

# **“The Coffee-house of Villa Ada-Savoia in Rome (IT). A classic facade that hides a jewel to be renewed“.**

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## **Abstract (Calibri 11 pt bold)**

The eighteenth-century “Temple of Flora” is located in Rome (Italy) in the green area of Villa Ada-Savoia, the second largest public park. This villa was the private residence of the Savoy royal family and after the proclamation of the Italian Republic (1946), it fell into a state of neglect and hereditary disputes. From 1990, after municipal expropriation and restoration interventions, the entire park was opened to the public. The small building is part of a project to transform original vineyard into an “English landscape garden” and it is an important example for architectural quality.

This paper focuses on a proposal for its restoration project. Starting from an historical-critical study and comparison with similar buildings; the technical-scientific analysis of materials and decorations degradation, up to the processing of conservative interventions.

The aim is to propose an architectural reconstruction and re-functionalization of the building and neighbouring spaces for contemporary leisure use.

**Keywords:** monument preservation; technical-scientific analysis; contemporary adaptive re-use

## **1. Introduction (Calibri 11 pt bold)**

This paper aims to present, as example of experience transfer, a study and a proposal for sustainable restoration and reuse of the eighteenth-century “Temple of Flora or coffee-house”, present in the garden of Villa Ada-Savoia in Rome, Italy. This project was proposed to the Municipal Superintendence for Cultural and Archaeological Heritage and to the Environmental Protection Department, in view of a wider program of redevelopment of the historic urban park with the re-use of some internal buildings, called in the past “*fabbriche da giardino*” [1].

It is therefore interesting to describe the different phases of the philological-critical study carried out on the artefact and of the technical-scientific investigation “of its current state of affairs”, in order to contribute with an example of restoration as conservative as possible and a re-functionalization of the building and the its context for contemporary reuse.

Starting from the consultation of direct sources on site and indirectly in historical archives, libraries, municipal and Superintendence offices, the identity and historical value of the building was reconstructed, to then proceed with an accurate architectural analysis of the constructive, stylistic, technical aspects and of the main problems of degradation and disuse.

These examinations and studies were a prerequisite for a correct reading of the actual state of the building, non-destructive investigations that led to historical-critical knowledge and to the methodological and technical control of the restoration intervention.

An intervention based on sustainable and integrated applications into the best choice of procedures, materials, accuracy and location of interventions. Surely because the restoration intervention is always an invasive act, especially on historical facades.

It produces a change and, in its recent evolution, has taken a dual specialization: on the one hand a **conservation project** and on the other an **advanced research of innovative re-use**.

## 2. The state of knowledge

The example of renewal presented here is inspired by the concepts of contemporary **critical-conservative restoration**, promoted by Prof. Arch. Giovanni Carbonara [2] who adopted and perfected the instructions of the Italian restoration theorists Roberto Pane (1897-1987) and Cesare Brandi (1906-1988). <<Conservative>>, because it is prompted by the assumption that a monument demands first and foremost to be perpetuated and handed down to the future in the best possible condition; in addition, because it reflects the fact that the current critical conscience demands that more “things” should be preserved than in the past.

<<Critical>>, because of its explicit reference to critical theories and partly because it is prompted by the belief that any operation is a single event, not part of a category, not governed by dogmatic or pre-established position, but something that must be thoroughly investigated on “case- by-case”[3].

The concept of “integration among the different arts” or current “inter-disciplinary” is very important for the theoretical unity of restoration discipline, as well as different skills are necessary for practical cohesion and quality conservation and restoration project.

As specified by the Venice Charter (1964-art.9), the aim of the restoration is “to preserve and reveal the formal and historical values of the monument and is based on respect for the ancient substance and authentic documentation”. A definition that we intend to apply, emphasizing how project planning and management must be “of and for restoration”.

Therefore, the true nature of restoration is a complete fusion of historical and technical-scientific expertise. In summary, there are three fundamental components:

- the history of architecture and theory of restoration;
- the techniques of survey, analysis, diagnosis and intervention on the materials and the structure;
- the legislative and regulatory aspects for an integrate sustainable project.

According to Carbonara, contemporary restoration must be:

*« An act of culture and at the same time highly specialized. The restoration looks to the future and not to the past, nor is it reserved for enjoyment of a select few lovers of the ancient. It has educational and memory functions, for future generations, for young people. After all, it is not the satisfaction for the studies in itself, but the formation of every citizen and his quality of life, understood in the spiritual sense and more extensive material...» [4]*

## 3. The area of Villa Ada-Savoia and an eighteenth-century jewel hidden in the landscape

The eighteenth-century “Temple of Flora” (Roman and Italic pagan divinity, symbol of Nature and flowering; rebirth and fertility) is located in Rome (Italy) in the green area of Villa Ada-Savoia, the second largest public park (160ha) and private residence of the Savoy royal family until 1946.

This area is placed in a strategic position, at the confluence of Aniene river with Tiber river, an hill inhabited even before the Romans (as evidenced by the ruins of village Antemnae).

It is located in the northern part of the city, on consular road Via Salaria, just outside the Aurelian walls that enclose the historic centre and characterized by historical and archaeological remains.

From data, documents and historical maps it possible know the period of construction of the small leisure building (a coffee-house), included in a transformation project commissioned by Prince Luigi Pallavicini (1785). His purpose was to transform the original vineyard into a “summer villa” and he first commissioned the French architect Auguste Chevalle de Sain-Hubert and later the Italian architect Carlo Puri De Marchis, assisted by the brilliant landscape architect Francesco Bettini.

They designed a new palace, service buildings and the surrounding gardens also, partly according to the formal baroque garden and on the other side as an “English landscape garden”[5].



**Figure 1.**

Map n.153, Gregorian Cadastre (1818). Hunting Lodge of Pallavicini family and coffe-house (Temple of Flora)  
Source: State Archive of Rome, Italy - IMAGO Project.



**Figure 2 - 3**

"Temple of Flora", coffe-house, Villa Ada-Savoia, Roma (IT). Main Upper Facade (north) and east facade

#### **4. The identity of the building from the historical-philological-critical analysis**

The indispensable basis for a philological and critical study of the building is the predisposition of a **geometric and architectural relief**. It can be carried out according to the **direct method** (data acquisition in visual and direct contact) or with the **indirect method** (through the aid of optical, electronic, digital instruments and historical and archival sources). A photographic survey of the different components and materials allows to highlight details and the various forms of alteration and degradation over time. This important phase is fundamental to understand the geometric, constructive, stylistic identity, as well as the visible sedimentations, alterations and degradations. One of the most interesting study carried out was the **historical, metrological and typological analysis**, which allowed a critical knowledge of the building and a comparison with other similar and

existing artefacts. This coffee-house, typical “building for rest” in the landscape garden composition, reproduces a *classical temple in Doric style*, but with innovative aspects as the fusion of the typology of the prostyle-rectangular temple and the circular-tholos. It is inspired by the classical canons diffused by A.Palladio in 1570 with a perfect symmetrical proportions both in plan and in elevation (the unit of measurement used at the time in the Papal State was the “*romanus palmus minor*”).



**Figure 4**

“Temple of Flora”, coffee-house, Villa Ada-Savoia, Roma (IT). Lower Facade (south)

Just as the compositional studies have related each part (measurements, openings, decorations) to the harmonious total composition, the historical archival researches have confirmed that the actual condition has not undergone structural changes and it is the same as the eighteenth century one designed by Hubert. In fact, in 1872 Villa Pallavicini was bought by the Savoy royal family and they changed only the decorative frieze (adding their emblem – cross and eagle), cover the columns and upper facade with a fake marble stucco and adding the iron fountain in the basin. Some photos of the early 20th century represent the interiors with reading/resting sofas in the niches and an amphitheatre - rose garden.

### **5. Restoration Project as a “Cultural Operation”**

Since April 1999, in the area around the temple, close to the entrances from the Parioli district, the Urban Natural Oasis managed by the WWF and through the Jubilee 2000 funds, various care interventions and safe use of the urban green and redevelopment of some internal buildings for public use (WWF headquarters, leisure center, Toy Museum ...).

Therefore, within this general re-organization is this proposal to restore and reuse the “Temple of Flora”, which in addition to recovering the structural, aesthetic and functional quality of the coffee house, proposes the re-opening of the eighteenth century entrance and the re-organization of the external area, of perspective axes and of the Belvedere as designed by Francesco Bettini.

The restoration and project proposal, therefore consists within an in-depth study and sustainable reuse interventions, to give historical identity and contemporary value within a wider program of redevelopment of the historic urban park.

In recent decades, the use of computer tools is a valid support in data processing and in the design of documents and drawings, both for the relief-straightening-photographic insertion, and for graphic restitution with the use of symbols, colors, screens , nuances [6].

## 5.1 Degradation phenomena and restoration techniques

The main problems and degradation phenomena have been identified according to international standards and codes and symbols of the unified reference framework - UTET Architectural Restoration Manual), different analyses and various restoration interventions have hypothesized. Overall, each intervention on a historical building is always an “invasive act” and it must be operated in the most conscientious and compatible way. So, the intervention project consists of the best choice of procedures and materials and initially tests are carried out to assess the efficiency of the methods [7]. Being a building inserted in a green context, articulated on several levels, partly open (exedra and tunnel lower), most of the degradation phenomena were caused by external agents (sun exposure, wind and water action); thermal oscillations; air pollution; biological agents, as well as some sudden loads (falling trees) and anthropogenic degradation.



**Figure 5-6**

Original structure in tufa blocks, mortar and plaster (different layers – colours)  
Note the supporting structure in pillars at the upper niches



**Figure 7-8**

External degradation: erosion; disintegration; surface deposit; biological patina; efflorescence; moisture stains; detachment; fallen decoration parts, missing pieces; vandalism; weed vegetation



**Figure 9-10**

Internal degradation: surface deposit; detachment; fallen parts; moisture stains; corrosion; no fixtures; fractured floors; vandalism; improper use

About the coffee-house/Temple of Flora, each component (plaster, stucco, travertine, stone, brick, fixtures, roof tiles, iron railings...) was analysed, cleaned, recomposed and integrated during a restoration process that has been divided into seven main phases:

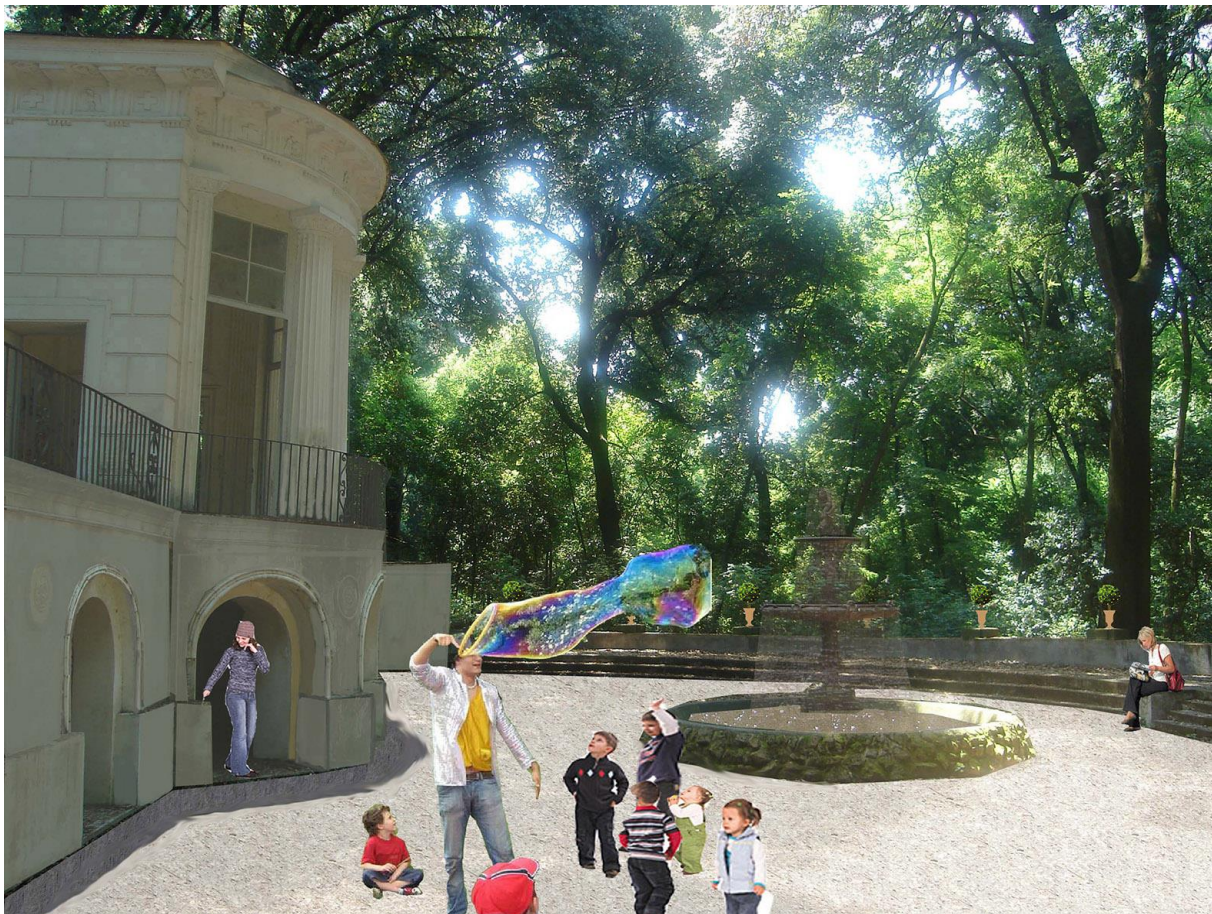
- 1) After organizing the restoration worksite and several inspections, we will proceed to a first phase of weeding and **PRELIMINARY WORKS** with surface preparation function.
- 2) Subsequently we pass to the **PRE-CONSOLIDATION** aimed at giving greater cohesion to the materials that could otherwise be further damaged. It is carried out with *injections of acrylic resins* or with spray or brush applications of *protective polymers* or with *stabilizer* mortar additions.
- 3) The third phase consists of the delicate **CLEANING OPERATION** with different tools and methods depending on the composition and delicacy of the surfaces (*manual cleaning with brushes or scalpel; chemical cleaning with water spray or compresses; spray cleaning with organic or chemical solvents*).
- 4) Then is the phase of **CONSOLIDATION**, carried out with imbibing or application of *consolidating solutions* or with *re-adhesion* to the wall support and injections.
- 5) The **REINTEGRATION** phase instead consists of the *re-composition (both physical and figurative)*, restoration and integration of the damaged or missing parts. In order not to alter the historical and architectural identity of the building. Attention will be paid to distinguishing additions or remakes with contemporary materials, simplified finishes and decorations and different shades of colour, so as not to make “a fabrication of history”. All of this, respecting the authenticity and historical values of the monument, both original and settled by time.
- 6) Finally, the **PROTECTION** phase is fundamental, which consists of the spray or manual application of *organic protective preparations* (herbicides, silicones, resins and waxes). Since water is one of the main causes of degradation, all protective materials must be water repellent but must also allow the material to “breathe”. These are transparent and water-repellent products (5-10 years duration), which in addition to create a layer resistant to atmospheric agents and chemical and biological attacks, do not alter the reflection of light, the characteristic colour and tone of the materials.

7) Proposal of an **INTEGRATED and COHERENT PROJECT** for a **contemporary re-functionalization** and use as an urban service in a public park, to return to being a place of rest, meeting and leisure, as well as an evidence of historical identity and culture.

The basic concepts that have guided the restoration of this particular and articulated building have been those of proposing an *intervention as minimal as possible* (little invasive), *reversible and distinguishable*, with a structural, chemical-physical compatibility and a topical and expressive sincerity, manifestation of today's historical-figurative culture and contemporary restoration techniques.

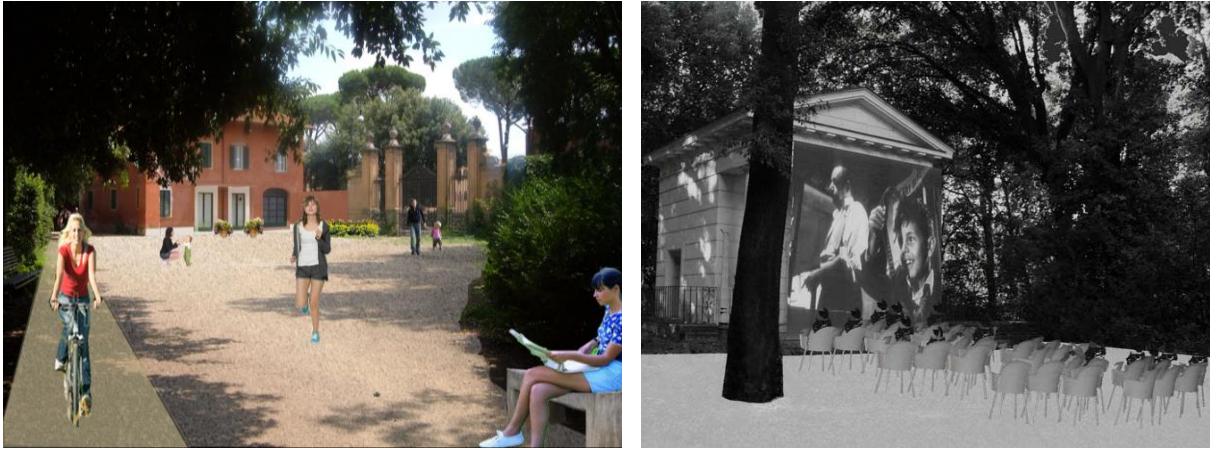
The intervention strategy analyses the various critical issues and, in addition to dwelling on the restoration and consolidation of the small temple, relocates it in the context of the public garden, planning **“an integration zone”** connecting it with the other existing buildings-services and inserting it in a re-design also of the original eighteenth-century entrance and perspective axes; of new pedestrian-cycle paths and the project of the green (garden, hedges, flowerbeds) and of the surrounding area (furnished with seats, lighting, services).

The proposed project involves the use of natural and sustainable materials and technologies, well integrated in the context and highlighted by the environmental, architectural and technical details (adjustable LED spotlights and cameras) that allow to redefine the temple and exedra and to propose a re-functionalization and a contemporary use as an **urban service and place of identity, rest, meeting, leisure and culture** (relax, children's entertainment, public readings, film festivals, theatrical and musical performances, temporary photographic exhibitions / sculptures ...).



**Figure 10**

Contemporary re-functionalization and public use (place of identity, rest, meeting, leisure and culture)



**Figure 11**

Re-design of the original entrance and perspective axes (pedestrian-cycle paths) and green redevelopment

#### **4. Conclusion**

In conclusion, this project proposal, presented to the Municipality of Rome (IT), intends to provide a possible methodological/technical process and contemporary conservation and restoration activities on a small but very interesting building.

If at the base of modern restoration discipline there is the concept of “reintegration of an image”, both aesthetic and historical, in the early twentieth century the debate is very active on the use of modern techniques, innovative materials and additions (if necessary and functional), as well as on quality of scientific supervision of experimental applications. Therefore, opposed to an ordinary, not accurate renovation or artificial redesign “in style”, but following the aforementioned “**case by case**” **methodology**, the intervention on the coffee-house of Villa Ada-Savoia is planned.

Reviewing its evolutionary history in a critical manner, the monument and its urban and landscape context were analysed and interpreted, in order to elaborate the most coherent and sustainable project for a current public use, respecting the original eighteenth-century character, recovering some fine Liberty elements from the early 1900s and protecting it from misuse and vandalism, designed to enable everyone to enjoy this heritage.

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