

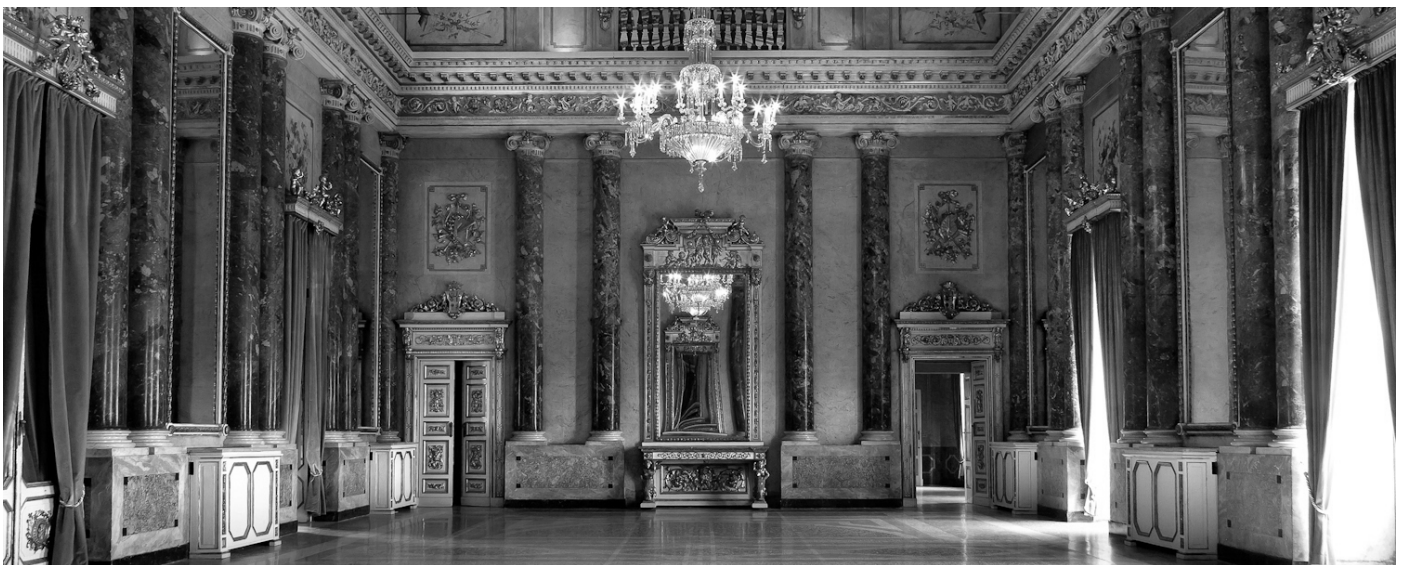


The Napoleonic Staterooms

Work on the Palazzo piano nobile, the principle reception and living area, began in the middle of the 1700s and was only finished one century later. La Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan's Ambrosian Library, houses documents attesting to the furnishings and decorations of these rooms in 1866: tapestries, bronze statues, porcelains from Sèvres, Saxony, Eastern Europe and China, paintings by Bonvicino called il Moretta, pictures by Velasquez, statues sculpted by Canova (one of which adorned the landing of the large double-ramp staircase), monochrome or polychrome frescoes painted by Sala, Sabetelli and Trabellesi, many of which are still in the Palazzo today.

Other frescoes, painted by Giuseppe Albertolli and Agostino Gerli depicting mythological scenes, were often inspired by Parini's favorite myths.

The artistic influence of the Academy of Parma, founded in 1752 by Guglielmo du Tillot, whom Parini greatly admired, is also quite evident.



Each of the rooms had a fireplace in keeping with French taste of the times.

Skilled artisans were summoned to create a rich array of decorations for the rooms: scagliola stucco work imitating semi-precious stones; terracotta Ionic columns painted to resemble veined marble; tapestries; stucco and marble work; intricate inlaid parquet floors or Venetian tile flooring; gilded inlaid door lintels surmounted by wooden carvings of lions, dogs, eagles, seahorses, fruit, griffons holding a coat-of-arms in their claws; garlands; royal crowns; family initials or heads of famous people wearing acanthus leaf crowns, to name just a few.

The stucco decorations were the work of Macchi; Invernizzi did the inlaid woodwork; the wooden carvings were gilded by Venegoni whereas Borri painted the wall murals.

Between 1779 and 1781 Carlo Visetti added more stucco work to the ceilings, and in those same years, gilt workers Paolo Ferrari and Carlo Benaglia applied 24 carat gold leaf to the rest of the woodwork in the rooms. In 1780, Carabelli sculpted rosettes to decorate the ceiling coffers that supported the 24 Murano glass chandeliers hanging in the staterooms.

The three different styles decorating the Palazzo Serbelloni staterooms correspond to three different periods in decorative art.

- The grotesque style of the boudoir and its small antechamber, full of imaginary figures, symbols and vivid colors with frescoed scenes from the myth of Amor and Psyche, probably painted in 1836-37;
- The grisaille style of the figures, cornices and rosettes painted in monochrome shades to look like three dimensional stucco decorations, found in Sala Galeazzo, Sala Parini and probably in the original version of Sala Napoleonica also known as Sala Bonaparte.
- The decorations of Sala Napoleonica.

Sala Napoleonica or Sala Bonaparte

The Sala Napoleonica or Sala Bonaparte, the last room to be completed, was the richest in lavish materials and variety of its motifs, scagliola work, polychrome paintings and stucco foliage and putti.

Although the decorations for this room appear to be Cantoni's project, there is reason to believe other artisans may have worked on them at a later date.

The molded stucco work for example, doesn't follow the dictates of the Albertolli School of ornamental decoration because the stucco leaves are too open and there is no rigid geometric scheme.

However it is hard to tell what is original and what is not in some cases because of the extensive renovation and restoration work carried out by Luigi Secchi on the palace after World War II.

The bouquets of flowers painted on panels above the door lintels are a unique and important decorative element of Sala Napoleonica. Clearly belonging to the Romantic Age of the 1800s, their fresh colors and soft brush strokes, attributed to the Milanese painter, Luigi Scrosati, are most striking.

The original chandeliers are of Bohemian rock crystal.

On May 15, 1796, Gian Galeazzo Serbelloni, commander of the Urban Militia of Milan, opened the doors of his palace to welcome Napoleon Bonaparte who marched into Lombardy at the head of his Grande Armée. Bonaparte, his generals and his wife, Joséphine Beauharnais, all stayed at Palazzo Serbelloni and for this Gian Galeazzo was bestowed the title of "Duke of the Republic". In fact, Duke Serbelloni was so impressed by Napoleon's revolutionary ideas, that supposedly he publicly cut off his "pigtail," the symbol of aristocratic society, in contempt for his fellow noble peers.

The balls, theater performances and musical concerts the Serbelloni family loved to share with the city's cultural aristocracy were, for the most part, held in the grand and richly decorated Sala Napoleonica.

Sala Gian Galeazzo

The large family heraldic crest in this room commemorates and exalts the military deeds of Duke Gabrio Serbelloni.

The original chandelier is of Bohemian crystal.

Sala Parini

The four figures frescoed here in grisaille possible represent the four seasons or perhaps four mythological figures, such as the Greek goddess of justice, Astraea, or the Roman god of wine, Bacchus. Episodes taken from mythology had often served as an admonition inviting people to lead a life of sagacity, moderation and rectitude; by the 1700s, mythology only raised a sardonic smile in society at that time, infamous for indulging itself in extravagant and dissolute behavior.

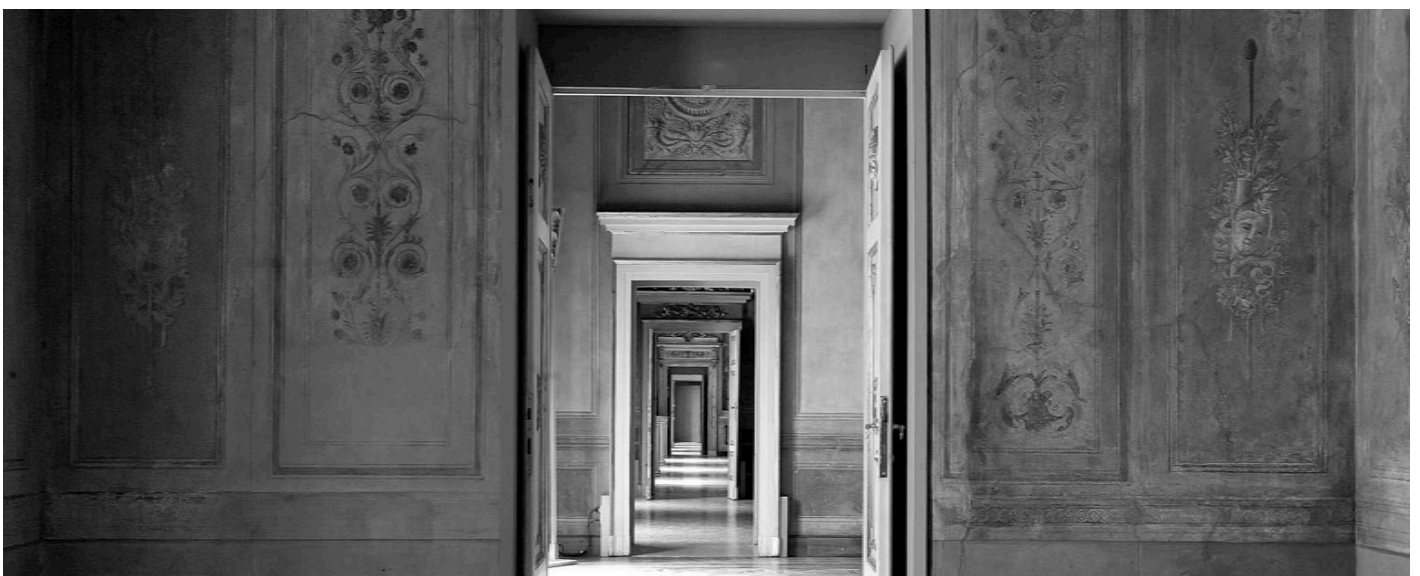
The marvelous crystal chandelier is from the early 1800s.

The boudoirs

It is said that Josephine slept in the boudoir when she and Napoleon stayed at Palazzo Serbelloni. The frescoes decorating these small rooms are attributed to Francesco Podesti but were influenced by Parini's study of allegoric and symbolic figures and by one of his most beloved myths, the love story of Cupid and Psyche. Podesti's work, "Psyche," portrays the moment "love ceases when nothing is left to desire, mystery is the sweetest and most constant ingredient".

The theme of Psyche and the grotesque figures in the boudoir can also be found in well-known works from the 1500s and the Renaissance, decorating the walls of the Loggia of Raphael in the Vatican and Villa Torlonia in Rome, for example.

The many musical instruments appearing in the frescoes perhaps allude to the music that entertained Psyche whilst she was in the golden Palace of Love.



From 1900 to the present time

1921: Gian Lodovico Sola Cabiati appointed the Milanese architect, Giovanni Greppi, to build the present spiral staircase

1924: Sola Cabiati appointed the architect, Aldo Andreani, to design a new garden

August 15, 1943: on that date, Milan was heavily damaged by the Allied air-raids of World War II. The bombs that hit the palace, set fire to it and destroyed extensive sections of the building; only the wing facing Corso Venezia was spared.

Lost forever were the famous library, the frescoes by Trabellesi, the tapestries, the paintings and works of art and history that the Serbelloni's and their heirs had collected over time.

The furnishings of the room where Napoleon and Josephine Beauharnais had slept were only saved because they had been prudently taken away at night, hidden in a wagon, to Villa Sola Cabiati in Tremezzo.

After 1943: Engineer Luigi Carlo Caligaris was appointed to survey and evaluate the damage and draw up plans for the reconstruction and restoration of the palace wing overlooking the garden.

21 June 1948: Caligaris wrote to Guglielmo Pacchioni, Superintendent of the Galleries for Lombardy in charge of restoring works of art damaged in the war, to inform him that the frescoes in the Sala "degli uomini illustri" or illustrious men, on the ground floor in the wing facing the garden, were too damaged and could not be saved.

1946 - 1950: The wing of the palace on Corso Venezia was reconstructed and restored under Luigi Secchi, the industrial engineer who was also responsible for rebuilding Milan's La Scala Opera House.

March to September 2012: the installation of state-of-the-art technology throughout the palace completed the conservative restoration works.

The idea behind the piano nobile's renovation project was to restore its historic role as a "salon" open to the people and city of Milan, equipping the staterooms on this floor to host large events of a cultural and social nature, on one hand, and making the palace a meeting place where ideas and people could come together once more, on the other.

