

FIRST

DECEMBER 2020

A CAPSULE OF THE WORLD

WINTER GARDEN

*To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower*

IN THE MIDST OF WINTER, THERE IS A BIRTH

Winter Garden

"Find a place inside
where there's joy, and
the joy will burn out
the pain."

Joseph Campbell

Who of us can live with the everlasting fire? (Isaiah 33:14)... Your heart either burns out of love or out of hate, but burn it does; and every feeling, emotion, thought, and word has consequences, and its silences too, so that our greatest guilt and fear is an omission of love, always an omission of love, but most of us have numbed ourselves into a cold indifference as a means of survival rather than a real birth.

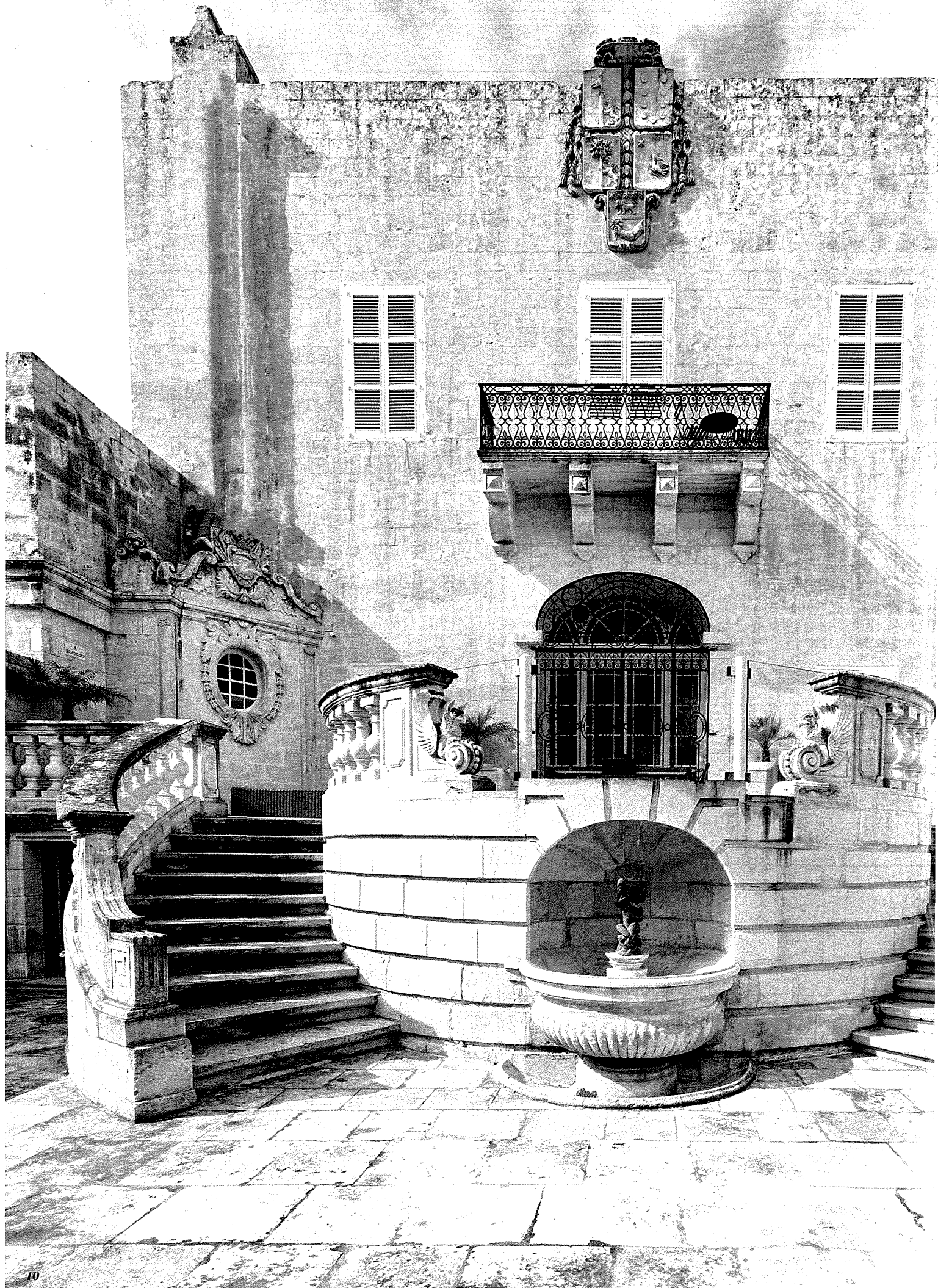
Covid, if it has taught us anything, is to embrace the things we enjoy doing in a simplified manner, but with more authenticity. ■



Adoration of the Shepherds, anonymous, 1550 - 1599, oil on panel, 205 x 142cm. Rijkmuseum, Amsterdam

ON THE COVER. The intricate wrought iron goat gate leading to the side garden at Villa Bolgna, taken from the gorgeous new book *Country Villas in XVIII Century Malta*, by Carmel Spiteri, published by Kite Group. Photography by Charles Paul Azzopardi, courtesy Kite Group.

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COUNTRY VILLAS

~ in ~



CENTURY MALTA

CARMEL SPITERI

CHARLES PAUL AZZOPARDI

VILLAS FOR THE LEISURED

COUNTRY VILLAS IN XVIII CENTURY MALTA

"The golden age was the eighteenth century when a friendly rivalry prevailed among the leisured classes for architecturally fine houses catering for an elegantly relaxed living in idyllic settings", writes Prof Mario Buhagiar in the foreword to this new book *Country Villas in XVIII Century Malta* by Carmel Spiteri, published by Kite Group. With a focus on three particular estates, Villa Preziosi, Villa Bologna and Villa Gourgion, step inside gorgeous country villas beautifully photographed in B&W throughout. Photography Charles Paul Azzopardi, courtesy Kite Group.

The back elevation of Villa Gourgion. The terrace, a buffer zone between the villa and the formal garden.

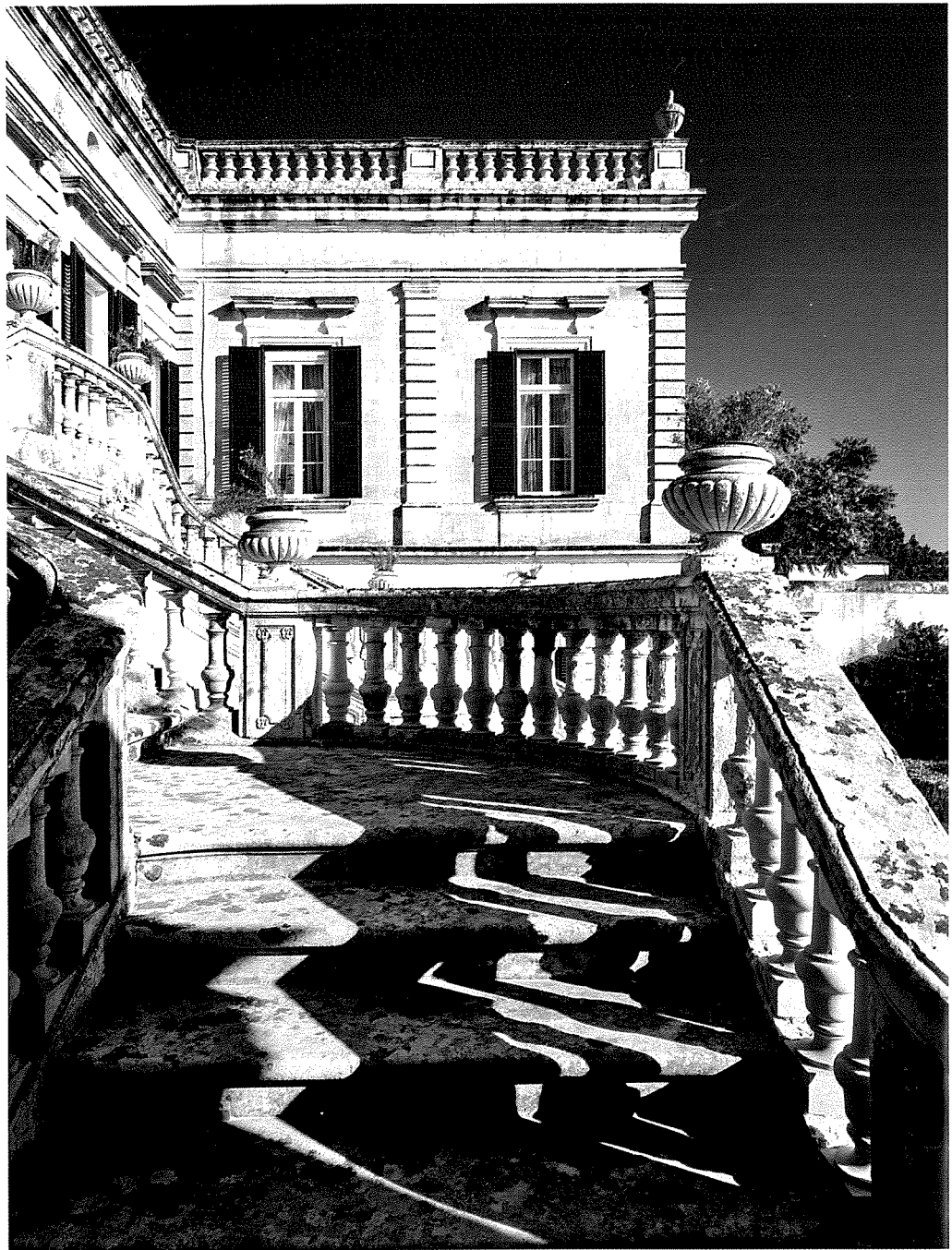
Country Villas in XVIII Century Malta reviews an interesting niche subject in the history of the architecture of the Maltese Islands, that of the construction of suburban villas for the leisured classes in the eighteenth century.

The trend of building villas outside city walls in Malta was established by the Knights of St John, and the leisured classes on the island soon followed suit. Owners moved with their families to their country villas in spring when the gardens were in full bloom.

This new book focuses on three particular estates, Villa Preziosi, Villa Bologna and Villa Gourgion, all built in the eighteenth century in an area known as the Three Villages, which still boasts of a significant concentration of similar country villas.

Prof Mario Buhagiar, who penned the foreword to this book, states that the country villas presented "reflect the sophisticated lifestyle and financial well-being of the Maltese elitist class in seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A country-house with extensive grounds in peaceful settings, with the necessary amenities for a relaxed elegant living, was an important pawn in this process of assimilation."

"Villa Gourgion, Villa Preziosi and Villa Bologna share a common geographic location but different histories. Spiteri's painstakingly thorough analysis of them is a major breakthrough in the study of the Maltese country villa and its often overlooked and multi-faceted relevance to the island's rich cultural heritage."



Above: Villa Preziosi, scenographic stairs, detail.
Left: The main facade of Villa Preziosi.



Above: Villa Preziosi, scenographic stairs, detail. **Right:** The second formal garden and the nymphaeum, Villa Preziosi



Prof Conrad Thake in the introduction to Spiteri's work writes that "the fact that all the three suburban villas discussed in this new title were situated in close proximity to each other is not accidental. They are situated within a short distance to the San Anton Palace, one of the main residences of the Grandmaster. One can surmise that the local patrons felt that by constructing their villa in such a location it would demonstrate greater social prestige and symbolically allude to close ties with the ruling Order of St John."

"Underlying the origins of each of these villas there is also an intriguing socio-political subtext. For example, in the case of Villa Bologna, Fabrizio Grech, in his capacity as sindaco of the Maltese Università and uditore or advisor to Grandmaster Pinto, had managed to acquire considerable wealth and wielded significant political influence. However, he lacked the then much vaunted social pedigree of nobility. The villa was intended as a dowry gift by Grech to his daughter Maria Teresa who was engaged to Nicolo Perdicomati Bologna, later to become 2nd Count de la Catena. Grech by his lavish gift of building a grand villa was keen to impress and to compensate for his lack of noble pedigree. This publication provides the reader with a comprehensive exposition of the villa within the context of eighteenth-century Maltese society."



“All three villas were surveyed in order to draw up architectural drawings, some of which are included in this book”, says author Carmel Spiteri. “The architecture of each of the three country villas is discussed in a dedicated chapter which also considers related issues of patronage, contemporary building techniques as well as the financing of the maintenance of the estates. Building projects of this scale could only be undertaken by the privileged

classes on the island and depended on sustainable financing. Two of the villa owners came from corsairing backgrounds and were highly respected by society, as corsairing itself was an authorised activity.” ■

Country Villas in XVIII Century Malta, by Carmel Spiteri, photography by Charles Paul Azzopardi. Foreword by Prof Mario Buhagiar and introduction by Prof Conrad Thake. 256 pages, published by Kite Group.



Top: Main facade of Villa Bologna.
Left: View of the English garden created by Lady Strickland in the early twentieth-century, Villa Bologna.