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PALAZZO VISCONTI AND ITS THEATRE

MILAN, VIA CINO DEL DUCA, 8

The origins of the Palazzo

Palazzo Visconti is one of the most prestige *palazzi* in Milan and dates back to the 17th century. It was restructured by the Spanish nobleman Giuseppe Bolagnos, who was a member of the Milanese patriciate, a magistrate and ambassador. Canaletto dedicated to him the masterpiece *Arrival of Ambassador Bolagnos in Venice*.

The Milanese *palazzo* then passed to his son Carlo and later to the Ospedale Maggiore, which made of it an income property, as did the later owners, families of the great aristocracy from the Vianis to the Tinellis.

From 1850 to the beginning of the 20th century: the Visconti family and the Liberty restructuring

In the mid-19th century the property passed to the Visconti di Grazzano family and adopted the name Palazzo Visconti and the Biscione symbol, which it still displays, but continued to be rented. It was only in 1908 that Duke Giuseppe Visconti, entrepreneur, philanthropist and playwright with a fundamental role in the architectural and artistic history of the Palazzo, decided to make it the family residence, bringing it back to its ancient dignity as an aristocratic residence. Giuseppe Visconti, husband of Carla Erba, the daughter of the first great Italian pharmaceutical industrialist, with whom he had seven children, including the director Luchino, asked the architect Alfredo Campanini in 1908 to restructure the Palazzo. The entrance on the ground floor was widened to make the most of the courtyard with its columns, the main staircase was enriched with multi-coloured marble and balustrades with the Visconti coat of arms, the rooms on the upper floor were transformed into formal apartments, with new marble floors, friezes with architectural views, cartouches and medallions and wooden ceilings, reinterpreting 18th century Lombardy baroque in the Liberty style, which was common in the city in those years.

The creation of the theatre, with private and public performances

The Palazzo hosted concerts (Carla Erba was an excellent pianist) and memorable parties (famous among them a great party in Second Empire style to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the independence of Italy in 1909), for the Visconti couple were among the most social and cultured in the Milan of the time.

The main innovation was the creation of a small theatre, sited next to the Fountain of Venus, between the first and second courtyards, designed to entertain guests at the Palazzo.

Between 1910 and 1913 it was also open to outsiders, with shows during the Carnival. It was Giuseppe Visconti himself who wrote the plays and directed amateur actor guests in the performances, with proceeds going to charity

From the Second World War to the 50s: the property is split up

During the Second World War the second courtyard suffered heavy bomb damage. In the 50s the Palazzo began to be split up, into apartments and prestige offices.

Palazzo Visconti: a place of culture

Over the centuries the Palazzo saw illustrious guests, including Mozart, who in his early youth held a concert there, Verdi, Manzoni, Radetzky and Apollinaire, who was emotionally linked to a young Visconti. It also has an extensive collection of paintings, mostly Italian works from the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Palazzo Visconti is the headquarters of the Bracco Foundation. The historic theatre, unusually open to the public on these occasions, hosts numerous activities of the Foundation.

