

Destinations

Destinations Summer 2017



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Managing Editor
Paolo Vannucci

Editor
Superyacht Services

Graphic design
michbold

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For more information:
info@superyachtservices.it

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Cover image:
detail of 48 Liberty Store, Viareggio

>> Ceramic decoration, Villino Flora,
Viareggio

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The Liberty Style in Tuscany: a journey between architecture and history



Gran Caffè Margherita. Viareggio

Like a butterfly, so light, evanescent and short-lived, Liberty flew to Tuscany. It charmed poets like D'Annunzio, and Giacomo Puccini embraced Liberty in his "Turandot". Liberty villas and embellishments appeared in Florence, Montecatini Terme, Livorno, Lucca and Viareggio. Even a heartfelt anarchist like Lorenzo Viani was inspired by it in at least two or three of his paintings. Liberty is a free-spirited style, of stucco, brass lamps and enamelled glass. Sensational examples are the Terme Tamerici (Tamerici spas) in Montecatini and the façade of Villa Argentina in Viareggio.

Both places feature some prestigious works by Chini, like the spas in Salsomaggiore. Not to mention Giacomo Puccini. His music, like the art of Chini (who helped him with the scenography), is imbued with melancholy and nostalgia and past echoes and modernity. And it can provide the ideal soundtrack when we have a coffee at Caffè Margherita in Viareggio, when we bathe at Pancaldi in Livorno, or when we stroll the streets outside the walls of intimate, refined Lucca.

Our desire this year is again to suggest an interesting itinerary in Tuscany, this time to discover Liberty.

Paolo Vannucci



Florence,
Montecatini Terme
and Viareggio



Among the artistic movements characterizing the final three lustri (fifteen years) of the 19th century and the first quarter of the 20th, the so called “Liberty” style appeared in Italy, after its spreading in Europe, where it acquired in turns specific names (Art Nouveau, Modern Style, Jugendstil, Sezession).

Known in our country also by its French name or by the Italian adjective floreale (floral), this movement affected all fields, from architecture to decorative arts, from interior decor to design and picture.



<< Grand Hotel Royal, Viareggio

^ Ceramic decoration, Terme Tamerici, Montecatini Terme

> Bagno Balena, Viareggio





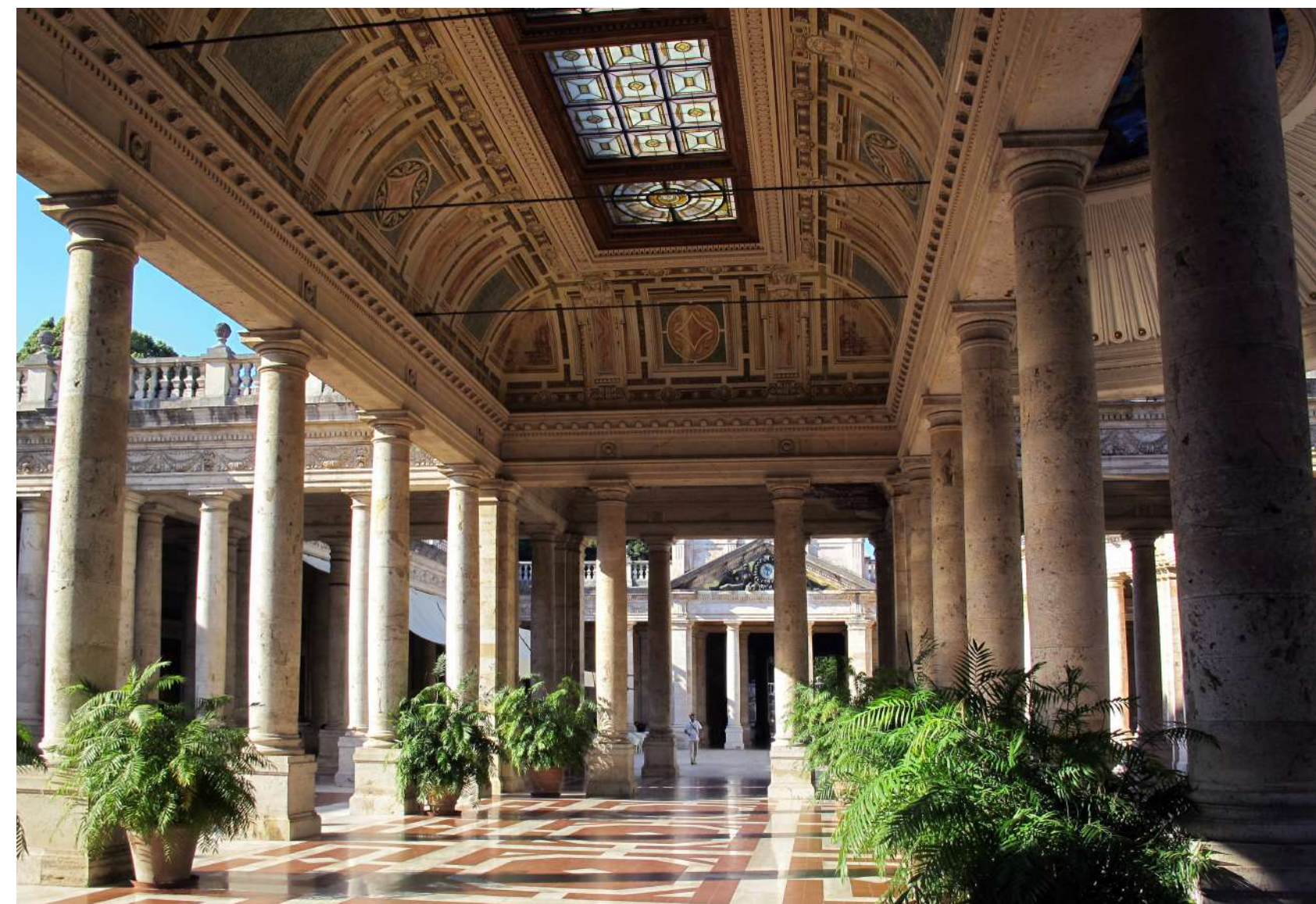
Tuscany, a well-known land for its abundance of artistic experimentations and innovations, couldn't be left out from the cultural and architectonic rising of the new floral art, featuring in almost every main centre of the region.

Two places in particular, in addition to Florence, are now particularly relevant to the minute and widespread penetration of the Liberty in their architecture because of all the existing signs we can still admire: Montecatini Terme and Viareggio.

^ Terme Tettuccio, Montecatini Terme

> '800's poster for the Regie Terme di Montecatini





< ^ Terme Tettuccio, Montecatini Terme



In the thermal city, not only the bathing infrastructures adjusted to the European-scaled movement, which rendered the thermal places a real workshop of architecture and decoration.

Stabilimento Excelsior, Montecatini Terme



Among the leading names, Giulio Bernardini (Padiglione Tamerici, 1903, with decorations by Galileo Chini and Domenico Trentacoste, Locanda Maggiore and Gambrinus porches, 1913, Terme Excelsior, 1915), Raffaello Brizzi and Luigi Righetti (Municipal Hall, 1920, interiors by Galileo Chini and Luigi Arcangeli); Ugo Giovannozzi, designer of Terme Regina and renovator of Tettuccio (1916-1928), which due to its rich ornamental apparatus (frescoes, pottery and decorations) is considered the thermal “temple” par excellence.

Terme Tettuccio, Montecatini Terme

“O Viareggio più bella dell’Oriente”

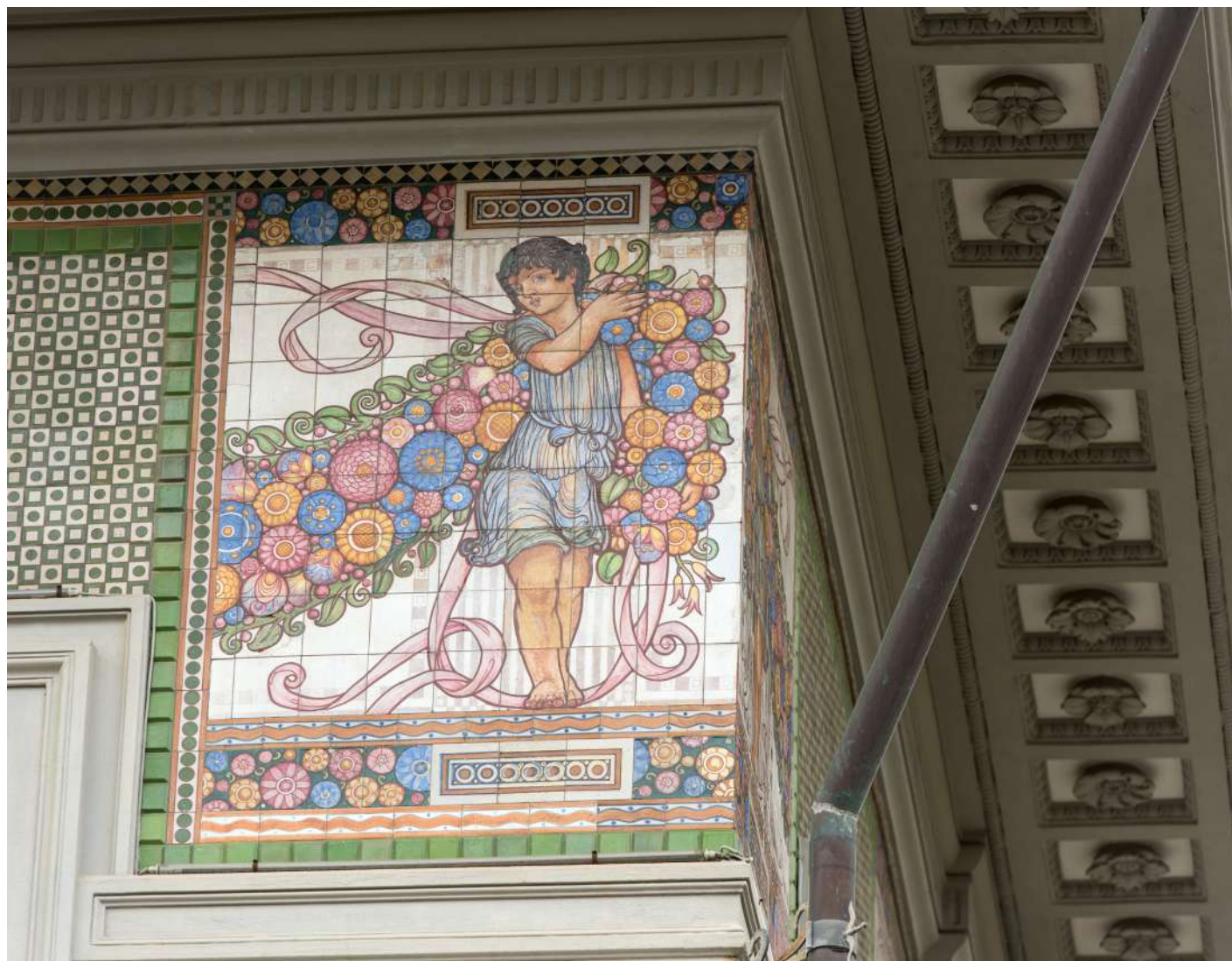
In Viareggio architects and designers competed, from the end of the Twenties, in committing themselves to the most extraordinary and fantastic speculations in this floral style. Poet and novelist Mario Tobino (1910-1991), with his words “O Viareggio più bella dell’Oriente” (Oh, Viareggio, finer than the East), not only pointed at the people’s souls, but also designed the architectural profile of his town, which looked oriental to him because of a series of spires, small domes, and turrets decorated in this floral style, and which, here and there, stood out from the ordinary urban views of fishermen and artisans’ sheds.

> Villino Il Cuscio, Viareggio

>> Ceramic decoration, Villa Argentina, Viareggio







Approaching the façades of those pottery-decorated villas or those buildings for the general public - beach clubs, cafés or warehouses – which resembled pagodas, it would seem that, with a little imagination, we were in Siam or around there, or even in Vienna or Paris.

And the first question is: how and why all that exotically-decorative, glittery stylishness arrived to Viareggio?

^ Ceramic decoration, Villino Caprotti, Viareggio

> Villino Caprotti, Viareggio

>> 48 Liberty Store, Viareggio





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to Viareggio?*



Chalet Martini and Gran Caffè Margherita, Viareggio



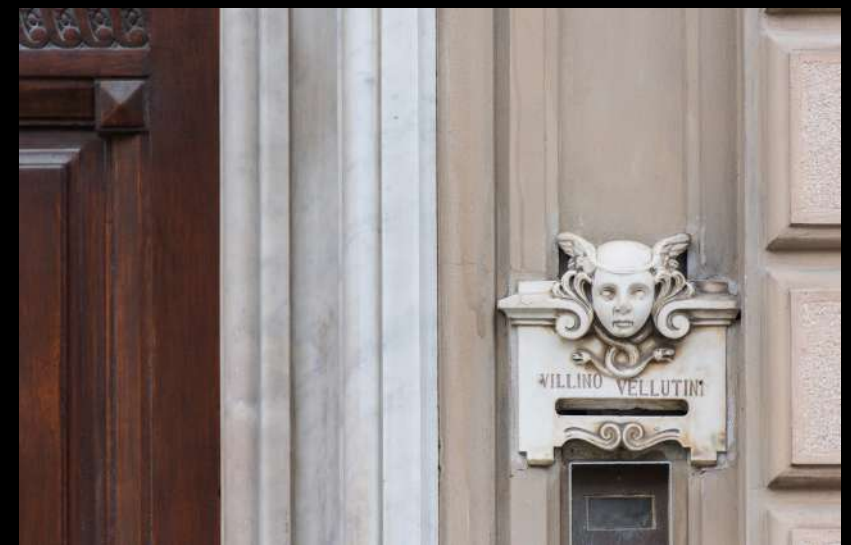
^ Details, Villino Flora, Viareggio

> Details, Villino Vellutini, Viareggio

>> Bagno Martinelli, Viareggio

Accounts can tell us: around the mid 1800s, the middle class was drawn here by the beauty of the place and to escape the heat in Florence, Lucca, and the other towns of the hinterland.

As a consequence, there was a new scene in rustic Viareggio, in which the black robes of the seamen's wives were contrasted by bathers' elegant dresses and parasols.







And that's how, as a consequence, around the second half of the 1800s, the first beach clubs appeared (such as the Nereo for men and the Dori for women) replacing the old capanni (sheds), and by 1834 there was even a casino and a maritime Hospice for ill children; the Alambra theatre and beach clubs Balena, Eden, Fiorentina, Martini and others.

^ Villino Amor Omnia Vincit and Hotel Imperiale, Viareggio

> Chalet Martini, Viareggio





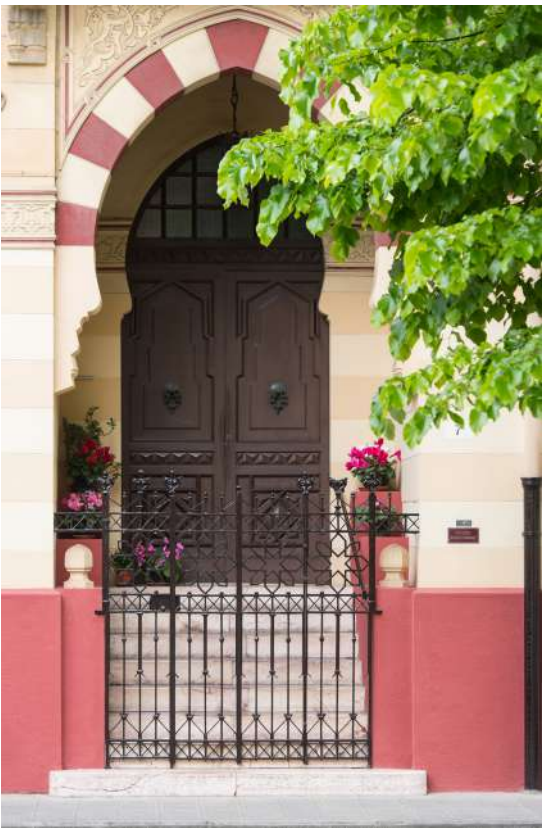


<< 48 Liberty Store/Grand Hotel Principe di Piemonte, Viareggio

^ Ceramic decoration, Villino Sofia, Viareggio

> / >> Details, Villino Nistri, Viareggio

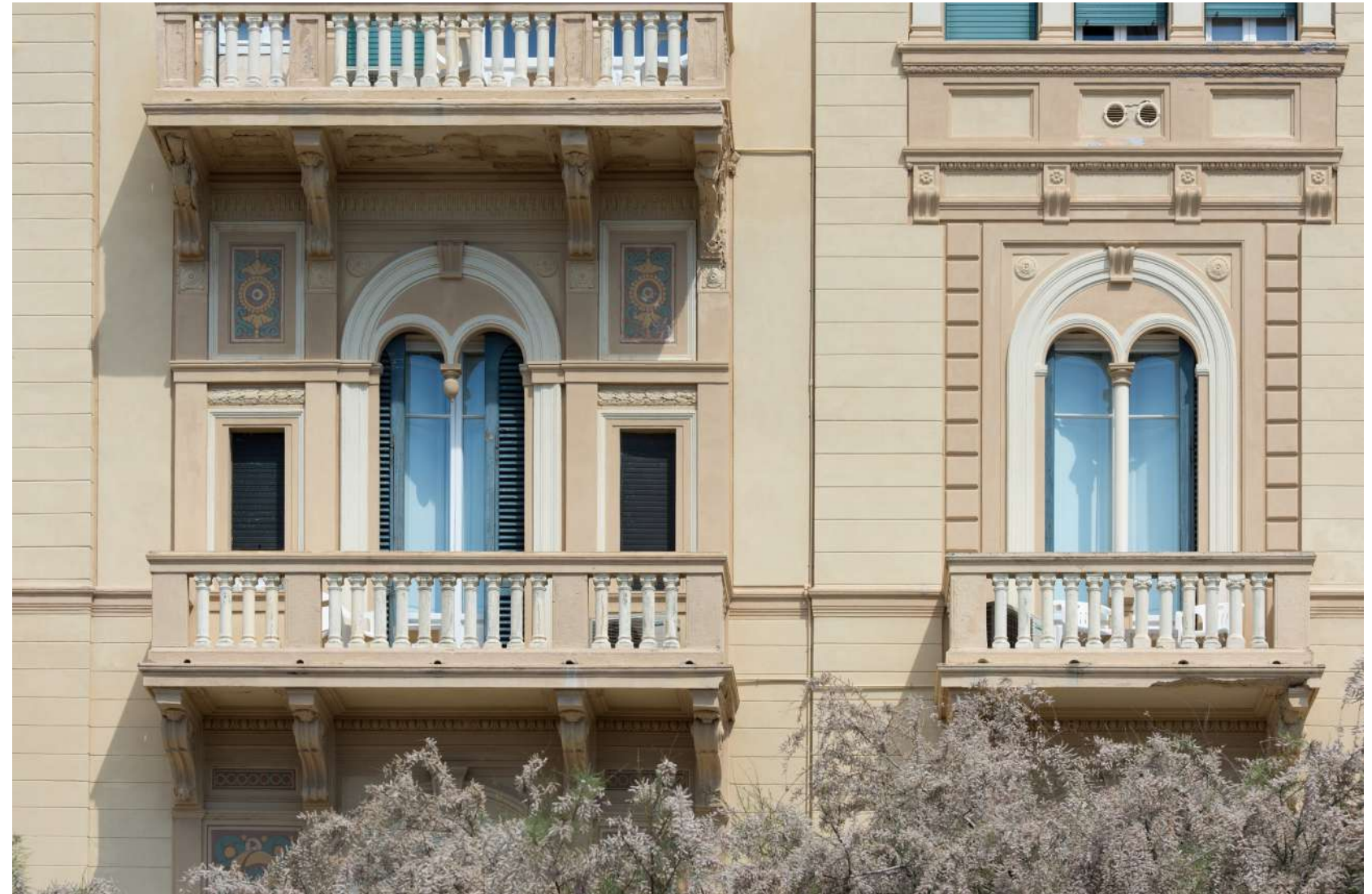
Funny that the well-known local maestri d'ascia (shipwrights) largely contributed to the creation of these centres for worldly pleasures; they left aside their expertise in ship carpentry, on boats and fishing vessels, and totally made themselves available to architects and various designers, thus giving life to those buildings and exotic-European decorations, which increasingly embellished Viareggio in the wooden-Liberty style, somewhere between Japanese and Baroque.







But the night of October 17, 1917 disaster occurred, as a fire reduced to ashes all those frail embellishments. What to do? After all due cursing and swearing, the people of Viareggio started working, this time on stone, bricks and cement.



^ Detail, Bagno Balena, Viareggio

< Grand Hotel Royal, Viareggio



> ^ Details, Hotel Villa Liberty, Viareggio

And so, while the shipwrights were back to their boats and to the Carnival floats, workmen restored all that was possible and raised up all that was new: to mention but a few building, Salone Margherita, Kursaal, Imperial, Eden concert café, pavillion Il Guscio, Magazzini Duilio 48, pavillion Lilia, Villa D'Andia; Select Palace Hotel (later known as Principe di Piemonte), Excelsior Hotel and others.

> Hotel Imperiale, Viareggio

v Villino Chizzolini, Viareggio





^ Hotel Maestoso, Viareggio

> Details, Villino Sofia, Viareggio





The Liberty style was mostly prominent in the twirly decorations, both figurative and floral, on the façades and the various spires whose marker was painter Galileo Chini (Florence, 1873 – Lido di Camaiore, 1956). Having worked in Bangkok and owning a company named Arte della Ceramica (Art of Pottery), Chini was ready to make halls, walls, sitting rooms “shine” through his refined exquisiteness.

L to R Villino Fontanella/ Villa Crastan Arrighi/ Villino Flora, Viareggio

Villa Argentina, Viareggio

>> Grand Hotel Principe di Piemonte, Viareggio





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MARINA RINALDI  **persona**

Via Fratti 165 (angolo Via Mazzini) - Viareggio - Tel. +39 0584 960621



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