

THE PALAZZO

AUDIO-VIDEO DESCRIPTION

Welcome, you are in front of a tactile, scaled-down model with audio-video description of 'Palazzo Bon, later renamed Ca' Rezzonico', built by architects Baldassarre Longhena and Giorgio Massari between 1646 and 1759.

The palace that now houses the Museo del Settecento Veneziano (Museum of 18th Century Venice) in the “Sestiere”, or district, of Dorsoduro, was built at the behest of the Bon family, exponents of the ancient Venetian nobility. In the mid-seventeenth century they entrusted its execution to the most famous architect of the period, Baldassarre Longhena, who was also responsible for the construction of Ca' Pesaro, now the seat of the International Gallery of Modern art, and the Basilica della Salute. The monumental project proved too ambitious for the Bon's fortunes, however, and the palace remained unfinished when the architect died in 1682.

Shortly afterwards, due to the family's inability to bear the huge construction costs, work was stopped and the building remained incomplete.

In 1750, Giambattista Rezzonico – whose family had acquired the noble title through a cash payment in 1687 – bought the building and entrusted its completion to Giorgio Massari, then the city's leading architect. It was this family that gave its name to the “palazzo”, which was completed in just six years: in time to celebrate the social rise of the family culminating in 1758, when Giambattista's son Carlo was elected pontiff with the name of Clement XIII.

The rise of the Rezzonico family was short-lived, however, and already reached its end with the next generation: with no male heirs, the family died out in 1810 with the death of Abbondio.

During the nineteenth century, the palace changed hands several times and was progressively stripped of all its furnishings. Among its last tenants were the famous poet Robert Browning – who spent the summers of 1887 and 1888 here, before dying in the palace in December 1889 – and the great musician Cole Porter, who lived here from 1926 to 1927.

By now reduced to an empty container, the palace was purchased by the city of Venice in 1935 to house its eighteenth-century art collections. In addition to paintings, it contains furnishings, everyday objects, as well as frescoes removed from their original context and ceiling paintings from other city palaces.

The result is an extraordinary atmospheric museum whose rooms not only present works from one of the felicitous seasons of European art, but also preserve the glory and splendour of an eighteenth-century Venetian residence.

The main entrance to the building was originally on the Grand Canal, through the monumental water gate. Here one can see the great novelty of the architectural solutions adopted by Baldassarre Longhena on the palace façade.

He elaborated the solution first proposed by the architect and sculptor Jacopo Sansovino on the façade of the Ca' Corner della Ca' Granda building, abandoning the traditional layout of the Venetian palace, which envisaged a tripartite structure: in other words, with a row of windows in the central part and two wings on the sides. Instead, his design reproduces a single architectural module reinterpreted in a Baroque key, with accentuated relief of the various elements to create a contrasting play of light and shadow.

The innovations also affect the building's floor plan.

If you try to “circumnavigate” the model of the palace with your hands, you will realise that the entire building is divided into three floors, with an inner courtyard and a large garden, located opposite the water gate.

Stopping at the Braille caption, you can run your fingers from left to right and feel how the ground floor is composed of seven ashlar rows, that is, made up of overlapping, protruding and worked stone blocks known as “bugne”. These rows are separated from each other by semi-columns and pillars embedded in the wall from which they protrude slightly.

The centre is occupied by three fornices, which are architectural structures serving the function of portals, the one in the middle of which is slightly wider than the lateral ones.

On the second floor, the architect Massari substituted the double internal columns supporting the arches of the first-floor with pillars so close to the columns of the main order that the impression is still that everything is supported by an architectural membrane.

Now let us move to the rear of the palace and we will be able to identify the sumptuous land entrance, with its grand ashlar doorway leading from the entry into a loggia from which the great staircase, leaning against the west wall of the building, leads up to the Ballroom. The latter was obtained by exploiting the double height of the already constructed “piani nobili” (or main floors) of this part of the building,

eliminating floors and intermediate spaces to create a grandiose space.

The usual enclosed portico called “Portego”, which in ancient Venetian palaces crossed the building longitudinally from the water gate to the land gate, is here interrupted by an inner courtyard, a typology typical of a mainland building but not much used in Venice.

In the lowest part of this model, you can also explore the garden of Ca' Rezzonico with its inclusive playground, accessible free of charge when the museum is open.

Thank you for dedicating your time to this experience.



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