

Introduction

The land on which the Villa is built is a farm known (still today) since the 17th century as 'I Chiosi'. In the records, the name Chiosi is also given to the Villa. The term 'Chiosi', which still indicates the tree-lined promenade from the Ponte della Cresa to the Villa, probably means 'Shrinkage', and refers to the shrinkage of the Valle del Verde, which flows into the Magra.

The **Dosi Delfini family** acquired the land in the late 16th and early 17th century, as attested by a **document from 1610** that mentions the land among the family properties, together with a building.

The family is not originally from **Pontremoli**, they arrive during the 16th century and are known as **Belgioiosi**: in fact, they come from Belgioioso, in the province of Pavia. They arrived in Pontremoli as **soldiers for the Sforza dukedom**, and were responsible for the defence of Cacciaguerra, the fortress that divided Pontremoli Guelph from Ghibelline Pontremoli. The first Dosi to arrive in Pontremoli, therefore, is a military captain.

The family's first residence is located in today's Piazza della Repubblica, in the centre of the town. There they organised the services for the armies crossing the Apennines (canteen and lodging): in this way, they quickly became rich, and tried to increase their status through marriages with members of the old Pontremoli nobility.

To increase their prestige, the family also invested in the land: one of these investments was the purchase of the estates where the Villa stands.

In the mid 17th century, **Pontremoli became a sort of 'tax paradise'**, a free port for the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, on the trade route connecting the new port of Livorno with the Padana Plain. The family purchased several ports of call at the Tuscan port, and organised commercial activities between northern Italy and Tuscany, becoming even richer.

Between the end of the 17th century and the beginning of the 18th century, the brothers Carlo and Francesco Dosi began the construction of the Villa: the estate began at the Chiosi arch, and the artistic structure of the Villa was to include the bridge over the Verde stream, which guaranteed a perspective telescope on the façade.

The beautiful cedars of Lebanon that now frame the Villa were planted in 1863, on the occasion of the birth of the great-grandfather of the current owner of the Villa. Today they are listed in the register of monumental trees in Tuscany.

Stopping below the façade, it can be noticed that the building was created ex novo, on an open space. At this point, there is a **triple perspective**: the two wings of the villa intersect with the orthogonal axis of the bridge and the entrance.

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The entire villa presents **continuous perspective plays** that create amazement and wonder in visitors.

The building is a large H-shaped structure, a central body with wings and a double entrance staircase. At the sides are two hanging gardens, at the back a steep slope: this is the last side of Monte Molinatico, on which the castle of Piagnaro also stands. A vineyard is planted on the hill, framing the Villa.

The façade

The model is that of the Medici Villas.

The exterior is simple, with marble and sandstone decorations.

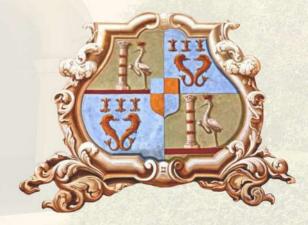
The façade is symmetrical and rests on five arches, one central and two wings. Strong contrast with the rich interior.

At the entrance there is the double coat of arms of the Dosi Delfini family, whose double surname is mentioned in the earliest documents (so its origin is unknown).

The **dolphin** is also often present in family iconography.

The coat of arms features a stork

with a tower three crowns and two dolphins.



The tower is a symbol of solidity,

The crowns are a symbol of nobility.

The **stork**, on the other hand, is a symbol of alerts.

During migration, when resting, the head of the family stays awake, holding a stone as an alarm, to protect the whole flock.

On the main door are the busts of the two brothers to who is linked the design of the entire building, known as the 'Parrucconi': Carlo and Francesco di Nicolò Dosi, between them the date '1700", taken as a symbolic year (the villa was probably finished earlier).



While **Francesco** must have been a businessman, following the family business, and died in 1701 at the age of 46 (posthumous portrait), **Carlo** was a highly cultured intellectual, passionate about philosophy and art.

He always lived in the villa, with his 12 children, and can rightly be considered the creator of the palace (although his brother Francesco will always be presented as the creator of the villa).

Later, the family also built a city palace, today known as **Palazzo Dosi Magnavacca**, because it passed to another family. Only the villa, however, was considered a place for social occasions and relationships.

The artistic choices of the commissioners, therefore, were not only determined by formal reasons, but also and above all by social ones: in 1714 Francesco Farnese, Duke of Parma, visited the Villa. Almost twenty years later, in 1733, the family obtained the title of Marchesi from the Farnese family, with Giuseppe Antonio Dosi, son of Carlo.

The interior

Note the richness of the decoration, which was meant to arouse astonishment in the spectator. The large entrance hall is on two levels, with a functional balcony on the first floor. The floor is not original but from the early 20th century. Supposedly, there was a red terracotta floor, typical of Pontremoli palaces.

The **ceiling** is also not original, having collapsed in 1816 following a period of neglect, but was restored between 1991 and 1993. The renovation is in keeping with the context, but its original form is not known: it is assumed to have been **richly decorated with figures and squares**, like the one in the town hall, where the most important scene of the **entire decorative cycle** (a celebration of the Dosi family) is located.

After the death of Giuseppe Antonio, with whom the family reached the peak of its success, obtaining the title of marquisate in 1733, and who built the Dosi Magnavacca town palace (the 50s and 60s of the 18th century were also the years of greatest artistic production in the Pontremoli area, the Teatro della Rosa and the Church of Nostra Donna were built), the heirs divided up the estate.

The French Revolution, with the looting and destruction of the coats of arms, caused a period of neglect that lasted from around the 1780s to 1820. During this period, the lower part of the frescoes in the hall, which was used as a barn, was ruined.

From 1820 onwards, the villa underwent a **long process of renovation**: the family retrieved the furnishings from the town palace and repurchased their pieces on the antiques market.

The frescoes

From 1696 onwards, the quadraturist painter Francesco Natali, who also worked for the Farnese family, decorated the villa's salon with fake architecture and fantastic trompe l'oeil, which were intended to astonish the spectator, break through the walls and frame the scenes, now lost. Note the architectural balustrade, below the real one. The figures are by Alessandro Gherardini.

The same work scheme (quadraturist and figurativist) is typical of the **Baroque period** and is also applied to all Pontremolese palaces and churches, the model being imported into the city through Villa Dosi.

The quadrature is deceptive, and hides the defects of the room, which is actually trapezoidal and irregular: note the medallion that is outside the perspective centre. The iconographic narration is not known, as many of the figures have been lost.

On the left we recognise the three "Parche", on the right allegories of abundance and peace, led by a man who is probably chasing away negative allegories. On the right is Giulia Righini, wife of Carlo Dosi. She died in 1713 and later her husband, devastated by the loss of his wife, decided to retire from social life. Above her, a Madonna with three crowns is depicted, which was probably meant to crown Giulia Righini herself. Also in the room is a wooden console with mirror by Setti probably made for the city palace (sold in 1931): we can still see the family coat of arms, the stork with a tower. In the salon there is an original 18th century sedan chair, female.

From the salon branch off **9 rooms**, semi-public and representative spaces: the private rooms are located upstairs.

The Red room

Originally, the walls were covered with damask fabrics.

There is a large fireplace. The Salottino must have been a music room, as attested by the central harpsichord.

On the walls, grotesque genre portraits, which still have no attribution. There are several objects of Neapolitan origin: a 17th-century Saint Joseph of the Neapolitan school, the chandelier is made of Capodimonte ceramics, and there are also two portraits of the Dukes of Parma, who were guests at Villa Dosi in 1714.

Elisabetta Farnese, daughter of Odoardo Farnese and Dorotea Sofia of Neuburg, married Filippo V of Spain by proxy. The family then accompanied her to the port of Sestri Levante for her departure to Spain in 1714. On their way back, the Dukes stopped in Pontremoli, according to chroniclers precisely in order to 'see the house' of their friend Carlo Dosi. The Pontremoli chronicles on the subject are very rich and accurate, describing the entire stay. Carlo Dosi was ill and still suffering from the death of his wife, and following the Dukes' stay he wrote to the **Grand Duke of Tuscany** to apologise for the impromptu reception.

The Farnese family is linked to the presence of Neapolitan paintings: Giovan Battista Natali, son of the villa's designer Francesco, worked in Naples for the Bourbons (who later inherited the Duchy of Parma through Elisabeth), and purchased 17th-century paintings from the Neapolitan market for Giuseppe Antonio Dosi.

The billiard room

This room is also richly adorned with paintings of the Neapolitan school, followers of Caravaggism: note Luca Giordano's Seneca Morente and Sebastiano Furini's David and Goliath. Gherardini's Sacred Allegory is an expression of a painter who was still late Mannerist. Gherardini took a wife in Pontremoli and moved to the town as a consequence of the marriage. On the walls, portraits of family members: on the left Carlo, on the right Francesco, with a more 'unkempt' appearance. Giulia Reghini is depicted next to Carlo. The ceiling is decorated with gilded quadratures.

On the walls are also oval portraits of members of the Dosi family, including the two blessed Giusto Dosi and Elena Dosi.

The library

The room is located at the intersection with the horizontal axis, on a double staircase. Here begins the family archive, which contains 13,000 volumes, including important Latin and European manuals.

The family chapel

The family had a private chapel for their celebrations as weddings.

The dining room

The room is centred, open towards the salon and on the bridge to complete the perspective, which crosses the horizontal row.

The grotto at the back is a typical element of the Baroque garden.

In summer, at the peak of the sun, the rays are reflected in front of the Neptune and seem to give life to the statue.

Family members call the statue Gibigiana.

The 19th century room

The room was refurbished in the 19th century, the squares, much ruined after the Napoleonic period, were covered with wallpaper (as in some city palaces, e.g. Palazzo Pavesi). The large portrait depicts Andrea Ranzi, personal physician to the Pasha of Egypt, patriot during the Battle of Curtatone and Montanara, and professor at the University of Pisa.

Bedroom

On one side we have a bed with a coat of arms and a mirror.

On the other, doors decorated with landscapes, painted by Antonio Contestabili, nephew of Francesco Natali. In the room there are two works by Alessandro Gherardini, depicting sacred allegories, and a chest of drawers originating from the Ligurian area, dating back to the 16th century.

Staircase

The only internal connection between the noble and servants floors is this spiral staircase.

The gardens

The right-hand garden still has a layout similar to the original one. It is divided into **two areas**: an open one, with flowerbeds, and a more secluded one, enclosed by hedges and trees.

The marble bas-relief with the Madonna was originally in the small bridge, where a copy now stands, and was moved here for conservation reasons.

(to be supplemented with the information on the villa's website).