Outline

Getty Villa, Malibu, Los Angeles
Vincenzo Scamozzi, reconstruction of Pliny’s Laurentian Villa
Antonio da Sangallo (after Raphael), design for Villa Madama
Bramante, design for Cortile del Belvedere
Antonio Pollaiuolo, after Heemskerck, Villa Belvedere, Vatican

1513-17 Leo X bought property on Monte Mario, site of an earlier villa belonging to Arcangelo Tuzio, Leo’s primary doctor
Raphael, Villa Madama (originally called Villa Falcona), commissioned by Cardinal Giulio de’Medici, cousin to Pope Leo X, and future Pope Clement VII, begun c. 1518; called Madama after it was sold to Empress Margaret of Austria, who was known as Madama; she was the illegitimate daughter of Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor and wife of Alessandro de’Medici, 1st Duke of Florence, assassinated in 1537. It slowly fell into disrepair, especially after the Farnese family became extinct and it passed to Don Carlos of Bourbon, who became King of Naples in 1735. Over time it was stripped of all furnishing and was downgraded to the status of farm. In 1913 it was bought by Maurice Bergesman, an engineer from Toulouse, who asked Marcello Piacentini to oversee its restoration. In 1925 Dentice di Frasso bought it and completed the original Piacentini restoration project. In 1937 the villas was leased to the Italian Ministry for Foreign Affairs and in 1941 the Italian State bought it.

Semicircular exedra = ½ of intended central courtyard
Hall leads to loggia which opens onto NW gardens
3 axial roads: to Rome (Vatican), North to Viterbo (via Triumphalis), South to Tiber + Milvian bridge

Design sources: Villa Poggioagale in Naples (fishpond), Bramante’s Colonna Nymphaeum at Genazzano, Hadrian’s Villa at Tivoli, Sanctuary of Hercules Victor at Tivoli (believed to be an ancient villa), Medici Villa at Fiesole, Poggio a Caiano

Literary sources: Letters of Pliny the Younger (Bernardo Bembo owned a 1483 edition), Paolo Giovio’s description of Villa Lissago at Como, written in 1504, Virgil’s Aeneid, Statius’s villa poems discovered by Poggio Bracciolini in 1417 at Reichenau Abbey

1520 death of Raphael
1527 Sack of Rome by Imperial forces; Clement VII took refuge in Castel Sant’Angelo – watched smoke rising from his villa on Monte Mario

Raphael and workshop (mostly Giulio Romano and Perino del Vaga), Battle at the Milvian Bridge, Sala di Costantina, Vatican, 1520’s.
Sebastiano del Piombo, Portrait of Cardinal Antonio del Monte, 1515; in 1519 Cardinal del Monte (made cardinal in 1511 by Julius II) and his nephew, Baldouino, brother of Julius III, purchased a vigna on Monte Valentino, ½ mile north of Porta del Popolo. They commissioned Jacopo Sansovino to design a villa – 1527 sack of Rome followed by 1533 death of Antonio del Monte.

Portrait of Gianmaria Ciocchi del Monte, nephew of Cardinal del Monte – elected Pope Julius III, in 1550 (1550-1555); immediately began to acquire land adjacent to his uncle’s on the Via Flaminia side of the Tiber, opposite the Villa Madama.

Vignola and Ammannati, Villa Giulia (now the Etruscan Museum), begun 1551

Jacopo Sansovino, Villa Garzoni, Pontecasale

Raphael incomplete letter describing villa, intended to be polished by Castiglione, to be sent to Cardinal Giulio de’Medici

“The villa lies half-way up the north-eastern slope of Monte Mario. Abutted by high ground stretching South-West and West, the hill curves round from its Rome-looking side, which faces South. To that facing North-West. Consequently, out of the eight winds six affect the villa which are the following: Austro (south), Sirocco (SE), Levante (east), Greco (NE), Tramontan (north), and Maestrale (NW). This will enable Your Lordship to understand the lie of the land. To have the villa face the most salutary winds I have disposed it lengthwise on a South-West/North-East axis minding that there should be no windows nor any accommodation facing Sout-East except where warmth is required. (the question of orientation is treated by Vitruvius, Book I, ch, XI and Book VI, ch, VI.)

The villa has two principal entrances. One faces the road coming from the Vatican, across the Prati, the other a new road going straight to Ponte Milvio. Both are 5 canne wide. Since the second actually ends at Ponte Milvio it makes it look as though the bridge had been built for the villa. At the head of this rad a large portal stands in the middle of the edifice.

To avoid confusing Your Lordship I shall start my description by the entrance facing the Vatican and Prati road. It is the main entrance of the villa. Standing clear of the hillside, it lies 4 canne above the level of the Ponte Milvio entrance. Yet the rise in the road is so gentle that the villa is reached before it is realized that one has ascended considerably and come to dominate the entire countryside.

The main characteristic of the entrance is that it is set between two large circular towers which make it both handsome and forbidding while permitting some defense in case of need. In the center is a very fine Doric portal leading into a court, measuring 22 by 11 canne, at the head of which is a vestibule. Conforming in lay-out and destination with the usage of Antiquity, this vestibule features six Ionic columns complete with their antae as Your Lordship would expect.

From the vestibule one passes into an Atrium in the Greek style, or Androne in the Italian sense, and thence into a circular court the orbicular character of which I shall not discuss here to save...
complicating matters. Instead, I shall return to the first court and describe its parts. Since it
looks to the South-East and South, it is here that one will hind the household kitchen, the
butcher’s shop and the common dining hall. A store-room, hollowed out of the hillside and lit
from the North, completes this part of the household quarters. As Your Lordship may imagine,
it is a very cool place indeed.

The part just mentioned is located between the vestibule and the hillside, on the left as one
enters. On the right is a beautiful garden planted with sour-orange-trees and measuring 11 by
51/2 canne. In the center of the garden, among the trees, is a fine fountain fed with spring-
water which arrives there under its own strong pressure by means of various conduits.

The bastion at the right of the entrance supports a very attractive structure such as the
Ancients called Diaeta (from Pliny the Younger – semi-detached structure in prime position in a
villa complex and enclose a room or suite of rooms). Built on a circular plan it has a diameter of
6 canne and, as I shall explain, is reached by way of a corridor protecting the garden from the
Greco (NE). It is further protected from the Tramontana (N) and Maestrale (NW) by the rest of
the edifice.

As I have just said, the Diaeta is a circular structure. It is lit through a ring of glass windows,
each of which is successively visited by the sun from the time it rises until it sets. Plane glass
being no hindrance, as Your Lordship knows, it follows that the room is made exceeding
agreeable by the constant sunshine and the panorama of town and country. In winter-time, it
will serve its purpose as a delightful place in which to hold polite conversation. This takes care
of one end of the garden and the corresponding angle of the villa.

At the opposite end, on the dwelling side, is a portico facing South-East and South, made for
winter use. It is through it that one enters the dwelling, not through the first court though they
lie side by side. Indeed, from the court one cannot see either the portico, the garden or the
Diaeta, since there is a wall in between. So much for the four sides of the first court.

The second court, in the middle of the edifice, is circular and has a diameter of 15 canne. On
the right stands a portal, open to the Greco (NE) similar to that by which one enters. On each
side of the aperture is a triangular stairway. The flights are 11 palmi wide and issue from a
lobby as long as twice the width of a flight. The lobby leads into a splendid loggia, fronting the
Greco (NE), which measures 14 by 3 canne and is 5 canne high.

At both ends of the loggia is a very fine apsidal recess. The façade is made up of three arcades.
Each of the side arcades encloses a pair of Doric columns while the central arcade is completely
open. Resting upon a square-angled bastion serving as the ground level portal and surmounted
by a balustrade, the central arcade stands slightly forward from the façade alignment. From
here, one may see the road to Ponte Milvio straight ahead, the beautiful countryside, the Tiber,
and Rome.
As Your Lordship will understand, at the foot of the loggia lies the hippodrome. It extends the whole length of the villa, from its North-West to its South-East ends. At the South-East end of the loggia, a doorway in the center of the apsidal recess opens into a vast and magnificent hall with five windows looking North-East across the hippodrome. The hall is 8 1/2 canne long, 5 1/2 canne wide. It is vaulted by means of four arcades forming a square and supporting a hemispheric dome 7 canne high.

From the hall one comes to a succession of five rooms....Three of these rooms are comparatively large, the other two somewhat smaller, the first being 4 canne square. Beyond these rooms a private stairway leads down to the ground level and up to the household quarters at the top of the edifice. From here one enters the SE portico, the sour orange tree garden and, by way of the corridor I mentioned earlier, the Diaeta.”

“On Tuesday, November 5, the Most Excellent Duke arrived at the city and was lodged at the villa of Pope Julius III outside the gate of Sta. Maria del Popolo, whence in a carriage he went secretly to kiss the foot of the Pope and then returned to the villa where were the Cardinal de’Medici, his son, and the Duchess, his wife, with many nobles.

On Wednesday, November 6, there came to the villa the Bishop of Urbino, Chamberlain of the Pope, with all the palace prelates and Papal court and the courts of the Cardinals, as is the custom. When it was time, the Duke, leaving the villa between the Bishop of Urbino and the Bishop of Bologna, sent as Nuncio as mentioned above, proceeded toward the city with a huge cortege among which were the courts of seven Cardinals with pontifical mules and hats in the usual manner, while eighty mules with baggage led the way. Afterwards numerous nobles of the Florentine state, who lived in Rome, ornate in varied livries with their servants, came and all the ambassadors resident in the city from both kingdoms and republics, the Very Illustrious Conservators of the city with all the Capitoline magistracy and officials, the Very Illustrious Marc Antonio Colonna with all the barons and nobles of the city and the court of the Pope. About the Duke walked thirty young Florentine nobles dressed in violet velvet decorated with many golden ornaments, both on their garments and their caps. At the gate of the city the Duke was met by two Very Illustrious Cardinals, namely Sta. Fiore and Ferrara, wearing violet deacon’s caps by whom, after the dutiful greeting, he was placed in their midst and let to the city....?

Diary of Papal Master of Ceremonies Firmanus, fols 125v-137v

“You, too, Raphael, while with your wondrous talent you construct Rome, mutilated throughout her body and recall to life and to its ancient beauty the city’s body, mangled by the sword, fire, and the years...you can return the breath of life to things long dead.”

Baldassare Castiglione, Carmen on the Death of Raphael, c. 1520

“Even more spectacular plans you have devised, Raphael, so as to supersede the magnificent deeds of the ancients! You uproot from the shadows the traces of earlier Rome, the way it was when flowering in happy days...What material each work was made of, the dimension of each, to which part of the sky they looked out. Nobody has made Rome so like itself when Rome still stood, as you do now that it lies covered with earth. Who, so I ask, has taught you to portray
forms buried underground and give them to our eyes to see? And to measure subterranean places over [such] a long stretch, without disturbing the houses built above? The divine power of your genius, augmented as it is by the divine power of Leo, must have produced this noble work, so that Leo, since he triumphed over all pontiffs, has you with him, to whom no ages know an equal.”

Girolamo Leandro, 1516-18

https://landscapelover.wordpress.com/2010/06/10/villa-madama/

Henry James’s account of his visit to Villa Madama in 1873
“A drive the other day with a friend to Villa Madama,. on the side of Monte Mario; a place like a page out of one of Browning’s richest evocations of this clime and civilization. Wondrous in its haunting melancholy, it might have inspired half “The Ring and the Book” at a stroke. What a grim commentary on history such a scene – what an irony of the past! The road up to it through the outer enclosure is almost impassable with mud and stones. At the end, on a terrace, rises the once elegant Casino, with hardly a whole pane of glass in its façade, reduced to its sallow stucco and degraded ornaments. The front away from Rome has in the basement a great loggia, now walled in from the weather, preceded by a grassy belittered platform with an immense sweeping view of the Campagna; the sad-looking, more than sad-looking, evil-looking, Tiber beneath (the color of gold, the sentimentalists say, the color of mustard, the realists); a great vague stretch beyond, of various complexions and uses: and on the horizon the ever-iridescent mountains. The place has become the shabbiest farmhouse, with muddy water in the old pieces d’eau and dunghills on the parterres. The “feature” is the contents of the loggia: a vaulted roof decorated by Giulio Romano; exquisite studdo-work and still brilliant frescoes; arabesques and figurini, numphs and fauns, animals and flwoers – gracefully lavish designs of every sort. Much of the color – especially the blues – still almost vivid, and all the work wonderously ingenious, elegant and charming. Apartments so decorated can have been meant only for the recreation of people greater than any we know, people for whom life was impudent ease and success. Margaret Farnese was the lady of the house, but where she trailed her cloth of gold the chickens now scamper between your legs over rotten straw. It is all inexpressibly dreary. A stupid peasant scratching his head, a couple of critical Americans picking their steps, the walls tattered and befouled breast-high, dampness and decay striking in on your heart, and the scene overbowed by these heavenly frescoes, mouldering there in their air artistry! It’s poignant; it provokes tears; it tells so of the waste of effort. Something human seems to pant beneath the grey pall of time and to implore to rescue it, to pity it, to stand by it somehow. But you leave it to its lingering death without compunction, almost with pleasure; for the place seems vaguely crime-haunted – paying at least the penalty of some hard immorality. The end of a Renaissance pleasure-house. Endless for the didactic observer th moral, abysmal for the story-seeker the tale.”