



# VILLA DORIA







## Villa Doria, today

at Sant'Alessio, Lucca

The villa stands on the slopes of the Sant'Alessio hill and is approached by a drive, in axis with the house, climbing gently towards the main façade, which faces south and is characterised by a large 'Serliano', a particular kind of triple opening with architraves at the sides and a central arch, named after the Bolognese architect Sebastiano Serlio.

The villa is protected by a walled 'chiusa' or enclosure that separates the master residence from the farm buildings to the west and from the surrounding fields.

No historical documents have been found that would help us determine the date of the architectural complex, but its type and its stylistic features suggest that the original layout dates from the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century. In the case of Villa Doria, as is true of numerous other examples to be found in the Lucchese hills, we find that the principles followed, the techniques used and the site chosen are those recommended in the treatise *On the building of country house and palazzi, and on the laying out of gardens and orchards*, composed by Giovanni di Vincenzo Saminati between 1580 and 1590. In Saminati's MS, now in the State Library of Lucca, we find detailed directions as to the choice of site, the building techniques, and the arrangement of the gardens. It is worth looking at some passages from this treatise, to see how its principles were put into effect in the case of Villa Doria.

'To build a country palazzo for the use of the landowner', the author of the treatise asserts, 'we must choose an elevated location between the mountains and the plains, but with a flat, open and spacious site'. We may note how well the site chosen for Villa Doria conforms to these criteria. It is located at a slightly higher level than the public road from which branches the entrance drive, and it dominates the plain stretching downhill, so that from its rooms and partly from its garden one can enjoy 'lovely views', and at the same time 'a noble view of the palazzo and the surrounding buildings' can be seen from below. The entrance drive itself also conforms to Saminiati's precepts, since it consists of a 'long and wide avenue leading up to the doorway of the palazzo, with other pathways crossing it and intersecting with it'. Indeed the whole layout is perfectly in harmony with the treatise, as we can see from the cadastral map made in 1837 by the surveyor Santi Pinochi and now in the State Archives in Lucca. This nineteenth-century planimetry clearly shows the entrance drive branching off from the public road, in axis with the main building, and a secondary pathway diverging from it in the direction of the fields under cultivation. We find a similar arrangement in the next edition of the cadastral map, although in this case the secondary pathway is no longer shown.

Isa Belli Barsali (*Ville e commitenti dello Stato di Lucca*, 1979), who was the first to document the presence of the villa, does not provide precise documentation of the original layout, though she notes that the Serliana on the main façade must be a later addition.









In the catalogue of the exhibition 'La villa lucchese, il suo territorio' that was held in Palazzo Mansi in Lucca in 1977, the villa is documented photographically but there are no historical notes.

In the later eighteenth century the villa belonged to Domenico Nocchi, a physician who died in 1793, as is recorded by an inscription set into the wall of the family chapel: HIC IACET / DOMINICUS NOCCHIUS / L.C. / SUI ET OMNIBUS CARUS / MORIBUS INNOCENS INGENIO CLARUS / IN / AUGUSTAE TAURINORUM ACADEMIA / BIENNIO / OMNIUM PLUSULAUREATIS TOGATUS / MEDICUS / SUMMA RELIGIONE DECESSIT / A. AE. C. MDCCXCIII / XIL KALEND MARTIAS / AETATIS AN. XX / M.

In the earlier nineteenth century, the villa, in the area called 'In Ghindolfo', was known as Villa Ricci and belonged to the Reverend Francesco Ricci, son of the late Giuseppe, as appears from the cadastral register of 1837. There the property is described as comprising 'an open space with the master residence and a portion of the entrance drive' in the centre of an estate with agricultural appurtenances, in part 'vineyards' and in part kitchen gardens, with a 'shed and threshing floor', a barn, a well and a pigsty. It was essentially a villa-farm, like numerous other ones in the Lucchesia, dominating vast areas of farmland and conferring on the countryside of the Lucchese hills those qualities that we now admire and celebrate. Fr Francesco Ricci died of an apoplexy in 1846 at the age of eighty-two, as is recorded in a marble inscription inside the chapel (FRANCISCUS RICCIUS SACERDOS / HIC SITUS EST DECIMO SEXTO / KAL IUNIAS MDCCCXLVI POPLEXIA / CORREPTUS AETATIS SUAS AN LXXXII / AETERNAM PACEM ADPRECAMINI).

The palazzo consists of a massive square building with a splendid loggia on the south side, where we find the main entrance and also the entrance to the chapel. This latter has 'wattled' vaulting, and an altar near where the inscription mentioned above is set into the wall.

The large entrance hall is in axis with the entrance to the enclosure; it runs right through the building to the garden side, where there is a French window. From the hall four doors lead into side rooms and to the stairs that give access to the first floor. On this floor too the central hall gives onto side rooms. The kitchen and the dining room are on the ground floor.















The villa was carefully restored in 2008, so that the functional and formal characteristics of the architectural complex have been recuperated. The main work involved consolidating the structure and eliminating unsuitable additions, such as the subdivision of some of the spaces into a number of tiny rooms. Modern plumbing and wiring have been installed, so as to make the building both functional and comfortable.

Particular care has been taken to restore the painted skirting-boards and the simple painted rectangles in the lower part of the rooms, and the large painted rectangles with cornices that reach up to the height of the ceilings.

The palazzo has a family chapel, now deconsecrated, which is reached from the entrance loggia with the Serliana. The little belfry on the roof, at the western end of the building, was obviously used in connection with the religious services formerly held here.

The portion of the garden to the east, at a lower level than the palazzo, is enclosed by lovely green hedges and has a pool and a long covered veranda, equipped as an open-air sitting room for the enjoyment of the wonderful position on summer days.

[Gilberto Bedini]