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View of the building in 1991 before the renovation works.  
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## A SHORT HISTORY OF VILLA SCHIFANOIA

Originally Villa Schifanoia was probably part of a large swathe of land belonging to a single owner that included other villas and country houses in the surrounding area such as Villa Palmieri, La Badia, Villa Il Granaio, Villa Malafrasca. This land was known as 'Schifanoja' or 'Schivenoglia', meaning a place where to get rid of 'la noia', or boredom.

In fact, it is thought that Villa Palmieri (which still exists, and is just across the road from Villa Schifanoia) was the setting of some of 14th-century Decameron stories, by Italian author Giovanni Boccaccio: a place where young people sought refuge from a bubonic plague epidemic and kept themselves entertained.

It is not known when the property was divided and when exactly Villa Schifanoia was built; it was probably one of the numerous farmhouses scattered over the Fiesole hillside. Around the middle of the fifteenth century the original farmhouse became property of the Cresci family, an ancient Florentine family of bourgeois origins. Thanks to their trade activities they had the resources to transform the original building into a real 'villa', at a time when this type of second dwelling for wealthy families was becoming more and more common in the outskirts of Florence, changing the rural landscape.

The original central structure of the villa dates from that period: built on two floors, with a large portico on the ground floor facing South and opening onto a large terrace. Two staircases connect the terrace to the beautiful gardens. On the top floor a balustrade encloses the south-facing roof terrace, while the western side overlooking the Mugnone valley is topped by a covered loggia supported by slender columns. From the beginning, the external appearance of the villa was deliberately simple with the large and well preserved garden playing an important role in the overall design.

The Cresci family owned Villa Schifanoia for about a century; afterwards the villa changed hands several times. Until the eighteenth century the external structure remained unchanged except for the garden which was progressively transformed into a 'giardino all'italiana' based on symmetry, axial geometry and order.

When the Ciacchi family, a noble family linked to the papal Curia, took over the property of the villa in the second half of the eighteenth century, they clearly wanted to leave a mark: in 1847 they built a small chapel dedicated to Saint Thomas and indeed several architectural elements of both the chapel and the villa are emblazoned with their family emblem. In the cadastral description registered at the time, Tommaso Ciacchi's property included also the so-called 'Casale', a two-floor building on via Boccaccio with an L shape and meant to be the Villa's warehouse and il 'Villino', at the bottom of the park, near the main gate.

At the beginning of the twentieth century the property passed to a rich Australian, John Norwood Young, who changed the character and atmosphere of Villa Schifanoia: from being the Summer residence on the hills of Florence for aristocratic local families to entering the cosmopolitan circle of the city's Anglophone community, and becoming the main - although often only temporary - residence of its owners; a place where prosperity, culture and glamour would meet.

When, in 1927, the Villa was bought by the wealthy American businessman Myron C. Taylor and his wife, it became their refuge from the frenetic world of business. Taylor was also an antique collector and passionate historian; he made the Villa's gardens bigger and made sure it was well kept. He worked at improving the interiors and the furniture of the villa by consulting architects, decorators, artisans and artists. The Villa was decorated with precious paintings and furniture; the original 15th-century structure got a sumptuous antiquarian appearance as was the fashion of the time. In 1939 Taylor was nominated the personal representative of the US President to Pope Pio XII; Villa Schifanoia then became a place where personalities from the political and financial worlds would meet and where the American diplomat would hold receptions.

It was during Taylor's ownership of the Villa that the precious and rare wooden ceiling of the Sala Triaria was acquired. It is a Spanish ceiling from the fourteenth century and one of the best examples of a technique typical of the town of Teruel called 'mudéjar', which combines Islamic art in a Christian environment. The mudéjar art of Teruel has been declared World Heritage by UNESCO.

During the second World War the villa was closed but it was never looted by the Nazis as it was under the Pope's protection. At the end of WWII, Taylor donated the property to the Pope, who offered it to an American nuns' religious order. The villa became the seat of the Rosary College, an artistic and cultural educational institute for young American girls. In 1948 the chapel was re-opened for religious functions, after being shut during the war.

In 1986 the Italian government bought the Villa to make it one of the European University Institute (EUI) seats. In 1988, the EUI started renovation works; at that time the only building partially accessible was the villa, while the others needed some radical restoration. The works finished in 2002 with the villa, its annexes and its beautiful garden completely restored as we see them today.