



Villa Benni Park - Via Saragozza 210

This large park at the foot of the hill, between Via Orsoni and Via Battaglia, overlooking the portico of Via Saragozza, lays the backdrop to the scenic villa built in the 1920s by Alfredo Benni, a Bolognese landowner, following the demolition of a previous building. The vintage iron gate, standing right in front of the niche with the statue of the so-called Fat Madonna, opens onto an esplanade with tree-lined avenues leading up to a sumptuous flight of steps with low walls, balustrades and a fishpond introducing the villa, whose neoclassical façade is partly concealed by the foliage of a pair of red-leaf beech trees. A shady curtain of trees runs around the perimeter of the park, contemporary to the mansion. The areas close to the building, on the other hand, feature a formal design, with flowerbeds planted with trees or marked by groups of ornamental shrubs, palms, borders of ornamental herbaceous plants, climbing roses and numerous antique pots and planters. The vegetation includes many evergreen trees (cedars, firs, thuias, holm oaks, magnolias) alongside exotic and native broadleaf trees (horse chestnuts, lindens, black walnuts, white poplars and cherry trees); a driveway with oaks alternating with *Ginkgo biloba* specimens is developed in the western part of the park. Some large tree specimens, in particular a group of lebochedrons and a group of thuias, possibly predate the 20th-century arrangement. The plateau at the back of the villa, shaded by isolated trees, is dominated by a large sequoia (*Sequoia sempervirens*) with a polycormic trunk, a majestic plane tree and a specimen of *Sofora japonica pendula* with its characteristic procumbent appearance.

A walk along the cobbled paths, bordered according to Bolognese custom by kerbs of selenite or cement, will reveal box hedges, borders of *Danae racemosa* and *Hemerocallis* spp, patches of flowering bulbous plants, carpets of St. John's Wort and, in the shadier and cooler areas, groups of ferns and expanses of periwinkle; the undergrowth also hosts plants typical of spontaneous flora, including butcher's broom, *Coronilla emerus* and precious wild orchids.

The mansion boasts noteworthy decorations by Silvio Gordini, professor of Ornamentation at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Bologna from 1887 to 1921; most notably, on the front is a splendid tripartite wrought-iron facing bearing the initials of the Benni family. The villa houses a perfectly preserved German air-raid shelter and is open by reservation for receptions, also offering a bed&breakfast service of outstanding quality. (info@villabenni.it)

By Fondazione Innovazione Urbana Rusconi Ghigi, in collaboration with Fondazione Bologna Welcome