

Renaissance Gardens at Dubrovnik's Aristocratic Summer Houses

The Renaissance changed the world in just about every way one could think of. It cut the ties with the Middle Ages and helped to plant the seeds of the Modern world.

The “Rebirth” of culture and science

The rising of cities and a growing urban population made Italy a fertile ground for a cultural revolution, the Italian Renaissance. Never before had there been such a synergy of science, philosophy and art. From Dante and Machiavelli to Shakespeare; from the beauty of Michelangelo's David to the perfection of Leonardo's Mona Lisa; from Copernicus' heliocentric system to Galileo's discoveries in astronomy; from Columbus discovering America to Magellan circumnavigating the world!

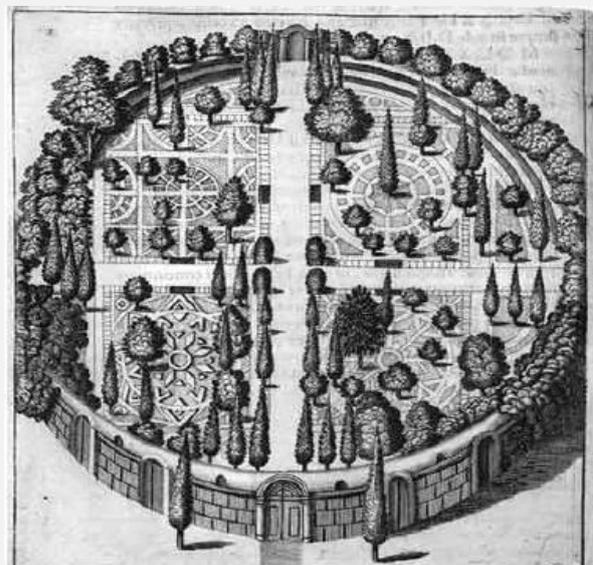
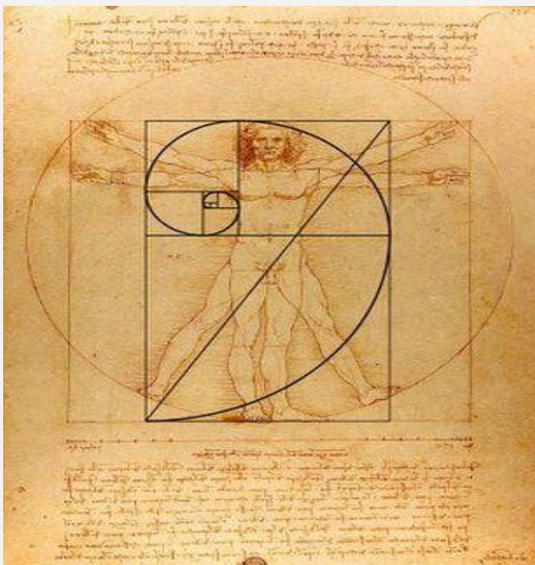


Cathedral of Dubrovnik seen through a rosette

All these revolutionary discoveries made a strong impression on the man of that time. He started questioning all he believed to be true, and for the first time in history, human needs and values became more important than religious beliefs. Thanks to Guttenberg's printing press, another invention of the Renaissance, these new ideas would spread faster than ever before.

"Man is the measure of all things"

Now man was considered to be the centre of the universe and limitless in his potential for development. Leonardo da Vinci, the true genius of the Renaissance, embodied this ideal of l'uomo universale - the universal man. Not only was he a master painter, but also a great scientist, inventor, architect and writer. In many of his artworks, he used the Golden Ratio, also known as the Divine Proportion. The Golden Ratio represents perfect beauty and it is considered to be pleasing on the eye.



Golden ratio (Divine Proportion) Layout of the Botanical garden in Padua
(1545)

The big comeback of villae rusticae

As cities became overcrowded and were often devastated by deadly outbreaks of plague, people often retreated themselves to their countryside villas which invoked the time of the Roman villa rustica. Slowly but surely these estates turned into places for pure leisure and embodied an ideal of the villa in the country. Here it was possible to live in harmony with nature and dedicate oneself as much to leisure pastimes as to the arts and knowledge.



Small harbour of the Gučetić villa in Trsteno near Dubrovnik

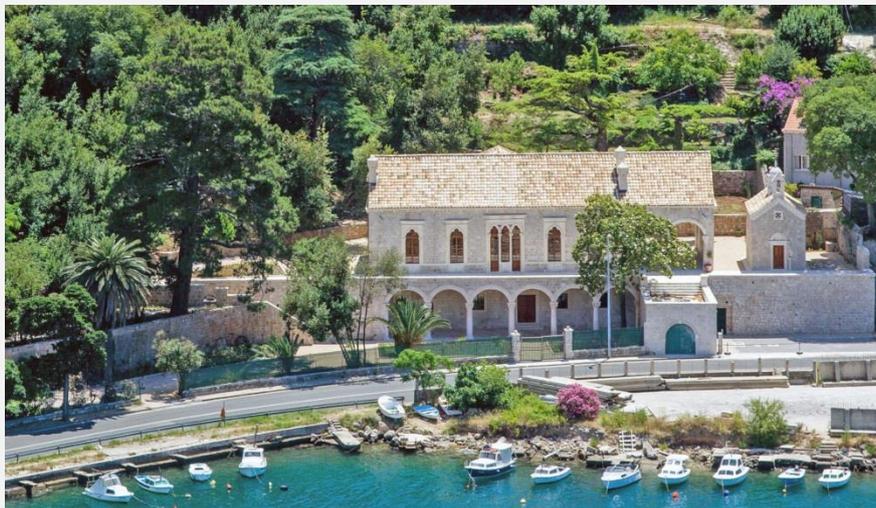
Now villas were surrounded by large renaissance gardens, which gradually became even more important than the villas themselves. The highlights of Italian landscape architecture were the enchanting gardens of the Medici family in Tuscany. Their influence can be seen even today in contemporary gardens.

The Renaissance and Dubrovnik

Young noblemen from Dubrovnik often went abroad to study. And Italian universities were the most popular, such as Bologna, Florence and Venice. Many of them interacted with European noble circles and were friends with eminent philosophers and writers. During his studies in Padua, Dubrovnik's aristocrat Marin Getaldić, a famous mathematician and physicist, met Galileo Galilei with whom he corresponded regularly.

Dubrovnik stone beauties surrounded by Renaissance gardens

The Adriatic Sea, which divides Croatia from Italy, was by no means an obstacle to cultural and political influences. On the contrary, it did not take long for the culture of Renaissance gardens to reach Dubrovnik. Some of Dubrovnik's villas are very similar to early Renaissance villas in Tuscany. But unlike Tuscany, the land around Dubrovnik was dry and stony, and thus a lot of love and dedication was needed to surround villas with abundant gardens.



Bunić-Kaboga villa on the shore of Rijeka Dubrovačka

The beauty of Dubrovnik landscapes were created against all the odds. Despite the lack of fertile soil, the noblemen of Dubrovnik adorned their villas with luxurious gardens. To make them abundant with sweet oranges, lemons and other trees of various kinds, they used to load their ships with soil on their return home from Italy. Many gardens were filled with exotic plants, thanks to the fact that the Republic of Dubrovnik was one of the most powerful maritime states in the 15th and 16th century. One of the world's oldest arboretums, located in Trsteno near Dubrovnik owes its beauty to centuries of labour and devotion of Dubrovnik seaman. They would undertake world voyages and bring back home seeds of exotic trees to enrich the garden of the Arboretum.



Karaka – one of the largest ships in the world from the era of the Republic of Dubrovnik