

A true renaissance

This Milanese villa, rich in history, is now a venue fit for the 21st Century

report: Ruth Bell



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Built on the site of a Celtic settlement and Roman stronghold, in a building that dates back in parts to the 14th Century and has interiors from the 18th Century, the Hotel Villa San Carlo Borromeo near Milan has a rich historical heritage of which few hotels could boast. Following damage during the Second World War and 20 years of neglect in the 1960s and 1970s, the Villa's renaissance began in 1983 when it was bought by the appropriately named International University of the Second Renaissance.

The Villa that the University inherited was a sad shadow of its former self: the terrace had collapsed, the entire roof was damaged, walls affected by damp, door and window frames were ruined and the park was almost completely overgrown. Substantial restoration work purely to save the building moved onto extensive work to preserve and recreate the splendour of the original interiors at the same time as installing lighting and cabling to bring the villa into the current century. Restoration continues today.

For the past four years though, a unique space underneath the villa has been the focus as a magnificent conference centre was created. The newly named Hall of Muses is a restoration of the great Feasting Hall, which is – according to Cristina



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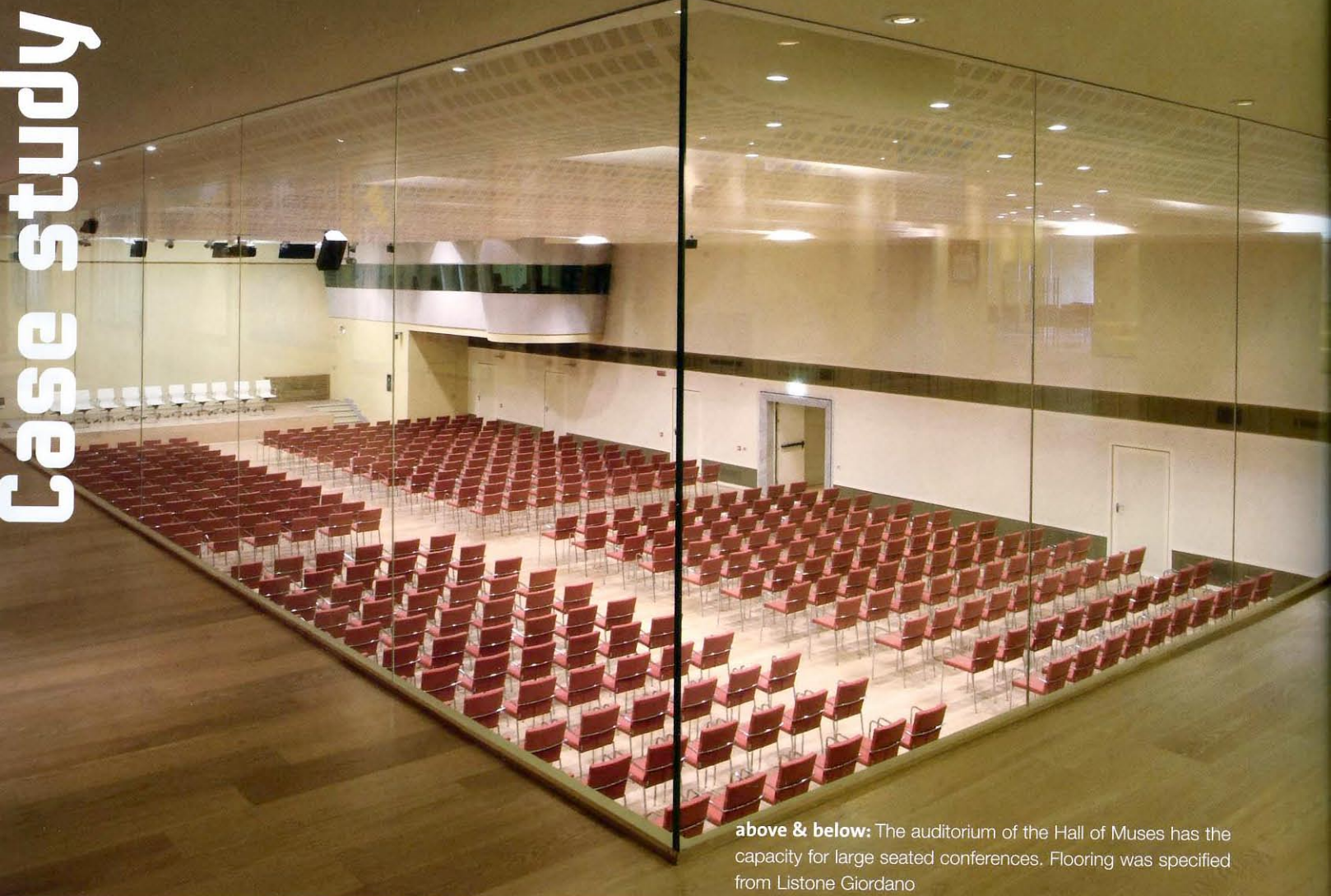
case study

left: The entrance to the underground conference centre blends perfectly with the Villa above

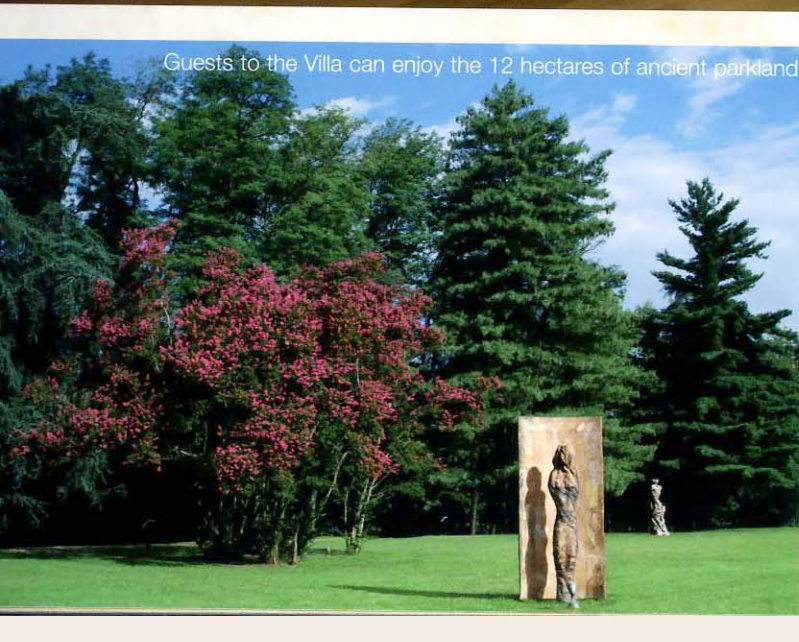
above: The magnificent architecture inside this beautiful hotel

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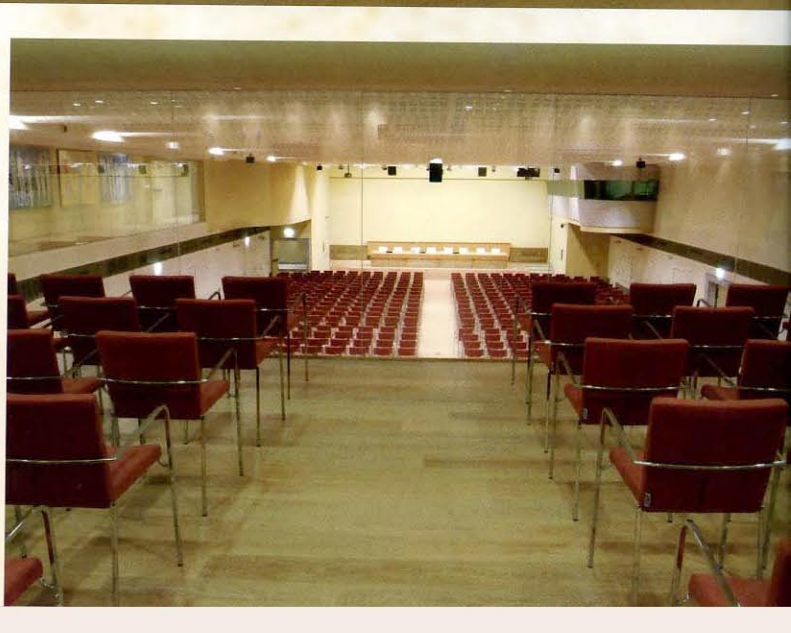
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above & below: The auditorium of the Hall of Muses has the capacity for large seated conferences. Flooring was specified from Listone Giordano



Guests to the Villa can enjoy the 12 hectares of ancient parkland



Frua De Angeli, president of the University – the only hall of this size to be found inside a historical house. "The Hall of Muses project arose from a specific practical need to find an additional area for use as an art gallery, but also as a hall for conferences, major events and social gatherings," explains Cristina, who has supervised the entire restoration. "The resulting museum space is beyond comparison in size, attributes and elegance," she says.

The completely underground structure is able to seat over 1000 people and required state-of-the-art technological and engineering solutions. "This has been our major challenge to introduce technology in a historical residence," continues Cristina. An army of architects, engineers, technicians and consultants, as well as artisans and specialists – who have been



Sweeping staircases are at the heart of the 17th-Century-style interiors

sourced throughout Italy but particularly in Lombardy, has worked on the Villa. And materials were chosen strictly from those already within the Villa: marble, gneiss, granite, painted cement and wood, into which the infrastructure for multimedia audio-visual facilities has been installed.

For the flooring, the architects were looking for something very particular: a material that was both contemporary and innovative enough to meet the technical requirements but that would also remain sympathetic to the age of the Villa. Listone Giordano came to be specified for the flooring after its founder and other staff were involved in a series of cultural events at the Villa Borromeo.

"We started working on this project more than a year prior to the beginning of the construction,"



Painstaking work was done to match the original stone flooring and tiling

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Local craftsmen were brought in to restore all the interiors, as with this bathroom

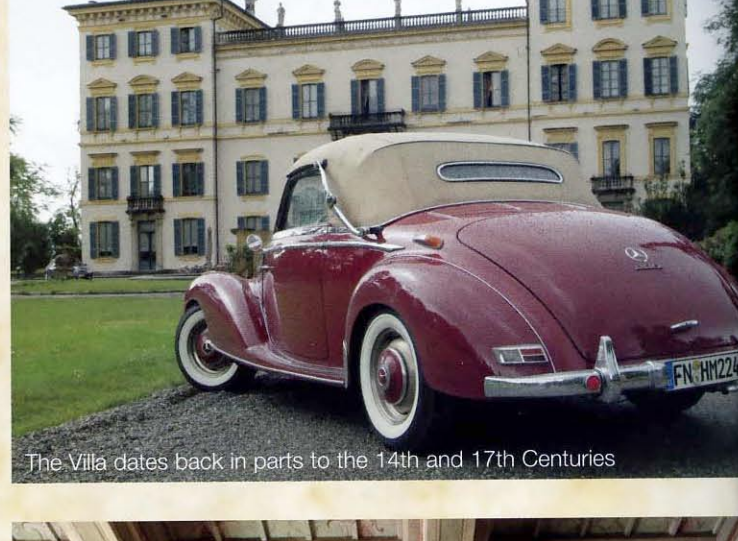
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explains Andrea Margaritelli, marketing director of Listone Giordano, of which Listone Giordano is part. "We followed the various building phases step by step and advised the engineering team on the making of the subfloor on which the wood floor had to be installed. Then we oversaw the whole fitting process."

Listone Giordano supplied a custom-made oak wood floor in wide boards for the Hall of Muses, "which fulfilled both the aesthetic and technical requirements, and would perform well in terms of acoustics and resistance to wear and tear," adds Andrea. And oak was chosen to perfectly complement both the overall

interior design and the existing trees in the park. "Despite the fact that oak is often seen as a classical or traditional wood, we oil finished it in a whitened colour tone, giving a very contemporary look with a super natural and soft finish."

The overall effect is exactly as Listone Giordano intended – flooring that complements and actually helps lighten the space, which is particularly important in a subterranean area with limited natural light. As Andrea concludes, "We believe that the wood floor of the auditorium enhances and harmonises the true nature of the space, welcoming the visitor and warming up the whole structure."



The Villa dates back in parts to the 14th and 17th Centuries



All the hotel's bedrooms and suites have been restored on a grand scale

Key facts

The 12,000sq m Villa San Carlo Borromeo houses a hotel with 51 bedrooms and suites, conference facilities for over 1000 people and museum space. It is also headquarters of the International University of the Second Renaissance, a publishing house and centre for various cultural foundations. Twenty minutes from Milan's city centre, it is set in 12 hectares of ancient parkland.

Owner: International University of the Second Renaissance
Structural engineer (Hall of Muses): Lorenzo Lurina
Period of restoration: Ongoing – 1983 to present day
Restoration of Hall of Muses: 2004 to 2008
Flooring supplier: Listone Giordano
Overall cost: €250million

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