

DISCOVERING PALAZZO SPADA



Palazzo Spada is particularly worthy of note for two reasons. While the façade is one of the most consistent and elegant of all works of Renaissance architecture, within the palace, the Baroque style is taken to new heights. We owe the exterior to Cardinal Girolamo Capodiferro, who, in 1550, commissioned from the architect from Piedmont, Bartolomeo Baronino, a residence which would reassert the value of ancient culture. Even today we see the portraits of eight illustrious figures, from Romulus to Augustus. They flank the cardinal's coat of arms on the façade. These figures represent models of virtue and glory which the cardinal himself wished to emulate. It was an invitation to all the people of Rome, passing by on the street, to pay heed to such examples as these. In the mid-seventeenth century, when the property had already been transferred to Cardinal Bernardino Spada, an extraordinary world-renowned addition was made - the perspective gallery, or Galleria Prospettica, by Francesco Borromini. From the outside, the gallery (which is no more than 8 metres long) appears to be of a length of 37 metres. The flooring and barrel vault converge toward the back, creating a trompe-l'oeil effect, exploiting natural optical mechanisms, conveying the impression of much greater depth. At the end of the gallery, Borromini placed a statue the height of which appears to be about 1.5 metres. It is actually no more than 60 centimetres in height. This optical illusion is entirely the product of mathematical calculations and perfectly combined geometric lines. Ramona, in all her innocence, reveals Borromini's "trick" as she moves along the gallery - something not possible for the normal visitor to the palazzo.

For visitors

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