The revival of a dead palazzo

JESSICA ARENA

Like many centuries-old buildings in Valletta, Palazzo Carafa is haunted.

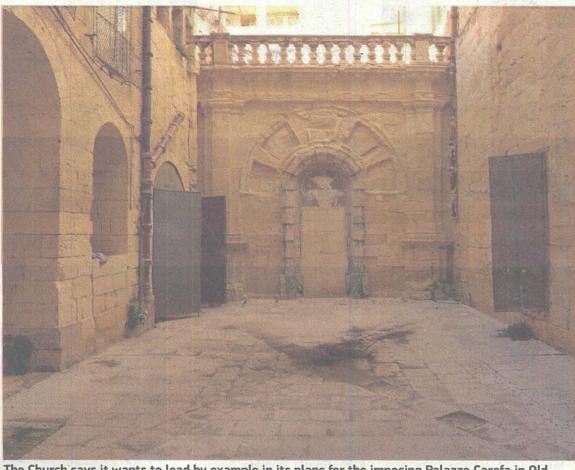
While it remains to be seen whether spectral apparitions and ghostly figures skulk in its decaying archways or hide away in cavernous halls that have not seen the sun in decades, the 17th century palace is haunted by signs of life.

"We opted for something that will restore this jewel to its former glory"

Its imposing facade on Old Bakery Street does not linger in the memory once you turn a corner. While its heavy doors are shut, their brass knockers gathering dust on a busy road, its legacy as a community recollected by a few.

If you were to make your way steps, you would be met with the baroque architecture. sight of a property where many its former splendour.

have rested their heads were terns on a royal bed of blue. adapted, almost charmingly, Built in the 1600s, the Grade into classrooms or activity 1 scheduled palazzo was known as the premises of the on a tour of the building.



centre and hub for youth The Church says it wants to lead by example in its plans for the imposing Palazzo Carafa in Old engagement is only distantly Bakery Street, Valletta. PHOTOS: CHRIS SANT FOURNIER

In a room with impossibly in 1663. children made happy memories, high ceilings, a trio of neon Halls that might have greeted above them a delicate fresco Cattolica di San Giuseppe, a that are not in keeping with her-

In 1944, the property was Umberto Primo.

past the doors, through the centres. The modern interven- named after its owner, Fra D. Circolo Gioventù Cattolica, a courtyard and up the many tions clashed starkly with the Carlo Carafa, who joined the formative centre for boys that store the property to its origi-Order of the Knights of St John lent itself to myriad cultural and social activities.

"Our goal here is not to make now eaten away into a ghost of clowns spray-painted onto the acquired by the Church. It had major alterations but to remove masonry smile down, while previously housed the Unione interventions made over time nobility, and chambers where depicts idyllic country scenes in- predecessor to APS Bank, as itage preservation," Michael knights and diplomats would terspersed with intricate pat- well as the Istituto Italiano Pace Ross, administrative secretary of the Archdiocese of It perhaps remains best Malta, told Times of Malta while an open call went to Neville

The Church has plans to renal context as a palazzo. Given the size and years of damage by disuse, the property is being leased to a developer who is spearheading the project, primarily to restore the palace and retain its unique and original architectural features.

The proposal selected through Agius, who was responsible for the restoration of the Wignacourt Museum in Rabat as well as the Carmelite Priory in Mdina.

Agius presented a six-tier proposal that focuses on restoring in restoration and felt that other projects were not in line with the the building as well as incorporating corporate offices, an arts hub, an area designated to house a private collection of master paintings, office space for use by cultural exhibitions and workshops to be run by a charity foundation and a roof garden and cafe with a focus on arts networking. jewel to its former glory."

"This project really isn't about the money," Pace Ross continues. proposal after a 'historic' Heritage are ongoing.

"The Archdiocese could have easily sold it off or opted for a proposal with a stronger commercial element. But we believed strongly

Church's philosophy. would be remiss if we allowed a retained, while also making it boutique hotel to ruin the fabric of the building so we analysed ability," he added. proposals carefully and opted for something that will restore this

wooden stage used in theatre productions in one of the palace's repurposed halls was removed by Agius. Original flagstones as well as an ornate fireplace, which matches several others throughout the site, were subsequently uncovered.

An emergency protection order was also issued on a concrete viewing platform and projection room, believed to have served as one of the country's oldest cinemas.

The later additional structure cuts into the original masonry, obstructing a doorway as well as a balcony with unobstructed sea views.

"Projection room is believed to have served as one of the oldest cinemas"

"We appreciate that the building had multiple uses and was enjoyed by many as a theatre and cinema, we are even ready to document this and the many phases the building has seen through 360 years," Pace Ross said.

"But a concrete platform is obviously not part of the 17th century building, and certain interventions have to be undone in order to enjoy its original context. Some features and "We want to lead by example. It commemorative plaques will be accessible to people with dis-

Plans for the project are currently suspended at the request of the applicant while talks with Contention has arisen with the the Superintendence of Cultural



