



THE HISTORY

The history of the Villa Emo is very closely linked to the history of the family that commissioned it. Before 1535, on deciding to retire from his life of service to the state, the Venetian nobleman Leonardo Emo, already familiar with the flat landscape around Fanzolo, acquired 80 Trevisan fields from Andrea Barbarigo. His aim was to devote himself actively to the reclamation and cultivation of the land and the raising of livestock to the renewal of crops and to establishing flour and silk mills.

Leonardo Emo's undertaking with respect to agricultural planning and land administration resulted in a decided improvement in farm management. His first concern, within the framework of a carefully structured agricultural campaign, was to create a system for the distribution of the plentiful water supply on his lands, so as to ensure the watering of his animals and the irrigation of his crops. In 1536 the Doge, Andrea Gritti, granted Emo the rights to a small water course, known as the "seriola Barbariga", an offshoot from the Brentella Canal. The canal system devised in the sixteenth century imposed the original pattern on the organisation of land and buildings. It is present to this day and clearly recognisable in the property of Fanzolo.

The innovation which most influenced the subsequent history of the territory, both economically and socially, was the introduction of the maize crop, or Indian corn. This replaced the broomcorn, locally known as red sorghum, till then the basis of the wretched local diet. The subsequent improvement to the family table, in the shape of polenta, guaranteed a warm welcome from the resident population to their benefactors. The transition is recorded in the frescoes which ornament the

main rooms of the villa; among the many agrarian motifs and festoons of flowers and fruits of the earth, decorative cornucopias catch the eye. Leonardo Emo's plan was undoubtedly to build a house on the lands in Fanzolo, but he died in 1539, before carrying it out. It was instead his grandson, another Leonardo, who commissioned the great architect, Andrea Palladio, to build the villa in the latter half of the 1550s. Not much is known about the relationship between the patron and his architect, but it is certain that for the young Leonardo the project was highly stimulating and challenging in its interpretation of the humanist principles according to which "dall'intelligenza (dell'architettura) nasceva il diletto e il piacevole spendere". Probable influences on the project in Fanzolo may be traced to the Villa Soranza in Treviso, Castelfranco, and the smaller Villa Cornaro at Sant'Andrea oltre il Muson.

Of a slightly earlier date, both villas may have served as models for the philosophy and architectural language underlying Emo's and Palladio's plan. The finished project in Fanzolo reflects the former's personality; Emo enjoined his architect to design a model farm building which would at the same time serve as a home and granary for the needs of the family and their retainers. The resulting achievement, one of Palladio's most spacious, was of a residence completely open to the surrounding countryside, simple but imposing, evocative of the classical image but well-suited to the practicalities of daily life, with the activities of the farm labourers and the intellectual employment of the owner and his circle gathered together under one roof. Leonardo Emo, as master of the estate, made it his concern to oversee the deployment of water on his land, the requirements of the farm and livestock, as well as the good governance of the villa itself, with its splendid architecture and decoration. A picture emerges of a new kind of socio-economic reality in which fruitful communication between different levels of society, till then at odds with one another, had become possible.



THE ARCHITECTURE

The principles which informed Leonardo Emo's project in Fanzolo found clear expression in his architect's design: an extremely simple ground plan based on parallel fundamental axes, a language pared to its essence with no concessions to extra architectural elements, reveal the force of its creator's ideas and the purity of its composition.

In the plan of Villa Emo the architect achieves perfect harmony between the architectural form, the functions to which it is linked, and the surrounding landscape. Inspired by the symmetry of Roman buildings, Villa Emo is the geometric epitome of the spatial structures present in all Palladio's villas, becoming, through the simplicity of its style and plan, emblematic of the canons which characterise the Palladian opus. Because of its particularly open lay-out the villa has often been compared to the Villa Barbaro at Maser. In these two innovative projects the "barchesse" (wings), continuations of the central dwelling-house, do not enclose an outside space but are anchored to the ground, and follow the lines dictated by the landscape, in which the old Roman grid can still be recognised.

At Villa Emo simplicity and a certain severity prevail, qualities emphasised by the almost total alignment of the "barchesse" with the main façade, where the portico and fronton recess into the body of the villa, and confirmed by the austere dove-cotes, set slightly back, which in no way reflect the elaborate architectural choices present in the façade of the villa at Maser. The balance and harmony of the architectural composition arise from the rhythmic succession of volumes, heights and spaces, coordinated but separate in the sequence of villa - barchesse - dove-cotes.

The great ramp which leads to the entrance is such an unusual element for Palladio that its authenticity has been questioned, but the structural conception of the vault in the passage beneath the ramp testifies to its being contemporary with the original project. The ramp, like the whole repertory of building techniques in the villa and in line with the owner's philosophy, belongs to the rural building tradition: a simple sloping sur-

face without steps provides a comfortable approach to the landlord's dwelling, makes it easy to roll up barrels, or to drag up sacks, victuals and furnishings, as well as to spread the hay out in the sun for drying and airing. The main prospect of the villa illustrates the relationship between the interior spaces; there is no vertical thrust to detach the central block from the annexes, the basement is partly masked by the ramp, which serves to connect the main building harmoniously to the level of the ground and the wings, whilst the windows on the front of the house indicate the varying heights and sequences of the rooms within.

In direct contrast with the numerous variations on a geometric theme present in the ground-plan of the villa at Maser, in the Villa Emo the rooms are contained within a simple geometric pattern. The structural harmony of the interior and exterior spaces achieves its maximum expression in the main hall, where the floor and elevation measurements reflect Humanist principles by transposing the proportions present in musical harmony to the architectural proportions, both in individual elements and in their relationship to the whole. The simplicity of the owner's dwelling, with the pronaos and façade aligned with the body of the building, is repeated with greater evidence in the barchesse, where the arches of the long colonnade rest on pilasters, their capitals reduced to simple moulding.

The long symmetrical arcades perform a primary function in the administrative requirements of the property; in Palladio's own words, "that he [the master] may be able to go every place under cover, that neither the rains, nor the scorching sun of the summer, may be a nuisance to him, when he goes to look after his affairs; which will also be of great use to lay wood in under cover, and an infinite number of things belonging to a villa... besides which these porticoes will be a great ornament." The clearly functional nature of the barchesse, originally used as storerooms and granaries, is revealed by the interior partitioning, which contrasts with the unbroken symmetry of the exterior plan. The architecture of the villa is thus a paradigm of its builder's ideas, a point of reference for the economy, culture and customs of the entire territory.





THE INTERIOR

The frescoed decoration of the villa's interior, carried out by Giovanni Battista Zelotti (1526-1578), once again underlines the owner's concepts by depicting, with scenes dedicated to mythology, agricultural life, family and domestic virtues, the common goal of landlord and peasant to improve the yield of the land.

This dwelling on mythological themes linked to agrarian allegories alluding to the fertility of the fields, has also been interpreted as a moral imperative, pointing the way to the abandonment of decadent aristocratic eroticism in favour of the labour and commitment which characterise rural life. The scenes are framed by trompe l'oeil architectural elements, typical of frescoes in Veneto villas of the sixteenth century.



LOCAL ENVIRONMENT

The Villa Emo complex lies to the east of the village of Fanzolo, in a broad plain at the foot of the Pre-Alps, between the Brenta and Piave rivers. Andrea Palladio developed his designs

for important Venetian families in the context of great country houses, linked to the productivity of their farmlands. Of all the Palladian villas, Villa Emo is probably the most representative of the architect's ability to combine the twin requirements of territory and patron.

The land and its characteristics dictate the plan on an urban scale, articulating the various parts of the building, its entrances and the way in which the interior spaces connect. The property is distinguished by the long tree-lined avenues which run north – south in a direct parallel with the old Roman road axes still present in the surrounding countryside. These avenues provide the connecting axis between the central block of the villa, its lands and the outside world.

The main entrance to the villa, which follows the same direction, is characterised by its great ramp, in an unusual blending of a courtly approach with a functional space in an agricultural context. Perpendicular to this there is a second axis consisting of the country road which separates the villa and its farm buildings (known as the "Fattoria") from another complex known as the "Borgo." These farm annexes, which lie parallel to the wings of the villa and formed part of the original Palladian plan, were used as service areas for the running of the property. The main body of the villa provides the perfect intersection point for the two principal axes, which are emphasised by the two accessramps, front and back. These become the practical expression of the close link between the villa and its territory, which is also manifest in the plan of the house, open as it is on all sides to allow for complete visual control over its extensive lands.



CONTACT DETAILS

Fondazione Villa Emo Onlus
Via Stazione 5, 31050 Fanzolo di Vedelago (TV) | Italy
info@villaemo.tv.it - www.villaemo.org
Pho (+39) 0423 476 334 - Fax (+39) 0423 487 043



PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR VISITORS

OPENING HOURS

FROM MAY TO OCTOBER

from monday to friday
morning 10.30 a.m. - 12.30 p.m.
afternoon 2.00 p.m. - 6.00 p.m.
saturday, sunday and public holidays
10.30 a.m. - 18.30 p.m.

FROM NOVEMBER TO APRIL

from monday to friday
morning 9.30 a.m. - 12.30 p.m.
afternoon 2.00 p.m. - 5.00 p.m.
saturday, sunday and public holidays
10.30 a.m. - 18.30 p.m.

CLOSURES

01 January - 25 December - 31 December

HOW TO FIND US

Situated in the Province of Treviso, approximately 40 kms from Venice, Fanzolo di Vedelago may be reached as follows:

BY ROAD

SP 667 e SR 53. Motorway exits:
A27 Venezia-Belluno (Treviso nord)
A31 Valdastico (Vicenza nord)
A13 Padova-Bologna (Padova est)
for more information visit www.autostrade.it

BUS

for more information visit www.ctmspa.com

BOOKINGS

INDIVIDUAL VISITS

Standard € 7,00 - Students all ages € 5,00 - Over 65s € 6,00
Park and gardens only € 1,50 - Children 0 - 14, Free

Only during opening hours, no booking required

GROUP VISITS

Standard € 6,00 - Over 65s € 5,00
Students all ages € 4,00
Park and gardens only € 1,00 - Children 0 - 14, Free

Visits out of regular opening hours may be arranged for groups of minimum 15 people. Advance booking by fax +39 0423 487 043 or e-mail info@villaemo.tv.it is requested.

BY TRAIN

Padova-Belluno line, make sure the train you plan to travel on stops at Fanzolo. The station is a few hundred metres from the villa gates. Or Treviso-Vicenza line or Venezia-Trento line, Castelfranco Veneto station, change onto the Belluno line for Fanzolo, or taxi or bus n.5 (once or twice an hour), approximately 9 kms. For more information www.trenitalia.com

BY AIR

The nearest airports are:
Antonio Canova Airport, Treviso - www.trevisoairport.it
Marco Polo Airport, Venezia - www.veniceairport.it

