

# SECRET ROME



GINEVRA LOVATELLI, ADRIANO MORABITO AND MARCO GRADOZZI



JONGLEZ PUBLISHING

## VILLA MARAINI

48 Via Ludovisi

- Guided tours: every Monday at 3pm and 4pm (in English, French and Italian), on request only, by writing to: [visite@istitutovizzero.it](mailto:visite@istitutovizzero.it)
- Admission €5
- Metro: A – Barberini; Bus: 61, 63, 80, 83, 116



***A superb panoramic view from an artificial hill***

In the heart of the Ludovisi district, close to Via Veneto, Villa Maraini offers one of the most spectacular views over the city: from the tower of the villa is a 360° panoramic viewpoint that is only 3 metres lower than the belvedere on the dome of Saint Peter's Basilica.

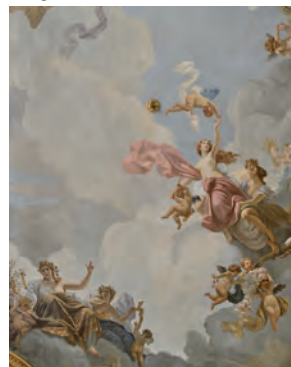
This luxurious and eclectic building combining Renaissance and Baroque influences was built between 1903 and 1905 by Emilio Maraini, a successful captain of industry born in Lugano, Switzerland, in 1853. He began to produce sugar from beets that he had grown in the countryside around Rieti and in a few years became the “sugar king”. He then obtained Italian citizenship and even became a member of parliament, which is why he moved to Rome. A short distance from the church of Trinità dei Monti he bought some land where tonnes of stone, gravel and rubble had been piled up, partly for the construction of Via Ludovisi. Rather than just dispose of the rubbish, Maraini had the idea of building his house on top of this artificial hill.

The majestic three-storey villa, set in lush gardens, was designed by his architect brother Otto, who was also involved with the construction of the Excelsior Hotel on Via Veneto.

Inside, stucco, columns, frescoes, tapestries and marble figures grace the rooms, among which is the unmissable grand ballroom overlooking a loggia open to the garden. The monumental staircase with its three landings, flanked by two columns and graced with an incredible marble parapet, leading from the ground floor to the first floor, is very impressive. The villa's decorations are

the originals, embellished with copies of antique sculptures.

The owner's widow, Countess Carolina Maraini-Sommaruga, donated the villa to the Swiss Confederation in 1947. Since 1949, it has been home to the Swiss Institute, whose mission is to promote scientific and artistic exchanges between Switzerland and Italy.



## THE FAÇADE OF PALAZZO ZUCCARI

Via Gregoriana  
• Metro: A - Spagna

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### “Monsters on the façade

Palazzo Zuccari occupies an area comprising the last part of Via Sistina and that of Via Gregoriana and its façade is probably the most curious and unusual in the city. The cornices of the main door and of the windows are all formed by gaping monsters' mouths.

Federico Zuccari, the famous Baroque artist, bought the land in 1590, struck by its wonderful location, and he built the house and the studio for himself and his children, drawing inspiration for the palace's façade from the “monstrous” style of the famous monsters of Bomarzo, close to Viterbo. This architectural whimsy was both criticised and admired, but in any case soon became the ideal house for artists in the area. Through the Accademia di San Luca, Zuccari left the dwelling to foreign artists, but his wishes were not respected and when the artist died, the building was passed on to another owner.

The Queen of Poland lived there from 1702 and for decades the house was the centre of high society in the city. After several changes of ownership, Zuccari's wish finally came true and the building became an inn for foreign artists. Winckelmann and Reynolds stayed there, David and Nazareni painted famous works there, and it appears in *Il Piacere* (The Child of Pleasure) by Gabriele D'Annunzio. In 1900 Henrietta Hertz, the last owner, left her collection

of paintings to the Italian state and the palazzo and its library to Germany, allowing for the creation of the famous Biblioteca Hertziana (Hertzian Library), specialised in art history and still open today to scholars with special letters of recommendation.

The building, which is closed to the public for restoration, is full of important works, such as the frescoes of Giulio Romano.

In the basement the ruins of the villa of Lucullo, from the end of the Roman Republic, were found.



## PRIVATE TOUR OF PALAZZO SACCHETTI

5

Via Giulia, 66

- Visits on request reserved for cultural associations or groups, Monday to Friday



**A jewel  
waiting to be  
discovered**

The sumptuous Sacchetti Palace is still the residence of the family of that name, which explains why it is less famous than other Roman palaces, even though it was built and decorated by such renowned artists as Antonio da Sangallo and Francesco Salviati.

On the death of Sangallo, the original owner, the palace was bought by Cardinal Ricci di Montepulciano, who commissioned Nanni di Baccio Bigio to make some alterations, including the masterful Sala dei Mappamondi, with its walls frescoed by Salviati depicting scenes from the Old and New Testaments. The allegorical and mythological decorations of the majestic gallery were carried out by Giacomo Rocca.

In the middle of the 17th century, the palace passed into the hands of Cardinal Giulio Sacchetti, member of a family of Florentine merchants and bankers, who wasted no time in carving out a prominent position for himself in Roman society and acquiring the title of marquis, buying up vast properties in the Latium countryside and throwing himself enthusiastically into the business of artistic patronage.

Cardinal Giulio did not make many changes when he moved into this splendid palace, but he began to collect hundreds of precious objects, archaeological artefacts, and contemporary works of art, including some twenty paintings by Pietro da Cortona. Only two works remain from this remarkable collection, *Adam and Eve* and *The Holy Family*. The others have been dispersed, the fortunes of the Sacchetti family having sharply declined at the beginning of the 18th century following their dazzling rise up to the time of Cardinal Giulio, who at one point almost became pope.

At the side of the palace overlooking the Tiber, a recently restored nymphaeum still embellishes the garden, which used to run right down to the water before the construction of the quays. Within a small arcade are two niches with an ornamental basin and satyrs portrayed lifting a section of drapery to reveal an imaginary view of Rome. Above, the framed family coat of arms can be seen, surmounted by ephebes. In addition to the stucco, imitation marble, and mosaics, the artistic techniques used here are highly original: real shells embedded at various points alternate with festoons of fruit and flowers covered with coloured glass designs, not to mention the *tartari*, chalk formations imitating stalactites and stalagmites.



## PALAZZO PAMPHILJ

13

Brazilian Embassy  
14 Piazza Navona

- Free tours on registration with Embassy website (lengthy waiting list)
- [www.ambasciatadelbrasil.it](http://www.ambasciatadelbrasil.it) • Tel: 06 683981



### The main gallery of the Brazilian Embassy

Palazzo Pamphilj, built in the 17th century, has accommodated the Brazilian Embassy since 1920. Twice a month, visitors who have booked ahead are shown round the seven magnificent chambers on the first floor (*piano nobile*), where biblical

and mythological subjects alternate in the work of the most famous artists of the time: Giacinto Gimignani, Agostino Tassi (who went down in history as the rapist of Artemisia Gentileschi), Andrea Camassei, Gaspard Dughet and Giacinto Brandi.

The highlight of the visit is the main gallery, which is over 30 m wide and overlooks Piazza Navona. Designed by Francesco Borromini and decorated (1651-1654) by Pietro da Cortona, whose fresco cycle depicts scenes from the life of Aeneas, this privileged environment was designed to welcome and

impress even the most distinguished guests of the Pamphilj family.

Although the Pamphilj had owned houses on this side of Piazza Navona since the 15th century, it was not until two centuries later that the family had its moment of glory, when Cardinal Giovanni Battista was elected to the pontifical throne as Innocent X in 1644. This taciturn and wary pope was little loved by the public on whom he imposed heavy taxes to satisfy his architectural ambitions. As soon as he became pontiff, he commissioned Girolamo Rainaldi to build this magnificent palace as well as the church of Sant'Agnese in Agone (the family's private chapel), two projects on which Borromini subsequently worked.

The palazzo is also linked to Donna Olimpia Maidalchini, the pope's sister-in-law and one of the most influential women of her time. An authoritarian and hated figure, all kinds of sordid acts were attributed to her (it was said that she ran Rome's brothels); her ghost is still believed to haunt Piazza Navona. This powerful woman, nicknamed "Pimpaccia" (a pejorative diminutive of Olimpia) as well as "she-pope", was probably no worse than her male contemporaries but she was never forgiven for her influence over Innocent X (she was reputed to be his mistress). She was also renowned for her greed – it is said that on the pope's death she stole two chests filled with gold meant for his funeral expenses. In the end, Innocent X was buried without pomp and ceremony in the crypt of Saint Agnes, the place he had built by starving the people.



## THE “NOBLE FLOOR” OF PALAZZO SPADA 20

13 Piazza Capo di Ferro

• Tel. 06 6832409

• Open the first Sunday of every month at 10:30am, 11:30am and 12:30pm

• Admission: €6 + entry ticket to Galleria Spada

• Tram: 8

“ A splendid  
palace open  
once a month

Many curious passers-by go inside the courtyard of Palazzo Spada to admire the famous optical illusion created by Borromini, while lovers of 17th- and 18th-century paintings will have already contemplated those in the Spada Gallery, but very few also know of the palace’s sumptuous *piano nobile* (literally “noble floor” in Italian – the main floor). The seat of the State Council, it is normally closed to the public except on the first Sunday of the month.

The palace, which was built at the behest of Cardinal Girolamo Capodiferro from 1548 onwards by the architect Bartolomeo Baronino, already had extraordinary paintings and stucco decorations decorating the Galleria degli Stucchi (Stucco Gallery) and the Sala delle Quattro Stagioni (Four Seasons Hall) of the main floor in 1550. Another extremely rich stucco decoration (by Giulio Mazzoni, Diego di Fiandra, Tommaso del Bosco and Leonardo Sormani) adorned the inner courtyard and the façade.

Cardinal Bernardino Spada acquired the palace in 1632, and commissioned painters, sculptors and architects with a series of new work. He extended the left wing of the palace onto Vicolo dell’Arco and the right wing onto Vicolo del Polverone, and created a painting gallery in four halls of the left wing of the main floor (these halls have remained intact and today are open to the public), but above all he gave expression to his passion for optics and astronomy.

The walls of the Salone di Pompeo (Pompey Hall), next to the Four Seasons Hall, are painted with distorted architectural perspectives. The adjoining Corridor of the Meridian, a catoptric sundial based on reflected light and not on shadow, was constructed by Father Emmanuel Maignan (see below) in 1644 or 1646, depending on the source.



There is another catoptric sundial at the convent of Trinità dei Monti (see page 27 for more information on this type of sundial).

## THE CLOISTER OF SAN GIOVANNI BATTISTA DEI GENOVESI 2

12 Via Anicia

• Open Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2pm-4pm in winter and 3pm-5pm in summer



**A  
little-known  
15th-century  
marvel**

**A**mong the maze of buildings in the Trastevere district is the headquarters of the brotherhood of Saint John the Baptist, where one of the most beautiful cloisters in Rome is hidden from the street. Access is via the church through a little door in the left-hand wall.

You will find yourself in a haven of peace and silence, immediately entranced by the beauty of the ground-floor archways buttressed onto octagonal columns and the architraves of the upper storey, as well as the contrast between their shade and the luxuriant green plants bathed in sunshine. In the centre of the garden stands a 14th-century travertine well, set off by two antique columns in Ionic style.

Fragments of antique marble are scattered here and there beneath the arcades. The church and most of the buildings were given so many facelifts between the 15th and 19th centuries that they have lost their original appearance, with the exception of the old hospice and the cloister, built in 1481 and attributed to Baccio Pontelli, designer of the Sistine Chapel.

An inscription on a funerary stele explains that inside the cloister there used to be a compound, demolished at the end of the 18th century, while another inscription on a column, in Latin this time, says that in this cloister the very first palm tree to be imported to Rome was planted by a friar from Savona in the late 16th century.

The cycle of frescoes attributed to Guido Signorini and Gerolamo Margotti date from the beginning of the 17th century, however. They were discovered in the 1970s under a thick coat of lime-washed plaster during the restoration of the site.

The brotherhood was founded in 1533, although the church dedicated to Saint John the Baptist (patron saint of the city of Genoa) and its hospice (founded by Pope Sixtus IV and paid for by the Genoese ambassador to help sailors) already existed.

### WHY IS JOHN THE BAPTIST THE PATRON SAINT OF GENOA?

Around the year 1100, on the way back to Genoa from the Crusades, Genoese sailors stopped off along the coast of Lycia [now south-western Turkey] and found the ashes of Saint John the Baptist in a convent, not far from the town of Myra [modern Demre]. Following this episode, the town adopted the saint as its patron.

## CASINO DELL'AURORA

1

Palazzo Pallavicini-Rospigliosi

43 Via XXIV Maggio

• Tel: 06 83467000

• Open first day of the month, 10am-12pm and 3pm-5pm

• Admission: Free

• Private visits: Every day, group of 20 people minimum (€15 per person on weekdays and €20 per person on public holidays)

• Specialised foreign language guides available on request



**See  
the dawn  
once a month**

In the grounds of the extraordinary Palazzo Pallavicini-Rospigliosi, the Casino dell'Aurora (Dawn Pavilion) is open to the public free of charge on the first day of every month. The palace, built in 1610 over the ruins of the Baths of Constantine, was the former home of the powerful Cardinal Mazarin (Giulio Mazzarino). The *casino* (pavilion), designed at the same time as the hanging garden and the semicircular fountain on the opposite side, was built by the Flemish cabinet-maker Giovanni Vasanzio (the Italian name of Jan Van Santen), who became the assistant of the celebrated architect Flaminio Ponzio upon arriving in Rome. The building's two levels are only visible on the outside from Via XXIV Maggio, because on the other side, which faces the garden, the lower level is buried due to the difference in height between street and garden. The building, which on both levels consists of a central hall flanked by two smaller rooms, has the typical "C" form of hunting lodges and suburban villas built from the end of the 15th century, and the garden side corresponds to the second floor of the building reserved for banquets and formal ceremonies. On the ceiling of the central hall is the fresco masterpiece that gives the pavilion its name: *Aurora* by Guido Reni, painted 1613-1614, and one of the most copied works in the history of art over the past four centuries. The central hall is filled with 17th-century marble busts of Roman emperors and famous Greek statues, such as *Artemis the Huntress* and the *Rospigliosi Athena*.

### PRIVATE VISIT: THE SIDE ROOMS OF CASINO DELL'AURORA

By booking [Madame Capaccioli at 06 83467000], not only can you visit the pavilion in peace but also gain access to two side rooms that are closed during the monthly public tours.

The ceilings are frescoed with Giovanni Baglione's *Renaldo and Armida* and Passignano's *Battle of Armida*. There are also two paintings by Guido Reni, *Christ Crucified* and *Andromeda Freed by Perseus*, as well as *The Death of Julian the Apostate* and *The Conversion of Saul* by Luca Giordano.

### PAVILION OF THE MUSES

Exceptionally it may also be possible to visit the Pavilion of the Muses, which forms part of the same palace complex. Some very fine frescoes can be seen there by Orazio Gentileschi and Agostino Tassi. Reservation again through Madame Capaccioli at 06 83467000.



## FISH FARM NEAR STAZIONE TERMINI

10

Casa dell'Architettura – ex Acquario romano  
Piazza Manfredo Fanti

- Open from 9:30am-5pm except during events
- For further details, call 06 97604580
- Metro: A or B – Termini



*The  
troubled history of  
an unusual dream*

This building in the Esquilino district, a new development in the heart of the Kingdom of Italy's fledgling capital, was originally the idea of Pietro Carganico, a Lombard entrepreneur who had arrived in Rome in 1881. His plan was to create a fish farm-cum-pisciculture centre, aquarium and outlet for the “wholesale supply of fish for food”.

This unusual and elegant building of classical design, with an imposing pronaos (porch) shaped like a Greek arch, took only two years to build on ground conceded by the Municipality of Rome. Completed at the end of 1885, it was opened in 1887.

The cylindrical hall with mezzanine was filled with twenty-two aquariums aligned along the walls, and decorated with stucco, cast-iron columns, paintings on marine themes and polychrome mosaic flooring (unfortunately now covered over, with the exception of a tiny section at the entrance), all below a large iron-framed glass canopy.

Carganico's ambitions were thwarted long before work began, however: by a series of legal manoeuvres he was sidelined, and after many vicissitudes the building became the property of the municipality.

Until 1899 it was indeed used as an aquarium, before a disturbed period began in which the various spaces were given over to alternative uses: a venue for festivals and fairs, skating rink, circus, cinema and gymnasium. In 1908, the building was turned into a small-time theatre for variety shows and revues. The 1930s saw various proposals for converting the building into public baths or a regional bus station, or even demolishing it. In the meantime the building was used to store scenery for the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma (Rome Opera House) and as the municipal electoral offices.

In 1984, major renovation works began, which when completed six years later saw the building's original splendour restored. The “recovered” space is now home to Rome's Casa dell'Architettura (House of Architecture) and once again hosts cultural events.

Although nothing remains of the fish-farming constructions (which included an outside lake and pools in the basements), nor the twenty-two aquariums, the beauty of the building, with its numerous nods to the maritime way of life – a reminder of Pietro Carganico's dream – can still be appreciated.



## A VISIT TO VILLA ALBANI

7

92 Via Salaria

• Apply by fax [06 68199934] or e-mail [amministrazione@srdps.191.it](mailto:amministrazione@srdps.191.it)



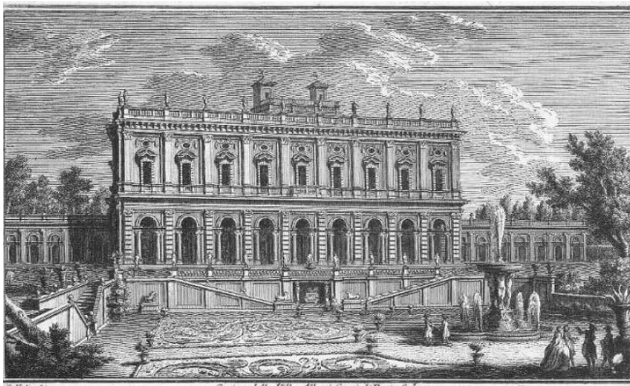
**An (almost)  
inaccessible  
treasure**

**M**ost Romans believe that the fabulous Villa Albani is closed to the public, but in fact it can be visited by appointment.

This villa is one of Rome's largest and most important late Baroque buildings. Designed as a suburban residence for pleasure and leisure, it was filled with works of art and held festivals and concerts, all within a large park extending over 10 hectares – from Via Salaria to Viale Regina Margherita, the third-largest green space in the city. It also has a splendid Italian garden dotted with fountains.

The villa was built over a period of twenty years from 1747, under the direction of architect Carlo Marchionni, and was designed as the residence of Cardinal Alessandro Albani, nephew of Pope Clement XI. It was then inherited by the Castelbarco and Chigi families before being bought in 1866 by Prince Alessandro Torlonia, banker and art lover, who had carried out excavations at Villa Massenzio and Villa Quintili.

The main building consists of a ground floor flanked by two wings with arcades and a *piano nobile* (first-floor salon). Part of the Museo Torlonia (Torlonia Museum), the largest private collection of ancient sculptures – statues, bas-reliefs, sarcophagi and busts – is housed here. The villa also has a large art gallery, which has been inaccessible to the public for centuries but houses works by Perugino, Guercino, Van Dyck, Tintoretto, Giulio Romano and many other painters. There are also precious Etruscan frescoes

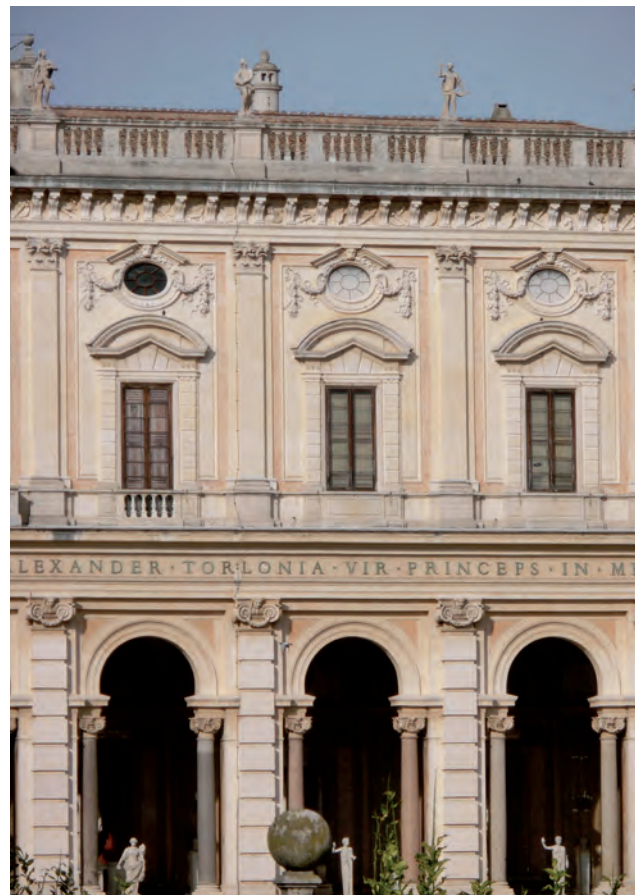


Di F. de' Rossi. Casina della Villa Albani, fuori di Porta Salaria. Fontana con statue antiche e tarnea di arrendo Baisi a Portana con statue antiche di bronzo e due Sibille Baisi. e Portici con statue antiche e colonne di arca.

from the François Tomb at Vulci. Inside is the wonderful Parnassus salon, with its ceiling fresco by the neoclassical painter Anton Raphael Mengs. In an adjoining room the famous relief depicting Antinoüs, originally from Hadrian's Villa, stands in the hearth.

In one of these rooms, on the afternoon of 20 September 1870, a few hours after the nearby Porta Pia had been breached, leading to the fall of Rome, the Papal States signed the surrender of the city. The villa effectively became the headquarters of the Italian army. At the opposite end of the garden is a belvedere known as the "Caffehaus". There are other minor buildings in the park, including a small temple that served as an aviary and fake ruins built with authentic archaeological fragments.

For years there has been talk of the villa (which still belongs to the Torlonia family) being expropriated so that it can be enjoyed by the people of Rome, but this does not seem likely to happen any time soon.



## THE SALVATOR MUNDI BY BERNINI

8

Basilica of San Sebastiano fuori le mura

136 Via Appia Antica

• Tel: 06 78 87 035

• Open daily 8am - 7pm

• Bus: 218; or 5 km on foot from Circo Massimo



**Bernini's  
last masterpiece  
found!**

The basilica of San Sebastiano fuori le mura (Saint Sebastian outside the walls) flanks the celebrated Appian Way, the *regina viarum* (“queen of roads”). In 2001, Bernini’s last masterpiece, still largely unknown to the general public, was found in the adjoining convent.

To reach the basilica, you can avoid the traffic by following the route of the catacombs of Saint Calixtus, departing from the church known as *Domine Quo Vadis* and emerging near the basilica. Strangely enough, you will pass sheep grazing along the roadside.

A church was first built here in the 4th century on the site of the catacombs of Saint Sebastian. It was rebuilt by Pope Nicholas I (858-867), but we owe the present edifice to Cardinal Scipion Borghese (1576-1633) who had it built at the beginning of the 17th century. The façade dates from the 18th century.

In August 2001, through a series of coincidences, art historians identified a statue by Bernini in a small niche at the entrance to the convent of Saint Sebastian. The work, which had been sought for a long time, and allegedly found several times since 1972, had disappeared at the end of the 17th century.

The bust now stands beside the Relics Chapel. The finesse of the marble sculpture, and the gesture of the hand raised in blessing, is proof enough that we are in the presence of work by the great master of Baroque sculpture, Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598-1680). The *Salvator Mundi* is a marble bust of Christ that is considered to be his last masterpiece, sculpted in 1679. Bernini’s son, Pier Filippo, wrote in his 1680 biography of his father that the latter had “worked in marble until his 81st year, which he finished with a Saviour out of his devotion”.

In the Relics Chapel is a stone bearing the imprint of the foot of Christ at the moment when he appeared to Saint Peter. Tradition has it that, fleeing Rome to avoid persecution, Peter met the risen Jesus along the Appian Way and asked him: “*Quo vadis, Domine?*” (“Where are you going, Lord?”). Jesus answered: “*Eo Romam iterum crucifigi.*” (“I am going to Rome to be crucified again.”) This meeting convinced Peter to retrace his steps and face martyrdom in Rome.

The Relics Chapel also contains one of the arrows that struck Saint Sebastian during his martyrdom. Directly opposite is a beautiful sculpture of the saint by Antonio Giorgetti, one of Bernini’s pupils.