

1. Preamble

This study aims at analysing the architectural and spatial composition of Sala della Vigna at Delizia Estense di Belriguardo, located in the city of Voghiera. The room is named “della Vigna” for the depicted subjects, climbing vines with bunches of grapes that were covering most of the ceiling and lunettes joining the walls.

The name “Bel-riguardo” (i.e. nice view or related to beautiful) certainly referred to the artistic value of the activities carried out for decades inside Delizia, which became summer residence of the House of Este; a “bel-riguardo” based on escape and entertainment, but steeped in the best Renaissance culture of the time.

The main scope of the research consists in describing the “concept” of Sala della Vigna by identifying the main geometric and compositive principles implemented to realise both real and virtual spaces (frescos).



Fig. 1: Aerial view of Delizia del Belriguardo

The analyses were carried out through visual and photographic surveys, in particular decorations and 3D virtual reconstructions of the “back-stage” settings concerning walls and forced perspectives (trompe-l’oeil).

The main goal will be therefore to illustrate and retrace the first phase of the “project” consisting in the division, distribution, hierarchy of geometric and visual spaces, and the rules followed to accomplish the above, if, where and how they were applied. Anyhow, the general impression is to be in front of a spatial layout thought according to an ideal model and with homogeneous parts.

2. Brief historical outlines

The Delizia di Belriguardo was commissioned by Niccolò III d’Este and designed by architect Giovanni da Siena in 1435.

Sala della Vigna was built upon commission of Ercole II d’Este, between 1536 and 1537; during this period, the Court of Belriguardo also saw the architect and painter Girolamo da Carpi and his father Tommaso, painters Dosso Dossi and his brother Battista, Benvenuto Tisi da Garofalo, Camillo Filippi and Biagio da Bologna.

The main historical orientation attributes the creation of the painting cycle to Girolamo da Carpi, architect and scene painter and his father Tommaso. The Dossi brothers painted natural background landscapes while Benvenuto Tisi da Garofalo and other painters executed the figures of the caryatids in collaboration with each other.

A more in-depth analysis on the identification of the authors and artistic-historical aspects can be found in book *“La Sala delle Vigne nella “delizia” di Belriguardo”* by Jadranka Bentini.¹

In 1598, the ducal family of Este was forced to leave the Duchy of Ferrara to permanently move to Modena and unfortunately this work of art, along with the entire Delizia, suffered the consequences of abandonment.

Already in the 1700s, people of that time were openly speaking about *“bad preserved, ignorance and avidity for profits: that led the famous Sala della Vigna to be even transformed into a “room to store grains”*.²

1 *“Arte e Storia al Belriguardo”*, 1997, A.A.V.V.

2 *“Gli Estensi e la Delizia del Belriguardo”*, 1988, Fiorenzo Artioli

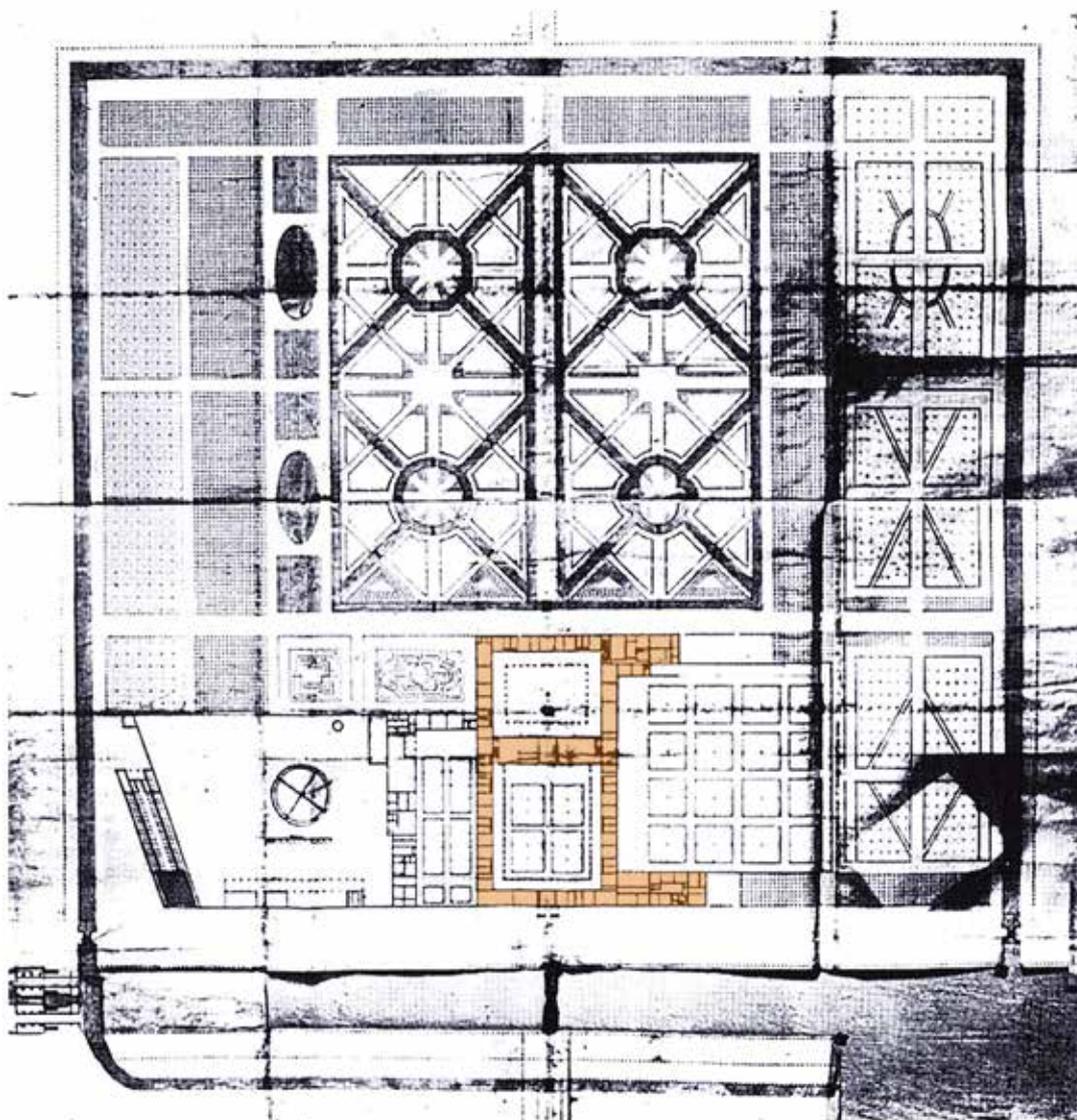


Fig. 2: The ancient floor plan of Belriguardo 15th century

This oblivion persisted until the '80s when, as stated by the last private owner of the Hall, before being bought by the Municipality of Voghiera: *“you could see silhouettes of figures completely covered in dust and cobwebs, and one day, my mother equipped with a water bucket and I, with a broom, discovered this amazing thing. It was an unforgettable emotion”* (Fig. 3 and 4).

The cycle of frescoes, as we can see it today, is the result of a significant restoration work that began in 1989 and ended in 1997 promoted by the competent Superintendencies for Cultural and Environmental Heritage of Ravenna and for Artistic and Historical Heritage of Bologna.