

Summer School

The Renaissance Villa and Garden

Villa Falconieri, Frascati

9-23 May, 2026



Details

Enrolment: maximum 15 participants; minimum 10 participants.

Faculty: José Cornelio da Silva, Ettore Maria Mazzola, Jonathan Weatherill

Guest lecturers: Luigi Miraglia, Ignacio Armella Chavez, Alexandra Massini, Franco Brugo, Leonid Ilyukhin

Duration: 2 weeks

Fee: Euro 2700,00 including room & board, tuition, visits to relevant sites. This fee does not include the cost of travel to Rome, for which participants must make their own arrangements, in addition to providing their own travel insurance. A refund less a €150 administration fee will be given to students who notify us of withdrawal 30 days before the beginning of the course. No refund will be made for withdrawals after this date.

Program description

The Accademia *Vivarium novum* is launching the first Summer School in Garden Design, which will take place at Villa Falconieri from May 9 to 23, 2026.

This program will teach the theoretical and practical principles of the architectural typology of the Italian Renaissance villa and garden. For the duration of two weeks, participants will be fully immersed in the territory of Frascati, located just south of Rome in the Alban hills, to study the ruins of the ancient *villae suburbanae* and the circuit of the Tuscan villas which from the sixteenth century served as magnificent summer retreats of the Roman aristocracy.

Participants will be housed in the historic Villa Falconieri, currently home to the Accademia *Vivarium novum*, which provides an excellent example of a Renaissance villa combining the ancient concept of *otium* with the theme of *villeggiatura* (life in the villa) in close relationship with nature (wild, domesticated, cultivated or formally designed), amidst woods, orchards, fields and gardens.

The site

The Accademia *Vivarium novum* is an international centre for the classical humanities which takes inspiration from Renaissance schools and strives to positively influence the education of young people and society. Through renewed teaching methods in the humanities, arts and sciences, the Academy's students, who come from all over the world, receive a solid education in the Classics, aimed at reinforcing the values of *humanitas* and human dignity. Additionally, the Accademia *Vivarium novum* has instituted the *Poikile* School of the Arts and is developing a World Campus of Humanism.¹ Within such initiatives, in collaboration with international traditional architects and designers, the Academy is also promoting the creation of a *European School for Architecture, Urbanism, and Traditional Construction Techniques*, intended as a truly “Vitruvian” university, that will be located in Frascati and include a program in landscape and garden design.

The history

Since ancient Roman times, the pleasant climate and the natural beauty of the Tuscan area, along with its proximity to the eternal city and the Alban lakes, attracted personalities like Cicero, Lucullus, Horace, or the Quintili, who built magnificent retreats still partially visible today. Later, during the Renaissance and Baroque periods, several cardinals and popes revived the noble tradition by building twelve villas in the current territory of Frascati and Monte Porzio Catone, many of which were visited by notable artists, literates, and grand-tourists, and are still beautifully preserved.

The first of these, villa Falconieri, was built in the mid-sixteenth century on the site of an ancient Roman residence at the behest of Monsignor Alessandro Rufini, bishop of Melfi and former personal secretary to Pope Paul III. Designs were provided by Giovanni Lippi, known as Nanni di Baccio Bigio, from the circle of Antonio da Sangallo the Younger. Subsequently, from 1573 to 1623, the villa belonged, with varying fortunes, to the Cenci, Sforza, Gonzaga and Montalto families. In 1628, it was finally purchased by the Falconieri, who owned it until 1879, when the complex was sold to Elisabetta Aldobrandini Lancellotti.

Upon acquisition, the Falconieri commissioned Francesco Borromini and his collaborator Camillo Arcucci to refurbish the villa adding two side-wings, a taller atrium and a new façade. The sections of the villa that were not damaged by the tragic bombing of 8 September 1943 still house splendid frescoes by Niccolò Berrettoni, Ciro Ferri, Giovan Francesco Grimaldi, Giacinto Calandrucci, and Pier Leone Ghezzi, among others. In practice, the villa counts as an extraordinary document from which we can learn how such architectural and landscape complexes were conceived as unified systems, where nature and man's artistic endeavours fully complement one other, creating places of fascinating harmony.

Program structure

The Summer School, will combine theory sessions in the classroom, covering the history and structure of the villa and garden design from antiquity to the Renaissance, with excursions to historic villas (Villa d'Este at Tivoli, Villa Parisi, Villa Aldobrandini, Villa Lancellotti, Villa Falconieri, Villa Mondragone in Frascati and Monteporzio Catone, Castello del Gallo di Roccagiovine at Mandella) and archaeological sites (the Sanctuary of Fortuna Primigenia in Palestrina, the archaeological area of Tusculum). Afternoons will be dedicated to drawing and designing an Italian garden and/or a park for Villa Lucidi.

A lecture on the philosophical concept of *otium* will offer further insights on the theme of 'living in a villa'. The program is complemented by one or more workshops in fresco-painting, and gardening, and/or brick vault construction.

¹ <https://vivariumnovum.net/it/academy/the-academy>
<https://vivariumnovum.net/it/academy/poikile>

For the entire duration of the program, participants will have the opportunity to engage with the Academy's community of students, professors, and researchers, and will be treated to a concert offered by the Academy's choir *Tyrtarion*.

Learning Objectives

Upon successful completion of this course, participants will be able to:

- Illustrate the concept and structure of Italian villas and gardens of the Renaissance
- Analyze Renaissance villas and gardens within their multiple contexts (functional, social, historical, cultural, and environmental)
- Apply Renaissance tenets and techniques of designing, planning, and building
- Design an Italian garden according to the principles and examples of Renaissance villas

How to apply

Applications should be emailed to Alexandra Massini: massini@vivariumnovum.net

The selection of participants will be made on the basis of merit.

Your application must include:

1. a cover letter detailing your interest in participating in the Summer School and what you hope to gain from it
2. an academic *curriculum vitae* with your contact details (telephone and email) and details of University courses/modules undertaken with results
3. one letter of academic reference

The deadline for receipt of applications is 28 February 2026

Applicants will be notified by March 30th whether they have been accepted for the course.

Bibliography

Useful tools:

Monty Don series (4 episodes) on Italian Gardens (BBC, 2011)

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01061xg/episodes/guide> also available on YouTube

Primary sources (up to 1925):

ALBERTI, Leon Battista, *De Re Aedificatoria*, The Ten Books of Architecture, translated by J. Leoni, London, 1755, reprint, New York, 1986

COLONNA, Francesco, *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, Venice, 1499, (reprint)

COLUMELLA, *On Agriculture and Trees*, translated by H.B. Ash, E.S. Forster and E.H. Heffner, London and Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1951-55

PLINY The Elder, *Natural History*, translated by H. Rackham and W.H.S. Jones, London and Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1949-80, especially volume VII, second ed. 1980

SERLIO, Sebastiano, *The Book of Architecture*, London, 1611, reprint by Dover

SITWELL, Sir George, *Essay on the making of Gardens*, London, 1909

TRIGGS, Inigo, *The art of garden design in Italy*, New York, 1906

VIRGIL, *The Georgics*, translated by Robert Wells, Manchester, 1982

WARTHON, Edith, *Italian Villas and their Gardens*, 1904, reprint by Intra

General reading:

BAZIN, Germain, *Paradeisos*, London, 1990

COWELL, F.R., *The Garden as a Fine Art*, London, 1978

GOTHEIN, Marie Luise, *A History of Garden Art*, New York 1928 (reprint 1979)

HOBHOUSE, Penelope and TAYLOR, Patrick, *The Gardens of Europe*, London, 1990

HUXLEY, Anthony, *An Illustrated History of Gardening*, London, 1988; id. *The Painted Garden*, London, 1988

JELLICOE, Geoffrey, JELLICOE, Susan, GOODE, Patrick and LANCASTER, Michael, Editors, *The Oxford Companion to Gardens*, Oxford, 1986

MOSSER, Monique, and TEYSSOT, Georges, editors, *The History of Garden Design*, London, 1991

THACKER, Christopher, *The History of Gardens*, London, 1979

On Roman gardens and the origins of gardening:

DUDLEY, Donald, *Roman Society*, Harmondsworth, 1970

HIGHET, Gilbert, *Poets in a Landscape*, Harmondsworth, 1957

HUXLEY, Anthony, *Green Inheritance*, London, 1984

MACDOUGALL, E.B. and JASHEMSKI, W.F., editors, *Ancient Roman Gardens*, Washington, DC, 1981

PREST, John, *The Garden of Eden*, New Haven and London, 1981

On Renaissance gardens in Italy and Europe:

COFFIN, David R. editor, *The Italian Garden*, Washington, DC, 1972

JELLICOE Geoffrey and SHEPHERD, J. C. *Italian Gardens of the Renaissance*, London., 1994

LAZZARO, Claudia, *The Italian Renaissance Garden*, New Haven and London, 1990

MADER, Gunter, and NEUBERT-MADER, Laila, *Les Jardins Italiens*, Fribourg, 1987

MASSON, Georgina, *Italian Gardens*, London, 1961

On the Renaissance villas of Latium:

AZZI VISENTINI, Margherita, *La villa in Italia. Quattrocento e Cinquecento*; Milano, 1995; idem, *L'arte dei giardini. Scritti Teorici e Pratici dal XIV al XIX secolo*, 2 vol. Milan, 1999

BELLI BARSALI, Isa, PUPPI, L. and SCIOLLA, G.C., *Le grandi ville italiane. Veneto, Toscana, Lazio* Novara, 1998

COFFIN, David R., *The Villa in the life of Renaissance Rome*, Princeton, 1979

FRANCK, Carl L., *The villas of Frascati, 1550-1750*, London, 1966

SCHEDULE

The Renaissance Villa and Garden

SESSION	TIME	TOPIC	PROFESSOR
Sat May 09	09:00-10:00	Arrival to Villa Falconieri	AVN staff
	10:00-10:30	Welcome and Introduction to the course	Luigi Miraglia Ettore M. Mazzola
	10:30-12:00	Visit of Villa Falconieri	Alexandra Massini
	12:15-13:30	Life, nature, and cultured <i>otium</i> in the Renaissance villa	Ignacio Armella
	15:00-18:00	Visit of Villa Mondragone and Villa Lucidi	Luigi Miraglia Architecture faculty
	19:00-20:30	Project Definition	Architecture faculty
Sun May 10	09:30-12:30	Visit of the ancient <i>Tusculum</i>	AVN professor + Architecture faculty
	15:00-21:00	Planning and Drawing session	Architecture faculty
Mon May 11	09:30-11:00	Nature and the man made	Jose Cornelio da Silva
	15:30-17:30	Visit of Villa Lancellotti and Villa Aldobrandini	Luigi Miraglia, Alexandra Massini Architecture faculty
	18:30-21:00	Planning and Drawing session	Architecture faculty

Tue May 12	09:00-18:00 Full day excursion	Tivoli, Villa d'Este The ancient Praeneste and the Sanctuary of Fortuna Primigenia	Alexandra Massini, Architecture faculty
Wed May 13	09:30-10:30	The landscape and garden as stage for human life. From the Renaissance to the 18th century	Jose Cornelio da Silva
	15:00-21:00	Planning and Drawing session	Architecture faculty
Thu May 14	09:30-11:00	Designing a Renaissance garden	Jonathan Weatherill
	11:30-13:30	Planning and Drawing session	Architecture faculty
	15:00-17:00	Visit of Villa Parisi	Alexandra Massini Architecture faculty
Fri May 15	Full day	Planning and Drawing session	Architecture faculty
Sat May 16	09:30-tbd	Fresco Workshop	Leonid Ilyukhin
Sun May 17	9:00-16:30	Castello del Gallo di Roccagiovine Mandela	Luigi Miraglia Architecture faculty
	pm & evening	Planning and Drawing session	Architecture faculty
Mon May 18	09:30-13:30	Planning and Drawing session	Architecture faculty
	15:30-17:30	Guest lecture Franco Brugo	
Tue May 19	Full day	Drawing session	Architecture faculty
Wed May 20	Full day	Drawing session	Architecture faculty
Thu May 21	Full day	Drawing session	Architecture faculty
Fri May 22	am	Finalizing the projects	Students only
	15:00	Pin up	
	16:00-21:00	Critique	AVN and Architecture faculty
Sat May 23	am	Program conclusion	All
	pm	Departure	