

The Castle of the Lakes in La Mandria Regional Park: restoration of restoration

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The Castle of the Lakes is built in the east part of “La Mandria” regional park. With its garden and connections, it has been part of the process of reorganization of the whole estate carried out by Savoyard King Vittorio Emanuele II in the sixties of nineteenth century. Nowadays, aiming to its hypothetic restoration requires to face different subjects: the recently built construction, the original parts of the nineteenth century castle and, finally, those who suffered heavy adjustments during the works of enlargement of the original building in the latest 70s. The expression “restoration of restoration” is meant to show that a most interesting and conspicuous part of the analysis on the building deals with those structures, decorative elements and surfaces that, somehow, have been previously restored.



The castle seen from the shore of the lake.

King Vittorio Emanuele II built a little castle on a peninsula of a heart-shaped lake; together with other two artificial lakes, it takes part to the project of that little paradise meant by the purchaser. The building is made up by a central square part (recalling classical examples) with four towers at its corners (suggesting the romantic idea of medieval castles). Besides the towers, pictorial decorations reproducing dense vegetation and exotic animals represent the other peculiar element that characterizes the building, covering the entire external plaster. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, the will to merge building with nature is been given high prominence. Up to today the name of the castle designer is still

unknown, while it is documented that internal staging has been designed by engineer Domenico Ferri. The construction of the building took place from 1861 to 1863. In 1882 the family Medici del Vascello bought the entire estate of "Regia Mandria", and so the Castle of the Lakes. During the First World War most of the estate was occupied by the army. Soon after the family Medici intensified different kinds of breedings; the castle was transformed into an incubator for pheasant eggs. In 1963 the whole region of the lakes, and its castle, has been bought by family Bonomi Bolchini who charged architect Renzo Mongiardino to enlarge the castle. This professional has been highly debated by contemporary architectural criticism; he formed himself mostly as a theatrical and movie set-designer and frequently collaborated with famous director Franco Zeffirelli. With his project Mongiardino made the original building the fulcrum of a new one, expanded by two wide wings (two floors high) forming a 45° degree angle with the main axis of the castle. The strong relation between nature on one side and the building on the other was at the basis of Mongiardino's project as well as his predecessors': as floral paintings adorned nineteenth century castle, now the whole building is covered by creeper ivy. Externally it seems as if the architect tried to follow original mouldings and their own scansion while inside he expressed all his passion for luxury and his care of details, just as if each room was a kind of movie set. The original building was completely emptied and a single important library (two levels high) substituted many little rooms.



Aerial view of the castle of the lakes.

The restoration of the building deals with different specific fields: the treatment of fabric and pottery that cover many rooms' walls and the delicate restoration of external painted plasters that suffer different kinds of deterioration, depending on the geographic exposure but mostly on the previous operation made on the building during the past years.



Detail of painted plaster on octagonal tower

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