

Abandoned Italy

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Manicomio di Q – Liguria

In the 19th century, a public order law defending the society “against the supposed violence of fools” facilitated the confinement of anyone considered dangerous to himself or others. Anyone could report an act of violence or a public scandal. It was enough to warrant a medical certificate being issued against the supposed perpetrator. With the stamp of a court, and after a month of observation, they were irremediably locked in a mental asylum.

The mental asylum of Q is one such institution. Opened in 1895, it could accommodate more than 700 patients, who were mainly treated with electroshock therapy. Experimental operations on the nervous system and trepanation were also widely practiced in rooms adjoining the clinical research and radiology laboratories.

According to the records, however, the quietest patients could be taken to the movies or allowed to walk around the gardens. The hospital even had a theatre in which patients mocked the staff!

The asylum was closed in the early 1980s following the Basaglia Act, which comprehensively reformed the psychiatric system. Mould has since invaded the rooms and corridors, but the place remains remarkably preserved.



Villa Poss – *Piedmont*

Villa Poss was one of the most famous residences in the Lake District of northern Italy. It enjoys a privileged location overlooking a magnificent panorama of the lake and its intense blue waters. The status of the property is due as much to its remarkable architecture as it is to the importance of its residents and the variety of its botanical collections. On a stretch of land purchased at the end of the 18th century, the Marquis Poss built the house in several stages. Most notably, he erected a characteristic medieval tower that was later called Villa La Torre. During the following decades, prestigious guests of this private villa followed one after another: a Napoleonic minister, a countess of the region, two industrialists, a Polish prince, and in the 20th century, a rich entrepreneur.

Although the building is heavily damaged, some elements, such as the majestic staircase flanked by a beautiful wrought iron banister, still exude an atmosphere of evaporated luxury.

The gardens were once a special attraction; the beautiful six acre-park consisted of greenhouses, caves, valleys, bridges, a gazebo, stables, and many trees and shrubs of rare and imported species.

The park, just like the villa, has been abandoned for years. In 2000 the municipality suggested it could be renovated and transformed into a museum, but donors interested in safeguarding this precious heritage are yet to be found.



Teatro Guido – *Lombardy*

Inaugurated in 1895 on the occasion of the September festival with a performance of Faust, this theatre in Lombardy was designed by the architect Francesco Piazzalunga.

In 1905 it was the turn of La Traviata, The Barber of Seville and Don Pasquale. In 1938, after some restoration works, it took the name of Teatro Guido and began a very profitable season with a series of well-known shows, including Carmen and La Bohème.

In the mid-1950s, film screenings alternated with theatrical performances. But all activity ceased in 1982 and the theatre closed, leaving it without maintenance or conservation.

After years of abandonment, there is rubble and cobwebs; the smell of mould and pigeon droppings taints the air; dotted around, clear evidence of overnight bivouacs; mountains of soaked manuscripts crumble when touched. There are also posters, strips of old film reels, ticket price signs and many documents related to theatre and film activities.

The Civic Center is now inviting the municipality to contact fundraising experts to save the theatre.



Castello dell'Artista – *Lombardy*

The manor and its fortified court with its annexes were built in the early 1600s by the Marquis Gonzaga, who belonged to one of the most famous aristocratic families in Europe. The building, a true symbol of the power of the family, was inhabited by successive generations, each modifying and restructuring it over the years.

In 1661 Prince Octavio transformed the central body of the building and equipped it with a loggia that can still be admired today. It is to him that we owe the creation of the sumptuous gardens.

On the walls, sepia photographs typical of the early 20th century augment family portraits, creating a warm atmosphere in the house, despite its state of abandonment. In the two-level salon the walls are decorated with busts, while each of the doors is surmounted by a majestic golden eagle. The other rooms of the palace, with their coffered ceilings decorated with rural scenes, bouquets of flowers and rosettes, are no less impressive.

The castle was abandoned in 2005 when the last heir died ... at the age of 108!





Palazzo Athena – *Lombardy*

Purchased at the beginning of the 20th century by Silvio Strumia, an entrepreneur in the silk industry, this old neoclassical house is surprising. In the centre of the building a large elliptical room extends over two floors, crowned by a dome with a skylight. The dome is decorated with caryatids in white stucco and is supported by 16 Corinthian columns. Each column bears the insignia of an art or a profession ... perhaps a subtle reminder of the workers the industrialist employed between 1920 and 1950.

Recognisable by its characteristic high chimney, the spinning mill that Strumia had built in the gardens adjacent to his palace also gave work to many women of the region.

The plant was destroyed by a fire in 1992, a few years after it closed.





Hotel Paragon – *Emilia-Romagna*

Built in the late 19th century, this five-star hotel has hosted many diplomats, doctors and celebrities from around the world.

In addition to the neoclassical façade, you can admire the splendid dining room with its stained glass windows and elegant skylight, set among an enchantment of mirrors and stuccoes that has witnessed more than a hundred years of refinement and tradition.

The hotel had 110 rooms, but it is only in the most luxurious of them we find the feature that attracted the wealthy customers: direct access to thermal water. Here they could enjoy all the health benefits of the water without leaving the comfort of their apartments.

It was in 2008 that the five-star fairy tale came to an end.



The Casa del Coach – *Emilia-Romagna*

Welcome to a villa in the heart of the Italian countryside where time has stopped. Everything is as it was: the furniture, the photographs, the newspapers, the football trophies and diplomas ... It seems that the host of this place was a football coach!

Judging by the calendars, magazines and mail still found here, it is possible that the villa has been abandoned since 2006.



The ancient Oculus distillery – *Emilia-Romagna*

An imposing concrete industrial tower, its walls dotted with a hundred windows, forms the majority of the remains of an old abandoned distillery, codename: Oculus. This huge factory transformed sugar beets into products for use by other manufacturers, such as alcohol for Martini and industrial oils for Manutti.

Founded in 1889, the distillery has long been one of Europe's largest producers of alcohol and sugar. The quota system applied by the European Union in 1968 helped it to prosper by allowing it to benefit from the public intervention mechanisms put in place to manage surplus production. The situation changed when in 2005 the European Union decided on a drastic revision of regulations and the abolition of production quotas.

With no more EU aid, the increase in production led to a sharp fall in prices and a severe crisis for producers. Companies were strongly encouraged to modernise their facilities, forcing the closure of obsolete plants, including the Oculus distillery.



Discoteca medievale – *Tuscany*

After opening on the night of New Year's Eve 1993, this Tuscan disco was only active for four years. During this time, the club gained a good reputation and became the go-to place for night owls; thousands of people from the world of cinema and entertainment, such as Alain Delon and Alba Parietti (an actress, singer and Italian TV presenter), came to dance. Sadly, due to mismanagement, the club eventually closed.

For years the structure was neglected and degradation is well under way, but there are still some remnants of its fake medieval castle decor: flags at the top of the towers, murals depicting knights in armour, coats of arms with animal heads. Although all its copper wires have completely disappeared, the building retains a certain beauty in its rather flattering red seats.



Cementificio Sacchi – *Tuscany*

The former SACCI cement factory was created in December 1933 by the merger of several small local companies producing hydraulic binders and ready-mix concrete. The factory played a fundamental role in the economy and housing development of the surrounding area.

During the Second World War it suffered considerable damage. Reconstruction works began with a comprehensive programme to restore the potential for producing and distributing grey and white cement, concrete and aggregates. In 1949 the company had nearly 300 employees.

Today the site is abandoned, but the company was absorbed by the Italian multinational Cementir Holding, with more than 40 concrete plants in Abruzzo, Marche, Tuscany, Lazio, Apulia and Molise.



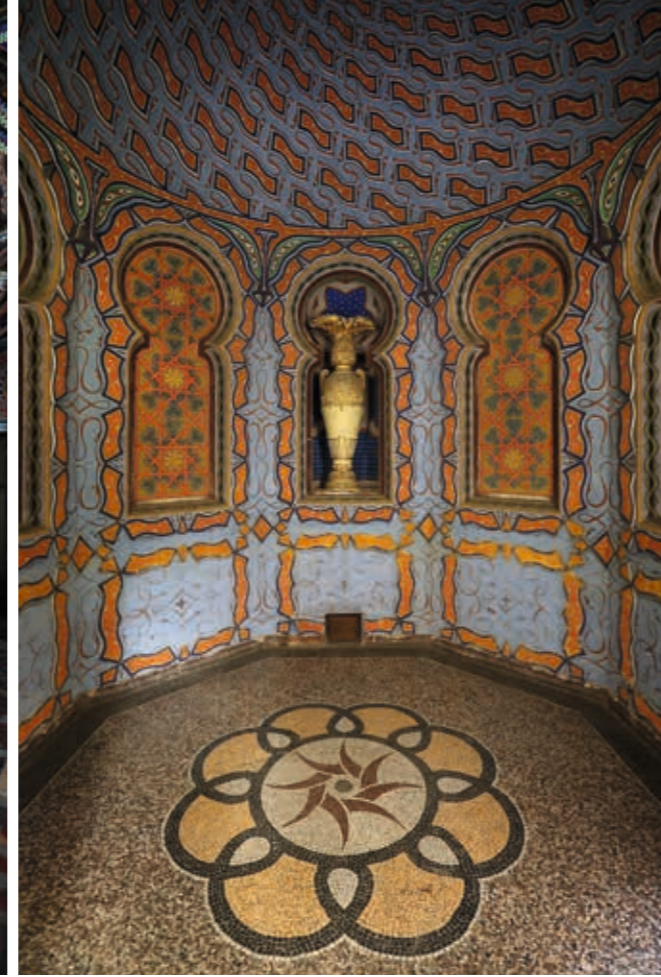
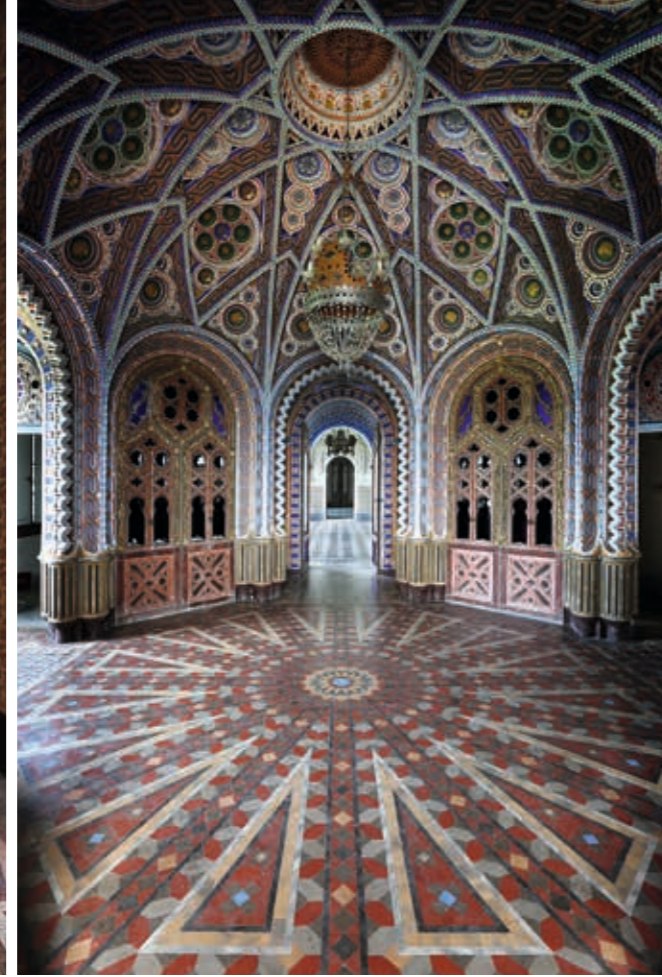
Castello Non Plus Ultra – *Tuscany*

The castle of Sammezzano is a masterpiece of excess and refinement. This proud place has hosted many personalities — Charlemagne himself stayed there while his son was baptised by the pope in 780 AD — but the one who had the most remarkable impact was Ferdinando Panciatichi Ximenes, the owner who transformed it between 1843 and 1889. A politician, patron, lover of architecture, engineering and botany, this man of immense culture undertook to make the castle a true work of art reflecting his complex, tormented and megalomaniac personality. The magical atmosphere that permeates this labyrinth of myriad colours, the Moorish-inspired sculptures and grandiose salons (including the Peacock room, with its majolica-decorated walls), leaves no visitor indifferent.

The gardens are equally impressive: Ximenes conceived the “Historical Park” — 65 hectares of exotic plants, fountains and oaks that would prepare the visitor for the splendours waiting at the end of the path. But the castle was deserted by his descendants, looted during the Second World War, and transformed into a luxury hotel in the 1970s ...

Now awaiting the realisation of a project to transform it into a luxury resort with spa and golf courses, the building and its park remain once more abandoned.





Castello M – Umbria

The castle, built on an island in the middle of a lake in the late 19th century, was commissioned as a summer residence by the Marquis of Vulci, a senator in Rome, administrator of the Roman railways, and a philanthropist who wanted a home worthy of a great lord.

Annexed to it is the existing medieval tower, the monastery and the huge church. The latter, with decrepit walls in blue tones, can even accommodate a condominium.

According to local rumours, the house had lounges hosting many art collections, a gallery featuring portraits of ancestors and armours, a salon decorated with tapestries and Murano chandeliers, and a billiard room where important issues were discussed. Beautiful paintings and delicate stucco decorations can still be seen on the walls of the salon, while carved woodworks also catch the eye ... and the dust.

The Marquis's daughter taught the daughters of the local fishermen the secrets of the precious art of lace making, which still flourishes throughout the region. But in the second half of the 20th century, their heirs could no longer afford to live there and had to move.

The castle is seeking a buyer, in case you are interested!



Power plant – *Umbria*

Italy is one of the pioneers in hydroelectric power generation. The first plants were built in the late 19th century, located mainly in the Alps and Apennines, near the major rivers.

In the 1950s, hydropower accounted for 20% of the energy produced throughout Italy.

Energy requirements increased considerably in the middle of the 20th century and other more efficient production units were created, including nuclear power plants. But with greater ecological awareness, and with Italy being located within a seismic zone, which drastically increases the risk of nuclear accidents, the government, under the pressure of a referendum held in 1987, decided to no longer build nuclear power plants and to close those in operation until then.



Galleto power plant – *Umbria*

The Galleto power plant, built between 1924 and 1925, was the first major construction of the national hydroelectric programme, and was of paramount importance in the industrialisation of Italy.

It was the exploitation of the waters of the Velino River that produced electricity, upstream of a mobile dam, connected to the nearby lake, which was inaugurated with great pomp in 1929. In 1931 the plant could supply up to 146,000 kW thanks to four groups of turbo-alternators.

During the Second World War, Allied forces tried more than once to destroy the plant. It was eventually the Germans who blew it up as they retreated, although by the end of 1945 the four production units had already been restored. In 1962 the power plant was nationalised and was bought in 2001 by the ENDESA group to become a colossal enterprise.

Following the construction of a new and imposing modern power plant, the turbines, the V-shaped control room and the obsolete Galleto buildings were abandoned.





Villa Pontificia – *Marches*

In 1830 Count Mei Gentilucci, who was from a family of the Italian aristocracy in Ancona, built a large, traditional residence in a small village far from the bustle of the Adriatic coast. With precisely 99 rooms, the villa attracted the admiration of the whole region.

The paintings adorning the property are inspired by the papal colors (white and yellow), lending it a unique freshness. The entrance staircase, flanked by majestic columns, leads to a hall illuminated by frescoes by Ciasca, and to a gentilizia chapel (a private place of worship built by a family).

Village archives teach us that during the flight of the royal family from Savoy to Italy on the night of 8-9 September 1943, the house offered hospitality to Prince Umberto, the future Umberto II, the last king of Italy.

