



he history of Villa d'Este dates back more than 500 years when Cernobbio was a little village, populated only by fishermen and woodcutters. First to arrive on the site where the Hotel now stands, were some nuns who, in 1442, took refuge from the civil war in a church where today you find the park of Villa d'Este.

Nearby Como was already a thriving city famous in the 1500s for the silk manufacturing which is still the major industry of the area. Among its leading families of that period were the Ottavio Gallios whose youngest son Tolomeo studied in Rome and returned to Como as a Cardinal of the city at the age of 38 under the papacy of Pius IV.

It was at this stage that the Gallios, having acquired the old cloister of Sant'Andrea and adjacent land, decided to build a Villa on the lakeshore, which at the time, was considered extremely fashionable. One of the best architects of those days was Pellegrino Pellegrini of Valsolda and Cardinal Tolomeo Gallio commissioned the planning to him. The Villa, named Garrovo, after the

AN 1815 LITHOGRAPH OF  
VILLA D'ESTE WHEN IT  
COULD BE REACHED ONLY  
BY BOAT. (RIGHT)

mountain stream that flows into the Lake, was built in 1568 and was considered one of the finest examples of architecture and landscaping.

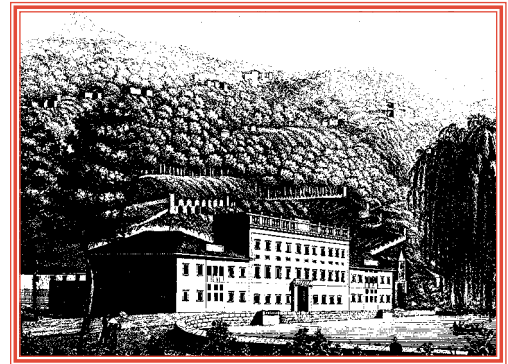
After the Cardinal's death, the Villa Garrovo was inherited by a nephew, Tolomeo, Duke of Alvito. He continued to embellish the house and the gardens in true Renaissance style. Its fame reached far and wide and in 1614 even the Sultan of Morocco, accompanied by his retinue, arrived in Cernobbio with the sole purpose of visiting the Villa and seeing for himself its reported splendors. For more than two centuries, the House of Gallio reigned uncontested on the shores of Cernobbio but, during the latter part of the 18th century, one of the descendants of Tolomeo Gallio moved to Naples and the family began to lose interest in the property.



In 1784, the Villa had a new proprietor in the person of Marquis Bartolomeo Calderara, a dissolute and affluent aristocratic who squandered a fortune on wine, women and song.

The renovation of Villa Garrovo was due to the aged Milanese playboy Marquis Calderara who had married Vittoria Peluso, a ballerina nicknamed "Pelusina". It was rumored that the Marchioness was not accepted by the aristocracy of Milan because in those days it was scandalous for a nobleman to marry a commoner even though "Pelusina" pirouetted on the La Scala stage; but she decided to ignore the slight and undertook an ambitious plan of building up her image in competition with the noble families of Lombardy.

Once the old Marquis died, Donna Vittoria (still young and attractive) wasted no time in remarrying. Her choice fell on a young, handsome Napoleonic General, Count Domenico Pino and since she feared that he might suffer from nostalgia of warfare, she had a series of simulated fortresses and towers built on the slopes overlooking the gardens. These are still standing in the gardens of Villa d'Este. The General was so delighted he recruited a group of military cadets to play mock battles after which lucullian meals were served and off went the fireworks.



It was the year 1815 when Caroline of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel, Princess of Wales and future Queen of England made her royal entry. Many controversial books have been written about the tragic figure of Caroline and many slanderous things were said, so it pleases us today to learn that she spent the happiest time of her troubled life right here on Lake Como. It is known that the Princess of Wales lived practically in exile because she didn't get along with her husband, the future George IV, who was also her first cousin. He repudiated her shortly after the wedding which had been arranged solely to pay off his debts, replenish

A CARICATURE OF THE FUTURE QUEEN OF ENGLAND,  
CAROLINE OF BRUNSWICK TOGETHER WITH HER CHAMBERLAIN BARTOLOMEO PERGAMI.  
VILLA D'ESTE CAN BE SEEN IN THE BACKGROUND. (NEXT PAGE)

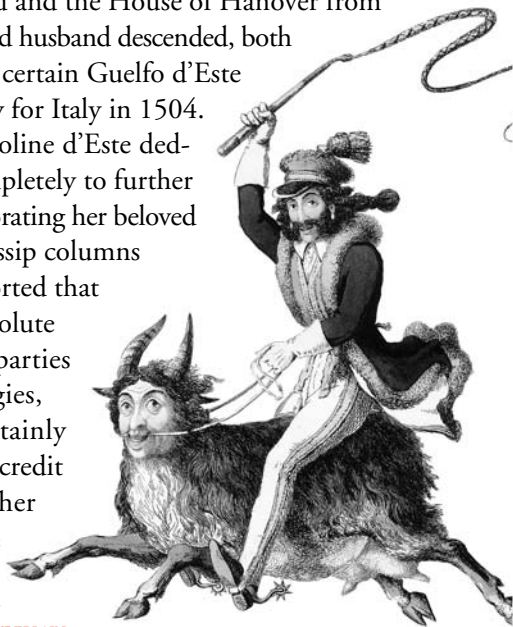


*The Long & the Short of the Tale,  
-or, the whole of the Concern. Sure  
such a pair were never formed to meet by Nature!*

his finances and to obtain a legitimate heir. The marriage was a disaster. Caroline took leave from the conjugal roof and travelled throughout Europe without a fixed residence. When she discovered Lake Como in 1814, it was love at first sight.

Determined to purchase the estate of Garrovo, she rented a villa in Como and the following year the Countess Pino consented to the sale but only because it was a royal wish and she insisted this should be expressed in the deed of sale. The Pinos then took up residence at Villa Cima, which is the first house one passes on the right after entering the gates of Villa d'Este.

**A**t this point Princess Caroline changed the name of the Villa to “New Villa d’Este”. The connection with the Este family was very remote but after much researching it was found that the House of Brunswick to which Caroline belonged and the House of Hanover from which her estranged husband descended, both originated from a certain Guelfo d’Este who left Germany for Italy in 1504. For five years Caroline d’Este dedicated herself completely to further adorning and decorating her beloved residence. The gossip columns of those days reported that she led a very dissolute life and that her parties were veritable orgies, but they were certainly exaggerated to discredit her in the eyes of her



A CARICATURE OF THE FUTURE  
QUEEN OF ENGLAND,  
CAROLINE OF BRUNSWICK  
TOGETHER WITH HER CHAMBERLAIN  
BARTOLOMEO PERGAMI. VILLA D’ESTE CAN BE SEEN IN THE BACKGROUND.

future subjects, who continued to adore her. The calumny was mostly due to the continued presence of her Chamberlain, Bartolomeo Pergami, Baron of Franchina, a young good-looking man who was introduced to her by Count Pino.

She was also popular among the people of Cernobbio to whom she was extremely generous; in particular we should be grateful to her because, among the many innovations, she had the road completed between Como and Cernobbio. However this lavish and extravagant tenure of life put the Princess so much in debt with her banker, Prince Torlonia of Rome, that when in 1820 she returned to London in an abortive attempt to take her place on the throne, she left the Villa d’Este deed of sale in the hands of her banker with the understanding that she could get it back by paying up her debts. But Caroline was never to come back. She died heart-broken in 1821 after the scandalous divorce action filed against her by the King.



*Then a long period of silence followed...*

**I**n 1825 Louis Viganò published a guidebook on Villa d’Este and hordes of tourists and souvenir hunters descended upon Lake Como to view the famous Villa and its gardens. Unfortunately, all this did not contribute to its preservation. In 1829, the heirs of the Banker sold the property to Prince Domenico Orsini who in turn resold it to Baron Ippolito Ciani in 1834.

Ciani who had served as aide-de-camp to Napoleon and had been given the title of Baron by the Emperor, was responsible for restoring the estate with loving care.

In 1856, he built a new Villa on the premises and named



*The XVI Century Mosaic, symbolic of Villa d'Este, is considered one of the*



*most*

*photographed monuments in Italy. Edith Wharton in "Italian Villas and their Gardens" published in 1904, refers to the Mosaic as follows: "...though Caroline, Queen of England and owner of Villa d'Este from 1815 to*

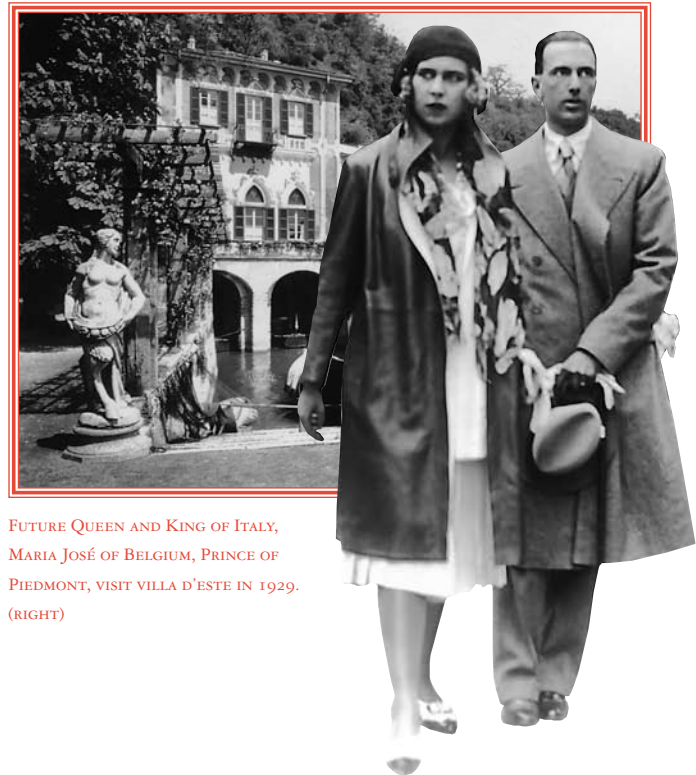
it in honour of Caroline of Brunswick: Hotel de la Reine d'Angleterre. The plan was to launch it as a spa. Overlooking the lake and located beyond the 500 year old plane-tree, it is now known as the "Queen's Pavilion".

IN 1856 THE BARON  
CIANI BUILT THE  
TROMP L'OEIL QUEEN'S  
PAVILION IN HONOR  
OF CAROLINE OF  
BRUNSWICK, QUEEN  
OF ENGLAND. IN 1873,  
TOGETHER WITH THE  
MAIN BUILDING,  
KNOWN AS THE CARDI-  
NAL'S BUILDING, IT BE-  
CAME THE VILLA  
D'ESTE HOTEL.(RIGHT)

The most glorious page in the history of Villa d'Este was written during Ciani's stay on the shores of Lake Como. Milan and all of Lombardy were still under Austrian domination, but the insurrection was already underway. This is when Villa d'Este underwent another transformation: the return of frivolous parties and banquets was a cover-up for the patriotic activities of those involved in the preparation of the "Five days of Milan", (March 18-22, 1848) during the period of the Italian Risorgimento which culminated in 1870 when Italy was finally united.

In 1868, another glamorous page was added when the Empress Maria Fedorowna, wife of the Russian Czar, rented the Villa for two months and stayed for two years. The mild, pleasant climate and the peaceful, relaxing atmosphere of the Lake so became the Czarina that she settled down very happily to this new way of life. Loved by all because she dedicated a lot of her time to charitable works, her sudden return to Russia caused great sadness to the inhabitants of the village. This was when a group of ingenious businessmen decided to form a Limited Company and combined into one property the two Villas: the Cardinal's and the Queen's.

The year was 1873 and Villa d'Este was to become famous the world over as a luxury Hotel. The first major improvement was to build a terrace overlooking the Lake because originally the façade of the Villa rose directly out of the waters. From then on it was a succession of carefully planned additions. In 1926, the famous Villa d'Este 18-hole Golf course and Club House were inaugurated at Montorfano. Only seven miles from the Hotel, it is considered one of the finest and most challenging ever designed. During the past 40 years, Villa d'Este has undergone a complete streamlining in order to provide up-to-date service without disturbing the aura of palatial authenticity. Its guest rooms - no two exactly alike either in size and decor - have the intimacy of a private home.



FUTURE QUEEN AND KING OF ITALY,  
MARIA JOSÉ OF BELGIUM, PRINCE OF  
PIEDMONT, VISIT VILLA D'ESTE IN 1929.  
(RIGHT)

For centuries, the magic of lake Como has been a fountain of inspiration to poets, artists and musicians from Virgil, Pliny, Shelley, Stendhal, Byron and Longfellow to Bellini, Rossini, Verdi, Liszt and Puccini.

Hotel registers dating from 1873 list everyone from Mark Twain to Joseph Heller; from King Leopold of Belgium to the Saudi Arabian Royal Family; from José Carreras to Madonna.

Known as “Hollywood on Lake Como” after Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks visited Villa d’Este, a succession of movie stars followed suite from Greta Garbo and Bette Davis to Elizabeth Taylor and Sharon Stone; from Clark Gable and Gary Cooper to Mel Gibson and Woody Allen.

For centuries Como has been considered the silk capital of the world. Bill Blass, Donna Karan and Ralph Lauren refer to Villa d’Este as their second home.

Villa d’Este is so much more than a Hotel ... the luxury and magnificence of a bygone era is maintained intact... we simply added all the modern comforts including a sybaritic spa.



ALFRED HITCHCOCK ALWAYS SPENT HIS SUMMER HOLIDAYS AT VILLA D’ESTE BECAUSE THIS WAS HIS FAVORITE PLACE IN THE WORLD.(TOP)  
A HOTEL GUEST IN THE 1930S. (RIGHT)



## *In the garden*

THE DESIGN OF THE LOWER PART OF THE GARDENS IS FROM THE RENAISSANCE PERIOD WHILE THE OUTLOOK OF THE UPPER PART IS FROM THE 18TH CENTURY.

. “Arco del Pastore” (Triumphal Arch) 18th century, located at the end of the perspective facing the entrance of the main villa. A marble plaque remembers the beneficences of Caroline of Brunswick, Princess of Wales, who owned the Villa in the years 1815-1821.

. The magnificent **plane-tree** on the terrace overlooking the lake is believed to be among the oldest in Lombardy and over 600 years old.

. **The Nymphaeum**, which opens to the perspective of the fountain of Ercole, was erected by Pellegrini Pellegrini said “**Il Tibaldi**” (1527-1596) also the Architect of the main Villa. Unlike other later Nymphaeums its Mosaics are made with coloured marble splinters. In 1985, to the original eight bass-reliefs an additional two have been added by Sculptor Francesco **Somaini**, with the themes of “Love” and “Solitude”.

. The grandiose **Perspective and Fountain of Ercole**, from which the water flows over 130 granite basins, are from the Renaissance period. The statue of “Ercole e Lidia” (Hercules and Lydia) is an addition of the late 18th century.

**SALA FLORA** - *Flora Room*

. “Eros and Psyche”, marble group from the School of Antonio **Canova** (1757-1822).

. “Mars and Venus with love and Mercury”, by Michele Rocca, said “**Il Parmigianino**”(1675-1751)

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**CANOVA BAR** - *Canova Bar*

. “Adam and Eve”, Carrara marble statues, by Marco Antonio **Prestinari** (1575-1621)

. Four precious **Faenza vases**, 17th century.

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**SALA NAPOLEONE** - *Napoleon Room*

. **Lacunar ceiling** superbly decorated by Andrea **Appiani** (1757-1817) while the Giants supporting the girders are from the **Maestri Intelvinesi**, a prestigious line of artists specialized in plaster moulding.



*Short description of the artworks displayed  
at Villa d'Este*

MOST OF THE GUEST ROOMS AS WELL AS THE CORRIDORS OF THE SEVERAL BUILDINGS ARE DECORATED WITH ANTIQUE FURNISHING, PAINTINGS AND ARTWORKS, WHICH GIVE THE HOTEL A PALATIAL ATMOSPHERE. HEREINAFTER FOLLOWS A SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE MOST INTERESTING ARTWORKS WHICH ORNATE THE PUBLIC AREAS AND THE GARDENS.

*In the main Villa*



**SALA DELLE COLONNE**

*Columns Room*

. “The Fall of Troy” by Gioacchino Giuseppe **Serangeli** (1768-1852) apprentice painter to Jacques-Louis David, who displayed this imposing neo-classical painting at the Paris Salon in 1812: “Pirro Neottolema, after killing Priam, kidnaps Polyxena to sacrifice her on Achille’s tomb”.

. “The Creation”, 19th century copy of a detail of the Michelangelo fresco in the Sistine Chapel.

. “The Universal Flood”, 19th century- French School: “Agar with Ismaele, the son fathered by Abraham, wander in the desert until the Angel of God guides them to the well where they quench their thirst.”



. Further up the gardens above the Fountain of Ercole, the ruins of the **Labirinto (Labyrinth)** built upon the will of Caroline of Brunwick with the remains of a Medieval Monastery formerly on the site of the Queens' building.

. Il **“Tempietto di Telemaco”**, charming Neo-Classical decorative temple from the 18th century.

. Wandering through the fake fortifications which since 1809 overlook the gardens, you will discover enchanting views on the lake.

