

PALLADIO 500 ANNI
La grande mostra
Vicenza, 20 September 2008 - 6 January 2009

Exhibition notes

The story of the exhibition

PALLADIO 500 ANNI features over 200 original works: autograph drawings, paintings, books, manuscripts, maps, bronze statuettes, coins and a large number of architectural models.

These are the ‘stills’ from the film recounting the life and work of Palladio, whose architectural career began in the second half of the 1530s and ended in 1580.

The exhibition will present to the public a fascinating, all-round and essentially new synthesis of what is known about Palladio’s life, architecture and influence.

Thanks to the exceptional quality and variety of the original works on show, further illustrated by specially created models, video films and animations, the exhibition aims to capture visitors’ attention and stimulate their imagination through a very intriguing presentation.

The exhibition is set out in ten rooms, thus occupying the whole the *piano nobile* of the Palazzo Barbaran da Porto, the only the urban residence which Palladio completed entirely as intended.

The themes in the various rooms are divided into three main sections:

1. The career of a genius
2. Exploring the architect’s mind
3. An eternal contemporary

1. The career of a genius

One of the works in the exhibition, a painting by Leandro Bassano of a Renaissance Veneto building site, from the National Gallery, London, includes the figure of a young stonecutter busy dressing a block of stone. This image very effectively suggests what work was like for the young Andrea di Pietro, as Palladio was still called at the time of his first employment.

Alongside this work are two marvellous bronze objects from the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, and the Fitzwilliam Museum Cambridge, made by Vincenzo Grandi, Palladio’s godfather. He is known to have influenced the young Andrea’s decision to work with marble dust rather than the white flour of his father’s trade as a miller.

From Padua we move to Vicenza, to find Giangiorgio Trissino and Palladio’s earliest works, documented by a series of autograph drawings and portraits of patrons, like Iseppo Porto, painted full-length with his son Leonida in one of Paolo Veronese’s finest portraits (loaned by the Uffizi Gallery, Florence). Palladio’s project for one of his major urban palaces, the Palazzo Chiericati, is then described in a fascinating sequence of four drawings from the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), London, and Worcester College, Oxford. They have been reunited for the exhibition along with the construction account book, which was personally kept by the patron, Girolamo Chiericati (now in the Musei Civici, Vicenza). The world of Palladio’s villas and their splendid fresco decorations are evoked in an unusual painting by Veronese (*Susanna and the Elders* from the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna) and by some large wooden models based on his designs.

Venice and its Palladian buildings are ‘showcased’ in three works by Canaletto (from the Royal Collection, Windsor, the Manchester City Galleries and the Galleria Nazionale, Parma), while a

Tintoretto painting from the Uffizi provides us with scowling image of the formidable Sansovino, Palladio's rival in Venice.

A sequence of autograph Palladian drawings describes Palladio's unrealised projects: the designs for an ancient Roman-style bridge at Rialto, Venice, which was rejected in favour of a more traditional design by Antonio da Ponte; housing projects and minor buildings in Venice (from the RIBA London) and the magnificent idea for the Doge's Palace in Venice, 'Palladianised' with pediments and columns, but unsuccessfully proposed after the devastating fire of 1577 (from the Devonshire Collections, Chatsworth).

One surprising item is a precious chasuble (sleeveless coat) made from silk acquired in Turkey by Marcantonio Barbaro, Venetian ambassador to Istanbul, and embroidered with the family coat of arms to be donated to the church of Cividale. This piece of clothing is a tangible sign of the constant exchanges between Venice and the East which also enabled Turkish architects to become familiar with the work of Palladio (who built the villa at Maser for Barbaro) and vice-versa.

The first section ends back in Vicenza with the large autograph drawing of the Teatro Olimpico, shown for the first time alongside Palladio's studies of ancient theatres, its source of inspiration (from the RIBA, London, Westminster College Library, London, and the Biblioteca Civica, Verona).

2. Exploring the architect's mind

After having followed Palladio's career through over forty projects, the exhibition seeks to provide answers to a series of inevitable questions: how did the masterpieces come into being in Palladio's mind and how did he put them down onto paper? How did he organise his building sites? And how did he communicate his architecture to the world? The three rooms in the second section of the exhibition will take visitors on a journey in time, allowing them to look over Palladio's shoulder, as he works at the drawing table, gives instructions to workmen or corrects the proofs of his books and checks the printing process.

The first room is dedicated to 'Drawing the project' and features invaluable autograph drawings: they range from hastily sketched ideas made to explain the initial project to the patron (from the Biblioteca Bertoliana, Vicenza) to more advanced studies (from the RIBA) and sumptuously prepared drawings for final presentation. For the latter Palladio involved artist friends, experts in drawing the figures of statues and decorations to make unique, highly attractive drawings (from the RIBA, the National Museum, Budapest and the Musei Civici, Vicenza).

The second room in this section is dedicated to 'Building the project' and reveals the 'secrets' of Palladio's building sites: the way he moulded bricks to build columns without resorting to costly marble or stone blocks and the techniques involved in making plaster by mixing marble dust with lime to obtain *marmorino* (marble plaster). This room presents more autograph drawings, original fragments of his architecture, but also models and samples of material collected through careful research and experimentation undertaken by scholars in the years running up to the exhibition. One of the major interesting new facts which has emerged from this research is that Palladio used red colouring to distinguish the different parts of the architectural orders. This has produced surprising results relating to the interior of the church of San Giorgio in Venice, which for centuries was thought to have been conceived as completely white; the exhibition includes a large three-dimensional model reconstructing the original colours.

In the third room the focus is on 'Communicating the project', i.e. one of the fundamental means to success for Palladio in the world: the process of conceiving and publishing books, such as his popular guides to Rome of 1554, his masterpiece, *I Quattro Libri dell'Architettura* ('The Four Books of Architecture'), and his illustrated manuscripts of works by Julius Caesar (1575) and Polybius (1579-80). Palladio's method of devising books is explored through the preparatory sheets for the plates of the *Quattro Libri*, with the details of the text full of corrections and mirror-image drawings ready to be given to the engravers (from the RIBA). A mockup manuscript of Polybius

Histories (now in the British library, London), on show for the first time in Italy, reveals how Palladio personally corrected the proofs and positioned the images.

In addition to single pages of the original books open in showcases, multimedia presentations will enable visitors to browse through the Palladio's works in digital form.

3. An eternal contemporary

The last section of the exhibition begins with a remarkable work, the great bird's eye view of Vicenza from around 1580 (the year of Palladio's death). It was made as a model for the work to be included in the Gallery of Maps in the Vatican. This is one of the finest Renaissance large-format maps (130 x 140 cm) and shows us what had effectively been built in Palladio's Vicenza. We thus discover that at the time of the architect's death many buildings were still under construction: the Palazzo Chiericati, the Palazzo Thiene and the Palazzo Barbaran da Porto, the venue for the current exhibition.

Next to the map is what could almost be considered the architect's own 'mausoleum', the Villa Rotonda, Vicenza. A wooden model of the villa will stand beside Renaissance drawings of the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus, one of the seven wonders of the world, thought to have been the source of inspiration for the Villa Rotonda.

Palladio's influence is then explored in a number of buildings by architects who took up his legacy: Vincenzo Scamozzi, Inigo Jones (shown in a splendid portrait by Van Dyck from the Devonshire Collections, Chatsworth, and represented by his Banqueting House in London), Lord Burlington and his drawings for the house at Chiswick (again from Chatsworth), Giacomo Quarenghi (two works from the Biblioteca Civica, Bergamo), Charles Cameron, and Thomas Jefferson and his mansion at Monticello, Virginia.

The last image visitors will see on leaving the exhibition is a splendid *Capriccio* by Canaletto. This work shows the bridge of Rialto as Palladio had intended it, but the bridge is surrounded by the Vicentine buildings of the Basilica and the Palazzo Chiericati, 'virtually' set on the banks of the Grand Canal. This 'Palladianised' Venice is the result of the admiration his work continued to generate in subsequent centuries.

The architectural models

Describing architecture to non-specialists is always a fascinating challenge. For this exhibition, in addition to the large wooden models of existing buildings, further models have been specially constructed in the same scale as Palladio's autograph drawings in order to make the designs on paper intelligible to non-specialists.

Similarly, a series of video films and animations have been created to enable visitors to view the designs set in the contexts for which they were conceived.

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The private Palladio

What's in a name?

What kind of resonance did the name Palladio have in the 16th-century Veneto? Firstly, it brings to mind 'Pallas Athena', the goddess of wisdom. To the more erudite, it could also have recalled the name of Rutilius Taurus Aemilianus Palladius, a 4th-century writer on agriculture who was well known in Renaissance circles. But there was also another Palladio, familiar to the courageous readers who made their way through the 27,000 lines of the huge neo-Homeric work *l'Italia Liberata dai Goti* ('Italy freed from the Goths'). This epic telling of the victorious war conducted by the Byzantine generals Belisarius and Narses against the Goths was published by Giangiorgio Trissino in 1547 and 1548 after a very long gestation period. One of the characters in the poem is the Angel Palladio, the custodian angel of the Byzantine leader, General Belisarius. In the second book he begins to advise, guide and eventually also saves the life of Belisarius and his generals, from would-be assassins and enemies. But the Angel Palladio is also an expert in the field of military camps, buildings and urban planning. It is very likely therefore that Andrea owed his new name to Trissino. Also because between the lines in the *Italia Liberata* the reader can grasp allusions to several further personal details of Trissino's life. The grim Agrilupo, a man with no religion or faith, bent on persecuting his brother and despising his father, behaves very similarly to Giulio Trissino, Giangiorgio's son. In the eighth book Zenobia appears – she is the Queen of Palmira defeated by Aurelian – and hers is the unusual name which Palladio was to give to his only daughter.

Palladio's family

In 1534 Palladio married Allegradonna, the humble daughter of a carpenter called Marcantonio. They had five children: Leonida, Marcantonio, Orazio, Zenobia and Silla. The names reveal their father's preference (he was the son of a Pietro and nephew of a Francesco) for the heroes of the ancient world rather than the Christian one.

Allegradonna's name (literally 'Merry Woman') is almost all we know of Palladio's wife apart from the fact she personally went to receive her absent husband's salary for the construction of the loggias of the Basilica in Vicenza, as revealed by the building-site account book. She also asked for advance payments through her sons or building-site administrator friends in an attempt to balance the far from very healthy household books.

Of Palladio's eldest son Leonida, we know he was a self-confessed murderer who killed a man for trivial reasons. The proceedings of his trial reveal that on 14 February 1569 he stabbed to death a certain Alessandro Camera by striking him on the face in the middle of brawl in the victim's house. The row had broken out when, in an atmosphere of general drunken stupor, Camera's wife claimed she would like to 'tripudiare cum dicto Leonida' ('rejoice with the said Leonida'), prompting her husband's violent reaction. Initially the murderer fled but – clearly well advised – eventually gave himself up. At his trial he was acquitted on the grounds of legitimate defence by the governor Tommaso Morosini, leaving some doubts to the impartiality of the judge. The description of this crime and its brutality, and the fact that Leonida was armed with a knife and knew how to use it,

provides a far from reassuring picture of Palladio's eldest son. This image is compounded by the fact that, unlike his brothers, Leonida does not seem to have chosen a profession and was less involved in family commitments; he only rarely, for example, withdrew his absent father's salary. Marcantonio, on the other hand, probably led a quiet life. Palladio's second son is documented as being a member of the stonecutters guild in 1555 with the qualification of *maestro*, and therefore must have been at least eighteen. He was paid for carving various decorative details of the loggias of the Basilica, such as the grotesque masks or bucranes, and frequently withdrew his father's salary. Then, in 1560, he left Vicenza for Venice, where he was employed in the workshop of the Trent sculptor Alessandro Vittoria, who was rising to prominence in Venice, as demonstrated by his involvement in several major building sites. Marcantonio returned to Vicenza in the late 1580s and is last mentioned in documents in September 1600.

While the unruly Leonida was a cause of concern from his father and the practical Marcantonio reassured him, when Orazio graduated in law at Padua University in November 1569, it must certainly have represented a rise in social status for the family. Orazio played a very active part in managing family affairs. He took turns with Marcantonio and Silla in withdrawing his father's salary. He also negotiated the dowry of his sister Zenobia in 1564. The same year he wrote a letter on behalf of his father to accompany the designs of a new choir to be sent to the administrators of the cathedral of Montagnana. He had poetic ambitions and contributed a poem to a miscellany published in Padua (1568) dedicated to Geronima Colonna d'Aragona. But in 1569 Papal inquisitors caught him in possession of Lutheran pamphlets sent from some Vicentine heretics who had fled to Switzerland. We know nothing of the consequences of this 'crime', probably because he suddenly died, two and half months after his brother Leonida. Zenobia, the only daughter of Andrea and Allegradonna, married the goldsmith Battista della Fede in 1564. She had a daughter, Lavinia, who in 1596 married Tomasello Tomaselli, with whom she had ten children: Pietro, Novello, Giovanni Battista, Giustina, Elena, Ortensia, Altadonna, Anna, Ottavia, Zenobia and Ginevra. We have no information about their fate and yet they were only the third-generation with Palladio's blood.

Silla was the youngest of the Palladio brothers. He enrolled at the University of Padua but never graduated. He was close to his father, and accompanied him, writing letters and reports, but did not seem to have inherited his imagination and skill. Probably lacking Leonida's temperament, Marcantonio's solidity and Orazio's intelligence, as often happens, Silla became the custodian of the family memories. One moving example of this is provided by the fact that, on 23 May 1591, he baptised an illegitimate son (had with a certain Isabetta, a domestic servant), Andrea Orazio Leonida – almost all the family names in one. But the surviving documents do not reveal what fate befell this Andrea Palladio junior, despite his high-sounding name like that of character in a novel.

Palladio and riches

Was Palladio wealthy? Certainly not when he was born. But did he grow rich through his work? A turning point for his life and career came when he was aged forty. On 1 May 1549 he was appointed to construct the loggias for the Palazzo della Ragione (or the Basilica, as it is popularly known), and as such could rely on a salary of five gold *scudi* a month; he was to receive this fixed income for the rest of his life. It was not much, however, just slightly more than a chief mason's wage and as a fixed salary its real value fell over the years because of inflation. At the same time Palladio's involvement in other building sites gradually diminished, especially in the 1560s.

Over the years his fixed income from the Basilica was supplemented, however, by payments from other commissions, both private and public, although the Vicentine appointment was only regular employment he really ever had. In 1554 and 1570 he participated in the competition for the position of chief architect of the Venetian Republic, but lost out to less famous and possibly more reliable candidates.

In short, Palladio did not grow rich from his work, especially when compared to other leading figures on the Venetian artistic scene, such as Titian, Sansovino and Alessandro Vittoria. Moreover, what he had to sell was basically ideas, which were not paid particularly well. One way of making

money open to him would have been to act as an architect-cum-entrepreneur. This would have meant controlling – more or less directly – a good deal of the building process, from the design to the construction. But this was a direction that Palladio did not take. Similarly, he could have commanded an income as the head of a large building site, such as that for the basilica of St. Peter's in Rome, or as chief architect responsible for buildings in various duchies or republics, like Giulio Romano in Mantua and Jacopo Sansovino in Venice. Palladio only achieved this for the Basilica in Vicenza, where his earnings were proportional to the spending power of a medium-sized city. This may be one of the reasons why from the 1550s, Palladio engaged in publishing, as a parallel activity to architecture, but without any great financial success. Moreover, his friend the poet Giovanni Battista Maganza, in his *Rime Rustiche* ('Rustic Rhymes'), accused him of being a spendthrift: 'poor old Andrea, he spent everything that he earned'.

Palladio's death (and skull)

All we know about Palladio's death is the date: August 1580. But exactly where, when and how he died remains a mystery. On 7 July 1580 a payment of 30 gold *scudi* for the first six months of the year was approved for his services at the Basilica, and on 2 September his son Silla was paid another 10 gold *scudi*, as the settlement for the last two months of his father's work. We do have a little more information, however, because the records of the Accademia Olimpica mention a meeting held in great haste on 25 August to organise Palladio's funeral. Over thirty years later, Paolo Gualdo mentions that the date of his death was 19 August, and this may be accurate.

But where did Palladio die? We may eventually find out, but so far research on this subject has been fruitless and so we can only surmise. Palladio does not appear in the deaths register of the *Provveditori alla Sanità* (Administrators of Health) in Venice, or in the book of the dead for the parish of San Samuele, where he probably resided in the house of Contarini. In theory he should have been mentioned in these records if he had died in the city, where by then he was living almost permanently. He may have died in Vicenza: but the haste with which the Accademia Olimpica organised the funeral suggests that the news of his death had taken some time to arrive in the city. In addition to the Teatro Olimpico, at that time the Tempietto at Maser for Marcantonio Barbaro was also being built, and scholars have concluded he might have died there.

The place of Palladio's burial is also slightly mysterious. In 1578 Silla Palladio acquired the space for a family tomb between the altars of San Giovanni and the Epiphany in the church of Santa Corona in Vicenza, and an inscription was even devised. In the inscription, Palladio 'architectus celeberrimus', his son Silla and son-in-law Giambattista Della Fede commemorate Leonida, Orazio and the young Enea Della Fede. The inscription was never actually carved, but in 1845 the great Palladio scholar Magrini noted the presence of an unusual tombstone in Santa Corona. The stone was engraved with an olive tree and two hands joined across a tree trunk, one holding a shoot growing up from the foot of the tree. It is plausible that this represents the union of the emblems of Palladio (the olive, a tree sacred to Pallas Athena) and of the Della Fede family. But when, on 5 March 1831, the tombstone was raised to look for Palladio's body in order to transfer it to the monumental municipal graveyard, eighteen human skulls were found. There was, however, general agreement about which was the right skull. As the pathologist Grabner Maraschini wrote, in the grave 'one [skull], on account of its size, pronounced oval form from front to back with a spacious depression in the forehead region, and on account of the size and thickness of the bones, attracted our admiration, and although it cannot be proven, almost everyone who saw the skull uttered: this is the head of Palladio'. And so it was that the putative skull of Palladio was escorted with full honours to the municipal graveyard.

Palladio's house in Vicenza

We definitely know where Palladio *never* lived: in the house in Vicenza now known today as the ‘Casa del Palladio’ (‘Palladio’s House’). This was the home of the notary, Pietro Cogollo, who in 1559 commissioned restructuring work on the building, at a cost of no less than 250 ducats, thus offering his own contribution to urban decor in exchange for Vicentine citizenship. If Palladio ever set foot in the house, it was probably only to work on the project, or because his son Orazio lived there. The misunderstanding is due to the fact that Cogollo’s house is mentioned as the ‘Residence of Andrea Palladio in Vicenza’ on page 33 of the (apocryphal) ninth volume of a work by the Palladio scholar Francesco Muttoni. Although this claim was definitively refuted a few decades later, the legend continued to be fuelled by the desire of the people of Vicenza to find a house for their most famous citizen. Not being able to adopt the Palazzo Chiericati or the Palazzo Thiene on the grounds of their size and position, this small but elegant bourgeois building in the main street seemed perfectly suited to the purpose.

Palladio never owned a house in Vicenza: we know this from the list – very thoroughly compiled despite not being computerised – of house-owners, who were all obliged to pay taxes. He always lived in rented accommodation and in various houses. On arriving in Vicenza, he lived with his father in the Contrada del Castello, and then for around ten years in Contrada Pedemuro, near the workshop where he was employed. There is little further mention of him from his marriage to Allegradonna until 1552, when he is documented as renting a house at Porta Castello, probably owned by the brothers Orazio and Francesco Thiene. He then moved just over the Bridge of the Angels, towards Padua, to an area known at the time as Porsampiero. In 1564 he was living in rented accommodation at the beginning of what is now Via IV Novembre, on the right-hand side, and in 1569 he moved to the opposite side of the street, very probably to a house owned by the brothers Odoardo and Teodoro Thiene.

In the 1560s, however, Palladio began to stay more often in Venice, to be closer to his building sites, and by the 1570s, this must have been a more or less permanent move. His sons Leonida and Orazio died in Venice in 1572, and his wife Allegradonna took seriously ill there. As a sonnet by Maganza seems to suggest, Palladio probably lived in the palace of Giacomo Contarini at San Samuele. Contarini was a fascinating man, an art collector but also a scholar of natural and mechanical sciences. In his will he mentions his remarkable collection of ‘exquisite things and such that those who do not examine them well, might not believe their eyes, things of printed books like writings and pens, mathematical instruments, statues of bronze and marble, paintings, minerals, stones and secrets’.

Palladio’s character

Palladio’s first biographer, Paolo Gualdo, wrote in 1616: ‘Palladio was very agreeable and witty in conversation, much to the relish of the gentlemen and *signori* with whom he dealt, but also to workers, whose services he enlisted. Always keeping their spirits up by entertaining them with many pleasantries, he made them work in good cheer. He took great pleasure in patiently teaching all the fine terms of the Art, so that there was not a mason, stonemason or carpenter who did not know all the measurements, members and exact terms of architecture.’

Palladio’s popularity with Vicentine masons was so great that signs of it were still found and recorded by Inigo Jones, who in 1614 visited Vicenza, where he was proudly shown the corner capital of the Palazzo Thiene said to have been carved personally by Palladio. And in the foreword to the readers of the *Quattro Libri*, Palladio declares that the building site and not the library was the source of his own technical vocabulary: ‘I will avoid lengthy words... and will make use of those terms, which workers commonly use today.’

Palladio was equally at ease in the world of his wealthy patrons, thanks to his education received from Trissino and his familiarity with sophisticated milieus. Vasari felt the need to end his note on the life of Palladio by commenting: ‘I must add that so much virtue combined with such an affable and kindly nature makes him well-loved by everyone’.

500 YEARS OF PALLADIO

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Exhibition notes

The career of a genius (1508-1580)

Andrea Palladio is probably the most influential and best-known architect to have lived in the last five centuries. His fame and reputation outlived the Baroque, the neo-Gothic and Ruskin's invectives against him, and even the Modern Movement. The often pedestrian, random citations of Palladio's language taken, for example, from the loggia of the Villa Poiana, have kept his name familiar and have contributed to the continuing success of his book. But at the same time they have helped more perceptive observers understand the difference between Palladio's architectural system – in which structure and ornament and form and function are perfectly integrated – and pastry-chef architects simply adding decorations to their cakes.

Palladio's education with Giangiorgio Trissino

Palladio was an exceptional figure on the architectural scene of the 16th century. He did not come from central Italy, where the great architects who influenced him had been born or trained, but from the Veneto: he was born in Padua, but from the age of sixteen lived and worked in Vicenza. He had a very unusual training, not that of a painter (like Bramante, Raphael, Peruzzi and Giulio Romano), or a sculptor (like Sansovino and Michelangelo), but as stonecutter. In fact had it not been for his contacts from the second half of the 1530s with the Vicentine noble and writer Giangiorgio Trissino (1478-1550), Palladio would probably have remained a skilful intelligent craftsman, capable of designing portals and funerary monuments, but without the necessary learning and intellectual prowess required to become a true architect. He certainly would not have developed from the master stonecutter Andrea di Pietro into the celebrated architect Andrea Palladio, the sophisticated Roman name which Trissino invented for him.

Trissino was a crucial figure for Palladio in many ways. He himself was a very gifted amateur architect and in practical terms he almost certainly played a key role in recommending Palladio to Vicentine patricians in the early years of his career. It was also with Trissino that Palladio went on the trips to Rome which, in the 1540s, allowed him to explore the ancient and modern architecture of the city, previously only seen in books. But arguably Palladio's biggest debt to Giangiorgio Trissino, lay in his special system of rules making use of a grammar of forms and proportions and a 'measured vocabulary of motifs', clearly conceived and conceptually ready-made. Trissino was a leading authority on the theory of orthography, grammar and literary studies, and he possibly saw analogies between linguistic structure and a structured approach to architectural design. Moreover, through a kind of intellectual osmosis Palladio may have translated into architecture Trissino's approach to the relations between literary style and linguistic rules.

The 1540s: villas and palaces for the Vicentine élite

It is not exactly clear how Palladio made the transition from the work of carving difficult architectural details, such as capitals, to designing small-sized buildings, initially occasionally and then full-time. He thus became an architect who no longer worked with tools like the chisel, but with his mind, books, the square and pencil and his drawings after the antique. He certainly developed by degrees, beginning with the early projects for palaces and villas in the Vicentine countryside: the Villa Pisani at Bagnolo, the Villa Saraceno at Finale, and the Villa Poiana at Poiana Maggiore.

Palladio's villas met the demand for a new type of rural residence. His designs implicitly acknowledged there was no need to build large palaces in the countryside modelled directly on city dwellings. What was required was something smaller, often only with one storey of living space, and suitable for controlling the production activities providing the owner with most of his income, as well as impressing his tenant farmers and neighbours and entertaining important guests. These residences established a social and political presence in the countryside and were also designed for recreation, hunting and escaping from the still potentially unhealthy city. Dominated by pediments, usually decorated with the proprietors emblems, the villas announced a powerful presence in the vast flat surrounding territory. Inside the villas, Palladio organised the distribution of the rooms both vertically and horizontally. Kitchens, pantries, washrooms and cellars were situated on the basement floor, while the ample space under the roof was used to preserve the estate's most precious product: grain, also useful in isolating the living spaces below. On the main floor, inhabited by the family and his guests, the rooms were more public (*loggia* and *salone*). They were set on the central axis, while on the right and left where various symmetrical enfilades of rooms. Around the same time, from 1542 to 1550, Palladio was busy designing major urban palaces, all in Vicenza: the Palazzo Thiene, the Palazzo Porto, and the Palazzo Chiericati. While the economic resources of the main families of the Veneto cities were derived from the countryside, political life was concentrated in the urban centres, where most of those who built and owned palaces were also councillors running the city. In cities like Verona and Vicenza the nobility was generally divided in opposed factions, one in favour of the French and the Venetians, and the other on the side of the Spanish, according to a division which reflected the international political scene. In a certain sense these factions were a forerunner of political parties, although they were primarily the expression of a network of relations involving clients and protectors, often violently fuelled by vendettas and family feuds.

The first of the major palaces which Palladio tackled was the Palazzo Thiene. Work began on this building in 1542 for Marcantonio Thiene and his brother, at that time the wealthiest men in the city. It is thought that the initial design for the palace was by Giulio Romano, who visited Vicenza in 1542. Still relatively unknown and not established as an architect, Palladio would at first only seem to have been employed to build the project by the greatly revered elder architect. But after Giulio's death in 1546, Palladio was offered the opportunity to apply his ideas and motifs to the building, which he later published in the *Quattro Libri* as a work entirely of his own design. Shortly afterwards, Palladio designed the palace for Iseppo (Giuseppe) Porto, who had married the Thiene's sister. But he definitively 'graduated' in architecture with the Palazzo Chiericati. In this building he invented something completely new, a palace so well integrated into the urban fabric that there was a public arcade on the ground floor, directly inspired by great ancient architecture, with mighty pillars supporting the floors above.

The 1550s and the development of a Palladian style

While the Palazzo Chiericati may be considered a new type of private urban residence, the design of the loggias of Palazzo della Ragione led to the creation of the most imposing public palace in northern Italy. Palladio designed particularly magnificent monumental wings around the pre-existing central core of the Basilica (with shops on the ground floor and the city council assembly hall on the floor above). Despite its Roman feel, the solid stone structure is almost Gothic in the way it combines lightness and solidity. By adopting *serliana* openings Palladio ensured that light penetrated the building and that the inevitable irregularities in the façade were discreetly absorbed, almost imperceptibly, in the spaces between the minor orders and the pillars, leaving the main elements, the pillars and arches, always equal and regular.

Thanks to these extraordinary works, Palladio was ready to reach the highest rung in his career as architect to the great Venetian aristocrats. Throughout the 1550s Palladio designed villas for patricians in the countryside around Venice: the Villa Cornaro at Piombino Dese, the Villa Emo at Fanzolo, the Villa Barbaro at Maser, the Villa Foscari at Mira and the Villa Badoer at Fratta

Polesine. These were no longer the small-size villas of the 1540s but huge building complexes with sumptuous interior decorations made by the great painters of the day, such as Paolo Veronese or Battista Zelotti. By designing villas for the Venetians, Palladio drew closer to the capital itself. After having tried him out for their country residences, the Venetian patricians began to turn to him for projects in Venice. Most of these nobles belong to a ruling group who wished to rationalise political and administrative life, even at the cost of radical changes. Palladio and his rational architecture became the metaphor for a possible Venice of the future, based on reforms to law, administration and even military organisation.

The 1560s in Venice

Palladio's early projects in Venice were brokered by the powerful brothers Daniele and Marcantonio Barbaro: the remodelling of the façade of San Pietro di Castello (never completed), but most importantly an overall project for the Benedictine monastery on the island of San Giorgio, which led to the construction of the large refectory and then the church and cloister. At almost the same time, the Lateran Canons commissioned him to build their monastery of the Carità, which today houses the Gallerie dell'Accademia. Palladio thus began working for two very powerful religious orders in the heart of the city. By now he was the rising figure on the Venetian architectural scene and indeed took over from the powerful Jacopo Sansovino in designing the façade of the church of San Francesco della Vigna. The ultimate contemporary acknowledgement of Palladio's achievements came from the artist and art historian Giorgio Vasari, who included his works in the second edition of the *Lives of the Artists* of 1568. Two years later Palladio published his own treatise *I Quattro Libri dell'Architettura* ('The Four Books of Architecture') which played such a key role in enhancing his growing international reputation. Although Palladio was never formally appointed as an architect paid by the Venetian Republic, he was effectively given all the most important projects, such as the construction of the church of the Redentore as an ex-votive building after the plague of 1576, and the remodelling of the rooms in the Doge's Palace. His services were sought after by Emanuele Filiberto in Savoy, and he was invited to Bologna to design the façade of the church of San Petronio. Around this time he also built various palaces and the great Loggia del Capitaniato in Vicenza.

Palladio died suddenly in August 1580: the exact date, location or even cause of his death is not known. It is not even clear where he was buried, almost as if all traces of his death had been cancelled since he now lived on through the fame of his buildings and the pages of his books.

The Quattro Libri and Palladio's influence after his death

One of Palladio's most important creations deserves close examination: his authoritative architectural testament, *I Quattro Libri dell'Architettura* (Venice, 1570). In this work he set out his formulas for the orders, the measurements of rooms, and the designs of stairs and details. In the Fourth Book, he published his reconstructions of Roman temples which he had studied so carefully, while in the Second and Third Books he provided (as no architect had ever done before him) a kind of retrospective view of his designs for palaces, villas, public buildings and bridges.

In the *Quattro Libri* Palladio used concise clear language in effectively communicating complex information as well as carefully correlating the engravings and the texts. The result was the most valuable illustrated book of architecture ever published until that time.

Palladio's immense influence on the development of architecture in northern Europe and subsequently North America was not only due to his rationally-based designs, his clear grammar, and his focus on domestic buildings but also his remarkable powers of communication, as shown in his book.

Palladio clearly did not reveal all his secrets in the *Quattro Libri*. He never exactly says how to design according to a system without becoming boring and repetitive. He does not fully explain how and when to bend his own rules, and there is no indication about how to use a drawing to generate many ideas and further drawings starting from a single initial scheme or why it is

important always to make alternative designs. He does not does explain how to design a detail so that it is perfect for one particular building but not for every building. Thus, for example, the windows for the Villa Poiana are perfect for that villa and those for the Villa Rotonda are perfect for the Villa Rotonda. In writing the *Quattro Libri* he certainly aimed to educate and improve the general standard of architectural design. But like all good teachers, he may have realised it was better to leave his disciples the freedom to discover something for themselves.