

RELATION



The restoration of a seventeenth-century *barco* and its unique garden

The configuration of this large park, in the surroundings of Rome, where Gian Lorenzo Bernini and his co-workers worked, is determined by an informal and organic spatial sensibility, which gradually led to the making of a large "*barco*" (a sort of a private hunting, typical of Italian Renaissance gardens), originally without a proper garden.

The use of building "*barchi*", near the aristocratic palaces, especially since the mid-sixteenth century in Italy, is the expression of a tradition aiming to maintain a strict relationship with a nature viewed in its primitive and wild dimension. As we know, this approach is the antithesis of the formal garden tradition, much more practiced at that time, and characterized by a rationalization of the nature viewed as a space to be conquered, as one can see at its highest level in the spectacular near gardens of Tivoli, Bagnaia, Caprarola etc.

This characteristic of the park has been emerging during the centuries and today it appears as a confirmation of a specific "genius loci", derived from the ancient sacred forest dedicated to Diana (goddess of the forest), of which this park, originally, was a portion.

In this way a sort of reverential respect for the sacredness of the place prevailed throughout the centuries. This aspect clearly comes out if we consider the orography and trees density of the park, that are almost entirely those of the origin. In a few words a protection attitude for the **vitality** that this sacred forest evoked (and today still evokes) prevailed.

An ancient owner, intellectual prince, at the end of '700, wished to preserve the wildness and the picturesque aspects of the park by excluding any silvicultural activity and even, avoiding to take away the woods of the fallen trees.

The *Grand Tour* vogue brought many Italians and foreign visitors to know the Roman countryside, including this *barco*. Among these Turner, Fries, Corot, Frommel and many others, but also poets and writers such as Goethe, Stendhal, Seume, Sand, D'Annunzio. Goethe in 1787 writes: "*...Ci siamo soffermati all'ingresso di un parco, tenuto (non dico mantenuto) dal suo proprietario, ..., nel modo più strano: costui non vuol nemmeno che i passanti vi diano più che uno sguardo. Intanto vi si è formato un vero groviglio: alberi e cespugli, erbacce e tralci crescono come vogliono, si fan secchi, cadono, marciscono. E tutto va bene, e tutto anzi va per il meglio... Sarebbe un quadro del più grande effetto, se lo volesse fare un vero artista*".



Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot, The burg viewed from the park, Oil on paper, Fondazione Langmatt 1826-27



Ernest Fries, a view of the Park, Watercolor, 1824, Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe

Between the nineteenth and twentieth century the several interventions in the park, by the nobles owners, were not in opposition to these characteristics, as showed in some vintage pictures, where the park always appears to be kept in a free and informal aspect.

Perhaps this attitude was easier and more natural, in harmony with the soul of places, to indulge an aesthetic sensibility, by that time being dominant, that favoured informal spatial organizations of the gardens.

It was through this way that, probably, were formed some faces of the “*barco*”, such as the *piazzale dei mascheroni*, the *uccelliera* (the aviary) and the *giardino nuovo* (new garden), which explicitly evoke romantic atmospheres of nineteenth century, with the presence of exotics trees trendy, as the Camellias, and the majestic Sequoias and Cryptomeria of *piazzale dei mascheroni*.

More recently, in the last decades, the park had increased its wild condition, until compromising the preservation of the same historical structures.

So, for example, happened within the *uccelliera*, with its suggestive ancient brick arcs, seriously damaged due to the invasion of looming oak trees.

An urgent restoration of the complex was really necessary. It lasted four years, from August 2006 to December 2010.



The “Uccelliera” before and after the restoration works: today lives as re-interpreted in a walled garden with borders of shade plants (*Hosta spp*, *Acanthus mollis*, *Heracleum mantegazzianum*, *Ajuga reptans*, *Hydrangea petiolaris*, *Rheum officinale*)



The “viale dei leoni” before and after the restoration works

The restoration project

To restore and make available an area with such a complexity, historical, botanical, cultural and silvicultural and so on, has meant, first of all, to determine which aspect of *greenery* should prevail.

A visit to this park is a really suggestive experience. It leaves us an impressive atmosphere of its overall complex but an unfocused image in order of its spatial organization. What remains in our

mind is not the structure of space but a specific overall soul. The smell, the silence, the light and colours. From these considerations the restoration project moved.

Parco Chigi's singularity is a very strong resistance of its landscape features, wild, virgin, never touched. It has been expanded to become a complex of 28 hectares, with several additions, largely come intact up to us.

His distinctive features survived despite of the urban growth around, aggressive as everywhere into metropolitan area of Rome in the last decades of the last century. Today it's a fragment, or a relic, of the ancient forests that once cloaked these places.

The park, seen from the sky, looks like a green bubble, miraculously entrapped inside the surrounding city, or a **fossil amber** that, solidifying, has preserved the integrity and identity of what it contains.



An aerial photo of the park and the surrounding city

The aim of the project, therefore, was to preserve this unique atmosphere with a minimalist, *maieutical* approach, exalting its prevailing landscape features, focusing and underlining the particular sense of space.

The aim has been to reach a balance of a sort of "monitored disorder", by strictly controlling some of its sensitive aspects: such as the preservation of architectural structures, the feasibility of the paths, the colonizing species and weeds into the garden area, the hydraulic regime of the environmental system.

We think that garden restoring is not conceptually different from architectural restoring. The difference consists in the subject to be restored, that is an alive form. For this reason, we think, for the most historical gardens what is real important is to focalize the specific characteristics of the places, the sense of space, precisely, and to point out the theme to treat.

In this way the interpretive attitude becomes the most important category of the restoration process.

From this point of view, we want to specify, that the philosophy underlying the restoration project, does not necessarily comply with respect an exact reconstruction logic of the original garden (which always involves the risk of arbitrary reconstructions), both because of the heavy changes occurred over time, and because of the very nature of a garden which is a *work in progress*.

Moreover we just believe that the endurance, across the centuries, of the soul of this park, is explicable by the fact that other forerunners changed by adding without distorting the overall atmosphere.

For example, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the will of not breaking the romantic uncontaminated nature prevailed, as a result of a centuries stratification, suggesting to the ancient owners some slight interventions, nevertheless essential for leaving a trace of their historical time.

This happens, for example, in the area above the *uccelliera* (aviary), where they planted a Sequoia on guard of the "viale dei leoni".

One giant Sequoia, also, is at the beginning of the path towards the *barco*. But it is especially at the "piazzale dei Mascheroni" that you can see the highest result of this will of "marking" the site and overwrite, at the same time, the sense of place. So the owners planted a group of two



The new pond, created in natural form, as a memory of the ancient fishpond destroyed in the middle of '800. It reflects the baroque fountains and the nineteenth-century group of the Sequoias and Cryptomeria



The Borgo San Rocco ruins

Sequoias and a Cryptomeria in the middle of a glade just in front of the two seventeenth-century fountains. In this way, with the aid of time, one of the more suggestive places of all the park was accomplished.

The areas of intervention

This interpretation of the features of the site has suggested to us to structure the garden area as a sequence of distinct spatial scenes. Here you can experience precise views, emotions and various feelings, and the time factor appears as the main feature of spatial organization.

The various scenes induce mixed feelings.

The massive trees are composed as in the landscape paintings, creating different scenes and always new effects.

The new scenes of the garden area are; *entrance to the "barco" with the Sequoia, Pandusa monument area, borgo San Rocco, uccelliera, giardino nuovo (so-called new garden).*

This operative strategy, is the base for paying particular attention to the specific characteristics of the individual areas, enforced with minimalist intervention. So that the new exotic trees are concentrated next to architectures, to underline the evidence of an anthropic attitude of the site and to enrich the singularity of the scene. This is clear, for example, at Borgo San Rocco, a "real" medieval ruin of a small village in the park, evoking an unmistakable atmosphere of Ninfa historical garden, or into the "uccelliera", at the "barco" entrance, or finally in the area of "giardino nuovo".

L'uccelliera (the aviary)

If *piazzale dei mascheroni*, in the downstream area, is the space that condenses the synthetic image of *barco*, in the highest part of the garden area it is the "uccelliera" that impresses the memory of the visitor, as a symbol of nature-architecture symbiosis. It is an ancient stone cave re-utilized by original owners as an aviary in 1628, covered by a copper mesh. The inner space is characterized by the impressive brick arches, now restored with carbon fibers belts and the colorful rock walls of the cave.

After the restoration works the place revives reinterpreted as a *walled garden* with a lawn that simply highlights the plasticity of the complex, mixed bordures with ornamental leaf plants, such as *Acanthus mollis*, various *Hosta*, *Rheum*, *Astilboides*, *Ajuga reptans*, an *Hydrangea "Petiolaris"*. Two maples in autumn contrast the range of grey of the cave walls.

Among the new introduced species are several maples (*monspessulanum*, *saccharinum*, *negundo variegatum*, *vari palmatum*, *heptalobum*). They are to break the prevailing monochromatic look of the park due to the many *Holm oaks* and *Laurels* and provide a visual spatial depth.

Lots of trees have been introduced both to hide unpleasant views of the modern surrounding city and disguise the garden borders. This has been done by using typical species of this forest such as *Quercus ilex* and *Fraxinus ornus* for the borders, and other already existing species, such as *Camellias* along the paths. Besides a group of *Cynnamomum camphoras* have been placed to hide the back of the Pandusa's monument.



The phases of intervention of restoration the Uccelliera, with the demolition of the large oaks near the arches and the consolidation of the same with belts of carbon fibers.

The piazzale dei mascheroni

In this area a little naturalistic shaped pond has been realized during the restoration works, as a memory of the originally destroyed ancient fishpond. This new pond is also a mark of our time as a further addition after that one of the Nineteenth century of *Sequoias* and *Cryptomeria*.



It is somehow an attempt to integrate the atmosphere of the site, taking advantage of the nineteenth-century wisdom by explaining its minimalist sensibility. The pond position has been carefully studied to "double", by mirroring them, the group of *Sequoias*.

Furthermore this little pond plays an important ecological function for the environment, being rapidly populated by animals that ensure a favorable local ecosystem.

Today, at the end of the works, the park has increased its singular sophisticated tension, not an opposition, between the

wild nature and the artifice, between *Barco* and garden. We thought that the main enrichment and further addition of our contemporary times to this park should consist just in working on "shaping" this transition between a domesticated nature and a wilder one.

ANNO DI REALIZZAZIONE

2006-2010

IMPORTO LAVORI:

€ 941.846,13

Elenco delle specie arboree ed arbustive esistenti

Qi	Quercus ilex
Ph	Platanus orientalis
Fo	Fraxinus ornus
Cj	Camellia japonica
la	Ilex aquifolium
Rp	Robinia pseudoacacia
Ln	Laurus nobilis
Fs	Fagus sylvatica
Cs	Cercis siliquastrum
Bs	Buxus sempervirens
Ss	Sequiadendron dempervirens
Ac	Acer campestre
Crj	Cryptomeria japonica
Ch	Chamaerops humilis
La	Laburnum anagyroides

Elenco delle principali specie arboree ed arbustive di nuovo impianto (per le composizioni delle bordure vedasi la TAV. 2)

Qi	Quercus ilex
Apc	Acer platanoides "Crimson sentry"
Aja	Acer japonicum "Aureum"
Anv	Acer negundo Aureo Variegatum
Ag	Acer griseum
Ar	Acer rubrum
Ap	Acer palmatum "Bloodgood"
Am	Acer monspessulanum
As	Acer saccharinum
Anv	Acer negundo variegatum
Aph	Acer palmatum heptalobum
Cc	Cynnamomum camphora
Cj	Camellia japonica
Cjs	Camellia sasanqua
Ccv	Cornus Controversa Variegata
Cs	Cupressus sempervirens
La	Laburnum anagyroides
Au	Arbutus unedo
Pg	Punica granatum
Vp	Viburnum plicatum "Lanarth"
Vpf	Viburnum opulus "flore pleno"
Ln	Laurus nobilis
Of	Osmanthus fragrans
Oh	Osmanthus heterophyllus
Od	Osmanthus delavaij
Cl	Citrus microcarpa
Bs	Buxus sempervirens microphylla compacta
la	Ilex aquifolium
Ct	Cotoneaster horizontalis
Pn	Pyracantha Navaho
Fo	Fraxinus ornus