



Vignola, Ammanati, Vasari, and Michelangelo

Villa Giulia - Rome, Italy

Building Type

*Renaissance villa
*Papal residence
*1551-3

Total Square Footage

*16,716 sq. ft.

Comments

*series of various forms
at different levels

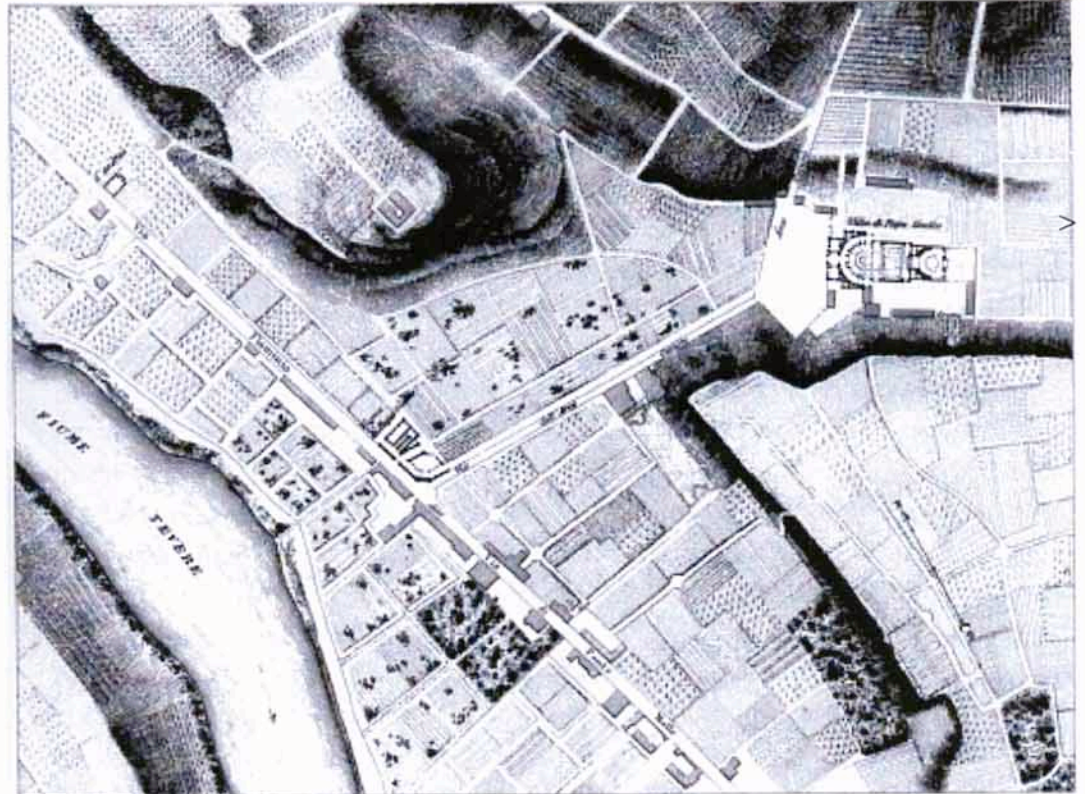
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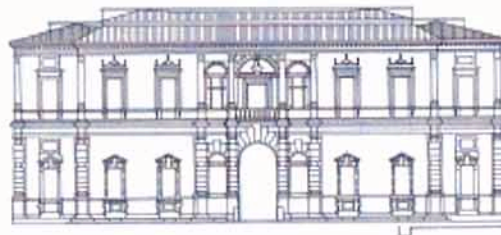
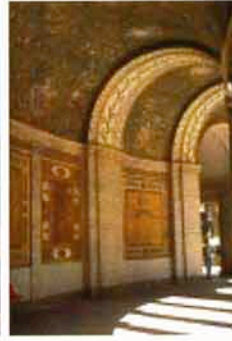
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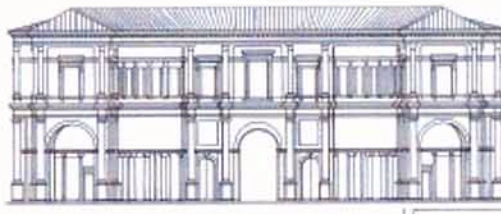
Villa Giulia was built in 1551-3 as a country retreat dedicated for relaxation and recreation for Pope Julius III. Designed by Vignola and Ammannati, with contributions by Michelangelo and Vasari, it was intended for entertaining guests of the Vatican rather than as a permanent home. Villa Giulia is situated outside the walls of Rome low in a side valley of the Tiber River that ran in a north-westerly direction. The two directions, arising from a bend in the valley, meet each other at the point where a long entrance drive ends at the forecourt of the villa. The path does not lie

in the main axis of the villa but instead follows the bend of the valley. One does not realize this until the last moment due to the laterally alignment of the trees. The villa does not seem to be situated in an enclosed valley, no matter from which direction it is viewed from, because of the bend in the axis. The villa was not designed as an object against the backdrop of the natural landscape. The architectural treatment of the villa plan is integrated into the surrounding landscape.

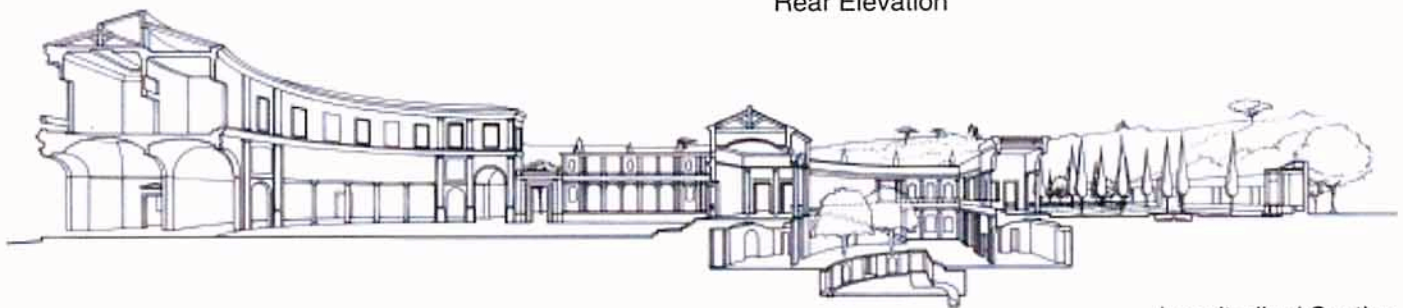
Site / Context



Front Elevation



Rear Elevation

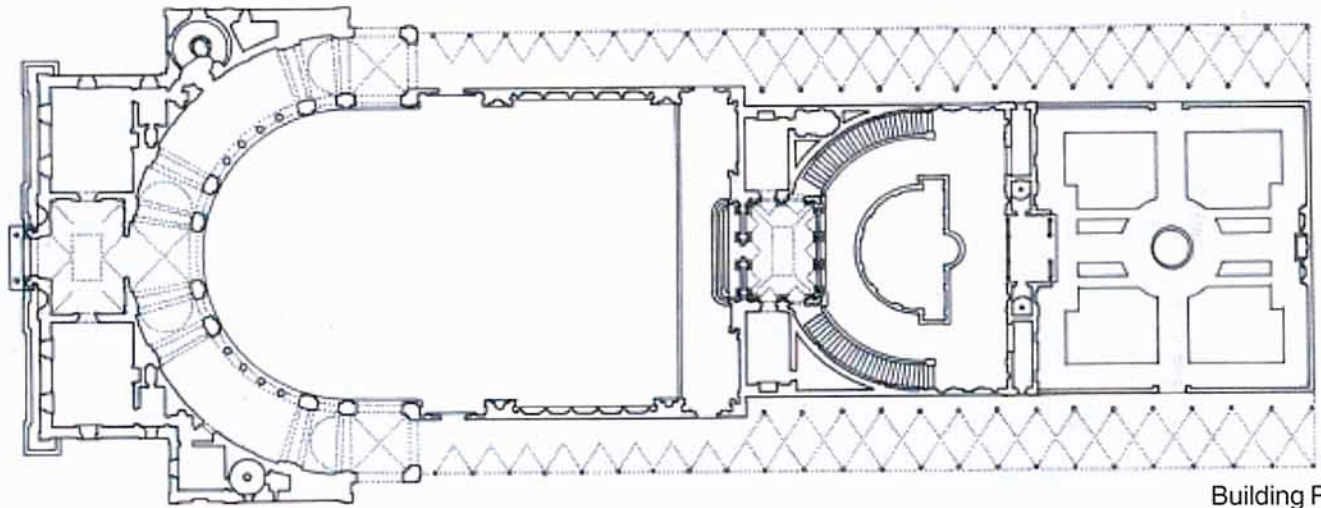


Longitudinal Section

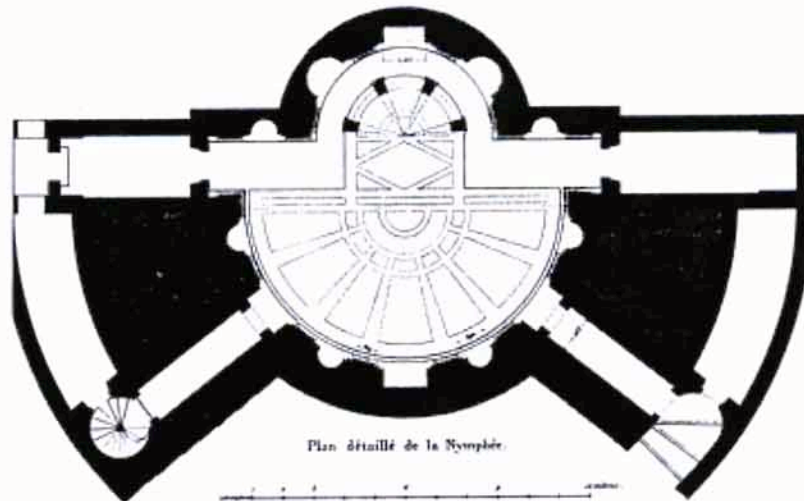
Section / Elevation

Luxury and comfort in Roman villas during the mid-16th century were turning its back on the outside and becoming more inwardly directed. Villa Giulia focused toward the interior decoration of rooms and the secret pleasures of the inner garden, while the part of the villa facing the street was provided with a simpler, more modest appearance. The openness of the villa towards the landscape is not apparent at first sight because of the severe, closed front elevation that is directed towards the square and has a clearly representative function. The severity of the façade

plays against and compensates for the lightness of the internal space. The sequence of movement is remarkable. Movement was directed towards the sides, where there are several features along the boundary. Although the courtyards are consecutively linked to each other on one axis, each consecutive space can only be reached by leaving the axis obliquely. It is only from the first floor of the building that there is a clear view over all the walls and that the view over the central axis is directed towards the surrounding landscape.



Building Plan

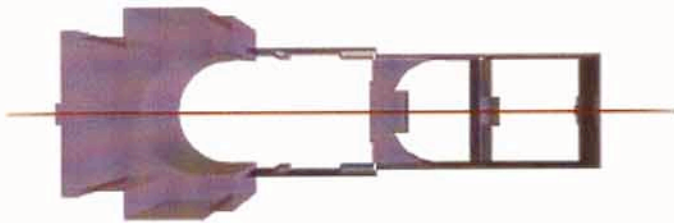
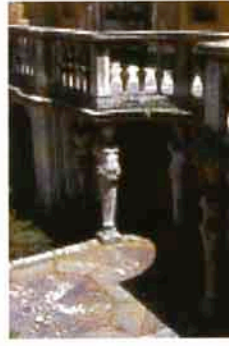


Detail Plan of the Nymphaeum

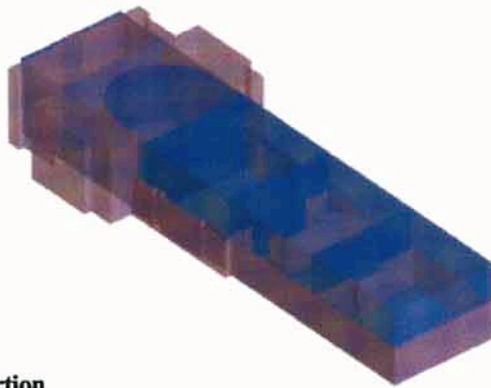
Building Plan

The overall plan is geometrically organized along a central axis as a sequence of spaces of various forms and at different levels. The plan consists "a straight front with the entrance leading to a semi-circular portico, a grand cortile with a formal garden, a sunken court embraced by summer rooms, approached by sweeping flights of steps and having a central fountain grotto with caryatic figures, rippling water and tiny cascades, and a further garden lay beyond (Bayley, 84)". The tradition of relaxation and recreation is integrated in the design with the garden, the porticos, and the pres-

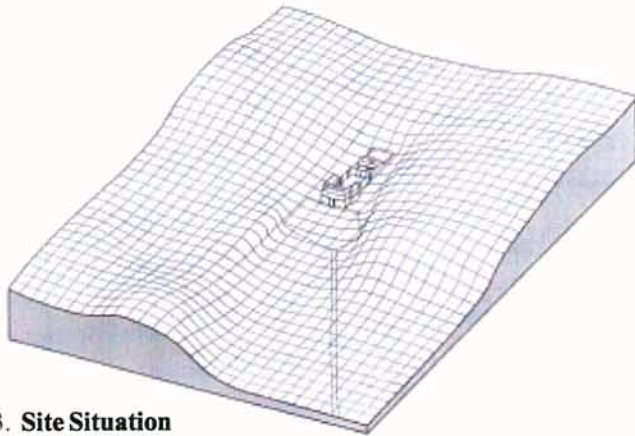
ence of water in pools and fountains. The transition from building to garden is quite elegant with courtyards that act as a series of voids and developed in such a way that the architecture of the building creates for framing of the garden itself. From the building towards the hill the openings in the screens widen and the volume of the elements and the height of the walls decrease. This increasing transparency is also given material form by the gradual transition from stone to vegetation.



1. Axial Symmetry



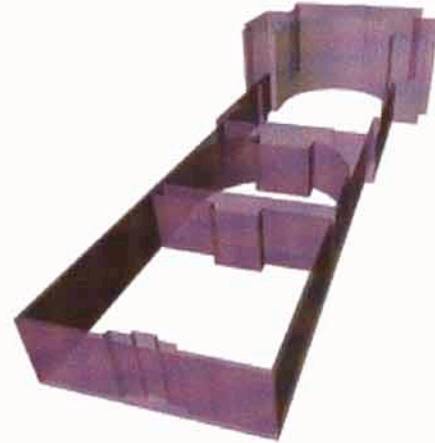
2. Proportion



3. Site Situation

Analysis Diagrams

1. **Axial Symmetry:** The main elements of the villa are organized geometrically along a central axis. 2. **Proportion:** The theme of juxtaposition can be seen in the plan. The meeting of the semicircle of the portico and the right-angle elements of the outer facades produces a series of unusable, curiously shaped spaces and excessive wall thickness. 3. **Site Situation:** The villa was not placed on top of a hill, but low in a side valley of the Tiber that ran in a north-westerly direction. 4. **Enclosure:** The position of the villa, outside the city walls, explain the hints of fortification. 5. **Level Changes:** A tension of between axis



4. Enclosure

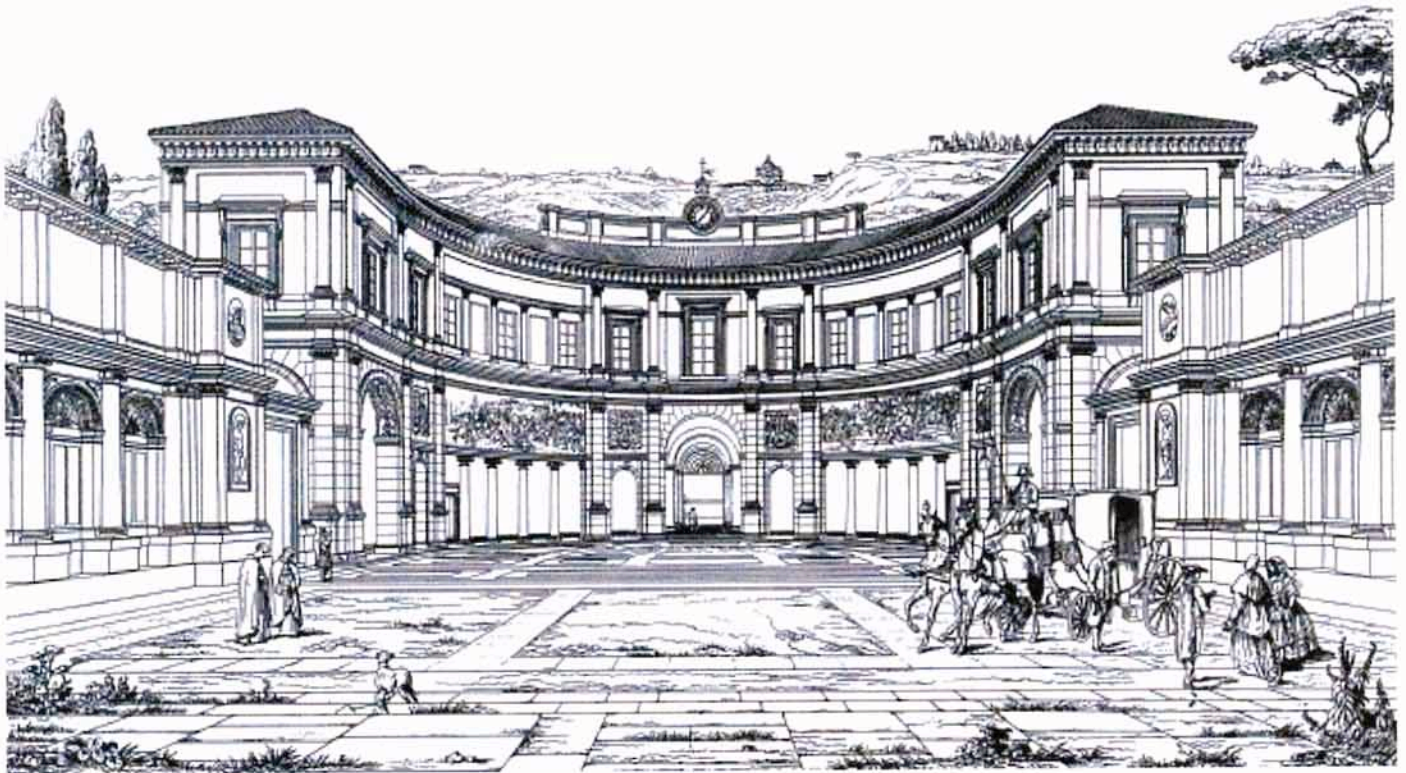


5. Level Changes



6. Inside vs. Outside

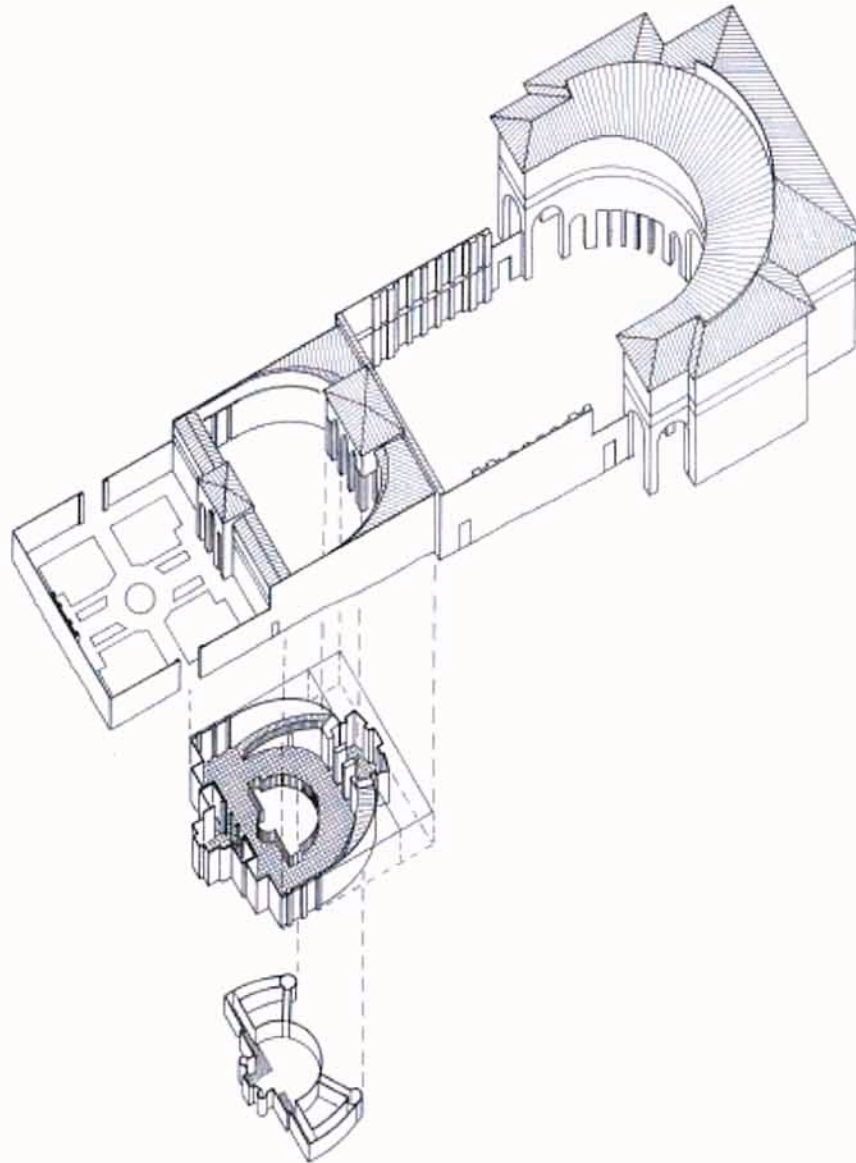
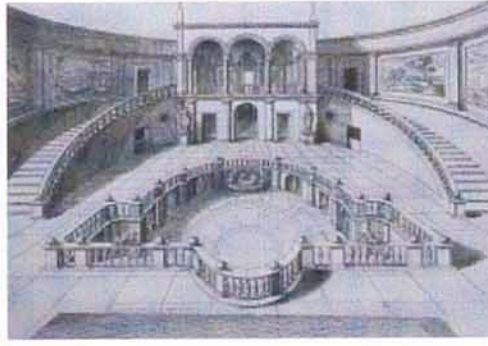
and route is created and heightened by the vertical construction of the nympheum, which consists of three layers and, in so doing, forms "a repetition of the tripartite division of the geometry of the entire garden layout (Van der Ree, 166)". 6. **Inside vs. Outside:** The building is compared to a theatre and the garden to a proscenium and a stage. The garden courtyards is the place for summer relaxation and recreation.



Repetitive Element

The repetitive element seen reiterated throughout the villa is the arch element: both in plan and section. The triumphant arch motif is present in the center of both the front and rear elevation of the villa that helps form the link between the two sides. The center is made up of three bays that are executed in stone blocks, so that this section of the facade stands out with respect to the flat brickwork to either side. The horseshoe-shape portico upon which the building rests gave way to three arched bays: one in the center and two end bays. This semicircle of the portico,

extending laterally to form the enclosed courtyard in plan forms the shape of an arch. The arch element is then again repeated in Ammannati's portico, consisting of the three bays. It is from here that one is able to see the sunken nymphaeum.



Single Significant Element

A tension between axis and route is created and heightened by the vertical construction of the nymphaeum, which consists of three layers. The nymphaeum is concealed from the entrance. Only three open arches in the wall gave access to a loggia, providing a view over this sunken "*giardino segreto*" carved out of the rocks. The sunken theatrical nymphaeum is a lively and joyous setting with walls that descended all the way to the grotto below, forming an exuberant "water theater". This was the center of the villa and also its most heavily decorated spot. Water

from the Acqua Vergine aqueduct was channeled into the scenic nymphaeum and then directed into splashing fountains, helping create a "theater of water". This lower level, the "secret fountain" can only be reached by descending down a pair of curved staircases that had been integrated in the great retaining wall. Ammannati compared the villa to a theatre and the garden to a proscenium and a stage. The play is opened by the visitor himself: he is both spectator and actor in his progress through the plan. Movement is essential for the unveiling of the spectacle.