

THE TREASURES OF VILLA ARCONATI-FAR

#6 – il grande Parterre

Waiting to open wide the doors of our little Versailles to welcome again the visitors who love it so much, we take this opportunity to let you know better the "treasures" that Villa Arconati-FAR guards and that still few know.

Why dedicate one of our writings to Parterre only and not to the whole garden?

Well, the answer is very simple although not trivial. The monumental garden of Villa Arconati-FAR, to begin with, is actually composed of two gardens: the largest part - which extends over ten hectares - of Italian Renaissance garden, and the smaller part - two hectares - which was built about a century later and is precisely the parterre, or French garden. Two elements that together form a unicum and yet have different characteristics, which tell us about two worlds that deserve to be discovered thoroughly!

Our French garden is one of the very few still preserved in Lombardy today. This is because, between the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, many gardens were transformed in "English" style, following the most romantic idea of a nature that must have seemed left to a more wild and natural aspect.

At the time, the Castellazzo saw the transfer of ownership from the Arconati to the Busca, who did not transform the garden - although it seems they had a project, lost, by Leopoldo Pollack for an English-style transformation - trivially because they did not have the necessary money to carry out such an intervention. And this, in hindsight, was a stroke of luck, since even today we can enjoy a wonderful jewel of fine green architecture, very different from all the others in the area, which still retains the characteristics of the daring seventeenth and eighteenth century architecture!

The term parterre derives from the French *par terre*, or "on the ground". The concept of this type of garden derives directly from the French grandeur of the Palace of Versailles, an unrivaled model of beauty and grandeur for the whole European aristocracy.

The concept that is expressed through this type of garden is that the gaze of those who walk away must be able to range to infinity, thus admiring the vastness of the estate of the Arconati.

The effect is further amplified if you look at the parterre from an elevated position, for example from inside the beautiful Ballroom of the Villa. From here the scenographic effect is made to its maximum! It is even said that on clear days you could see the Madonnina of the Milan Cathedral, letting your gaze wander just beyond the parterre!



The parterre in the eighteenth-century engraving by Marc'Antonio Dal Re

The scenographic effect of this garden is underlined by two elements: the first is represented by hornbeam plants, which are pruned following the dictates of the topiary in the form of a "ballerina", that is, with the rounded top as if it were a small head and flounces of greenery to remember the tutu of the classical dancers.

The other element is the "drawings" made inside the large flowerbeds, through different essences of green or colored gravel.

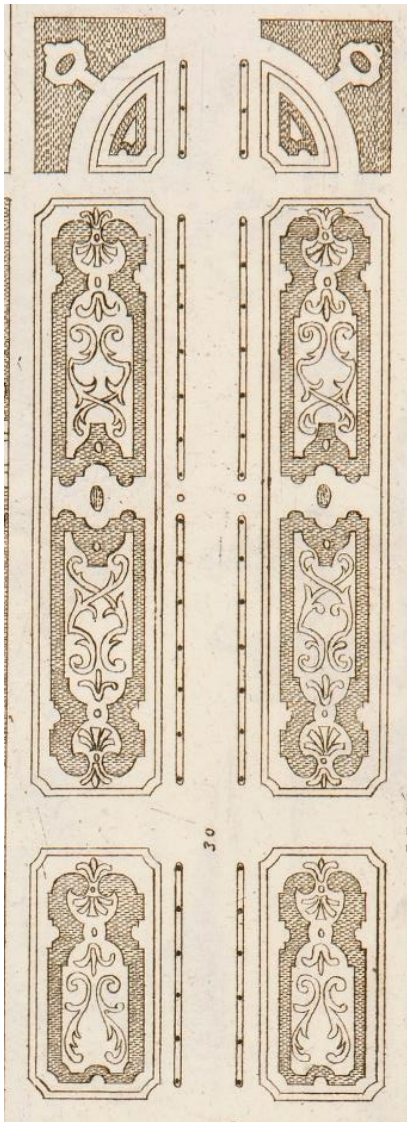
THE RESTORATION PROJECT

The design of a parterre inside the garden of Castellazzo is documented in the 24 engravings that Marc'Antonio Dal Re made in the volume "Ville di delizia o siano palagi camparecci dello Stato di Milano" of 1743. As you can easily understand, the project for the construction and maintenance of the parterre costs a lot of efforts in terms of time, workforce and money; therefore over the centuries the cut of the "ballerinas" has been maintained, while the design of the large flowerbeds has been completely lost.

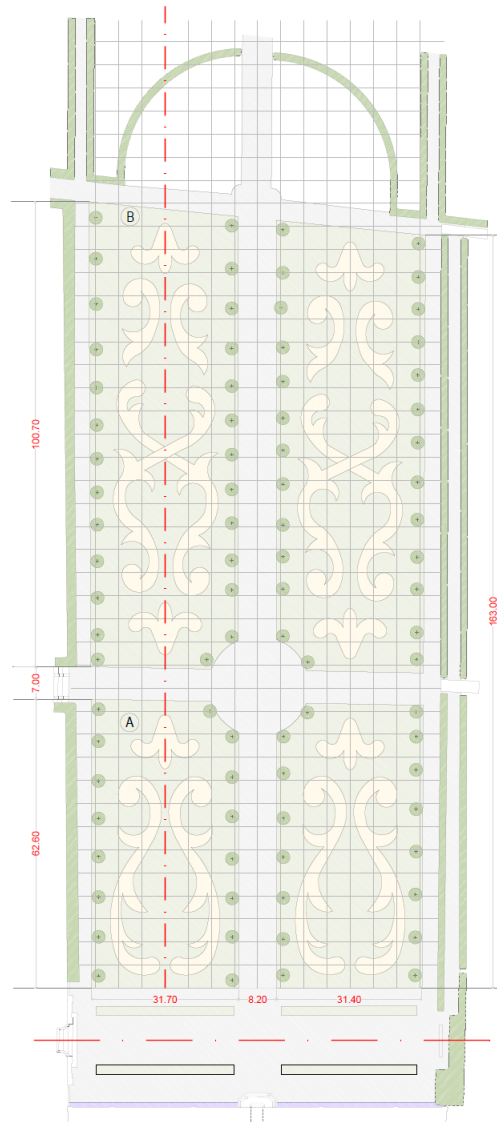
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As part of the project for the recovery and enhancement of the property, which the Augusto Rancilio Foundation carries out with the constant support of the Superintendency of Archeology, fine arts and landscape for the metropolitan city of Milan, it was decided to recreate the ancient eighteenth-century design on the flower beds, made on the project of the engravings of Marc'Antonio Dal Re.

An in-depth study of the eighteenth-century project led to the definition of a modern design to be made with colored gravel, which however reproduces the original Dal Re one.



Project of the parterre by Marc'Antonio Dal Re, 1743



Parterre project in progress

This intervention is accompanied by the positioning of new hornbeam plants, which replace those that over the years have unfortunately been lost.



Hole for relocation of hornbeam plant



Planting of new hornbeam

The restoration of the parterre is undoubtedly one of the most impressive made by FAR for the recovery of the monumental garden: the efforts made, and not yet concluded, will certainly be rewarded by the satisfaction of having brought back one of the very few French-style gardens in Lombardy to its former splendor!



Parterre of Villa Arconati-FAR, restoration in progress

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