

Presentation of the restoration of the Royal Gardens of Venice

Venice, Tuesday December 17, 2019 – Today, with a press conference and ceremony marking their reopening to the public, the Royal Gardens of Venice are returning to life.

Adele Re Rebandengo, President of the Venice Gardens Foundation and artificer of this important make-over, and **Philippe Donnet**, Group CEO of Assicurazioni Generali, the Foundation's main partner, will present the restoration of the Royal Gardens, together with architects **Paolo Pejrone**, responsible for the garden, **Alberto Torsello**, in charge of architectural restoration, and **Andrea Illy**, President of illycaffè. **Dario Franceschini**, Minister of Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism and **Luigi Brugnaro**, Mayor of the City of Venice, will be present.

“After five years of intense and passionate work, we are today restoring its Royal Gardens, a place of life, harmony and peace, to the city of Venice. In the years to come, we will ensure their conservation and growth, since a garden must be listened to, understood, cultivated, nourished and protected each day, to accompany it to germinate, season after season.

The Royal Gardens have once more become formal and luxuriant, in keeping with their historic nineteenth-century design, filled with unexpected perspectives, a place of meeting and of thought open to Venetians and visitors, artists and researchers, a small oasis for migratory and sedentary birds.

In keeping with the historic and environmental value of the monumental complex and the indissoluble ties that exist between Venetians and these gardens, the Venice Gardens Foundation has worked in deference to the cardinal principles of patronage for the arts, with the Superintendent for the Cultural Heritage and the City of Venice, with architects Paolo Pejrone and Alberto Torsello, and with its main partner, Generali, which has supported and accompanied us in this endeavor. Together we have made it possible to make this important project a reality for the city, a World Heritage Site.”

Adele Re Rebandengo

President, Venice Gardens Foundation

“It is a special day for Venice, even more so in light of the events that the city has recently witnessed. At Generali, we are proud to have carried out, together with the Venice Gardens Foundation, this important restoration project. We are honored to be able to give the Royal Gardens, a treasured public space now restored to its original historic beauty, back to the community. The end result was made possible thanks to the excellent cooperation between the public and the private sectors for the benefit of all.

The restoration of the Royal Gardens marks the end of the first part of Generali’s larger overall project for Venice and the Piazza San Marco area, our Group’s historic headquarters. Full completion is scheduled for 2021 with the restructuring of the *Procuratie Vecchie* that will become the new home of ‘The Human Safety Net’ Foundation.”

Philippe Donnet

Group CEO, Assicurazioni Generali

“The reopening is a source of pride for all of Venice and will enable the city to once again be proud of the fascination of this site, its Royal Gardens. An exceptional green area set in one of the most anthropized and historic of the world’s cities, and that for this reason has an even more significant and strategic valence from an environmental point of view. A restoration that has always enjoyed full support from the current city administration, which has made the subsidiarity principle a cornerstone of its actions to safeguard its artistic and cultural heritage. With this operation, Venice is reiterating its vocation to remain forever a beautiful, fascinating city, and is even more clearly demonstrating that it is a place of myriad possibilities, where investments guarantee a return in terms of image, above all with the awareness of having contributed to bestowing new splendor on a part of the city that deserved to be valorized. Thanks are therefore due to all those who are making possible a project that, especially at a time when the city has been hard hit by exceptional tides, shows to what extent Venice is in the hearts of countless people, willing to support it so that it can be consigned to future generations and will be just as spectacular then as when we had the good fortune to see it.”

Luigi Brugnaro

Mayor of the city of Venice

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The Royal Gardens of Venice Reopen

Following thoroughgoing restoration promoted and carried out by the Venice Gardens Foundation, with Assicurazioni Generali as its main partner, The Royal Gardens of Venice are reopening on December 17. The restitution to the city of this site long loved by its inhabitants has an even greater positive valence in this extremely difficult period for Venice. The Gardens' first flowering will be celebrated in the spring of 2020.

The restoration project began in December 2014, when to counter the progressive decline of this site of outstanding historic and environmental interest, the State Property Office of the City of Venice entrusted the Monumental Complex of the Royal Gardens to the Venice Gardens Foundation, putting it in charge of its restoration and conservation in the years to come.

Created to restore parks, gardens and properties of historic and artistic interest, the Foundation entrusted the work of restoring the garden to architect Paolo Pejrone and put architect Alberto Torsello in charge of architectural restoration and renovating the greenhouse, based on plans drawn up by architects Carlo Aymonino and Gabriella Barbini.

Planning and restoration work was carried out in the five-year period between 2015 and 2019. The reopened Royal Gardens have reacquired their formal excellence and botanical complexity in coherence with their historical nineteenth-century design rich in unexpected perspectives, a place for meeting and for thought.

A member of the Private International Committees for the Safeguarding of Venice, the Venice Gardens Foundation, in keeping with the cardinal principles of patronage, will ensure the gardens' conservation and growth during the entire period of the concession. Qualified professionals will be engaged and site-specific maintenance programs, syntheses of age-old knowledge and new technology, will be used. The Foundation will also develop programs based on sustainable management and the protection of natural heritage sites and their fauna, as well as training programs devoted to these ends. In fact, it is currently undertaking collaborations with IUAV University, Lega Italiana Protezione Ucelli (BirdLife Italy) and the waste-management company Veritas.

The artistic, cultural and research activities promoted and supported by the Venice Gardens Foundation will be hosted in the wing of the Greenhouse named *The Human Garden*, meaning the connection between the activities made by people in the Greenhouse and the life in the garden surrounding it. The Royal Gardens' cultural activities are closely connected to the aims of Fondazione Generali's "The Human Safety Net", that Generali promotes as part of its commitment to assisting vulnerable communities in 21 countries, whose central office will be located in the Procuratie Vecchie building in Piazza San Marco.

International artists Maria Thereza Alves, Jimmie Durham, Francesco Neri and Mona Hatoum have been invited to participate and share their vision of the Gardens via site-specific works, as has Guido Guidi, in collaboration with Assicurazioni Generali.

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Brief history of the Royal Gardens

The Royal Gardens of Venice originated as part of the Napoleonic project to rebuild the Piazza San Marco area, with the decision formalized in Napoleon Bonaparte's decree of January 11, 1807 to use the *Procuratie Nuove* building as the site of the royal palace. On December 23, 1920, the Gardens, one of the properties the Crown had ceded to the State Property Office, were assigned to the City of Venice and opened to the public. On December 23, 2014, via a concession agreement, the restoration of the Royal Gardens was entrusted to the Venice Gardens Foundation, completed in December 2019

Surrounded by water, they cover an area of approximately 5,000 square meters, overlooked by the Correr Museum, the imperial chambers of the Royal Palace, the Archaeological Museum and the Marciana Library.

Starting in the 1950s, the Gardens, whose importance had been a source of pride for the city throughout the nineteenth century, fell into disrepair. The balanced relationship between the Gardens and the buildings adjacent to them was progressively lost. For several decades, their botanical heritage was comprised both by the presence of species ill-suited to the site, and by botanical and structural problems which had produced evident signs of disease, to such an extent that their original layout and composition had become nearly illegible. The neoclassical pavilion, constructed by the architect Lorenzo Santi between 1816 and 1817, was visibly damaged, while the nineteenth-century wrought iron pergola, railings and historic drawbridge were derelict and dilapidated, as were incongruous buildings constructed over the years, including a reinforced concrete bunker dating back to the second world war, which given its large size, had an extremely negative impact on the gardens' overall composition and impeded restoration of the pergola.

Information Sheet

Project promoted and curated by: Venice Gardens Foundation

Length of concession: 19 years starting from December 23, 2014.

Main partner: Assicurazioni Generali

Donors: Friends of Heritage Preservation, Venice Gardens Foundation, private donors

New plantings:

22 trees;

804 shrubs;

6,560 flowering plants;

3,150 bulbs;

68 climbing plants.

Trees being treated: 7

Diseased or dead trees replaced: 19

The Greenhouse: the restored building, with windows opening onto the garden and a roof made of titanium-coated zinc sheets, reinterprets the stylistic features typical of historical greenhouses. It consists of a circular central pavilion connected to the historic *Cafehaus*, and two orthogonal arms: the one on the east, named The Human Garden, will host artistic and cultural activities and research promoted and supported by the Venice Gardens Foundation, while the one on the west houses systems and 18 restrooms managed by the Venetian waste-management company Veritas, which carries out cleaning and sanitization using environmentally friendly products and minimizing water consumption.

Originally planned by architects Carlo Aymonino and Gabriella Barbini as a larger building, Venice Gardens Foundation, using the design project drawn up by architect Alberto Torsello, opted to reduce the measurements of the restored Greenhouse. The tables in the areas devoted to the Foundation's activities were ideated and custom-made for the Royal Gardens by Maria Thereza Alves and Jimmie Durham of the design collective Labinac; the armchairs, designed by Locatelli Partners, were made with Rubelli textiles.

The Coffee House Pavilion: built between 1816 and 1817 as the Royal Garden's *Cafehaus*, the restored building's interiors were designed by Locatelli Partners. With support from illycaffè, it will once more serve the purpose for which it was originally intended, making an important contribution to expenditures for routine and special maintenance work in the Royal Gardens.

Companies involved in the restoration project: De Zottis A. S.a.s.; Errico Costruzioni S.r.l. in ATI con Co.New.Tech S.a.s.; Sacaim S.p.A.; Setten Genesis S.p.A.; Vernillo Domenico S.r.l.

Suppliers and technical support: Erco; Futurall; Geberit; iGuzzini; Poggi Ugo Terrecotte; Rosa Salva; Rossato; Rubelli; Secco Sistemi; Zintek.

Venice Gardens Foundation for the Gardens of Venice

The Venice Gardens Foundation was founded in Venice in 2014 to restore and conserve parks, gardens and properties of historic and artistic interest and protect their fauna so that harmony and balance would be restored to these sites.

The Foundation, which is listed in the National Research Registry of Italy's Ministry of Education, University and Research, is also engaged in the study, development and application of programs related to innovation and sustainable management of heritage sites, and in creating training programs related to these ends.

As a member organization of the Association of International Private Committees for the Safeguarding of Venice, the Foundation's first project was to promote and supervise the restoration of the Royal Gardens of Venice. It will continue to ensure their conservation and growth in the years to come, involving specialized professionals and using site-specific maintenance programs that are syntheses of traditional expertise and new techniques.

Currently engaged in new research and restoration projects, the Venice Gardens Foundation carries out its work in accordance with the fundamental principles of patronage: protection of nature, support for the arts and for learning.

President Adele Re Rebaudengo

Councillors Simone Bemporad, Chiara Bertola, Alvise di Canossa, Anna Cuculo, Maria Cristina Fatta Del Bosco, Marie-Rose Kahane, Gesine Lübben, Agostino Re Rebaudengo, Roberto Spada

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 in 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 the *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 is present in Venice in its offices in the *Procuratie Vecchie*. The landmark building is undergoing a significant restoration; once completed, it will be open to the public for the first time in 500 years, becoming the home and global hub for The Human Safety Net. The Project is part of the broader vision for the restoration of the entire Saint Mark's Square area which we have promoted with pride and passion, and will foster new development opportunities for the city. For many years Generali has supported Fondazione Cini and La Fenice opera house. Venice continues to express the Group's spirit of internationalism and multiculturalism.

In participating in the project to restore the Royal Gardens, which includes a space named "The Human Garden" that will host the artistic, cultural and research activities promoted by the Venice Gardens Foundation, 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 one of the largest global insurance and asset management providers. Established in 1831, it is present in 50 countries in the world with a total premium income of more than €6 billion euros in 2018. With nearly 71,000 employees serving 61 million customers, the Group has a leading position in Europe and a growing presence in Asia and Latin America. Generali's ambition is to be a life-time partner to its customers, offering innovative and personalized solutions thanks to its unmatched distribution network.