. With the extinction of the family line, the estate passed to Andrea Erizzo, husband of Beatrice Pojana, the family's last heir; later, through successive inheritances, the villa came into the possession of the Counts Maniscalchi of Verona. During the nineteenth century, they were responsible for constructing the long building that connects the eighteenth-century addition attributed to Francesco Muttoni with the original barchessa, bearing witness to an architectural history shaped by additions, adaptations and transformations. Over time, however, the villa gradually lost its original role. The noble residence, conceived as a place of representation and the centre of a wider rural estate, was put to inappropriate uses, including as a warehouse and storage space for productive activities. These changes, combined with inadequate maintenance and the lack of care shown by some owners, damaged both the structure and its decorative schemes, beginning a period of gradual decline. When a new awareness of the heritage value of the Venetian Villas emerged during the twentieth century, Villa Pojana was in a state of serious deterioration. The decay of the decorated surfaces, alterations to some of the spaces and the overall state of neglect made the need for public intervention increasingly clear. In 1963, the central body of the villa alone was expropriated for public use in favour of the then Ente per le Ville Venete; the procedure was completed four years later, opening a new chapter of protection and restoration for Villa Pojana.



9. FROM THE TWENTIETH CENTURY TO THE PRESENT DAY

THE RESTORATIONS

The state of deterioration of Villa Pojana made it essential, beginning in the 1960s, to undertake an initial restoration campaign, which was completed at the beginning of the following decade. A new and more mature phase of restoration began in the 1990s, when the villa required more extensive work, combining the structural consolidation of the building with a renewed investigation into its architectural history. The works, promoted by the Istituto Regionale Ville Venete under the supervision of the Verona Superintendency for Architectural Heritage, were carried out between 1995 and 2000 to a project by architects Francesco Doglioni and Giovanna Osti. Beginning with repairs to the roof, the restoration site became an important opportunity for research: the openings in the façade were investigated, the plasterwork was analysed and numerous original elements were identified, allowing for a more complex and informed understanding of the villa's long architectural history. This intervention marked a decisive moment in the conservation history of Villa Pojana, moving beyond the idea of restoration as a means of recreating an abstract and idealised image of the Palladian villa and instead recognising the value of its historical layers. Particularly significant was the decision to leave the extrados of the Hall of the Emperors visible: a refined system of small, shallow vaults that still allows visitors to appreciate the quality of the construction and the craftsmanship of Palladio's builders.

9. FROM THE TWENTIETH CENTURY TO THE PRESENT DAY

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, protects places of outstanding universal value by recognising them as World Heritage. Within this context, the work of Andrea Palladio holds a position of exceptional importance.

In 1994, UNESCO inscribed the site City of Vicenza and the Palladian Villas of the Veneto on the World Heritage List, recognising the outstanding value of Palladio's work as a whole. Extended in 1996, the site now includes the city of Vicenza and numerous villas scattered across the Veneto: not simply country residences, but a new model of architecture and landscape organisation, in which the noble residence, agricultural spaces and relationship with the surrounding territory are brought together within a unified design.

Villa Pojana is among the villas included in the UNESCO site, having been added in 1996 as one of the Palladian buildings recognised as World Heritage. Its inclusion on the List confirms its historical, artistic and cultural significance, recognising it as part of an ensemble that has profoundly shaped the identity of the Veneto and the history of Western architecture. Villa Pojana is not only one of the most original achievements of Palladio's mature period, but also an exemplary expression of the culture of the Venetian villa and its relationship with the landscape.

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MODEL OF THE VILLA



10. A VILLA FOR EVERYONE

THE PNRR PROJECT

The renewal of Villa Pojana reached a decisive stage in the spring of 2026 with a project funded through Italy's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR), secured by the Istituto Regionale Ville Venete through a funding programme dedicated to accessibility and the enhancement of cultural heritage. The project provided an opportunity to rethink the villa not only as a heritage site to be preserved, but as a place to be made increasingly welcoming, understandable and accessible to a wide range of visitors.

The project brought together a range of expertise: accessibility specialists, heritage professionals, designers, specialised companies, professional associations and local organisations. This collaboration gave rise to a shared approach in which accessibility was considered not simply as a matter of technical adaptation, but as an integral part of the way the villa is interpreted and experienced.

The aim was to create a more inclusive visitor experience, placing people and the ways in which they engage with the spaces, history and content at the heart of the project. From this perspective, the PNRR project marked an important stage in the life of the villa, bringing together conservation, innovation and a strong focus on visitors.



10. A VILLA FOR EVERYONE

3D TACTILE MODELS

Among the most significant features introduced as part of the new visitor experience are three-dimensional tactile models of the Villa Pojana complex and its different floors. These resources make it possible to understand the architecture not only through sight, but also through tactile exploration.

They are particularly important for blind and partially sighted visitors, as they make it possible to perceive volumes, spatial relationships and the organisation of the rooms. Through touch, visitors can recognise the structure of the villa, orient themselves within its spaces and gain a deeper understanding of the logic behind Palladio's design.

The models, however, are not intended exclusively for visitors with visual impairments. They offer an opportunity for discovery for everyone: children, families and visitors curious to experience a more direct way of engaging with architecture. In this sense, Villa Pojana also presents itself as a “museum to touch”, where knowledge is gained through multiple senses, making the understanding of space more tangible.



10. UNA VILLA PER TUTTI

AAC, ITALIAN SIGN LANGUAGE AND DIGITAL TOOLS

Villa Pojana's accessibility project has also placed great emphasis on different forms of communication, based on the belief that a cultural site can only be truly open when it is able to communicate with a wide range of audiences. For this reason, an AAC guide — using Augmentative and Alternative Communication — has been created to make the content easier to understand for people with communication or cognitive difficulties. Alongside this resource, the use of Italian Sign Language (LIS) enables deaf visitors to access information in a more direct and inclusive way. The visitor experience is further enhanced by a new generation of digital tools, including touch-screen displays, informative videos and multimedia content that guide visitors through the villa and its historical context. One of the most engaging features is an interactive game station dedicated to the works of Andrea Palladio, designed especially to introduce younger visitors to architecture through play and discovery. Together, these initiatives present Villa Pojana as a place that looks to the present and considers accessibility an essential part of its cultural mission.

11. SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

ESSENTIAL TIMELINE

1240 — The first castle on the site is destroyed; the land on which the villa would later be built remains in the possession of the Pojana family.

1548–1549 — Bonifacio Pojana commissions Andrea Palladio to design the new villa.

1555 — The new villa is already recorded as built, although not yet completed.

1563 — The villa is recorded as completed and frescoed.

1570 — Palladio publishes Villa Pojana in *The Four Books of Architecture*, establishing it as one of the models of the Venetian villa.

1615 — Construction of the barchessa and the boundary wall enclosing the agricultural section of the complex is completed.

1648 — The statues on the pediment of the villa, representing Painting, Sculpture and Architecture, are created.

1658 — The statues of Jupiter and Neptune are placed on either side of the main staircase.

First half of the 18th century — The left wing of the villa is built.

19th century — The long building connecting the left wing to the villa and the northern barchessa is constructed.

1959 — Villa Pojana is entrusted to the management of the Istituto Regionale Ville Venete; this marks the beginning of a period of systematic protection of the building.

Second half of the 20th century — Conservation work is carried out on the villa to safeguard its Palladian structure and enhance its heritage value.

1996 — Villa Pojana is included in the UNESCO World Heritage Site “City of Vicenza and the Palladian Villas of the Veneto”.

11. SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

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