

# VENICE GARDENS FOUNDATION

Restoration Project  
Giardini Reali di Venezia  
Piazza San Marco

*Press conference*  
Friday April 7, 2017 at 12.30

## Venice Gardens Foundation Onlus

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Partner



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## Restoration of Giardini Reali, the Royal Gardens of Venice

The Royal Gardens of Venice, situated between Piazza San Marco and the Bacino di San Marco, came into being during the Napoleonic occupation of the city when it was decided to house the Royal Palace in the *Procuratie Nuove*, a building on the south side of the piazza. Surrounded by water, the gardens cover an area of approximately 5,500 square meters, overlooked by the Correr Museum, the imperial chambers of the Royal Palace, the Archaeological Museum and the historic Marciana Library.

The Royal Gardens are now urgently in need of restoration. Their original design is barely legible, in terms both of geometrical patterns and the placement of trees and shrubs. The nineteenth-century pergola and Lorenzo Santi's neoclassical pavilion are in ruins, and the historic drawbridge, railings and lampposts are rusted and crumbling.

All these factors have obscured the Gardens' historic, urban, social and landscape significance. Isolated from the rest of the Marciana area, of which they were once an integral part, they are rapidly deteriorating.

On December 23, 2014, the Venice Gardens Foundation, a nonprofit organization founded to restore, maintain and manage gardens and sites in the city of Venice that are of historic, artistic and environmental interest, signed a formal, renewable concession agreement with the State Property Office for the City of Venice, thereby assuming responsibility for the restoration, maintenance and promotion of the Gardens for 19 years.

An agreement between the Foundation and Assicurazioni Generali, signed in 2016, created a partnership whereby Generali will contribute to the restoration and promotion of the Royal Gardens.

The Venice Gardens Foundation has now obtained all necessary authorizations and following the detailed plans drawn up by garden architect Paolo Pejrone and architect Alberto Torsello, as well as the original project by architects Aymonino and Barbini, restoration work will begin in April 2017. The Foundation plans to reopen the Gardens mid-2018.

The Foundation, with the collaboration of professionals specialized in historic parks and gardens, will be directly involved in the maintenance and management of the Royal Gardens.

The restoration of the Royal Gardens has benefited from the provisions of Italy's "Art Bonus" law, granting a favorable tax regime to those who support culture.



## Venice Gardens Foundation

The Venice Gardens Foundation, a nonprofit organization with headquarters in Venice, was founded in 2014 to restore, maintain and manage historic gardens and sites. Listed in the National Register of the Ministry of Education, University and Research, the Foundation is also involved in the study, development and application of programs for the sustainable management of places of outstanding natural beauty and in training programs related to these ends. Focusing on culture and art, it brings together nature, artistic expression and gardening in all it does.

The first project undertaken by the Venice Gardens Foundation, a member of the Association of International Private Committees for the Safeguarding of Venice, will be the restoration of the Royal Gardens of Venice, made possible by the concession agreement stipulated between the Foundation and the State Property Office for the City of Venice in December 2014. The project will involve carrying out the botanical and landscape restoration work detailed in the plans of garden architect Paolo Pejrone and the architectural restoration and rebuilding of the Greenhouse envisaged by architect Alberto Torsello, based on the plans drawn up by Carlo Aymonino and Gabriella Barbini. Once the work has been completed, the Foundation, with the collaboration of specialized professionals, and specific programs of maintenance in which there is a synthesis of traditional expertise and new techniques, will manage and maintain the garden area.

*When restored, the Royal Gardens will be formal and precise, in keeping with their historic nineteenth-century design, but at the same time filled with the unexpected, an oasis for the small birds of the Venetian lagoon and a stopping place for migratory species that can rest there before once more setting out on their long journeys. It will be a meeting place open to the profound qualities of the arts, where researchers and artists will be able to enlarge the vast metaphorical concept of the garden, sowing new ideas, visions, sounds and languages, and giving rise to a work capable of remaining "timeless" and "outside time". A place for thought, silent entry into a world in which there is space for harmony, contemplation and productivity.*

*It will be a garden where visitors will walk in the shade of its long, centuries-old wisteria covered pergola, and hidden from view by dense screens of evergreens will discover the vast, intimate, timeless path that crosses the rebuilt drawbridge and leads to the Correr Museum, in a renewed dialogue with Piazza San Marco and the Marciana area.*

### **Adele Re Rebaudengo, President, Venice Gardens Foundation**

#### **Board of Directors, Venice Gardens Foundation**

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#### **Supporters of the Foundation**

Fondazione il pomo d'oro - pba S.p.A - Stella Design S.r.l. - Luigi Macioce

#### **Donors**

Friends of Heritage Preservation - Save Venice - Virginia Carabelli

#### **Collaborating organizations**

IUAV Istituto Univeritario di Architettura, Venice - LIPU Italian League for the Protection of Birds



## Generali, partner in the restoration project of the Royal Gardens of Venice

The Generali Group is actively involved in initiatives whose aim is to conserve and support the artistic and cultural heritage of the communities where it operates. Of these, Venice is a place of foremost importance, given the strong historic and spiritual ties that have linked the city and Generali for 185 years. The company's partnership with Venice Gardens Foundation in the restoration of the Royal Gardens aims to reconstruct and make available an important element in the history and art of the area around Piazza San Marco not only to the inhabitants of Venice but also to visitors from around the world. Piazza San Marco is a unique place and Generali is involved in a series of initiatives whose objective is to honor its past and safeguard its future: the restoration of the Royal Gardens marks the beginning of this journey.

Generali's presence in Venice dates back to 1832 when, one year after the Group was founded in Trieste, an office was opened in the *Procuratie Vecchie* building, located on Piazza San Marco. The Group's history rapidly became intertwined with the history of the city, with many events that bear witness to these links.

In 1848, leading individuals in the company embraced the cause of the Republic of Daniele Manin, a hero of Italian unification. In the midst of the struggle for unification, the company chose to use the lion of Saint Mark as its symbol, rather than the Habsburg eagle.

Further evidence of the close ties existing between Generali and Venice can be seen in the posters made for the company between 1926 and 1938 by the outstanding poster artist Marcello Dudovich and in scores of historic photographs: in one from 1867, Giuseppe Garibaldi celebrates newly-unified Italy, standing at the windows of *Procuratie Vecchie*, while a crowd gathers below in the square; in another we see the initials AG carefully composed on the ground, as they were every day until 1974, by the company's doormen when they spread seeds for pigeons. There is a photograph of the Fortuny tapestries with which *Procuratie Vecchie* was decked on important occasions; others of famous guests, such as one of Charlie Chaplin, shown on a visit to the company; yet others of the large gondola of the company's nautical circle opening the historic regatta on the Grand Canal as well as images of many other events promoted by Generali.

Generali continues to be present in Venice in its offices in the *Procuratie*. For many years it has supported Fondazione Cini and the Fenice Theatre. Venice continues to express the Group's spirit of internationalism and multiculturalism.

With the project to restore the Royal Gardens, Generali has once more interpreted its role as a patron of the arts in an innovative way. It has set itself the objective of sharing a unique heritage with the community in which it operates, confident that safeguarding and honoring culture will stimulate growth and development.

### The Generali Group

Generali is an independent, Italian Group, with a strong international presence. Established in 1831, it is among the world's leading insurers, present in over 60 countries with total premium income exceeding € 70 billion in 2016. With over 74,000 employees in the world, and 55 million clients, the Group has a leading position in Western Europe and an increasingly significant presence in the markets of Central and Eastern Europe and in Asia. In 2017 Generali Group was included among the most sustainable companies in the world by the Corporate Knights ranking.

Partner



## The History of the Royal Gardens of Venice

The history of the Royal Gardens dates to the decision to reconstruct the Marciana area in the early years of the nineteenth century. In 1806, following the decision by Napoleon and the young Viceroy Eugenio di Beauharnais to use the *Procuratie Nuove* building as the site of the Royal Palace, royal architect Antolini drew up the first plans, which were subsequently reworked by the architects Mezzani, Canonica and Soli.

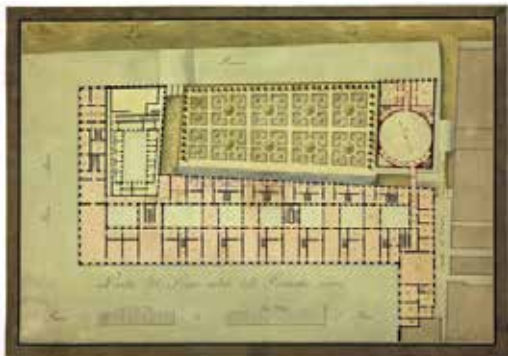
The formal garden with its geometrically shaped flowerbeds was conceived as an extension of the palace and a drawbridge was built so that it would be possible to walk over the water of the Bacino di San Marco, and also make it possible to have a view of the Bacino from the Royal Palace. In 1808 the buildings of the old granaries, at the time being used as barracks, were demolished, as were the workshops in the same area. Starting in 1815, when the Austrians returned, the architect Lorenzo Santi completed the work, creating a tree-lined avenue along the Bacino di San Marco, with geometric parterres and two wooded groves at the garden's ends. He added a Greenhouse on Ponte della Zecca and a neoclassical pavilion – the *Cafehaus*. The plants came from the Royal Park in Stra, and it was there that the citrus trees that adorned the Venetian garden in warm weather spent the months from November to May each year.

In 1857, Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian had the avenue along the bank separated from the gardens and opened this area to the public, while the rest of the garden was used exclusively by the court, and in 1872, to allow access from Piazzetta San Marco, a new bridge nearly touching the water, was built over Rio della Zecca. The bridge between the garden and the palace was replaced by an iron drawbridge in 1893, designed by civil engineer Filippo Lavezzari. In the late nineteenth century, the formal layout of the garden was replaced by the more sinuous design of the “English garden”, in fashion at the time, and an iron and cast iron pergola, one of the key elements of the garden's architecture, was built.

On December 23, 1920 the Royal Gardens in their entirety were opened to the public and entrusted to the municipal government. A radical renovation, carried out between 1939 and 1940, in compliance with “Italian style”, restored the Gardens' regular geometric layout.

The Royal Gardens have progressively deteriorated. Their original design is now barely legible, in terms both of geometrical patterns and the placement of trees and shrubs. Lorenzo Santi's neoclassical pavilion and the nineteenth-century pergola are in ruins, the historic drawbridge unusable, railings and street furniture rusted and crumbling.

All these factors have obscured the historic, urban, social and landscape significance of the gardens. Now isolated from the rest of the Marciana area, of which they were once an integral part, they are rapidly becoming derelict. Despite this, over the course of time, the Royal Gardens have remained one of the places most loved by Venetians.



Giovanni Antonio Antolini, Architect's drawing of Palazzo Reale, Plan for the “piano nobile” of Procuratie Nuove, Correr Museum, Venice.



Leopoldo Cicognara, Antonio Diedo and Giannantonio Selva, Outstanding Manufacturies and Monuments in Venice.



## Botanical restoration

### Plans by Paolo Pejrone

After many years, the Royal Gardens are about to return to life, to become not only an example of botanical elegance and extravagance, in homage to their glorious past, but also a modern symbol of sobriety and sustainability; they will be a historical garden, but one capable of keeping up with the times. The design of the large parterre, divided into finely cadenced flowerbeds, will remain nearly unchanged: logical and functional, it represents the way gardens were typically conceived by the Habsburg administration of the Biedermeier period. The same basic theme is repeated in each bed, conferring unity and structure to the whole, with patterns created using large groupings of agapanthus, farfugium and iris, plants with evergreen leaves, as well as paniced hydrangeas and autumn-flowering camellias. Every so often, in the center of some of the beds, there is a small grove of dwarf evergreen magnolias, which flower abundantly in summer, while the borders along the avenue leading to the Royal Palace, are filled with Chinese rice paper plants, with enormous velvety grey leaves. Some plants of hybrid continuous-bloom Chinese roses that produce masses of fragrant blooms in spring, and a sprinkling of naturalized bulbs (narcissi and tulips) complete the work. The large pergola, the true, majestic protagonist of the Gardens, supports rare varieties of wisteria, with their thick summer foliage, punctuated here and there by *Bignonia ricasoliana*, which produces an abundance of attractive pink flowers and glossy green foliage in late summer. Following the old landscape designs, two romantic areas that have now almost entirely fallen into disrepair will be rebuilt at the ends of the Garden. On its east side, holm oaks will form a soft but thick and compact evergreen screen, with a large niche serving to close the perspective towards the pergola, while on the opposite side there will be a grove of bamboo composed of plants of varying heights and with different types of leaves, forming a sinuous line that encompasses the Greenhouse. In the direction of Fondamenta di San Marco, the existing evergreen screens, essential for protecting the garden from the capricious weather of the lagoon, will remain. They will be interplanted with mastic and fragrant clerodendrum, edged on the parterre side with a border of *Beschorneria yuccoides* and agapanthus. Large terracotta vases holding pomegranate trees, glossy viburnum and bitter oranges will be placed along the balcony that looks onto Rio dei Giardini, to accentuate the idea of a green boundary encircling the garden.

The restoration work being contemplated entails detailed knowledge of the site and profound respect for its history, while being attentive to what the future suggests and to some extent demands, so that the Gardens may become a place of reasoned equilibrium between what has existed, what exists, and what is possible – a living and (once more) lived-in space.



Anna Regge, watercolor, 2017.



Anna Regge, watercolor, 2017.



... And dreaming we can imagine a garden of abundance and coolness, rich and lush ... For the most part It will not be a flower garden except for wisteria, bignonia and agapanthus, with some clerodendrum and hydrangeas: light, suffused presences, all of them, of color-filled and sometimes fragrant pauses within a sober garden of leaves ... It will be a triumph of boughs and green leaves, a play of transparency and penumbra: leaves of all kinds, thin and ribbon-like, supple and broad, glossy, tough or languorous and opaque. The Gardens will be luxuriantly verdant in every season of the year...

Paolo Pejrone, gardener and garden architect



Anna Regge, watercolor, 2017.

A small grove of giant bamboo frames the new building; slender-leaved *Phyllostachys viridiglaucescens* set at the base of clumps of *Phyllostachys metake*.

# Architectural plan for the restoration project



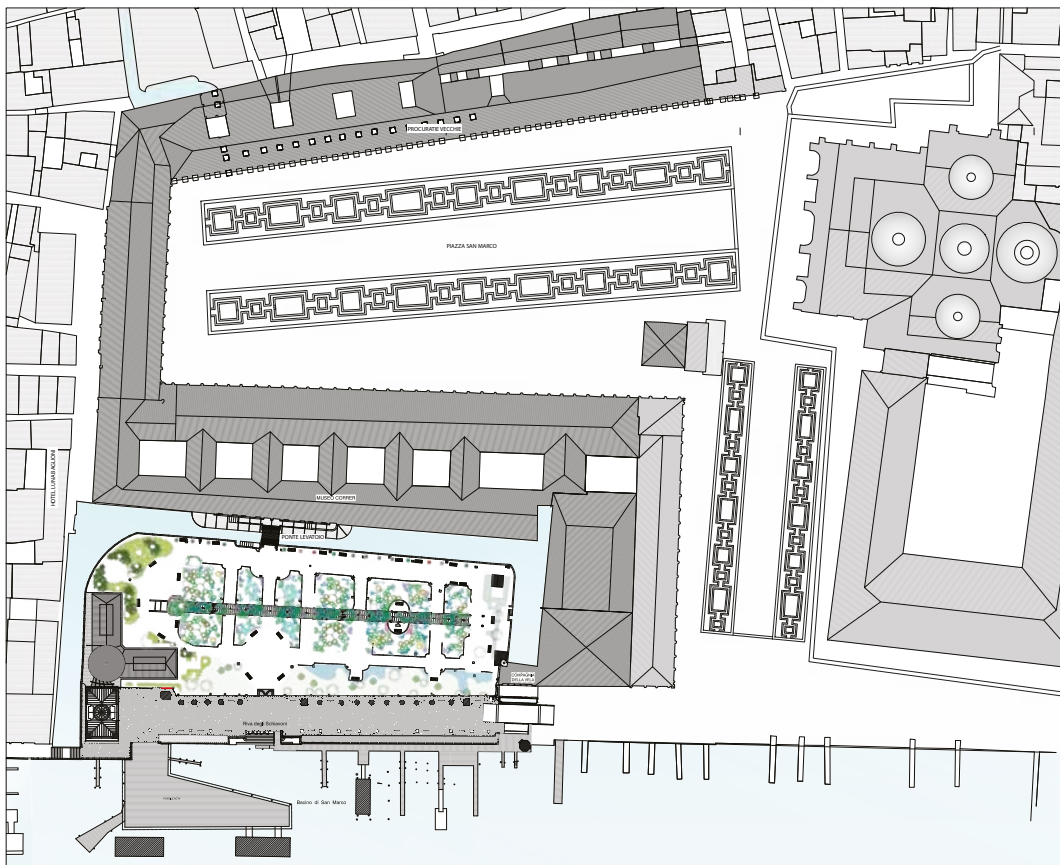
## Architectural restoration

Plans by Carlo Aymonino-Gabriella Barbini, Alberto Torsello

The restoration and requalification of the monumental complex of the Royal Gardens of Piazza San Marco, undertaken by Venice Gardens Foundation in partnership with Generali Group, is based on the principles and urban and architectural themes that gave life to the original nineteenth-century project for the Gardens.

The restoration will salvage the Gardens' centuries-old functions and architectural elements, renovate a space important to the Marciana area and to the city as a whole, restore equilibrium between parts and the environments in which they are arranged in symbiosis with their context. The work involved in restoring architectural components will respect the Gardens' historic stratification, emphasizing the matrix of their original design.

After the restoration of the nineteenth-century pergola and of Lorenzo Santi's neoclassical pavilion, the demolition of buildings which are both incongruous and in disrepair and the rebuilding of the Greenhouse and historic drawbridge, the Royal Gardens will once again be directly connected to Piazza San Marco.



Architect's drawing of the Marciana area.



## The Coffee House The Royal Gardens Coffee House Pavilion

The Coffee House is an elegant pavilion designed by Lorenzo Santi between 1815 and 1817, situated in the southwest corner of the Royal Gardens. Its architecture is simple, consisting in a parallelepiped block of Istrian stone decorated and perforated in “neoclassical” style, and a central cupola. The building urgently needs restoration: there are leaks in the roof of the cupola; the stone is badly damaged. The project will consist in restoring the building, connecting it to the Greenhouse and modernizing technological features and systems, thereby allowing it to serve the function for which it was built.



Contrasto\_Martino Lombezzi, photography, 2016.



Contrasto\_Martino Lombezzi, photography, 2016.



Nicola Bertasi, photography, 2016.

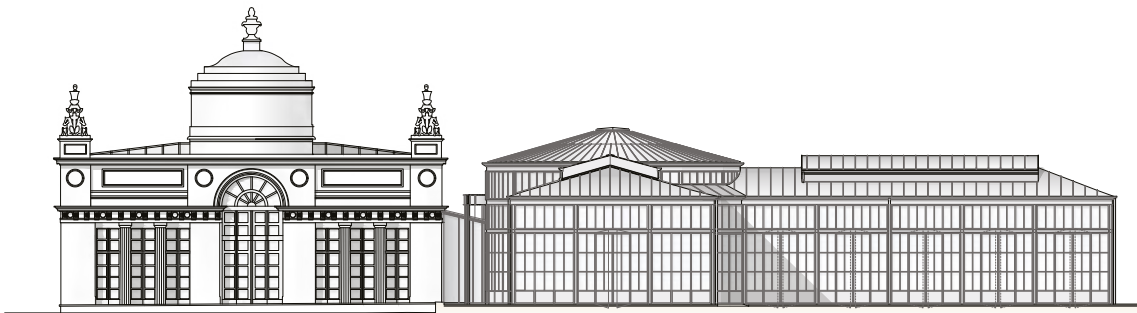


Nicola Bertasi, photography, 2016.

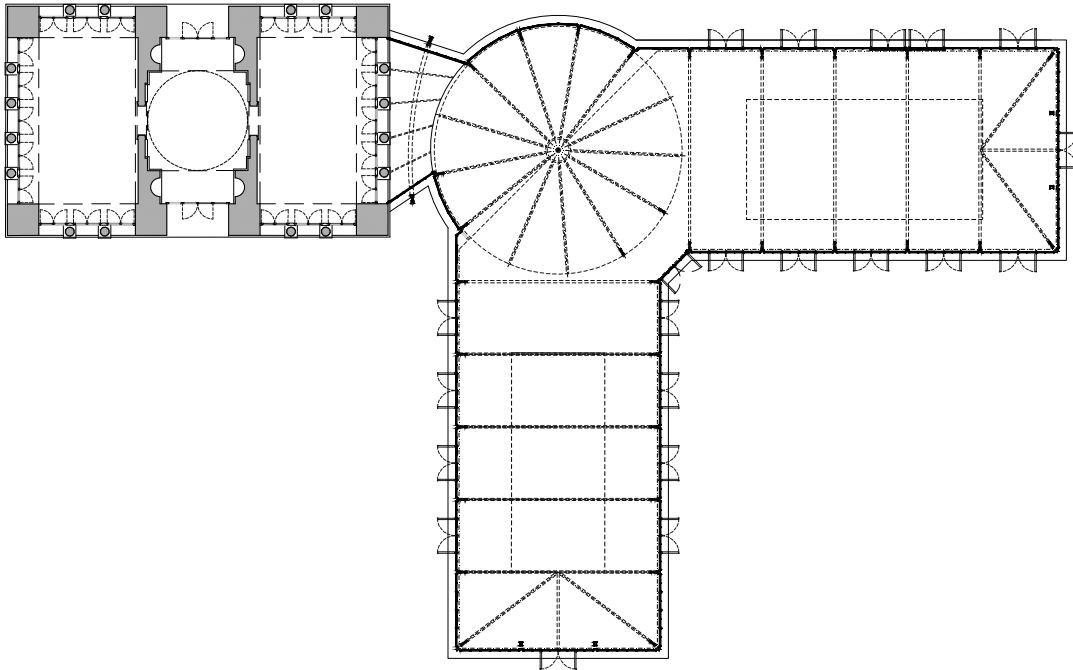
## The Greenhouse

The Greenhouse is an L-shaped building with a circular central pavilion connected to the Coffee House, and two orthogonal arms: one will house services for the public, while the other has been envisioned as a space for cultural activities and research.

In the modularity of its glass panels, the building will reinterpret the design of historic Greenhouses, reworked taking into consideration the essentiality of component-based contemporary design. Heating elements, pipes, wiring, etc. will be housed under the floor, while the weight-bearing structure, consisting in iron elements welded together to form a harmonious geometric design, will be integrated with the structure of the windows and will serve as a decorative element characterizing the building's interior space.



Façade of the Santi Pavilion in the Royal Gardens - south face of the Coffee House and Greenhouse.



Plan of the Santi Pavilion in the Royal Gardens, Coffee House and Greenhouse.

## The drawbridge

The drawbridge, designed as part of the nineteenth-century urban project, serves to join the Marciana area to its Gardens on the Bacino di San Marco side.

The bridge which has long ceased to serve as a passageway, is in nearly total disrepair. The restoration project will conserve existing elements, integrating them into a structure that complies with current regulations.

The permeability and continuity between the piazza and the side of the garden adjacent to the water, will infuse new life into the courtyard of the Royal Palace, currently the Correr Museum, directing attention along a now forgotten visual axis.



Francesco Neri, photography, 2016.



Francesco Neri, photography, 2016.



## The pergola

The pergola, currently in an advanced state of disrepair, marks the passage from east to west that begins in the shade of centuries-old wisteria and comes to an end in an octagonal space with a gazebo, now badly damaged and overrun with weeds.

A sequence of finely modeled cast iron columns hold up an iron structure which serves as a support for wisteria and lighting elements.

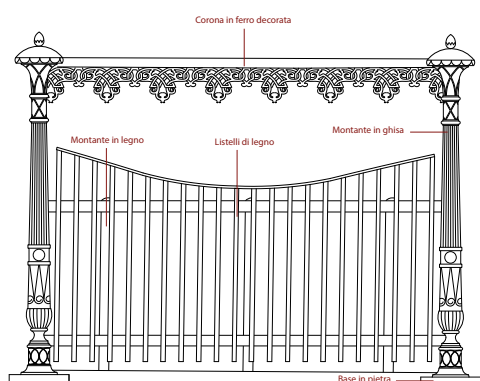
The project will salvage and restore all the original components and add elements produced using fusion.



Francesco Neri, photography, 2016.



Francesco Neri, photography, 2016.



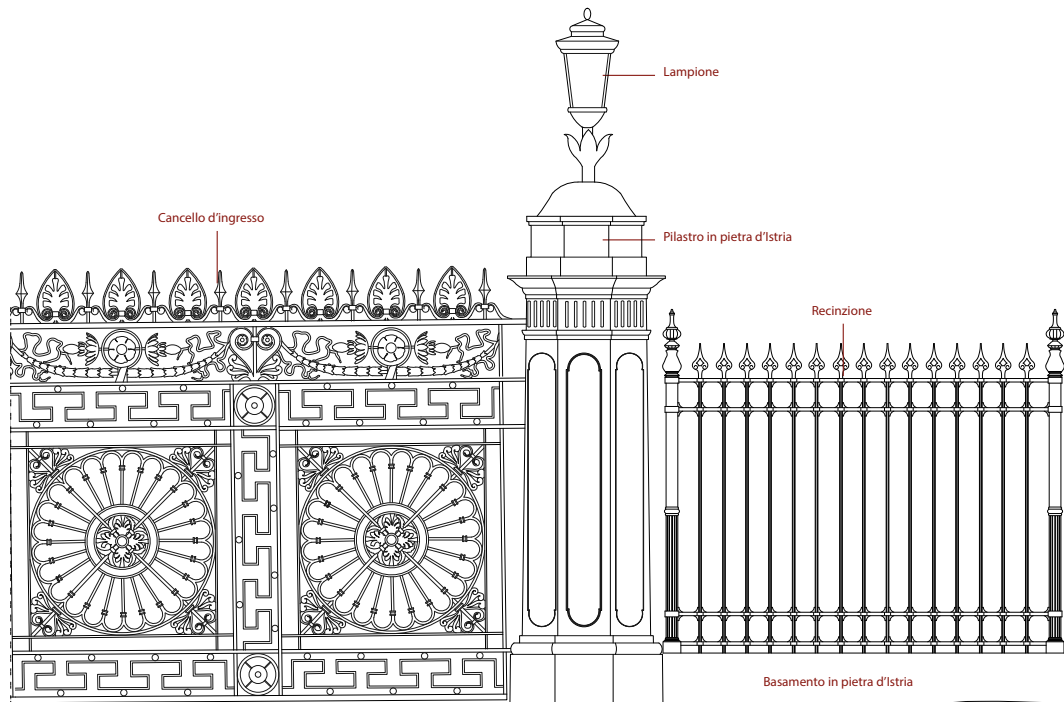
Detail of the arch of the pergola.



Anna Regge, watercolor, 2017.

## Railings and lampposts

All the antique street furniture, such as railings, balusters and lampposts, will be restored in compliance with conservation-based criteria so that they conform to the originals.



Detail of the railings and main gate.



Francesco Neri, photography, 2016.