

A visit inside Villa Recalcati

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Surrounded by a beautiful park, Villa Recalcati, which **today houses some of the offices of Varese Province and of the Prefecture**, is one of the oldest and most prestigious testimonies to the eighteenth-century architecture and **aristocratic life of Varese and of the Belle Époque in Europe**, which made Varese a prestigious tourist destination. The noble Marquis Gabrino Recalcati came to Varese in 1678 and bought a building in the area of Casbeno. At that time, the town **was considered the Versailles of Milan**; a lot of noble families from Milan built their country houses in the most characteristic parts of the town, and, because of its position as a “balcony” over the lake, Casbeno became a prestigious spot. The Recalcatis spared no expenses when decorating the most important rooms in the building, and called upon the best known local, 18th-century artists, including **Pietro Antonio Magatti, Giovan Battista Ronchelli and the Grandi brothers**.

At the beginning of the 19th century, the villa was bought by Count Morosini; at that time, the great Giuseppe Verdi was welcomed by the family, as the daughters’ music teacher. In order to pay off her husband’s debts, **the Count’s wife had to rent some of the rooms out to the first foreign holidaymakers**, which was a prelude to the great tourist season of Varese, a few years later. In 1872, the building became the *Grand Hotel Excelsior*. By the end of the 19th century, Varese had become one of the most desirable tourist destinations. **On a number of occasions, Eleonora Duse, accompanied by Gabriele D’Annunzio**, came to stay in the hotel. Unfortunately, as the holidaymakers of the day discovered other tourist resorts, the prestigious hotel entered a period of decline, which led to it eventually closing, in 1927, when Varese was made the **capital of the province**.

After a few years of sad neglect, the building was bought, in 1931, by the new provincial administration; since then, the ground floor rooms have housed conferences and exhibitions, while on the upper floors, there have been the offices of the Prefecture, of the provincial presidency and of the provincial administration.

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