



Villas, hotels, and lakeside walks: a symphony of flowers and plants

The innovative and creative spirit of the Art Nouveau period, which finds its greatest expression in architecture and the applied arts, also manifests itself in the design of parks and gardens. These spaces combine plants typical of the woods and lakeshores with those from all over the world. This colorful and vibrant nature, inspiring art but ephemeral in reality, is beautifully documented. Archival documents and vintage images attest to the presence, between the late 19th and early 20th centuries, of a significant number of villas built by wealthy vacationers on the shores and hills of Lake Maggiore, particularly on the Piedmont side. Despite their different styles, these villas feature towers and balconies to enjoy the view and are surrounded by parks and gardens that blend smoothly with the natural landscape.

This phenomenon began in Stresa even before the Belle Époque, with the construction of residences equipped with gardens and lake views, such as Villa Ducale, De Martini (now gone), Pallavicino, Vignolo, and "La Palazzola". Specialized builders and gardeners prepared the spaces where parks inspired by the natural English garden took shape. They skillfully arranged local and exotic plants and flowers, which thrived in the Verbano climate and soil. They created plays of light and shadow, colors, and scents by arranging flower beds and ornamental plants (camellias, azaleas, roses, lilacs, carnations, hydrangeas, wisteria, irises, freesias, etc.) and shady evergreen or deciduous trees, green and fragrant in the warm season and cloaked in warm tones in autumn. Crisscrossed by winding paths, the parks were equipped with greenhouses, gazebos, pergolas, and Art Nouveau-style tables. In Stresa, because the Napoleon Road of the Simplon ran along the coast, the gardens of the villas and grand hotels - the Grand Hôtel des Iles Borromées (1863) and the Regina Palace Hôtel (1908) - were partly beyond the road, which, made of beaten earth, was a place for strolling. There was no lakeside promenade yet (1922-1937), but with the increase of tourists and vacationers, public spaces were gradually beautified with flowerbeds and trees, and new structures, avenues, and green areas were being planned.

Conversely, the arrival of the Simplon railway, inaugurated in 1906, divided the parks of the inland villas. Additionally, the press of the time, in the name of landscape protection, denounced deforestation and the multiplication of constructions.

What has now become historic and fascinating was not to everyone's liking back then!



Above: the Borromées with the first trees of the lakeside promenade and with the garden facing the Napoleon Road of the Simplon. Below, right and left: the lakeside promenade before and after the Great War. Center: panoramic view of Stresa with gardens and parks.



Two views of the original appearance of the shoreline with the first planting interventions.



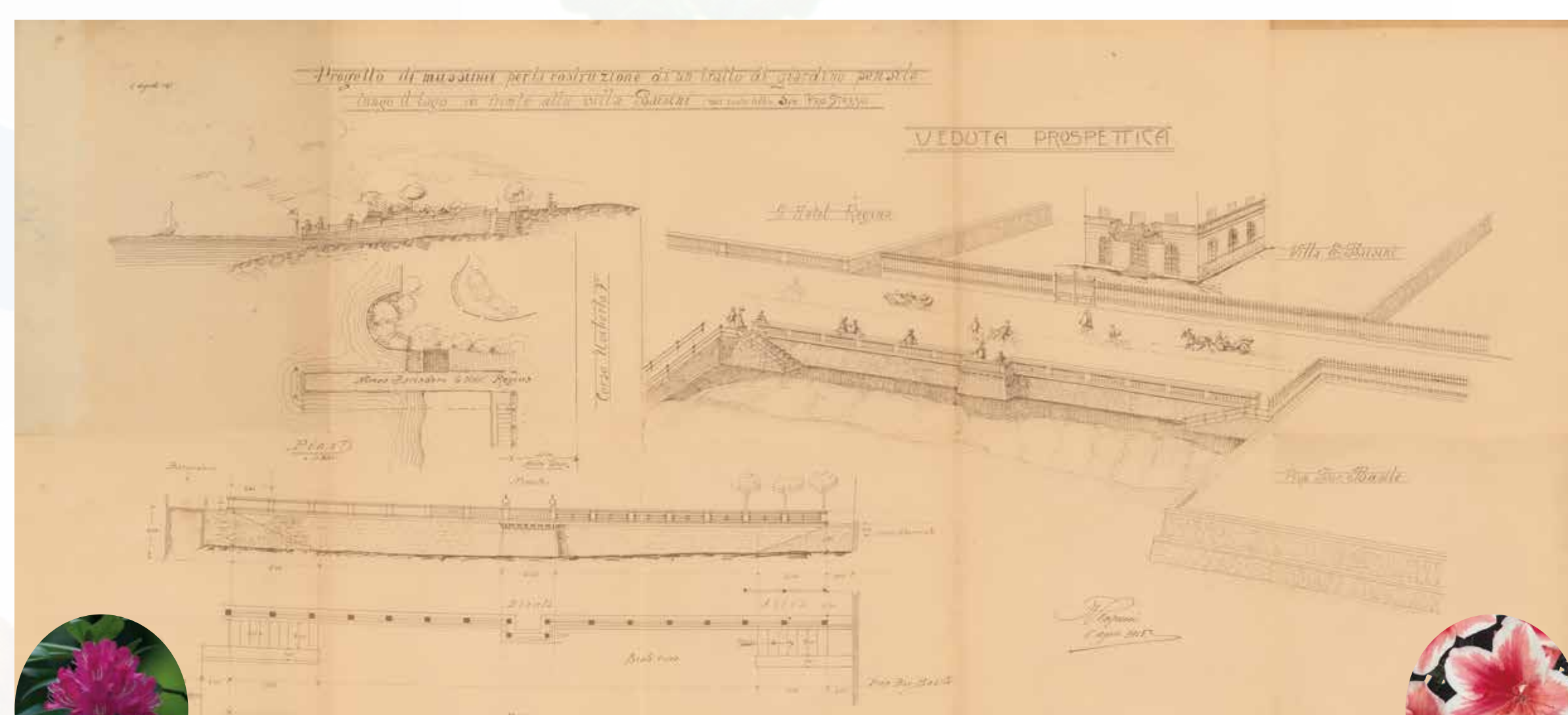
The monument to Umberto I by Pietro Canonica among the flowerbeds in the early 20th century.



The Music Pavilion in the park of Villa Baisini.



The stretch of coast in front of the recently built Regina Palace Hôtel and Villa Baisini, where the Hôtel Astoria now stands.



Project by master builder Vasco Capucci for the lakeside garden in front of Villa Baisini.

