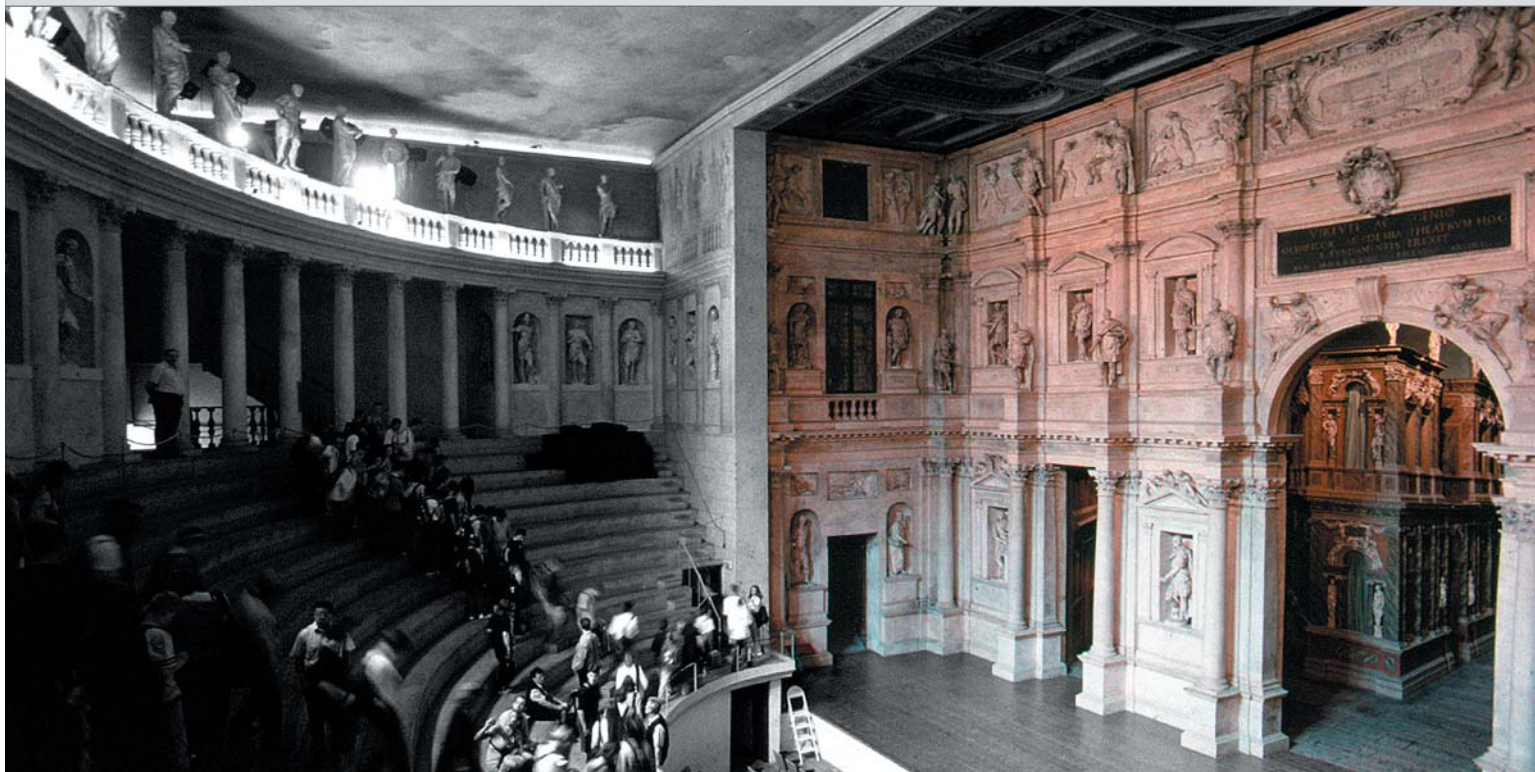


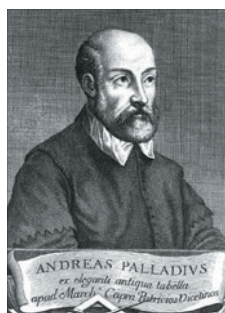
FROM VENICE TO FLORENCE



ANDREA PALLADIO

Much of the residential architecture in America draws on the great mansions of England for inspiration. These buildings drew on the work of a single architect: Andrea Palladio. For example, Thomas Jefferson studied Palladio's work through the many books he purchased when in Paris while was designing Monticello. He also was heavily influenced by a number of British architects such as Burlington, Gibbs and Morris, who were in turn also influenced by Palladio's work. Most of Palladio's buildings can be found in Venice or Vicenza, or in the surrounding area. Palladio's work has been so widely copied that specific architectural details have developed and evolved around his architecture. Many American homes have "Palladian windows" as a focal point of formal living rooms. A Palladian window has a center light with a semi-circular top and two rectangular side lites on either side.

Palladio is a contemporary of the late Mannerist and early Baroque architects. As such, his style is surprisingly Renaissance in proportion (quiet), and color (white). Some have said that his work was not favored widely at the time. In a way, it was *passé*; his contemporaries had moved on. If this is true, what is the basis of his popularity? Perhaps the answer rests with those who so admired his work - the British. With their increasing wealth, the English of the Enlightenment began the tradition of the Grand Tour to see the sites of antiquity and to take back to England anything and



everything they could carry. Given the outlook of the Church of England, the excesses of the Baroque period would not fit. Here again, architecture and politics (at least the politics of religion) go forward hand-in-hand. The Renaissance saw man at the center of a universe that was logical and could be understood. This attitude led to

the Reformation and a challenge to the authority of the Vatican. It also led to an architecture of harmony and simplicity. The Counter-Reformation was an attempt by the Vatican to retake lost ground. This movement demanded an architecture that reinforced their arguments. The result was the Baroque style, which exhibited a complex ornamental system that defied logic and explanation. It was an architecture that demanded interpretation - an interpretation that would be offered by the Vatican and the hierarchy of the Church.

Herein lies the need by the British to find something to admire and visit that was by implication not aligned with the prevailing tastes of the Vatican. With this mindset, it was the architecture of Palladio that offered the best lessons in applying classical architecture to modern times.

FROM VENICE TO FLORENCE

VICENZA

VILLA ROTUNDA (1550 - 1606)

*Grounds open T, W, Th, 10am - 12 noon and 3pm - 6pm;
interiors open only on Wednesday.*

Many historians consider Villa Rotunda to be Palladio's most complete building. The house sits atop a small hill where the four identical porticos "oversee" the surrounding landscape. The plan of the house is based on nine squares - a classical Renaissance approach to interior planning. Here the plan and massing of the building come together in a perfect composition. You can imagine the Bill Gates of the 16th Century standing on one of the porches eyeing his domain, knowing that he is master of all he sees. If you go on a day the interior is open, you will find the central hall richly painted in a *tromp l'oeil* style. This treatment was added long after the house was complete in an attempt to make it "fancy." Palladio originally left the interiors with lightly colored plaster of little or no decoration, similar to the exterior. The functional rooms were all in the "basement" - that is, the ground level - while the upper floor was left open for different functions. Often, livestock would wander up the steps in an idealized pastoral setting of man in harmony with all of nature.

PALAZZO CHIERICATI (1550 - onwards) and TEATRO OLIMPICO (1580 - 83)

Palladio also completed a number of commercial buildings, especially in Vicenza. One of the most interesting is the façade of Palazzo Chiericati. This building is composed of two levels. The first floor is defined by a colonnade and doric columns, while the second is defined by a similar colonnade of ionic columns. The center portion on the second floor is fully enclosed, setting up a fascinating tension with the open porches below and to either side. Also in this complex is the Teatro Olimpico. This is considered to be the first modern theater. In western Europe, the building of places specifically designed for entertainment effectively ended with the fall of the Roman Empire. Performances were staged in the rooms of large palaces and other similar spaces. Teatro Olimpico is a true theater in the modern sense. It has a raked seating area in a circular form, a stage, and a set of permanent sets in forced perspective.



Palazzo Chiericati illustrates Palladio's design principals in a public building.

FROM VENICE TO FLORENCE



The Teatro Olimpico.

SAN VITO

BRION TOMB (1970 - 72)

CARLO SCARPA

Italy is not known for modern architecture. For most of the 20th Century, the Germans, French, Dutch and, at times, the English have dominated the dialogue about an appropriate architecture for modern times. There are some notable exceptions to this rule. One of the most important is the work of Carlo Scarpa, especially the Brion Tomb found in the small town of San Vito, just outside of Treviso.

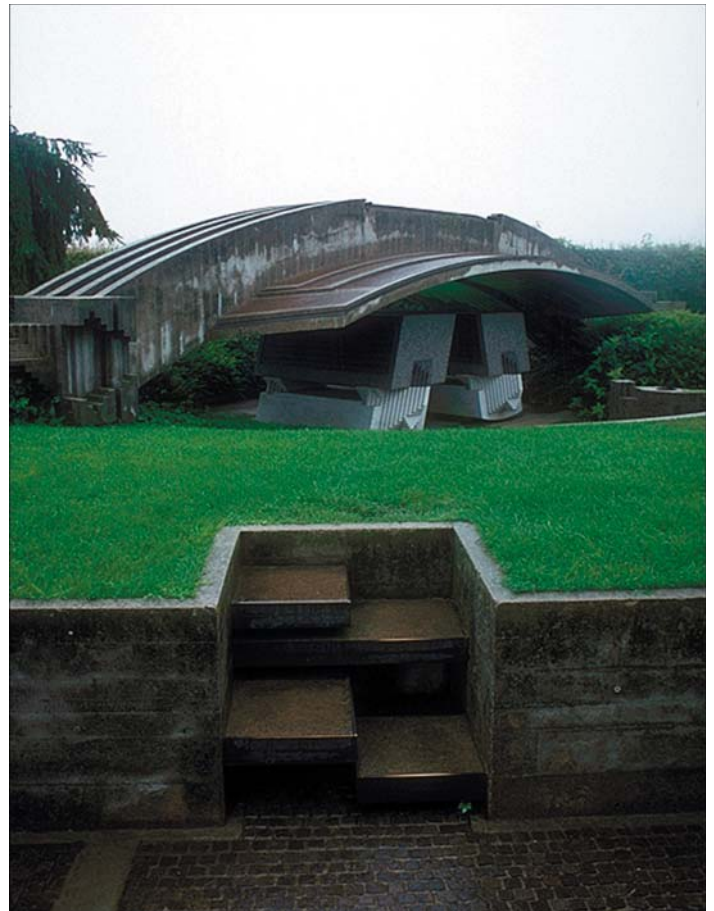
Classical design has brought us many examples of the ideal landscape. These places include the Boboli Gardens, Versailles, Veau le Vicompte, Paris, Washington, D.C., and many others. Modernism has found it difficult to match these places with plans that have equal power. In this family tomb, in a small town in Italy, modernism has proved that it can develop land plans with a power and significance to match classical planning.

The Tomb is an 'L'-shaped tract of land which wraps around the small village cemetery. The central feature of the plan is a small impossibly complex chapel. The sarcophagi of various family members are located at strategic points surrounding the chapel. In one case, a concrete vault forms an enclosure for two sarcophagi; another is supported by four slender steel rods hovering over a small pond.

The entire complex is filled with surprises. A gate is formed of cast-in-place concrete and rolls on a steel wheel. In one enclosed corridor, a glass door rises out of the floor. Everything is worked out in impressive

The ceiling is decorated with the night sky as a backdrop for the curved colonnade that surrounds the seating area. In many ways, the building recalls Roman theaters. It is as if asked to develop a new building type, Palladio looked for a precedent, found the outdoor theaters of Rome and brought the outdoors inside.

detail. The result is one of the most successful modern landscapes ever created. And, not surprisingly, Scarpa himself is entombed here; find his grave.



FROM VENICE TO FLORENCE

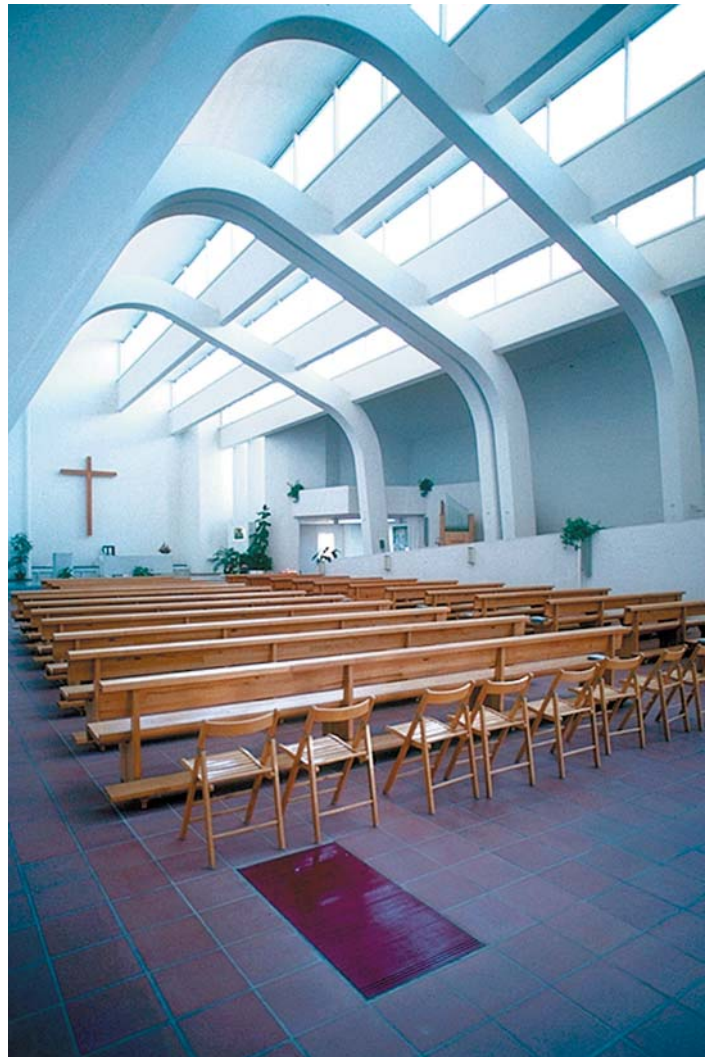


RIOLA

CHIESA PARROCCHIALE (1966 - 78)

ALVAR AALTO

Most of Alvar Aalto's buildings are located in his native Finland. There are two prominent exceptions: the dormitory he completed at MIT and a small parish church in the hills above Bologna. To find this building, take S64 out of Bologna towards Pistoia. The church sits adjacent to a small creek just across the bridge from the highway. Aalto designed a large open plaza that slopes down to the entrance of the church. The exterior is a sculptural overlapping of curved forms typical of Aalto's work. Between each shape is a linear clerestory window running from one end of the building to the other. These windows bring natural light into an interior that is truly luminous. Studying the interior, you quickly realize that the building is a brilliant composition of precast concrete vaults supported on precast concrete ribs that bring loads to the ground. The ultra-white interior is clearly a reinterpretation of sacred Christian space.



FROM VENICE TO FLORENCE



MODENA

MODENA TOWN CEMETERY

CARLO SCARPA

A second exception to the rule that Italian architecture has made little contribution to modern architecture is the work of Aldo Rossi. Of his many projects, none is more compelling than the town cemetery in Modena. It is unbelievably severe and at the same time idealized in its geometry. Rossi was really tough. Unlike Scarpa's cemetery, the plan is not modern, but actually depends on classical principles. However, the forms are rooted deeply in modernist design. All ornament has been stripped away, resulting in forms which are archetypal. The gable roofs are all equilateral triangles. The crypts for the ashes of the deceased define an orange cube. Of special interest is Rossi's interest in scale shifts. This is nowhere more evident than in the orange cube. Go inside the form and unravel the geometric discipline of this structure. The galvanized iron stairs and catwalks are especially interesting.

