

- Villa Doria Pamphilj -



English Version

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Villa Doria Pamphilj, placed just outside Porta S. Pancrazio on the ancient Via Aurelia, is one of the most beautiful parts of the city: it is situated on an area of 445 acres in the heart of Rome and it is one of its largest parks.

Several buildings were erected on its surface – two villas, one *Casino*, one theatre and one chapel – as well as the gardens, the small lake with a cascade, the pinewood and some architectonic elements such as fountains, statues and even the ruins of a necropolis that may be dated between the end of the Republican period and the Second century A.D.

The importance of this site is due to its historical and naturalistic value.

In this place administrative requirements and cultural and didactic activities meet together: on the one hand, the *Casino del Bel Respiro*, also known as *Palazzina dell'Algardi* from the name of its designer, is, in fact, the representation office of the Premiership of the Italian government, on the other hand, the main structure of the Villa called *Vecchia* comprises the Civic Museum of Villa Doria Pamphilj, dedicated to the history of the Roman villa. It is divided into sections describing its origin in the Sixteenth century and illustrating the events that brought to the conclusion of the construction in the Eighteenth Century. Inside *Palazzina Corsini* there is a library used as site for changing arts exhibitions. Finally, the whole area is an important recreative and amusing place for people of all ages.

The history of the main building begins in the first half of the 1600 with the vicissitudes of Prince Panfilo Pamphilj, a representative of the powerful Umbrian family, who bought the pre-existing building (called nowadays *Villa Vecchia*) and the surrounding lands cultivated with vines. Anyhow, the real transformation of the land happened when Cardinal Giovanni Battista Pamphilj became Pope as Innocent X.

Just like most of the offspring of the noble families of that time, Giovanni Battista, who was a patron and protector of artists, in order to enhance his power and praise his ancestry, chose this place as the suitable one to erect a new and stately villa where he could practise his favourite hobbies such as hunting and attending theatrical performances and concerts with his most faithful men.

The design was entrusted to the sculptor Alessandro Algardi and to the painter Giovan Francesco Grimaldi. They built a house known as *Casino di Allegrezze* or *C. del Bel Respiro* or *C. delle molte statue*, so called for the large quantity of statues carved by Algardi himself. It was conceived as a place for parties, balls and great receptions, as well as a site to preserve the first part of the Pamphilj artistic collection, which is still possible to admire at the *Galleria Doria Pamphilj* (Via del Corso 305, Rome): among its paintings, there are even works by Caravaggio, Raffaello Sanzio and Carracci.

The building, seat of the Belgium Embassy until 1962, is conceived in typical Baroque style and it is developed on two storeys on the façade and on three storeys on the back part due to the gradient of the ground.

The façades are enriched with friezes, relieves, ancient sarcophagi and stuccoes. On the inside, the various halls, restored a short time ago, are adorned with stuccoes and frescoes. The path leading to the house is embellished with Roman statues dated back to the First and Second century A.D.

It was Algardi who further modified the land surrounding the villa by turning the vineyards into a place of delights through the creation of spectacular fountains: it is still possible to admire the *Fontana di Venere (Venus Fountain)*, *Fontana della Regina (Queen's Fountain)* and *Fontana del Giglio (Lily Fountain)*, but also temples, natural labyrinths and water games such as an hydraulic organ which could play different melodies but which was unfortunately almost completely lost in the Nineteenth century. In the park, there is even a small lake called *del Belvedere* with natural cascades to please the Roman nobility which spent there their free time.

In the Seventeenth century, the villa became renowned even outside Italy, so that many travellers intentionally visited the place to admire its beauties and above all to celebrate the magnificence of the park.

The *Giardino Segreto (Secret Garden)* and the *Giardino del Teatro (Theatre Garden)*, built in the second half of the Seventeenth century and preserving nowadays only part of their original frames, were the most important attraction of the place.

Conceived with a geometric and linear, but not austere, structure, those two gardens looked like pleasant spots: there were clipped hedges with different shapes such as the coat of arms of the family (three golden lilies and a dove with an olive branch in its beak), park benches, where people could sit and relax watching theatrical and musical shows, marble busts of ancient subjects, a merry-go-round with wooden horses, rare and exotic plants such as palms, citrus fruits and citron trees and pine tree woods, where the nobles could hunt deer and pheasants.

In 1849 a bloody battle took place in this area between Napoleon III's army and Garibaldi's legions for the defence of the Roman Republic. The French took possession of *Villa Corsini* while the Italian army was defeated.

In the second half of the Nineteenth century the two villas were joined together and used as farm by the architect Andrea Busiri Vici on behalf of Andrea Filippo V Doria Pamphilj, while the gardens were changed from the 'Italian style' to the English one with the construction of greenhouses made of cast iron and crystal in order to preserve pineapples and exotic plants.

During the Fascist Regime, the *Comune di Roma (Rome Council)* began the expropriation of the estate and of the buildings; furthermore, in 1967 the Italian government bought the *Palazzina dell'Algardi* and the gardens, whereas Rome Council bought the land in the '60-70's in order to open it to the public.

The most recent building, that may be dated between the end of the Eighteenth and the beginning of the Nineteenth century, is the *Cappella Doria Pamphilj (Chapel)* designed by the architect Collamarini in Neo-gothic - Romanesque style with mosaic decorations. It still belongs to the descendants of the family that in the Eighteenth century merged with the Genoese one of the Doria.

In 2002 the Council began the works for the improvement and arrangement of the woodland to recover the green open spaces.

Inside the *Villa Vecchia*, is housed the Civic Museum illustrating the history of the area, an essential mean to understand and admire the whole structure following a chronological path that goes through the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth century.

Some of the statues and décors that adorned the estate are now kept in a permanent exhibition, in order to preserve them from the weather and from acts of vandalism. Even the fountains, the busts of famous men, the statues belonging to the Bernini school, those with funeral themes and the ones representing oriental myths such as the Nile and the Sphinxes, are preserved in the museum.