



The Per Niente



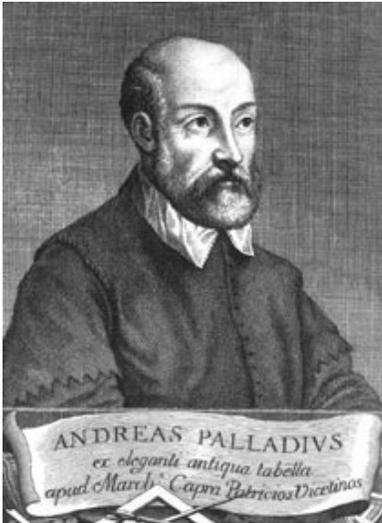
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Andrea Paladdio 1508—1580

In November 1817 Thomas Jefferson wrote to fellow Virginian James Madison: "We are sadly at a loss here for a Palladio. I had three different editions, but they are at Washington, and nobody in this part of the country has one unless you have. If you have, you will greatly aid us by letting us have the use of it for a year to come."

The book that Jefferson sought was *i quattro libri dell'architettura* (The

Four Books of Architecture) by Andrea Palladio, still at the time the standard authority in its field. The ex president urged another friend, who was building a house, to obtain a copy of "The Bible", as he referred to the book, "and stick close to it".

Andrea di Pietro della Gondola, known to history as "Palladio," was born in 1508 in Padua, a mainland possession of the island-based Republic of Venice. Apprenticed to a stonecutter in Padua when he was 13 years old, Andrea broke his contract after only 18 months and fled to the nearby town of Vicenza. In Vicenza he became an assistant in the leading workshop of stonecutters and masons.

Gian Giorgio Trissino, one of the period's leading scholar, assumed the role of Andrea's mentor and set about the task of introducing him to the principles of classical architecture and the other disciplines of Renaissance education. Trissino introduced his protegee to an ever widening circle of patrons, first in Vicenza, then in Padua, and finally in Venice itself. Trissino bestowed upon Andrea the name by which he was to become famous: Palladio. Suggesting Pallas Athene, the Greek goddess of wisdom, the name was also used by Trissino for an angelic messenger in an epic poem which he composed during the same period.

Through their books, Palladio learned the principles of Vitruvius, the classical Roman architect whose treatise had been rediscovered in the prior century, and of the Renaissance commentator, Leon Battista Alberti. Through personal contact, he became acquainted with the ideas and works of pioneering architects of his own period, including Giulio Romano, Giovanni Maria Falconetto, Sebastiano Serlio and Michele Sanmicheli. Under Trissino's sponsorship, he received further introduction to classical Roman works and to early Renaissance works on visits to Padua and Venice (1538-9) and an initial visit to Rome (1541).

By 1538, probably aided by Trissino's influence, Palladio and his workshop had begun construction of Villa Godi, the first of a series of country villas and urban palaces designed by Palladio in the following years for patrons among the provincial nobility of Vicenza.

Palladio became the most influential Renaissance architect in England and the United States.

In America, Thomas Jefferson followed Palladio in designing Monticello as well as various buildings for the University of Virginia and the Capitol in Richmond, as did Peter Harrison, architect of King's Chapel in Boston. The Palladian style also spread to Ireland, Denmark, Sweden, Poland, and Russia.

The dozens of magnificent villas Palladio and his followers built in Venice and the Veneto still bear eloquent witness to his genius for visual poetry.

Source: *Sprezzatura* by Peter D'Epiro and Mary Desmond Pinkowish

