



La Venaria Reale

History

The complex of **La Venaria Reale** is a unique environmental and architectural continuum of extraordinary charm, a boundless, varied, spectacular estate that offers its visitors magical atmospheres, cultural attractions and leisure pursuit. Here performances, events, concerts and outstanding exhibitions alternate with entertainment, direct and intimate contact with nature, relaxation, sporting pastimes and cultural food and wine events.

The Estate is made up of the lively **old town center** of La Venaria Reale – the setting of important historical events –, the imposing baroque **Reggia** (or Palace) that, together with the vast **Gardens**, offers one of the finest and most significant examples of the 17th and 18th century Baroque architecture and art. The Estate also includes; and the **Park of La Mandria**, one of the most significant natural reserves in Europe that is home to cattle and wild animals, where the **Castle** with the same name is preserved.

The Reggia of Venaria Reale and the Castle of La Mandria have been declared **World Heritage Sites** by **UNESCO**.



CONSORZIO DELLE RESIDENZE REALI SABAUDE
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The origins of **Venaria Reale** date back to the mid 17th century, when Duke Carlo Emanuele II of Savoy decided to build a new residence to be used by his Court for “leisure and hunting”. The site was selected because it had been used since 1580 by the Duke as hunting domain and because it would also complete the so-called “Crown of Delights”, the circuit of Court Residences that the Duke’s predecessors had gradually built around Turin.

The scale of the vast and complex urban project that issued from that decision was unprecedented in the Savoy State. It would radically alter the existing town of Altessano Superior, that was wiped away to make room for the new settlement. The project was commissioned to the Court Architect Amedeo di Castellamonte, who planned the village, the palace and its outbuildings, the gardens and the hunting domain (today corresponding to the Park of La Mandria) as a single architectural-environmental continuum that resulted in a grandiose estate built along a single symmetrical axis still recognizable today in the Via Maestra (today, Via A. Mensa), the main street of the town of Venaria. La Venaria Reale was not conceived as a Palace but as an organized estate where the village merged into the Court, blending in with the natural surroundings.

The fulcrum was the palace, the so-called **Reggia di Diana**, built between 1660 and 1671, which was destined to undergo two centuries of endless changes, reconstructions and events that, indirectly, influenced the town’s social and economic life. As early as 1693 the French troops under indirectly Marshal Catinat sacked part of the complex and the architect, Michelangelo Garove, was commissioned to rebuild it in 1699, also in response to the changing architectural taste of the times. Moreover, following the accession of Vittorio Amedeo II, the last duke and future first King of Savoy, the regal ambitions of the dynasty needed to be reflected and celebrated through the grandiose scale of its residences: it was this that prompted Garove to conceive an even more imposing plan for the palace of Venaria, one that was directly influenced by the French architectural fashions of the time, namely, large pavilions joined by galleries and mansard roofs. The work on the extensions was resumed in 1716 by Filippo Juvarra (who was responsible for completing the Great Gallery, the church of St. Hubert dedicated to the patron saint of hunters, the Citroniera and Juvarra’s Stables. The works continued until the second half of the 18th century under the guidance of other architects, including Benedetto Alfieri who, (from 1751, built the connecting wings between Juvarra’s central buildings, the riding hall, the new stables and the wing with the Tower of Belvedere that linked the chapel to the palace). French travelers visiting La Venaria Reale in the mid - 18th century described it as “the King’s largest and most imposing country residence”.



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As the layout of the buildings changed, the **Gardens** lost their original Italianate character, design by Castellamonte, and were transformed into a large park “in the French style”, stretching over 125 hectares, with intricately designed patterns made up of parterres, alleys, ponds, groves, pergolas and a large labyrinth. In 1798, French occupation marked the beginning of a slow and inexorable decline: the residence was not included –among Napoleon’s Imperial Residences unlike the Palazzina di caccia di Stupinigi (Stupinigi Hunting Lodge), its treasures were scattered and also the park was wiped away. In the period of the Restoration the Savoy estate was converted into a barracks and throughout the 19th century it was home to artillery regiments that played a leading role in the Wars of Independence of the Risorgimento.

Amedeo di Castellamonte also planned the current **Old Town Center** of Venaria, that was built between 1667 and 1690. The town hinges around Piazza dell’Annunziata, dedicated to the Annunciation of Mary. The two statues erected on the pillars at the center of the exedras depict the Angel of the Annunciation and the Virgin: the unusual layout of the square is reminiscent of the medallion of the “Collar of the Annunziata”, the symbol of one of the most ancient and prestigious Orders of Knighthood of the House of Savoy.

The square was designed as a relatively wide opening that divided in two parts the main street, known as Via Maestra (or Contrada Granda, which is now Via Mensa leading to the Reggia) and resulting visula effect offers a dramatic pause before reaching the end of the street and the imposing view of the Palace. In addition, the square served as a social and cultural meeting point for the local population and the craft shops lined under the arcades all round the square provided an effective display of local products.

After the 17th century, the area remained vastly unchanged except for the reconstruction, in the mid-18th century, of the Church of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary in Piazza dell’Annunziata by the architect Benedetto Alfieri. It was only under French occupation that new Houses were built to the South of Contrada Granda, but even after Napoleon’s occupation ended, no major developments took place for a long time, except for changes in the use of various buildings. In the 19th century, the Reggia was turned into a barracks and Venaria took on a military look.



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The history of **La Mandria**, which is now a Regional Park covering some 3,000 hectares and enclosed by a 35-km-long wall, is also closely linked to the town of Venaria and the Reggia: the estate was established in the 18th century as a center for breeding and training thoroughbreds for the Royal Family of Savoy who, followed by their court, spent time hunting on parkland that had previously been part of the area of Altessano Superiore. Today the park is one of the largest and most important environmental havens in the North-West of Italy, where various species of wild and domestic animals live in freedom or in semi-wild conditions. Moreover, the park offers the most significant example of woodland area on the plain in the whole of Piedmont. The construction of the so-called **Castle** dates to the early 18th century and coincides with the second building phase at Venaria: after Michelangelo Garove, other famous architects worked on the estate including Filippo Juvarra and Benedetto Alfieri, who were already involved in construction of the Reggia. Following the Napoleonic interlude, a new chapter began for the future park when Vittorio Emanuele II purchased the parkland area in 1863 and Royal Apartments in the park became one of his residences. It was during this period that the complex was expanded and further embellished, taking on the final appearance of what is now **Borgo Castello**.

La Mandria also includes a number of other buildings that dot the park, most notably **La Bizzarria**, a strange building dating back to the mid-19th century that was used as a hunting *reposito* by Vittorio Emanuele II, and the **Villa dei Laghi**, a neogothic style construction erected in the mid-19th century in a particularly evocative setting in the vicinity of three small lakes. King Vittorio is also credited for the construction of **La Rubbianetta**, the imposing horseshoe-shaped farm that was used from the outset for rearing horses (later, headquarters of the Horse Center).

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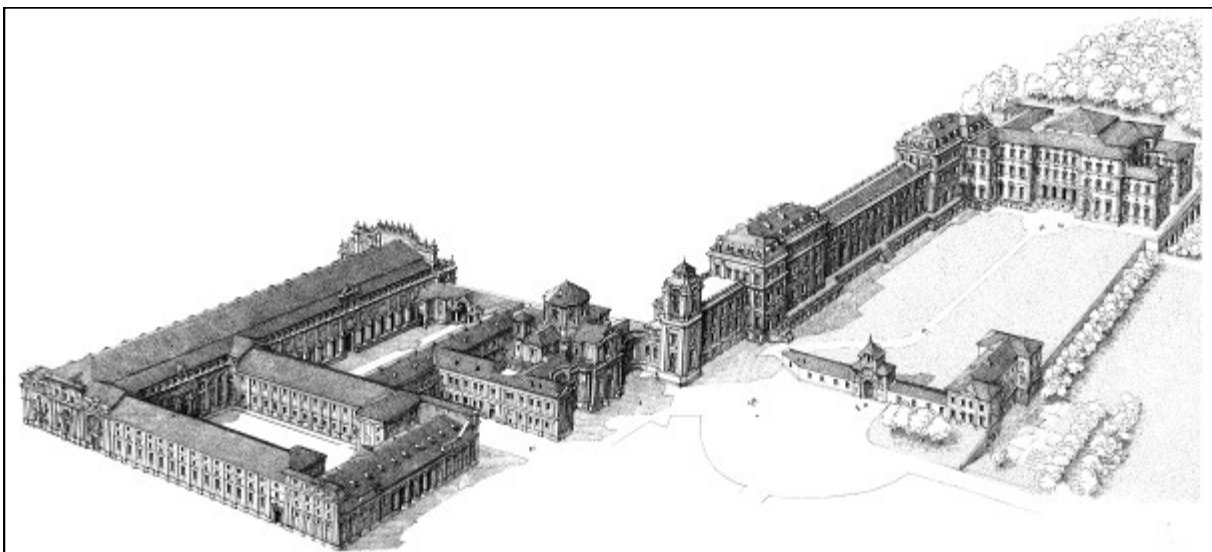
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You can download press kits and images of the Reggia and the Gardens here:

www.lavenaria.it/en - Press Office - Presentation and information



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