

Laudation Villa Ottolenghi

Mariachiara Pozzana, Florence

The garden of Villa Ottolenghi in Monterosso Acqui Terme

Near Acqui Terme, drawn on the soft profile of the Monferrato hills not far from Torino, surrounded by vineyards and woods, was built in 1955 one of the most extraordinary modern gardens which can be visited today in Italy, created by Pietro Porcinai around a villa by Marcello Piacentini and other rationalist architects.

The garden that lives in relation to architecture is wanted by Astolfo son of the owner Arturo Ottolenghi.

Arturo Ottolenghi father with his wife Herta von zu Horst Wedekind, had built the house and the nearby building, at the beginning of the twenties, asking Marcello Piacentini to design the villa and a building as a residence for the artists invited to work on place.

In the name of art, the adventure of the creation of Villa Ottolenghi as a center for artists, was developed to reach the excellence by Arturo Ottolenghi, who involved in the enterprise, the protagonists of the art scene in Italy at the early twentieth century: Marcello Piacentini, Vincenzo Vaccaro, Venanzo Crcetti and Arturo Martini, who will carry out on-site at the center of the large pond the sculpture Tobias.

After the war and the works started again in 1955 and Astolfo the son invited Pietro Porcinai into create the garden which had a simple layout designed by the architect Giuseppe Vaccaro. From then until the seventies, Porcinai was working in the garden. A photo of 1964 was dedicated by Astolfo to Porcinai creator of beauty.

Articulated around the two buildings of the villa and artists' studios, the Porcinai's project is successful in connecting a system of spaces that appeared fragmented. In the Porcinai's archive in Fiesole all the steps of the project are well documented. I want to thank Anna Porcinai who gave me all this so interesting documentation. At first Porcinai started designing the dune and the big lawn at the place of the old garden designed by Giuseppe Vaccaro. The second step show us the beginning of the idea of the squares garden based on the existing courtyard, and the third and last step is corresponding to the garden implemented in 1956, with the huge lawn, the dune, and at the end of the lawn towards the villa the rock garden and the entrance with a beautiful designed floor.

The squares garden is probably the most astonishing part of the garden, which remind us of the use of renaissance perspective in garden design. Porcinai designed also furniture as stone chairs still existing in the garden and other details as the pebbles mosaic floor in the courtyard, with themes of fruits and grapes, reminding us that Villa Ottolenghi has been and is also place of production of excellent wines.

In the courtyard and in the garden in front of it, the squares of the grid are filled with grass, flowers and roses to create an harmonious pattern, and a large garden terrace is opened with a balustrade to the beautiful panorama of Acqui Terme.

The very long pergola has been designed by Giuseppe Vaccaro and Porcinai enriched it with a long flowerbed, leading the eye toward the metaphysical facade of the artist's house.

For family reasons the villa and most of the furniture and works of art were sold in 1985, and the garden stared to be neglected till when in 2006 the property has been bought by the present owner Vittorio Invernizzi who decided to restore and to develop it.

The members of the international committee met in June by Schloss Dyck and decided to give the first prize in the category 'Best development of a Historic Park' to villa Ottolenghi garden for these reasons:

- First because it is one of the most important garden designed by Pietro Porcinai in Italy and till now not well known because of the difficult story of the property, so it is very important to know it mostly at an European level. It is also worth to know that for Italian law an historical work of art needs to be fifty years old to be protected, and villa Ottolenghi garden could be protected as the project started in 1956. So according to Italian law the garden is part of our heritage.

- Second because it is a rare example of modern garden developed after a period of neglect, and in this sense it is also a good and rare example of modern garden restoration, where the conceptual problem of garden restoration has to be followed with accuracy.

- Third because it is at the same time a good example of the very important union of an artistic garden and the wine culture, a binomial which is at the same time very important for the development of cultural itinerary.