

# HOUSE & GARDEN

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# A legendary Palladian villa returns to the family which built the house in the sixteenth century

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BALLO



ACCORDING to legend, Andrea Palladio could be very persuasive in both the spoken and written word. He knew how to appeal to the vanity of his likely patrons.

In his *Second Book of Architecture*, he specified the considerations which should attend discussions concerning the choice of the ideal situation for a villa.

'A house in Town,' he wrote, 'brings much Splendour and Comfort to a Gentleman, who must spend there the Time required for the administration of State affairs, as well as of his own Patrimony and Property. A Villa in the Country, however, will bring him no less Comfort and Advantage. There he can pass his time controlling his Estate, overseeing Crops and Livestock, increasing his Wealth.'

Certainly these factors were well considered in the building of the Villa Foscari on the periphery of Venice, by the banks of the Brenta which flows into the city, although the estate was little more than a smallholding. The villa, far better known as La Malcontenta, is one of the most famous examples, along with La Rotonda, of the Palladio's temple-villa style and was built to his designs between 1555 and 1560 for Nicolo and Alvise Foscari, the architect's first commission from the Venetian aristocracy.

Various ancillary buildings were later added to the villa in the seventeenth century, but these

**This page (left)** Garden front. **(Top right)** Malcontenta in the eighteenth century. **(Below)** Canal façade. **Opposite page** Two views of the main saloon on the first floor.

were demolished during the nineteenth century. The wonder is that the villa itself did not join the lamentable list of the Palladian buildings which have been completely demolished.

The villa belonged to the Foscari family until the end of the eighteenth century. The decline in Mediterranean power of the Venetian republic meant the decline of many of its more eminent families. During the First World War, the villa was a military hospital, and was later used as a forge and a barn. In 1926, A C Landsberg, a Brazilian of German origin, who adopted, first American citizenship and later Portuguese, bought the house. He was possessed of an abiding passion for Italy and Palladio and bought the villa in a brave attempt to save at least one of Italy's historic houses. He then began the long and arduous task of restoration of the structure and preservation of the frescoes by Battista Franco and G B Zelotti.

Thanks to his intensive care, La Malcontenta did not fall into ruin, and the frescoes, hidden under numerous coats of white-wash, were lovingly uncovered. The whole of the interior has also been restored.

Now La Malcontenta is once













**Above left** Small sitting-room on the first floor, depicting the Fall of the Giants.

**Above right** Master bedroom decorated with the theme of Bacchus. The baldacchina bed is set on a simple dais.

**Far left** First-floor ante-room, forming a corner of the villa, overlooking the garden.

**Near left (above)** Vaulted entrance-hall with minimum decoration.

**(Below)** 'Daton' sitting-room, opening of the main salon.

**Right** Family dining-area in the vaulted ground floor.



again in the ownership of the original patrons of the building, the Foscari family. Indeed, the latest restoration work on the exterior, which required the profound study and, in many instances, the revival of traditional techniques, known only to a few present-day craftsmen, was undertaken by Antonio Foscari. Apart from living a familial life in this magnificent house, Signor Foscari is also an architect, devoted to his vocation and to the study of Italy's great architectural heritage ●