

GINEVRA LOVATELLI, ADRIANO MORABITO AND MARCO GRADOZZI

SECRET ROME



JONGLEZ PUBLISHING

THE CANNON BALL OF VIALE DELLA TRINITÀ DEI MONTI FOUNTAIN

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Viale Trinità dei Monti, opposite Villa Medici
Metro: A - Spagna



***A real
cannon ball
in the centre
of a fountain***

In line with the entrance to the Villa Medici is a majestic granite fountain that, with the panorama of Rome in the background, has inspired many artists, such as the painter Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot who immortalised the scene in 1826.

The basin of the fountain came from San Salvatore in Lauro; Cardinal Ferdinando de' Medici is thought to have acquired it from the monastery in 1587 for 200 ecus. The setting, however, came from a square close to San Pietro in Vincoli. It was probably constructed around 1589 by Annibale Lippi, one of the architects of the Villa Medici.

There is an incredible story about the provenance of the cannon ball from which the water flows in the centre of the fountain.

In 1655, Queen Christina of Sweden, a prominent figure in 17th-century Roman life, is said to have had the cannon fired from Castel Sant'Angelo in the direction of the Villa Medici in an attempt to wake up the master of the house to go hunting. Three traces of the impact on the heavy door of the Villa bear out this version of events, while one of the balls was recovered to be set into the fountain opposite ...

At the time, however, the villa was no longer much used by its then owner, Cardinal Carlo de' Medici.

Another theory goes that Queen Christina (a bit of a loose cannon herself) had promised the painter Charles Errard, director of the Académie de France in Rome, to knock at his door at a certain time of day. At the appointed hour, she was still at Castel Sant'Angelo and found a way of keeping her word by having the cannon pointed at the door of Villa Medici ...

Note that this version is most certainly false: the Académie de France was established in 1666 with its headquarters at Sant'Onofrio (it only moved to the Villa Medici in 1803, having successively occupied several Roman palaces). What does seem sure, however, is that these legends grew up not only to justify the marks on the door, but also the impetuous character of Queen Christina of Sweden!

THE FAÇADE OF PALAZZO ZUCCARI

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Via Gregoriana
• Metro: A - Spagna



“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 whimsey 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.



THE POPE'S RAILWAY

Via della Stazione Vaticana
 • Open to the public

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**The
shortest
international
railway
in the world**

One thousand, two hundred and seventy metres – this is the total length of the Vatican railway built (following the Lateran Treaty of 11 February 1929) to link the Holy See with the Italian rail network via a junction with the nearby station of Roma San Pietro.

Construction work was finished in 1932. It involved erecting the 143-metre-long Gelsomino (“Jasmine”) viaduct, built of masonry faced with travertine and brick. The track passes under a wide arch surmounted by the coat of arms of Pope Pius XI and goes through the Leonine Wall to enter the State of the Vatican City.

A majestic sliding double gate – weighing over 35 tonnes – closes this passage, which is only open on rare occasions to allow a freight convoy through.

A short distance beyond the gate is Vatican City station, opened in 1933 and now a shopping centre.

The track continues for another hundred metres or so to end in a cul-de-sac: an 80-metre-long tunnel, with two parallel sidings used for shunting.

During the preparations for Jubilee 2000 at Roma San Pietro station, one of two tracks along the viaduct was taken up, to be replaced by a pleasant walkway with a fine view of the gate and an unusual perspective on *Er Cuppolone*, the immense dome of Saint Peter's.



PALAZZETTO BIANCO

28 Via di San Fabiano
• Bus: 916, Gregorio VII or San Damaso

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***A sailing
boat
in the street***

In a side street off Via Gregorio VII, standing between the Vatican and Piazza Pio XI among more anonymous buildings, is an architecturally avant-garde white residence with modern lines and a very unusual shape.

It was designed to fit a narrow triangular space of less than 900 square metres.

The project, which dates back to 1990, is the joint work of the renowned psychiatrist and artist Massimo Fagioli and the architect Paola Rossi: a unique combination where Fagioli took on the role of designer and illustrator and Rossi that of interpreter and director.

For administrative and planning reasons, construction did not commence until 2004-2005.

The two sides of the building could not be more different: facing the street is a hymn to the vertical – a curved, cliff-like wall with five floors pierced at regular intervals by twelve small square windows that illuminate the sleeping quarters. On the ground floor, an “indent” in the wall marks the entrance.

The rear of the building, looking onto the hill, consists of rows of projecting balconies, each slightly larger than the one on the floor below.

The tall windows give onto the living space of the apartments (there are two on each floor).

This small building – whatever you think of it – really grabs the attention of the (rare) passer-by. Young architectural students can often be seen gazing up admiringly at the white sail on Via di San Fabiano.

NEARBY

THE OPTICAL ILLUSION OF VIA PICCOLOMINI

Via Piccolomini • Bus 982

After a stroll to Villa Pamphili, it is worthwhile going to Via Piccolomini to enjoy an excellent and surprising view of Saint Peter’s cupola, much better even than that from the piazza opposite the basilica. The transformation of the shape of Saint Peter’s from Michelangelo’s Greek-cross design to Maderno’s Latin cross in fact meant that the façade advances so much that a large part of the cupola is hidden from view from Via della Conciliazione. Via Piccolomini however, offers a complete view of the gem and a curious optical illusion that few people notice. Arriving from Villa Pamphili, the cupola, which is visible in the background, seems huge and takes up the entire field of vision. But moving towards the cupola, you notice that contrary to what should logically happen, the cupola shrinks surprisingly until it becomes tiny.

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THE OLD PHARMACY OF SANTA MARIA DELLA SCALA

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Piazza Santa Maria della Scala

• Tram: 8

• Opening times: for group visits (only in Italian) contact Father Gaetano at 06 8414209



**A
16th-century
pharmacy**

The Farmacia di Santa Maria della Scala, which was opened by Carmelites who arrived in Rome in the late 16th century, became famous among convent pharmacies thanks to the various specialities invented there to fight the plague and other serious diseases.

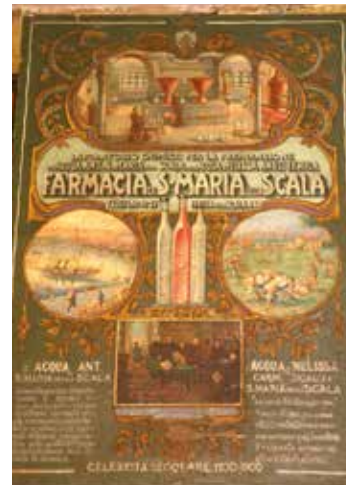
The pharmacy managed to keep a free dispensary open to the public until the 1950s and stayed open until 1978.

The upper floor of this old pharmacy has been preserved, above a more modern working establishment, virtually intact, as it was in the 18th century, and offers visitors a unique experience.

One of the monks working in the pharmacy, Brother Basil, became so well-known for his herbal remedies and especially for his famous Acqua Antipestilenziale (Anti-Plague Water), which cured various types of ailments, that kings, cardinals and popes consulted him. In 1726 he began to teach chemistry, botany and pharmacy to his disciples.

The eulogistic inscriptions on two paintings featuring this well-loved monk, who died in 1804 after almost sixty years of professional activity, sum up his life. His famous essays have been carefully preserved as precious artefacts.

Ghezzi's 18th-century painting, which is kept in the vestry, perfectly conveys the idea of the beauty and importance of the pharmacy at the time. It features Brother Basil teaching his disciples, surrounded by stills and mortars, shelves overflowing with heavy tomes, and cupboards with jars filled with salts and herbs.



VILLA MADAMA

1

Via di Villa Madama

• Tel: 06 36914284

• E-mail: cerimoniale.segreteria@esteri.it

• Visits on request to Ministry of Foreign Affairs at least fifteen days in advance



**A former
papal residence
where you can
book a visit**

Built from 1518 for the Florentine Cardinal Giulio de' Medici, cousin of Pope Leo X, Villa Madama occupies a prime location north of the Vatican on Monte Mario. The initial project was entrusted to Raphael. After the artist's untimely death in 1520, the work was entrusted to the architect Antonio da Sangallo the Younger, his collaborator on Saint Peter's basilica. Building work started again around 1524-1525, shortly after Giulio de' Medici was elected Pope (1523), taking the name Clement VII. But the villa remained unfinished and, as a papal property, it was not spared by Charles V's lansquenets in the sack of Rome (1527). Pillaged and burned, abandoned to decay for several centuries, the building was finally restored and completed by the architect Pio Piacentini from 1913.

The decoration of the villa takes its inspiration from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and is the work of a group of outstanding artists: Giulio Romano, Baldassare Peruzzi and Giovan Francesco Penni for the painting and decorations, Baccio Bandinelli for the sculpture and Giovanni da Udine for the stucco work. The most grandiose space is undoubtedly the loggia, which opens onto three large arcades, elegantly decorated by Giovanni da Udine and his team with stucco and grotesques inspired by Nero's villa, the Domus Aurea, discovered a few years previously. An aperture on the lower wall features the Cyclops Polyphemus by Giulio Romano.

In the gardens, which were originally planned to equal those of antiquity and run down to the Tiber, stands the curious elephant fountain, the work of Giovanni da Udine. It commemorates Hanno (Annone in Italian), the pet white elephant given to Leo X by the Ambassador of Portugal.

The villa is named after "Madama" Margaret of Austria, wife of Alessandro de' Medici, who also gave her name to Palazzo Madama, seat of the Italian Senate. It has been state property since 1941 and is now the official residence, hosting foreign heads of state received by the President of the Council and the Minister of Foreign Affairs.



BUNKER AT VILLA ADA SAVOIA



Villa Ada park, Panama entrance, at No. 55

- Guided tours organised by the Roma Sotterranea association on Saturdays, Sundays and some public holidays, other days by reservation only for groups of ten or more
- www.bunkervillaada.it
- visit@bunkervillaada.it
- Admission: €12, children under 8 free
- Bus: 168 - Panama or Lima; Tram: 3, 19 then bus 53, 360 - Liegi or Ungheria



**Royal
House of Savoy's
air-raid shelter,
accessible by car**

In the “wildest” part of Villa Ada, the wooded parkland site of the royal family’s residence until 1943, is an access road with a brick archway built into the hillside. The roadway leads to a gallery where few people had the courage to venture until a few years ago. For seventy years this place had been abandoned, frequented largely by vandals and vagrants and said to have been the scene of black masses and satanic rites. Several inscriptions exalting Satan earned it the nickname of “Devil’s Bunker”.

Since 2016, and following careful restoration, this air-raid shelter (built by Victor Emmanuel III in 1940–1941 for himself and his family) has regained its original appearance: the large metal armoured doors all work now, and just try opening and closing the main door with its two heavy weights, each of 1,200 kilos. The original brick-vaulted construction is shaped like a lifebuoy, and it includes a vast garage space – the bunker needed to be accessible by car as it was too far from the royal residence to travel on foot after a bomber alert.

In addition, there is a two-room shelter furnished in the style of the time with a bathroom annex, also carefully restored, and a bedroom equipped with two pedal-power electric fans (only one remains, resembling a bicycle). They would have allowed enough air to circulate should the electricity be cut off.

Last but not least, the bunker is equipped with a splendid spiral staircase in travertine, 13 m high, which served as an emergency exit. If you climb the slope outside, you can see the protective shield constructed from large slabs of reinforced concrete buttressed by small brick pillars. If the shelter had been hit by a bomb, this shield would have collapsed, cushioning the effects of the blast.

Nowadays the bunker has zero environmental impact: LED lighting is supplied by solar panels.

MUSSOLINI'S BUNKERS AT VILLA TORLONIA 10

Villa Torlonia
70 Via Nomentana
• Tel: 06 0608
• Visits on reservation only: Sovraintendenza Comunale (town planning services)



Three secret bunkers for Il Duce

Villa Torlonia, the residence of Benito Mussolini from 1925 to 1943, dates from the 19th century. It is fitted with three bunkers, the construction of which first required the modification of a double cellar under the Fucino Basin (former lake bed where the villa is sited), fixing armour-plated doors, anti-gas filters, a bathroom and electricity. Even though it was only a short distance from Casino Nobile (the building where Mussolini and his family lived), this bunker was not a secure shelter in emergencies, because you had to cross open ground to reach it. So it was decided to build a new shelter in the basement of Casino Nobile, where the villa kitchens were located. The ceiling was reinforced with a concrete framework and the living space fitted with two entrances and with sleeping compartments, which themselves had double gas-proof doors with peepholes.

This second solution was unlikely to have satisfied Il Duce, because a third bunker was built, a veritable air-raid shelter, linked by a tunnel to the basements of the villa. Consisting of two semi-circular galleries each about 10 metres long, laid out in the form of a cross with a reinforced concrete framework some 4 metres thick, it had two emergency exits that led directly into the park. This third shelter was never completed and the doors were not even fitted: on 25 July 1943, Mussolini was dismissed from office by the Fascist Grand Council, which had him arrested and replaced by General Badoglio.



HIDDEN SEPULCHRES

In one of the two sleeping compartments of the second bunker, recent archaeological excavations have unearthed a series of sepulchres dating from the 2nd century AD. One of the walls has three columbarium niches containing funerary urns, and a number of bodies have been found buried lying in a prone position, a customary fate for those presumed guilty of an infamous act.

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SECRET ROME



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Far from the crowds and the usual clichés, Rome is still a reserve of well-concealed treasures only revealed to those who know how to wander off the beaten track, whether residents or visitors.

An indispensable guide for those who thought they knew Rome well, or who would like to discover the hidden face of the city.

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