



Villa Besana

SIRTORI (LC)





Villa Desana





Historical notes on the municipality of Sirtori

Sirtori, a town of Roman origin, owes its name to the Gens Sertoria who, in Cisalpine Gaul, were dedicated to trade and military life: members of the Gens Sertoria are mentioned in inscriptions dating back to the 1st century A.D.

The town, remembered as “Sirtoles”, in 865 became part of the Martesana county, until becoming together with the nearby Missaglia, part of the twelve “Pievi della Martesana” in the 12th century.

The Sirtoles, lords of the municipality and partisans of the Torriani, were exiled after the battle of Desio in 1277 and recalled by the Visconti in 1385.

The descendants of the Gens Sertoria, appointed by Francesco Sforza, duca of Milan, as the ‘Sirtori Family’ in 1499, were granted the municipality as a fiefdom:

in 1647 Evangelista Sirtori was enfeoffed, and on 3rd September 1650 Philip IV, King of Spain, appointed Don Carlo Sirtori feudal lord of Sirtori.

The members of the Sirtori family took great care of their community, above all with legacies and donations from their priests.

In his will, Bernardino Sirtori, feudal lord of the Regio, ordered the construction of a small church dedicated to Our Lady of the Assumption which was completed in 1673, consecrated in 1683, and still today part of the building complex owned by the Besana family.

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The Catasto Teresiano

The “Catasto Teresiano” of 1721 is a fundamental document for the history of the villa and park complex. At that date, the current complex of the villa and park was still divided into four distinct properties. The buildings were inhabited or rented out to third parties by the various owners, and all land was cultivated except for that immediately adjacent to the buildings, which was used for vegetable orchards and gardens.

Among the various owners were the brothers Giovanni and Guido Sirtori, who owned approximately one third of the current property; little by little, the Sirtori family acquired all the other plots - in 1824 they owned a total of 108 perches, or approximately 70,650 square metres - until they became the owners of the entire complex.

From this document, it can therefore be established that the park, or at least a first section of it, was built between the 1830s and 1840s, by which time all the land comprising the present complex had been acquired by the Sirtori family.

The photographic images in the Besana Archive start from 1875. From this date, it is, therefore, possible not only to follow the changes to the built complex, which reached its current definition around the 1930s, but also to retrace more than two centuries of the park’s life, and in some cases to establish the park’s growth precisely by verifying the dimensions reached by the tree specimens.

The photos give clear evidence of how few changes have been made to the park, which almost exclusively consists of additions of designed elements and slight modifications to the vegetation composition, some clearly intentional and others simply due to natural turnover.

They therefore allow us to establish how the structure of the park has remained essentially unchanged, even in the majority of the vegetation composition.

The only parts that have undergone more radical changes concern the design of the flowerbeds, the decorative elements and some ornamental planting in the garden parts closest to the house.





The Villa and the Park

In the Catasto Teresiano of 1721, the area of the present-day complex of Villa Besana was divided into four distinct estates, one of which belonged to the Sirtori family in the persons of Don Giovanni and Guido and Gaspare brothers.

The Sirtori family were owners also of numerous other properties in the village of Sirtori, including the small church dedicated to Our Lady of the Assumption, erected in the will of the late Bernardino Sirtori.

In 1762, the Sirtori family acquired the buildings and land of Count Rosales and in 1824 those of Antonio Tettamanzo.

Subsequent changes of ownership testify the acquisition of the Crippa and Pirovano plots: the Sirtori family thus came to own all the plots on part of which the park was later built.

Ownership then passed to his successor, Gaspare Sirtori. In 1862 Teresa Prevosti, daughter of Febo Prevosti and Costanza Besana, Gaspare Sirtori's widow, took over the entire property, and in 1890 she bequeathed it to her sister Camilla, with the obligation that in the absence of heirs it should pass to her cousin Giovanni Besana.

In 1899, on the death of Camilla Prevosti, she was succeeded by Giovanni Besana, whose descendants still own the villa and the park today.

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The Villa

The building of the villa is said to stand on the ruins of the ancient castle of the feudal lords of Sirtori, the construction of which dates back to the 16th century. The complex is located in the town centre, not far from the square of the parish church and the Town Hall, on the provincial road that connects Sirtori to Viganò.

It is made up of the main building used as a private residence, the gatehouse, rural buildings, stables, sheds and converted barns, and the Oratory of Our Lady of the Assumption, located outside the fenced-in complex on the opposite side of Via Giovanni Besana.

At present, the main building is characterized by a façade divided horizontally into three parts by high stringcourses. Windows have large-shaped frames and balconies have elaborate railings in clear 17th-century style, as well as various elements in the interior rooms, which seem to be the result of a general renovation.

As far as the main building is concerned, a new transformation took place between 1875 and 1896, plausibly after 1890, when a third floor was added to the advanced body to unify it with the main façade.



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Between 1896 and 1901 the back section of the main façade was advanced and the façade took on a continuous and completely symmetrical curtain wall. In all likelihood, the transformations of the façades were accompanied by changes to the interiors.

Between 1903 and 1908, the façade was once again modified on the ground floor: the plasterwork was changed, the windows were surrounded by new frames and two pairs of openings were unified into two large windows.

Giovanni Besana was most probably responsible for these transformations as he inherited the property and undertook renovation work.

Around the 1920s and 1930s, part of the buildings towards the main entrance on Via Giovanni Besana were demolished and the rustic courtyard to the rear of the main building was enlarged.

In the 1980s, new changes were made to the internal subdivision.

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The Park

An analysis of the cadastral maps from 1721 and their comparison with the design of the park shows how the park was constructed by adapting to the pre-existing and orographic conditions of the terrain.

These conditions were skillfully exploited to create the main structural elements of the landscape park.

The boundaries of the park follow the routes of the two main roads, the municipal road that connects Sirtori to Barzanò to the west and the current via Giovanni Besana, to the east, which continues in a south-east-south direction.

The extension of the park covers a breadth of land that, with the acquisitions completed around the 1830s, was owned by the Sirtori family.

To the south, the boundary of the park follows for the majority of its length the boundaries of the adjacent fields.

The access roads to the inner fields become the basis for the park's route system: driveways and paths follow part of the existing tracks and the junctions of the country roads from the main ones become the entrances to the park.

The document in the archive shows that the lake was created in 1845 to solve a problem of water collection, so it was between the 1830s and 1840s that the park was created.









Photographs preserved in the archive testify to the development of the park from 1875 to the present day.

One photograph from 1896 shows how the plantations around the lake were composed of already mature specimens, confirming that the lake and this part of the park were not recent realizations. The same photo shows a dock on the right side of the tributary canal, the outlet of which is delimited by stones.

In a photo from 1920, the stones where the canal flows into the park are still present, but the dock has disappeared and is now on the opposite bank.

In an earlier photo, one can also see how the plants immediately around the lake are already large, while the trees on the border in the background are much smaller, which suggests that the plantations along the banks of the lake had begun many years earlier than those along the shores.

The earliest photographs, dated 1875, show the complex built at the time when Teresa Prevosti, widow Sirtori, was the owner. They show that the parts directly adjacent to the main building already had the shape that they still have today, while the plantations of ornamental conifers that characterise the present park, which were stabilised in 1908, do not seem to have been present.

There are numerous photographs from 1896: they show plantations that had already reached a certain maturity, even around the building: in particular, magnolias planted in front of the advanced body of the building appear at that date.

Particularly interesting is the appearance, between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, of the square in front of the villa and the one where the tennis court is currently located.

In front of the main front there was a gazebo covered with probably edera, which was later dismantled by the Besana family to uncover the well it covered; in 1901 a new parterre with flowerbeds with a curvilinear design was created.

There were various types of flower beds in the garden around the villa: some were circular and slightly raised, with mosaic flower borders and a central palm tree, while others were planted with aquatic plants and borders of annuals, and there is even a flower bed with a *Datura arborea*, evidence of a well-kept garden with valuable species.

Later on, this multiplicity of forms seems to have tended to be simplified into low flowerbeds with rocailles borders with a design more similar to today's parterre.

The parterre as it is today is shown for the first time in 1941.

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Among the clearly 19th-century constructions in the park are the St Helena edicule, enclosed in a semicircle of cypress trees, the circle of *Liriodendron tulipifera*, which in 1938 had already reached a considerable height, almost equivalent to the current one which is of more than fifty metres, and the various tree screens that guide the eye in wide perspective telescopes. According to family testimonies, the Hornbeam Roccolo was still in use in the early 20th century, but there are no pictures of it, while some photos from 1938 showing the Avenue of Palms, the Labyrinth and the Hornbeam Tunnel or Carpinata show how they had by then reached a stabilised configuration.

In the 1970s the swimming pool was built, on the main perspective axis. After the 1986 restriction decree, the park was given greater attention, and the most recent interventions have been aimed at the careful preservation of the park's landscape values, as can be seen in the planting of three beech trees, a short distance from the degraded specimens destined for felling, ready to replace them in the perception of perspective, in the period between the decay of the original specimens and the attainment of a sufficient size for the perception of the new specimens that will be planted in the same place.



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The complexity of the structure found would suggest that there was a specific project for the creation of this park, although there is no trace of it. In this case, we can consider the tradition passed down through the family that it was an administrator who allocated the money for the construction of the park, as it often happened that administrators of large estates had the competence for this type of project.

It is certain that the design of the park was dictated by the landscape conditions of the land at the time of its creation: the path of the avenue that follows and connects the existing roads, the openings and perspective views that take advantage of the unevenness and slope of the terrain, demonstrate a careful exploitation of the existing conditions that recovered rather than completely transformed the morphology and design of the landscape. From the documents analysed however, it is possible to establish a number of fixed points.

The park did not exist before the 1830s, when the acquisition of all the land comprising the current property was completed. It was in all likelihood

initiated by Gaspare Sirtori, who created the lake in 1845, and in 1896 it had an important and certainly not accidental vegetation that had reached maturity.

It is assumed, therefore, that certain plantations, such as the Liriodendron or the ornamental conifers on the screen, do not seem to have taken place when the lake was created, because in 1875, when the garden next to the villa already had its present appearance, no significant plantations could be seen, while in 1896 photographs show the presence of trees that had already reached a considerable size.

Other realisations, some of which are confirmed by the photographic documentation, are certainly 20th century in character, such as the parterre and the arrangement of the four statues, first shown in 1967.

Similarly, the Avenue of Palms, a species used until 1896 as a single specimen in flowerbeds and later in ornamental groups, and the Labyrinth, the first photographic documentation of which dates back to 1938, whose very schematic and rigorous design refers to the first decades of the last century.

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Villa and Park Highlights

5 monumental trees

Atlantic cedar, cedar deodara,
cryptomeria japonica,
hornbeam, horse chestnut, plane tree,
sequoia, linden, yew.

Circles of eight trees: liriiodendrons,
firs, oaks.

View looking south towards Milan
and the Po Valley.

Cannocchiale view towards the lake.

Pond with mini-dockyard

Pond promenade.

Little waterfall at the source of the
lake.

Hornbeam tunnel.

Roccolo with small house.

St. Helen's shrine.

Lombard tumulus.

Italian-style parterre.

Four-season statues.

Greenhouses.

Cypress avenue at entrance.

Forest of lime trees.

Orchards and agricultural area to the
east.

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THE RENOVATION PROJECT

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NORTH - SOUTH ELEVATION



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EAST-WEST ELEVATION



Villa Desana



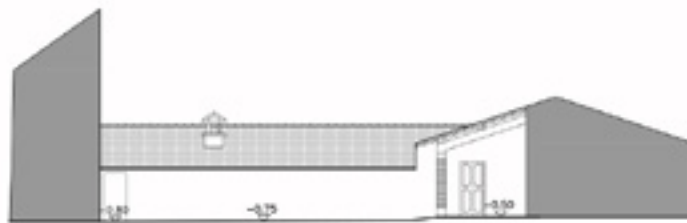
PROSPECTS



PROSPETTO SUD RUSTICI DA VIALETTO INTERNO



PROSPETTO NORD RUSTICI DA VIA GIOVANNI BESANA



PROSPETTO NORD DA CORTILE INTERNO



PROSPETTO EST DA CORTILE INTERNO

Villa Besana

GROUND FLOOR PLAN



I. GAETANO, FRANCESCO E CARLO
PROGETTO ARCHITETTICO
10A
DIP. P. 10/11
DIP. P. 10/12

FIRST FLOOR PLAN



SECOND FLOOR PLAN





Villa Besana is an aristocratic residence of ancient traditions
with a historic park with monumental trees
in the heart of the green Brianza region,
40 km north of Milan and 20 km from Lecco and Lake Como.

The project of renovation and sale wants to share a destiny
that comes from the past,
and entrust it to people with a contemporary aesthetic
and environmental sensibility
capable of creating a new quality of life.

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