

The Garden of Armida



magnolias, camellias, bamboos, cedars of Lebanon, sequoias, and araucaria were planted near medicinal herbs.

During the two world wars the Villa was used as a military base and therefore the garden was abandoned. When at the end of the 80s the current

A few kilometers from Lucca along the ancient Via Julia and Via Aemilia Scauri, known as the Silk Road, there is an intriguing botanical garden that frames the seventeenth-century Villa Anna Maria de' Lanfranchi: the Garden of Armida, *locus amoenus* in which the luxuriance of the plants translates into a proliferation of visual, auditory, olfactory perceptions, a hedonistic parenthesis of pagan paradise made on purpose to disturb the world of self-awareness.

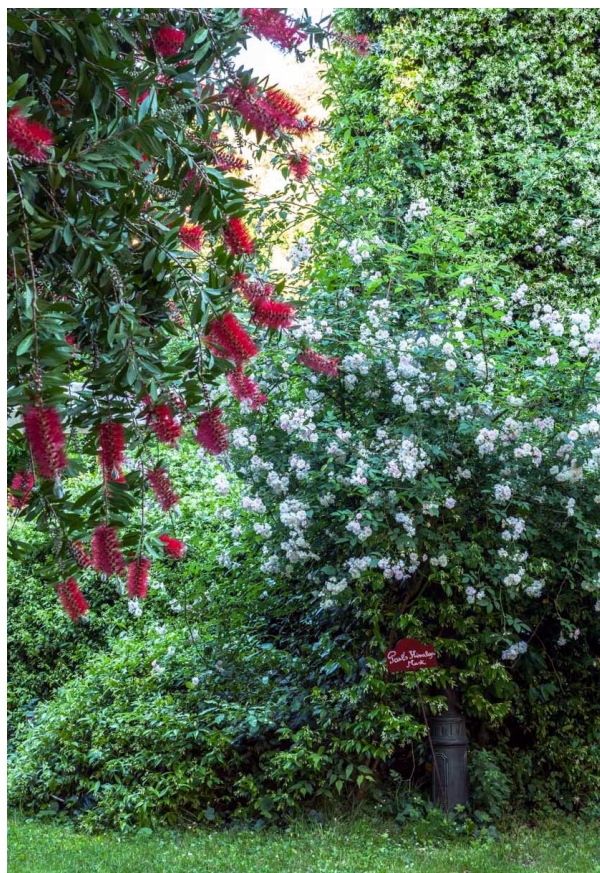
Armida is the charming sorceress who in Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* holds the crusader knight Rinaldo prisoner in her palace. Inside the palace there is an enchanted and artifact garden, where only with a glance you can embrace lakes, small rivers, flowers, and fruits that last forever and sprout among the newly born or already yellowed leaves.

And it is from the garden of Armida that the landscape doctor Cesare Studiati in the mid-nineteenth century drew inspiration to redesign the estate of the country villa of Anna Maria Franceschi Rosselmini intended to welcome Grand Tour's vacationers (Shelley and his wife Mary, Lord Byron, Alfieri, etc.) who frequented the nearby Royal Baths of San Giuliano. In the garden, geometrically divided with belvedere, Mediterranean shrubs, jasmine, clematis, roses, peonies, and even exotic plants such as palm trees, banana trees,

owners Claudio Zeppi and Maria Grazia Deffenu bought the property, the wood and the bamboo grove had taken over and reached the house. Then began a long and meticulous restoration work that lasted about five years, bringing to light the frescoes of the Villa and the ancient marble fireplaces, cleaning the wood, recovering the most important plants and trees (some are 300 years old), containing the bamboo rhizomes with iron plates stuck in the ground, and recovering an ancient greenhouse that leaning against the back facade gave life to a delightful winter garden intended to house the most delicate plants. The vision of the confused and confusing romantic garden, tired and tiring, was gradually implemented with rare camellias, palms, mimosas, wisteria, ancient roses, etc. Also included in the garden were a fish pond with a black bottom with edges of *pietra serena*, which is used as a swimming pool, and next to it was placed a nineteenth-century newspaper kiosk coming from Piazza dei Cavalieri in Pisa.

In the center of the lawn, an eighteenth-century belvedere with circular seats in *pietra serena* covered by an iron trellage dressed as Pandora and surrounded by roses, bergenias, irises, hydrangeas, wisteria, and lavenders. The greenhouse relocated to the original





site and furnished with antiques and collections of all kinds in the colder months hosts numerous exotic species such as cacti, insectivorous plants, orchids, proteas, tillandsias, platycerium, and bougainvillea. On the sides of the lawn are collections of ancient scented roses, Austin roses, majestic camellias, oleanders, and collections of hydrangeas, peonies and hellebores. The final part of the restoration involved the care of the large palm trees (over 80) – such as Phoenix, Washingtonia, Butia, Attalea, and the delicate Erythea – which, at the entrance, introduce the park beyond.

Furthermore, there are no mosquitoes in the garden thanks to a *Freezanz* biological system which, through small and discreet nozzles, nebulizes the entire area at certain intervals with a mixture of water and pyrethrum, harmless to humans and animals.

The Villa is part of the *Italian Historic Houses Association* and the *Parks and Gardens of Italy Association* and is located in the center of the village of Molina di

Quosa at the base of the hills that separate Lucca and Pisa, a few kilometers from both historic cities. Open on request to guided tours. Also this year, Sunday 23 May it will be open to the public for the national event ***Cortili e Giardini Aperti***.

Villa Anna Maria de' Lanfranchi
– Garden of Armida –
Strada Statale dell'Abetone, 146
56017 Molina di Quosa (Pisa)
Claudio 328 2334450
Maria Grazia 335 298433
www.villaannamaria.com

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