

VICENZA

## Showing an architect's signs of genius



DAVID LEES/TIME & LIFE PICTURES/GETTY IMAGES

Villa Valmarana, known as "La Rotunda," was built in a rural setting outside Vicenza.

By Paul French  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Barcelona has Gaudí. Glasgow has Charles Rennie Mackintosh. And this city has Palladio, a multi-tasking maestro whose name is synonymous with his homeland.

Andrea Palladio, the Renaissance architect and master builder, created a living museum with his groundbreaking, neoclassical designs that went on to influence everything from czarist palaces in St. Petersburg to the White House. And this year, the 500th anniversary of his birth, Vicenza will celebrate Palladio's legacy, putting a spotlight on this lesser-known jewel of a city in the Veneto region.

Vicenza is a northern city, lying about halfway — 35 miles in each direction — between Verona and Venice, which may be one reason why this quiet burg is overlooked by tourists who flock instead to Romeo and Juliet's balcony or the waterways of the Queen of the Adriatic. And although this provincial capital of 120,000 people has a plain setting amid farmland, it is the dramatic stage for a banquet of buildings from a man considered the most singularly influential in the history of Western architecture.

By marrying the grandeur of classical Greek and Roman design with the humanist sensibility of the Renaissance, Palladio (1508-80) fashioned a new aesthetic that brought him fame in his time and lasting distinction to Vicenza, which is designated a UNESCO World Heritage City with 23 sites listed in the historic center and 28 more in the countryside.

Many of Palladio's spare and elegant palaces, city buildings, and country villas are open to the public. For the ultimate in architect-tourist vacations, one villa is available for rental by the week.

Getting around the compact city center is easy, so I took a walking tour to get an overview of the architect's impact. His namesake boulevard, Corso Andrea Palladio, is an 800-yard showcase of palaces by him and his contemporaries, rich in his signature details of columns, pediments,

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SICILY

Chef Ciccio Sultano serves his almond pesto on bread.

PHOTOS BY JOE RAY/FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

## SAMPLING THE MOTHERLAND

An Italian odyssey wends through city, countryside, and kitchen, finding marriages of subtle and surprising ingredients

BY JOE RAY | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

RAGUSA IBLA — The way homes cling to the hillsides in southern Sicilian cities often looks like an M.C. Escher drawing: Look up and there's a stairway, look down and there's a stairway, forget to look and you fall down the stairs.

Contrast that tightly-packed beauty with the Ragusa region's endless fields of fruits and vegetables, almonds and olives, all neatly delineated with mile after mile of white stone walls. It's Baroque and Liberty architectural styles brought to a high point, juxtaposed with pastoral perfection, all joined and made human by the history of the table.

"When you look at it from far away, you feel the harmony that's been created, but there's nothing casual in that harmony," says Ciccio Sultano, who runs the kitchen at Ragusa Ibla's Il Duomo restaurant and is arguably the island's best chef. He's talking about Sicilian architecture, particularly his Baroque hometown on a hill, but this is also a key to understanding his philosophy on cuisine. "Even from the inside you feel it

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