



# ITINERARIO LIBERTY



## Pecori Giraldi Villa

The villa of Rimorelli, for a long time property of the Pecori Giraldi family, by which it was donated to Borgo San Lorenzo in 1979, represents one of the most interesting buildings of the Borgo San Lorenzo area. Probably rising on the place of an ancient construction of the Giraldis, one of the most renowned families of the Borgo San Lorenzo territory, it became the property of Count Antonio Pecori in 1748, who added his own surname to that of the Giraldis. The great villa, which expanded over two floors, shows a beautiful façade of Renaissance taste surmounted by a sturdy battlemented tower, fully restored in 1902. The decoration of the internal environments of the villa must have already started in the last century, since Chini, in his History of Mugello he recalls the paintings that the village painter Angiolino Romagnoli (1836 - 1890) would have realized there. Moreover, already near the middle of the century (1854) the intervention of the Chinis in the decoration of the villa began, since Pietro Alessio, with the collaboration of his young son Pio, carried out works on the inside.

This work, or at least the remains of it, are perhaps recognizable in the decorations of the vegetable and the grotesquerie type, vividly polychromatic, of some settings of the ground floor of the villa. Later on, the decorative enterprise, above all of the noble part of the building, is continued by Leto Chini, whose participation is very probably recognizable in the paintings of medieval and 15th century inspiration of the entrance hall. In fact, the same Leto, in an annotation in the autobiography of his brother, father Lino Chini, mentions that in August 1902 he was working in the heraldic hall of the Pecori Giraldi villa in Rimorelli.

Probably between 1906 and 1911, after the restorations in the very first years of the century, Gallileo Chini, who takes care predominantly of the continuation of the complex pictorial decoration of the entrance hall, intervenes, called by General Guglielmo Pecori Giraldi; this decoration contains the coats of arms and the undertakings of the noble Florentine families related to the Pecori Giraldis in the course of the centuries, and those relative to its famous members. With the earthquake of 29th. June 1919 the villa and its decorations must also have suffered remarkable damages, and the subsequent restoration works were presumably entrusted for the decorative part, to Tito Chini, who had been, amongst other things, the orderly of General Guglielmo Pecori Giraldi, during the First World War.

Tito guided the assignment with the help of his uncle Pietro very probably between 1920 and 1922, dates which it is still possible to read today in two distinct places in the villa, as evidence that the demanding work regarded all the decoration of the noble part of the building. The great entrance hall, onto which the main door opens, forms the heart of the villa and the fulcrum of the entire decorative display. All its walls are covered by paintings.

On the West and South walls, four Coats of Arms may be seen, of Eleonora Von Tautphoeus, Alessandro's wife from 1892, (the year which may also be considered that of the execution of the painting), of Anna Maria Capponi, of Giulia Niccolini, Bernardo Pecori Giraldi's wife from 1809 and of Theresa Suarez De La Concha: These paintings show nineteenth-century characteristics of academic overtones and seem to constitute the most ancient parts of the decoration, probably dating back to the end of the last century. A second more numerous group is constituted by the complex decoration of the ceiling, by a series of coats of arms and heraldic figures, by decorative fascias of the walls and by the skirting board with quatre-foiled, monochromatic panels. They are paintings of evident medieval and 15th. century imitation, which may be identified with those on which Leto Chini was working in 1902, given the similarity to the decorations of the halls of the Medicea Villa in Cafaggiolo, which he had completed in 1887 together with his brother Dario.

In a restricted, but very significant group of interventions it is possible to recognize the part due to Galileo. They are works destined to continue and perhaps complete the decoration of the hall, and probably carried out between 1906, the year in which the San Lorenzo Furnaces sprang up in Mugello, and 1911. On the

Eastern wall of the hall the portrayal of St. George killing the dragon, which Niccolai links explicitly to Galileo. The great painting, rich in dynamism and with vivacious shades of color, maintains a medievalist, fabulist inflection which is fascinating and makes a great impression, to which the usual graphical elegance and lineal Liberty ascendants, and characteristics of the best inspirations of Galileo are associated. The important work was most probably damaged by the earthquake already mentioned several times and restored by Tito, together with the other pre-existent parts of the decoration of the hall.

More precisely, from a note of Pietro Chini, who collaborated with Tito in this venture, it is learned that the background of St. George was re-done by the decorator Donatello Pietracaprina, under the direction of Tito. To the steady hand of Galileo other coats of arms may be attributed, like that of Camilla Sebreghondi, Guglielmo's first wife, characterized by two elegant models and fluctuating puttos, and by a splendid rose decoration by Glasgow and that of Iacopo, Neri and Francesco Giraldi, by the shield framed by a shell motif which calls to mind the windows of the central nave of the Parish Church San Giovanni Maggiore, and in which the beautiful vegetable festoon which engarlands it, stands out.

The Coat of Arms of **Francesco Guglielmo Pecori Giraldi**, in which, inside a stylized, abstract, dichromatic garland, the painter includes a vegetable decoration with ears of corn and a shield with a neo-Renaissance frame crowned by two splendid putti holding a basket of fruit in delicate colours, can also be traced back to Galileo. The Coat of Arms of Pietra Altoviti, with a beautiful vegetable festoon, is also referable to Galileo. Above the architrave of the door of the West wall, which leads to the room underlying the tower, there is a majolica on a blue background portraying the **Face of Christ crowned by thorns**.

The artefact, of remarkable quality due to the beautiful chromatic contrast and for the accurate design, above all of the blond hair, seems imputable to Galileo and is referable, at least as ideation, to the early years of the twentieth century. The completion of the decorative complex, carried on with the direction and the direct intervention of Tito, must, however, have seen the participation of other collaborators like Dino Chini, besides, naturally, Pietro. In fact one may observe a group of Coats of Arms stylistically quite heterogeneous but equally referable to the well-known decorative typology of the Chinis.

It is, however, also possible that at least a part of these Coats of Arms were painted between 1911 and 1920, in the intervening period between the presence of Galileo and the beginning of the works of Tito and Pietro. On the East wall, beside the entrance door to the great hall of the fireplace, one may see the painting of a large heraldic undertaking of Lavinia Morosini, whom Marshall Guglielmo Pecori Giraldi married in second marriage in 1917. The work bears the dates 1921 – 1922 and the double signature of Tito Chini, a certain demonstration of his activity in the Pecori Giraldi villa at that time.

The painting, which bears, besides the Morosini Coat of Arms, quite a complex allegory of the city of Venice and of the past years of the doges of the illustrious noble Venetian family, is of a remarkable qualitative level for the chromatic vividness, for the certainty of the sharp-edged, solid design which seems to synthesize the form according to a style characteristic of Tito and which is almost Art Déco.

One must not, however, forget that Tito carries out, also and above all in the glass manufacture, works stylistically very close to those of Galileo, as it is possible to ascertain in the large windows of the Roma Hotel, in Piazza Santa Maria Novella in Florence, completed in the 1920s. The signature of Tito Chini, together with that of his uncle Pietro, and the date 1920 are to be found, very worn out, on the splay of the door leading to the small tower of the villa. The intervention of the two Chinis to restore and complete the decoration of the villa damaged by the earthquake, must have been very vast and regarded numerous environments.

Returning beyond the tower room, one reaches another hall decorated with floral paintings referable to the XIX century, where one finds a small but delightful fire-place completely realized with a tiled covering of the Furnaces, belonging to the standard production of the manufacturing. The tiles with the red masks, those with lilies and those with a simple diamond motif are of particular interest. This fireplace represents a happy and successful example of the capacity of the Furnaces, and of Tito Chini in particular, to utilize the normal production of the manufacturing to realize, from time to time, original objects having an elevated decorative sense.

Crossing the entrance hall once more, one enters a vast hall, at the end of which a monumental **Fire-place** in painted terracotta can be found. Its structure bears a decoration in relief of Renaissance imitation and on the lateral pilasters there are the Pecori Giraldi coats of arms. The internal covering of the fire-place is realized by means of tiles with motifs of broken lines and with those with embedded geometrical decoration with small triangles, invented by Galileo in 1906 - 1911, and for which the anticipation of the styles of the

Optical Art were underlined.

Under the window of the reception hall one may see splendid panels in polychromatic majolica tiles which portray artificial fabrics in brocade with rich, refined floral decoration in metallic gloss of Oriental taste. The upper part of the walls has a decorative monochromatic painted fascia, portraying stylized floral motifs and others with bunches of grapes exactly similar to those used by Galileo to adorn some of his vases. Some environments show vivacious paintings perhaps closet to authors like Pietro Alessio or Tito Chini.

The visit to the ground floor of the villa is concluded in the hall of access to the great **Spiral Staircase** which goes up the upper floor. This relatively small environment impresses for the decoration of the two walls, consisting in a motif of false tapestry with white and black diamonds which descends from halfway up. The top half of the walls is painted blue, while a frame painted with small trefoil arches is the finishing touch. This decoration, of elegant neo-medieval tone, together with the three arches which lead into the stairway, constitutes one of the better preserved environments realized by the Chinis.

The splendid curve of the stairway, of which the dynamic spiral refers to the Liberty style, occupies a space decorated with monochromatic geometrical motifs, on the ceiling of which, decorated with a motif of false coffers, there is a beautiful garland which frames the triangular coat of arms the Pecori Giraldis. The villa conserves some parts of the decorations of the bathrooms, for the most part, unfortunately, lost consisting of tiles or of painted vegetable motifs, as well as some original wooden doors. Many environments of the building still appear to be decorated in some parts with geometrical spiral motifs or stylized vegetables.

Five window panels probably come from some environment of the villa, too, some of which almost completely ruined, the glass tesseras of which conserve a beautiful decoration between Liberty and Déco. While the central part of the panel consists of a geometrical decoration of small gold-plated squares and triangles, some tesseras portray the motif of the stylized beetle, so dear to Galileo right from the first years of the century and widely used in the production of the Furnaces.