



The Duchesses' Camerino, The Abundance Allegory (detail)  
photo: Centro Conservazione e Restauro La Venaria Reale

The façade along Corso Martiri della Libertà is the result of a restoration operated in 1738 by the architects Angelo and Francesco Santini. On Piazza Savonarola the palace is characterised by the so-called Loggia dei Camerini, elegant XVI Century architectural structure in marble on six arcades. The upper part has been built during the XVIII Century works directed by the Santini brothers.

Particularly suggestive is the story of Via Coperta, the building resting on five arcades and connecting Guildhall to the Estense Castle. The Via Coperta was born as a full architecture project with Ercole d'Este from 1471, but it was only with his son Alfonso I, in power between 1505 and 1534, that it became an incredible symbol of the power of the Estensi. In this building, indeed, Alfonso had built the famous 'golden dressing rooms' (known also as the 'alabaster dressing rooms') where he kept his famous collection of precious artworks, now held in the most important museums of the world, such as the Ermitage of Saint Petersburg, the Prado of Madrid and the Louvre of Paris. Of the XVI Century is also the marble balcony facing Piazza Savonarola, an element adding an elegant touch to this building, repeatedly transformed over centuries.

### Halls and interiors

The majestic Grand Staircase leads to the main floor of the palace, where it is possible to admire two vast halls with ceilings and decorations of the XVI Century. In this wing of the palace, since the XVII Century the seat of the Maestrato dei Savi (the executive body of the time), Ercole I d'Este in the second half of the XV Century had had built the so-called 'Great Hall' for feasts and theatrical shows. Here in 1531 Ludovico Ariosto, to show his comedies before the court, established the first stable theatre in Italy, unfortunately destroyed by a fire in 1532. Among the interiors of relevance, beyond the Golden Room (XV Century), the Duchesses' dressing room well represents the taste and sophistication of the Estense family. It consists of a small room, a 'precious chest' conceived for Eleonora and Lucrezia d'Este, skillfully decorated between 1555 and 1560 mainly by Cesare, Camillo and foremost Sebastiano Filippi (known as Bastianino).

In the Tapestry Hall, moreover, are exposed two precious Flemish tapestries of the first half of the XVII Century. Also to be noted is a late XVI Century wardrobe, the many antiques of the XVIII and XIX Centuries, and a very rare desk in painted marble. Also to be visited is the Arrengo Hall, frescoed with precious decorations between 1934 and 1938 by Achille Funi in cooperation with Felicità Frai. The interior, of great visual impact, is considered a true masterpiece of 20th Century decoration and offers to the visitor a genuine glorification of Ferrara's mythical and legendary aspects.

#### Tour of the Estense Ducal Palace by the Mayoral Spokesperson's Office Ideas and projects for the Old Town Centre

project manager: Anna Rosa Fava  
project coordinator: Ivana Cambi  
idea and planning: Ivana Cambi, Francesco Scafuri  
texts: Francesco Scafuri  
collaboration texts: Clara Coppini  
historical research: Francesco Scafuri  
collaboration historical research: Sandra Sarasini  
iconographical sources: Francesco Scafuri, Ivana Cambi  
graphic: Laura Quaggia  
web pages: Elena Querzola, Cristina Fiorentini

With the collaboration of the Istituzione Musei del Comune di Bologna  
creation QR Code guide for Smartphone: Claudio Borgatti



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|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. The Guildhall Grand Staircase    | 6. The Albo Pretorio Hall  |
| 2. The Lapid Hall                   | 7. The Duchesses' Camerino |
| 3. The Golden Hall                  | 8. The Covered Path        |
| 4. The Hall of Tapestries           | 9. The Arrengo Hall        |
| 5. The Grand Hall of the Plebiscite | 10. The Duchesses' Garden  |

#### The Ducal Palace of Estensi, now Guildhall Piazza Municipale 2, Ferrara

##### Opening times

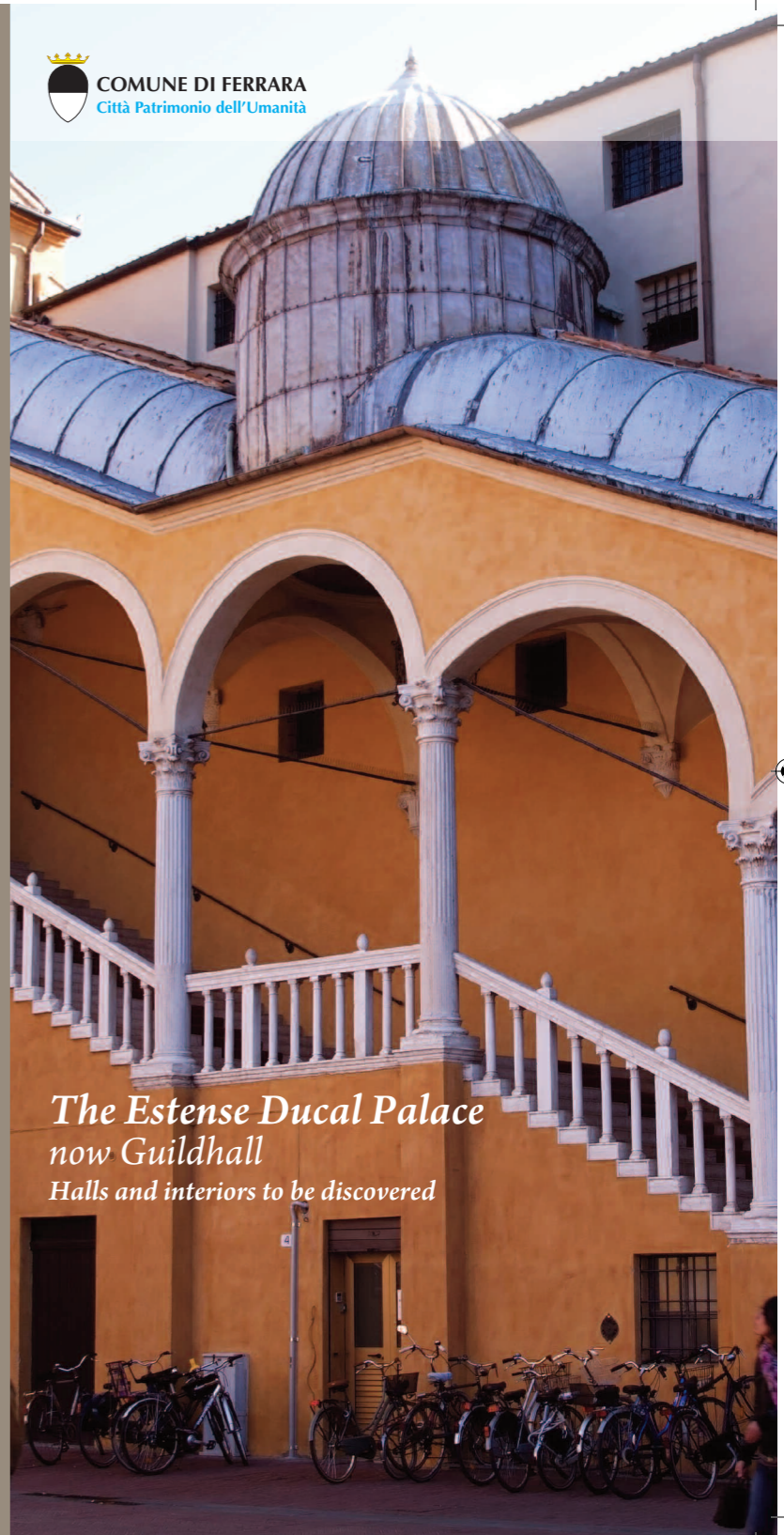
from Monday to Friday,  
all-day opening of the Town Hall  
from 9am to 1pm - from 3pm to 6pm

##### Information

URP via degli Spadari 2/2, 44121 Ferrara  
tel. 0532 419770 urp@comune.fe.it



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**COMUNE DI FERRARA**  
Città Patrimonio dell'Umanità

**The Estense Ducal Palace**  
now Guildhall  
Halls and interiors to be discovered



The Municipal Square, the façade with the monumental portal of the Estense Hall, the trefoil windows of the main floor and the Sundial, dated from 1869.  
photo: Clara Coppini

## History, Art and Architecture

The Ducal Palace (now Guilhall) is currently mainly property of the city of Ferrara. It was built from the XIII Century by the Estensi, lords of Ferrara since 1264, who here took up residence. The noble palace was built in front of the Cathedral (1135), around which at the time was consolidating the centre of city power. Originally the palace was constituted of the building on via Cortevecchia and of the one in front of the Cathedral. The palace was expanded in the second half of the XIV Century as desired by Marquis Nicolò II. Between 1479 and 1481 the Duke Ercole I d'Este ensured that the palace assumed its current planimetry, organising the Ducal Palace around the 'court' (now Piazza Municipale) and around the back Garden of the Duchesses. The latter was described at the time as a paradisiac place surrounded by beautiful porticos, an exclusive green space attended by the Duke and his court. Transformed in the following centuries, the garden still preserves a great charm and is open to the public for particular festivals. It was with Ercole I d'Este that Ferrara reached the peak of its glory. It was the Duke, with the court architect Biagio Rossetti, who devised the famous *Addizione Erculea*, the *ante litteram* urban plan for the area north of the Estense Castle, thanks

to which Ferrara became the 'first modern city in Europe'. The Estensi inhabited the palace until 1598, year in which Ferrara was transferred to the direct control of the Pontifical State. Since then, the palace, still remaining for a long time ducal property at least in part, stopped being the residence of the Estensi court. It later became an architectural complex divided among different owners, until becoming mainly the Guildhall. The palace is therefore affected by its many modifications over centuries.

### The exterior

The façade facing the Cathedral is the result of a radical rebuilding, executed between 1924 and 1928, when were re-proposed the shapes and architectures of XIII Century inspiration that we now see. During these works was also built the Torre della Vittoria (Tower of Victory), in completion of the new façade in 'gothic style'. The tower was dedicated to the memory of the dead of the Great War and contains the 'Vittoria del Piave' (Victory of the Piave River), a golden bronze statue executed by the sculptor from Ferrara Arrigo Minerbi (Ferrara 1881 – Padova 1960).

In front of the Cathedral protiro is the Volto del Cavallo. On the sides of this ancient access to the Court Palace are a re-

finied arch and a column on which rest respectively the Marquis Nicolò III on a horse and the Duke Borso d'Este sitting on a *faldistorio*. The two statues, completed in 1927 by the sculptor Giacomo Zilocchi, are copies of the XV Century originals. The originals, executed by skillful artists such as Nicolò Baroncelli, Antonio di Cristoforo and Domenico di Paris, were destroyed in 1796 during the French occupation. Original is Borso's column, restored several times, as well as the XV Century small arch on which the equestrian statue rests, authoritatively attributed to Leon Battista Alberti because of the typically Renaissance purity of its lines and executed by Bartolomeo di Francesco.

Through the Volto del Cavallo it is possible to access the Piazza Municipale (originally the Ducal Court). Here took place some among the first stage representations of the Renaissance: many classic comedies were put up by the Estensi, like Plauto's *Menecmi*, acted in 1487 in vulgar translation, to which assisted also the teenage Ludovico Ariosto. In the Piazza Municipale stand out both the imposing Grand Staircase, built by the ducal architect Pietro Benvenuti in 1481, and the Court Chapel (now Estense Hall), built in the second half of the XV Century by the Duke Ercole I d'Este for his wife Eleonora d'Aragona and in honour of the Virgin Mary. The monumen-

The Palace with the Volto del Cavallo seen from the Cathedral



photo: Massimo Baraldi © Archivio Fotografico della Provincia di Ferrara



The Estense Hall

photo: Clara Coppini

tal portal of this former church was composed with elements of various origins in 1692, while the two XIX Century statues of Saint George and Saint Maurelio, sculpted by Francesco Vidoni, were here placed during the 1835 restoration. The ancient church, transformed into a movie theatre in 1916-17, is now employed for conferences and shows. The portal is inserted in an interesting façade, on which stand out the eight elegant trefoil windows of the main floor (latter half of the XV Century) and the sundial.

While on the South side of the square stands out the narrow Volto del Cavalletto, one of the ancient access routes to the Court, the façade at the entrance of via Garibaldi is characterised by the Volto della Colombina and a Renaissance lodge, modified in its upper part at the end of the XIX Century, when the engineer Giacomo Duprà endowed the XV century building with its current features.