

Countryside Villas: The Culture of Leisure

*"Those who believe that happiness is in the town are wrong.
They should come here;
this place will offer them true pleasures"*

... these are the words inscribed on a countryside villa near Dubrovnik dating from the 15th century.



Bunić-Kaboga villa located at Rijeka Dubrovačka

An answer to the challenges of that time

In the Middle Ages towns became noisy, overcrowded and dirty and Dubrovnik was no exception. During its golden period the city had more than 40,000 inhabitants, which was equal to the number of inhabitants that London had at that time!

However, being one of the most important maritime trading centres in Europe came with a price. The city was often devastated by deadly outbreaks of plague. In response to that grave danger, Dubrovnik came up with the brilliant idea of building the world's first quarantine. The quarantine was finished in 1377 and everyone arriving in Dubrovnik had to stay there for 40 days.



Walled buildings outside the city walls were quarantine

“Villas are like sons: one is not enough, two are enough, three are too many”

Frequent plague epidemics also contributed to the growing construction of villas outside of the city walls. When the air was heavy with the pollution of disease people would escape from contagious towns and retreat themselves to their countryside villas. In 1458 Dubrovnik's humanist Benedikt Kotruljević recommended owning two villas: “You keep one for your benefit and the rent in order to feed your family. It is not important whether it is far away from the town because you should focus only on its usefulness. The other one is for entertainment and relaxation for you and your family.”

Living in harmony with nature

Life in the country has always been a primordial dream of humankind. It was in the 14th century that Dubrovnik's noble families first started building second homes outside the crowded city. During the Renaissance period, the number of these villas increased enormously and life in the countryside thrived. Summer residences were a place for agriculture as well as a place for leisure. They were usually constructed on steep slopes with terraced gardens that had breath-taking views over the sea and nearby islands. Renaissance gardens were abundant with lemons,

oranges, laurels, cedars and palm-trees. Along with pergolas they provided much needed shade and were ideal for taking a walk, even in the hottest months of summer.

These green oases were surrounded with high stonewalls that protected the garden from the wind, but also from the gaze of others, thus providing complete privacy for their owners.

Dubrovnik countryside villas represented a perfect union of nature, man and his way of life.



Countryside villa of family Gučetić in Trsteno Arboretum

Villas were the Facebook of that time

Countryside villas were used all year round, and very often became the centre of a family's social life rather than a place of quiet retreat. They were places for rest and leisure, reading and spending quality time with family and friends. Villas were places of freedom where their owners and guests would dance, play games, laugh and joke around. People would also gather in the beautiful gardens to talk about literature, art, science, politics and philosophy. Festivities and ceremonies, like weddings, were a very common and delightful sight at villas.



Renaissance concert at Bunić-Kaboga villa