

THE U.S. AMBASSADOR IN ROME



Built largely in the 16th century, Villa Taverna, the American ambassador's residence in Rome, was restored by architect Carlo Busiri Vici in 1920 and first used by the United States in 1933. ABOVE: A portico with Corinthian columns distinguishes the entrance.

BELOW: The current ambassador, Reginald Bartholomew, stands with his wife, Rose-Anne, in the garden. RIGHT: Renaissance-style ceilings and a Vietri tile floor define the salon, which features a portrait of Rose-Anne Bartholomew by Spanish photographer Urbano Galindo.



*Text by Elizabeth Helman Minchilli
Photography by Simon McBride*



OFFICIAL RESIDENCE AT THE HISTORIC VILLA TAVERNA





The George III mahogany dining table is set with service plates decorated with the seal of the Department of State. The 19th-century Italian paintings are *Fishing for Cockles* by Francesco Paolo Michetti, left, and *From the Sanctuary of Riomaggiore* by Telemaco Signorini.

Most first-time visitors to Rome are surprised to find the city so green. Cascades of bougainvillea and exuberant geraniums pour over balconies, and it is difficult to walk far without coming across a park or public garden. But perhaps more intriguing are the traces of nature—the sound of trickling water from a hidden courtyard; the smell of jasmine wafting through an ornately carved gate; the

treetops rising above ancient walls—that only hint at Rome's private villas and gardens.

One of the largest private gardens in the Eternal City belongs to the United States Embassy. Villa Taverna, as it is called, has been the residence of American ambassadors to Italy since the 1930s, yet the history of the site stretches back much farther.

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centuries. What had covered a whole section of Rome in the Middle Ages was by 1900 limited to the size of a city block. It was this property that Count Ludovico Taverna bought in 1920. The Milanese nobleman hired architect Carlo Busiri Vici to restore and enlarge the dilapidated villa. Vici respected the original structure, but the interiors were transformed into a nineteenth-century notion of Italian rustic elegance.

By 1933 the estate, renamed Villa Taverna, had passed into the hands of the count's heiress, Princess Borromeo-Taverna, who in turn rented it to the United States government as the ambassadorial residence.

During World War II the villa escaped destruction due to the machinations of Italian officer Count Nasalli Rocca di Corneliano. When the count understood the peril that could befall the villa because it had housed Americans, he raised the flag of the Knights of Malta and, declaring the building a convalescent home for Italian officers, staved off attacks by the Germans. Residents of the outlying estates took advantage of this sanctuary by boarding their livestock on the grounds.

After the war Villa Taverna was restored to the Americans, who acquired it in 1948 as the permanent residence of the ambassador. Although some changes have been made over the decades, the layout of both the gardens and the buildings owes much to Count Taverna's interventions.

The first floor of the residence retains the air of a country villa. With their high ceilings and generous dimensions, the public suites are perfectly suited to the large-scale entertaining required of America's foreign representative. Most of the antique Italian furnishings in these rooms were inherited from previous owners. Hand-painted floor tiles from Vietri add color throughout the first floor, while coffered ceilings achieve a note of sober elegance. American quilts and naive paintings on loan from New York's Museum of American Folk Art—selected by ambassador Reginald Bartholomew and his wife, Rose-Anne, as part of the Art in Embassies Program—are displayed throughout.

Paintings from the embassy's permanent collection hang in the formal dining room, which opens off the entrance

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ABOVE: Hanging in the gallery are a late-19th-century crib quilt from Maine, left, and a mid-19th-century quilt in a garden pattern from Kentucky. In the center of the space, a massive pilastered pier is painted with trompe l'oeil fluting.

BELOW: Once vineyards, the villa grounds cover seven acres. Among the marble fountains is a 17th-century example mounted with grotesque masks. OPPOSITE: The geometric box-hedge parterre typifies Italian Renaissance garden design.





BELOW: The folk art displayed in the residence, on loan from New York's Museum of American Folk Art, includes paintings of a family by 19th-century Vermont artist Thomas Ware. BOTTOM: A chandelier of Murano glass illuminates a salon off the entrance hall.



ter the abundant pear orchards in the northern part of the city. Early in its history, the villa and the adjacent vineyards belonged to the papacy and were conferred upon a Jesuit seminary in the sixteenth century. After returning to the papacy for a time, the villa was given over to the Roman Seminary in 1824, when it began to gain world fame as a center for theological study.

Although the main structure of the villa survived, the estate shrank over the

