

THE HISTORY AND THE RESTORATION PROJECT



The building is located in the historic center of the city, positioned on the top and rich in historical evidence that make it date back to pre-Roman and Roman settlements. Even the urban form, easily observable in aerial views, bears witness to a Roman origin, with the main axis, the current Via Roma, which divides it from north to south, identifying precisely the Roman cardo. In the aerial view one can easily recognize the ancient route of the walls, now occupied by avenues and walks that overlook the surrounding plain from above, with the Langhe and the circle of the Alps in the background.

The city consolidates and takes shape as a village only many centuries later, around the year one thousand, assuming the appearance that has been preserved up to the present day. The establishment of Fossano as a town is mentioned in a tombstone of 1236, preserved in the atrium of the Palazzo Comunale, a stone that also mentions the construction of the mighty walls, and in particular the north-eastern gate.

The positioning on the top, on the left of the Stura river, makes the city strategic for traffic between Piedmont and Liguria, in particular for the Savoy dynasty, for which Fossano constituted a narrow "friend" corridor, inserted between the Marquisate of Saluzzo and the duchy of Asti, enemies as mainly allies of the French, until, at the turn of 1500 and 1600, they also joined the Duchy of Savoy.



So the city soon became an important crossing point for the commercial flows of Piedmont, based on cow and sheep farming and agriculture, and Liguria, based on fishing and maritime activities, allowing the connection between Cuneo and Mondovì with Alba, Asti and all Northern Piedmont.

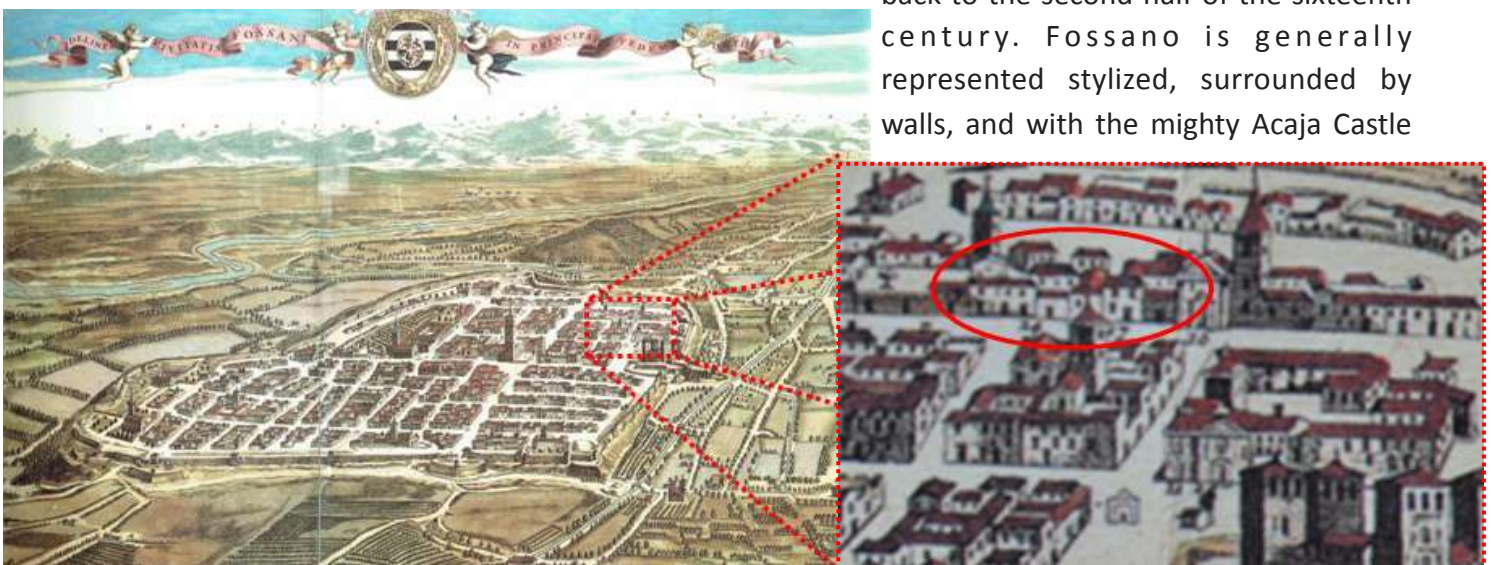
Since the foundation of 1236 there are more and more testimonies on the growth of the city, whose events are increasingly intertwined with those of the Savoy dynasty, until the definitive Sabaudian membership after the peace of Cateau Cambresis and the concession in 1566 of the city title by the Duke Emanuele Filiberto, with the motto "fidelitatis insignia" to witness the demonstrated loyalty.

The character and spirit of the city, and the importance it reached in those centuries are well explained in the 1657 description by Cambiano di Ruffia, cited by Muratori in his historical Memories of the late 1700s: «What a good city is Fossano, ancient for its origin, noble for the families, abundant for the riches, full of inhabitants, magnificent for the churches, adorned with fortitude and faith to its princes, bathed and irrigated by the river Stura, and surrounded by conspicuous lands and well-armed castles». Equally significant is the description of the beginning of 1800 by the Canon Pietro Paserio: "Almost in the center of Piedmont and in a beautiful position rises the town of Fossano, located above easy hill. Softly it looks to the east a delightful theater of scattered and varied hillocks and a vast plain. The view extends over a wide area of land to the most remote Swiss Alps, with the snowy slopes of the Saluzzo area to the left with the Monviso Stone King and, to the right, the fertile slopes of the Apennines».

Palazzo Righini di San Giorgio rises in the ancient third of Romanisio, the district of the Castle in the south-west area of the city, next to the church of the Augustinians. The buildings are located behind the Major Hospital and the annexed church of the Holy Trinity (1723-1728), both designed by the Monregalese architect Francesco Gallo. The buildings are located a few meters from the axis of the central Via Roma and from the overlooking on the great valley of the Stura di Demonte that deeply furrows the plain that leads from Cuneo to the Langa.

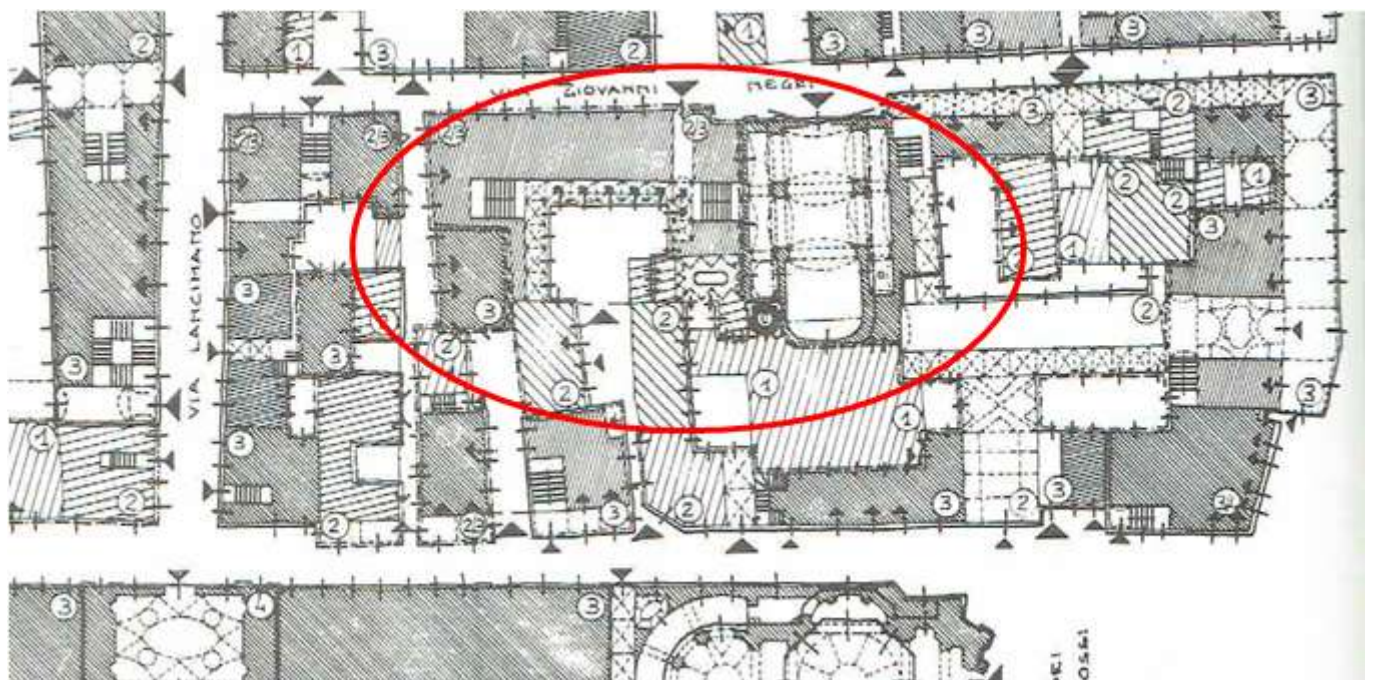
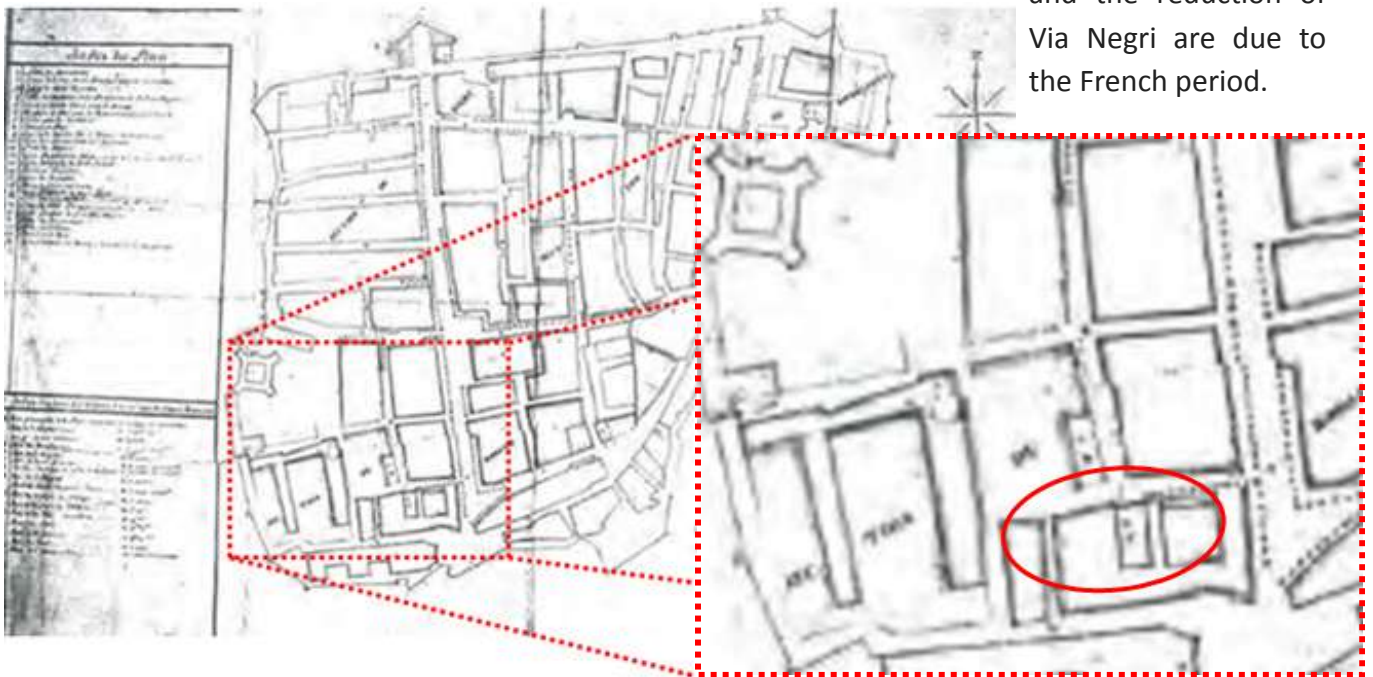
The transformations of the building and the Confraternity over the centuries are closely linked to the complex building transformations of the district, which since the second half of the thirteenth century has been the scene of profound mutations and reorganizations of the building cells due to the presence of numerous Convents seats of Confraternities and religious Congregations.

The cartographic evidence of the city and the territory of Fossano, on paper or parchment, dates back to the second half of the sixteenth century. Fossano is generally represented stylized, surrounded by walls, and with the mighty Acaja Castle



in the foreground. The first representation of the urban layout of the city, with the roads, the design of the blocks and the main monuments dates back to 1682, in the table of *Theatrum Sabaudiae*, engraved on a design by Giovenale Boetto, where, on the bottom of the Castle, the axis of Via Giovanni Negri is well read, continuing along Via Lancimano, from Via Roma to the stands. The north face of the street is well illustrated on the table, where you can see the facades of the palaces and churches. Particular emphasis is given to the church of the Augustinian Fathers of Lombardy who came to Fossano in 1618.

More than a century later, in 1812, Pierre Bernard's *Projet d'alignement de rues de la ville de Fossano* presented a substantial change in the distribution of blocks and alignment of road axes. The urban reorganization and the construction of the building currently home to the ASL (the health company) and the reduction of Via Negri are due to the French period.



The reduction of Via Negri following the urban reorganization of the French period is also clear in the 1960 philological survey, which highlights the construction of the large three-span atrium, hinged between the two wings of the buildings currently home to the ASL. Behind the block of Palazzo Righini there is the large complex of the convent of Santa Chiara and the hospital which ends on the square with the concave and convex front of the Church of the Holy Trinity.

The philological survey has promptly read and represented the curtain north of via Negri with the porticoed sequence between via Roma and the church of the Agostiniani. It highlighted the plan of the church, the entrance hall of Palazzo Righini, aligned with Via Muratori, the large internal courtyard, porticoed on three sides, the two steps placed symmetrically in the two sleeves perpendicular to the main front.



Part of the formal history of the Palace can be read in some black and white photos, dating back to the first half of the twentieth century. In the photos it is possible to gather information on the use of spaces such as the arcades on the ground floor, open towards the courtyard and on the loggia on the main floor, which was closed in the last century.



The building, built on the foundations of pre-existing medieval houses, was originally the convent of the

Augustinian Fathers of Lombardy, settled in Fossano in 1618, with a large courtyard surrounded by a loggia with a double row of arches between the pillars. After the Napoleonic occupation and the suppression of religious orders, the convent became a noble palace, first of the Celebrini family and then of the Righini family.



The church of San Giovanni Battista or Sant'Agostino, commissioned by the Augustinians, is the only one left of the three churches that were originally located in via Negri, each with its bell tower, all depicted by Giovenale Boetto in the aforementioned table of *Theatrum Sabaudiae*. After use as a warehouse and shelter for the troops during the Napoleonic occupation, the church returned to its function and in 1840 became the seat of the Confraternity of th Battuti Neri, also called the Misericordia, which in 1586 was linked to the Roman Confraternity of San Giovanni Decollato. The Battuti Neri, so called by the black dress, during the processions dedicated themselves to the spiritual accompaniment of the prisoners of the Castle and of those condemned to death, as well as assistance to their families. Until the early 1960s the Confraternity was involved in the evocative sacred representations of Good

Friday, since then abandoned together with the use of the church.

Unlike other minor churches in the city, which have a baroque brick cladding, the facade of the church, commonly called the Battuti Neri, is completely plastered and follows a strictly classical language, with a central tympanum supported by a metope frieze. and triglyphs, supported by a pair of giant Doric pilasters placed on a high basement. The

entrance is underlined by a crushed protiro ending in a triangular tympanum similar to that of crowning from the central nave, in turn surmounted by an arch. The church has three naves, a large central nave that ends with the presbytery and a splendid seventeenth-century wooden choir, seems to have been brought here by an older church of Misericordia, located at the time in front of Palazzo Righini, and two side aisles where there are the



chapels with the altars. The barrel vault of the presbytery is painted with fake hexagonal lacunars and with a red velvet canopy, also made of trompe-l'oeil. Even the back wall provides fake perspective environments that increase depth thanks to the trompe-l'oeil technique. In the background there is a faux loggia, distributed on two levels, the first with arches and the second with a balustrade. A third floor further back is an apse with a half-dome, marked by pilasters and ribs. In the wall, only three holes make it possible to illuminate the environment in an evocative way, thanks to the southern exposure of the church's apse, which fills with light a small service corridor whose depth is amplified by the trompe-l'oeil decoration of the loggia.

After the alienation by the heirs of the Righini Barons, which took place in the 60s, inadequate interventions have caused considerable damage, while the Church, in the nearly 50 years in which it has remained abandoned, has suffered a progressive deterioration.

The recent restoration and recovery project, initiated in 2005 by the new owner, was therefore particularly ambitious, both to remedy the damage of time and negligence, and to allow the Palace, a prestigious building, subject to protection since 1927, to be assigned a new function suitable for its conservation and enhancement. The intuition was that of the opportunity of a new use destination, through the transformation of the complex into a high-level tourist accommodation facility. The preservation of a structure of artistic value and the coexistence with a new high-level function, at the cutting edge of technology, according to the rules of current legislation, required a "conservative" and "innovative" approach at the same time, but of great delicacy.

The approach to adapt to new needs, since the design phases, was therefore of utmost caution to make the process of functional/technological adaptation of the least possible invasiveness in



compliance with the law, and with historical, artistic and architectural pre-existences. Careful restoration work was necessary, which recovered important elements such as the paneled fresco dedicated to the Angelic Cori in the ceiling of the staircase, a wooden floor in walnut and cherry from the 1600s, a painted coffered ceiling of the same era and the carved door.

Having to increase by about 25% the space to be allocated to the new hotel, in particular to locate the kitchens and the dining room, it was necessary to recover the missing space in the basement. The excavation, carried out for a depth of about 4 meters with archaeological assistance, covered the entire surface of the Palace and the areas of the two courtyards, getting new areas where the Restaurant, the Caveau of wines, the kitchens, the Spa and the equipment room have

found their place, and required the construction of sub-walls of the outer walls about one meter wide.

The arcades have been completely restored as regards the structure, reinforcing by means of steel "cages" the pillars of the ground floor, deteriorated due to the absorption of humidity caused by inadequate plastering carried out in previous interventions. The loggia and the arcades are an indispensable element for the release of the ground and first floor paths and the possibility of independent access to the various rooms and to the various service areas such as the Lounge Bar and the Breakfast Room. To guarantee the internal practicability, the spaces have been completely closed with wooden frames and panes, taking the model of the original ones.

The roof covering has been completely rebuilt. The wooden warping was removed, analyzed and restored from the ridge beam to the battens. The mantle was made using traditional techniques, maintaining the exposed beams between insulating packets of appropriate thickness and able to meet the legal requirements with regard to environmental comfort. The redevelopment of the roof made it possible to recover the attic floor. The completion of the interior of the rooms was carried out in the last lot of the works and ended in 2012. The interior ceilings of the rooms and connecting areas have exposed beams and pickled wooden plank to finish the thermal coat.

The "Caveau" of the wines, obtained under the courtyard, has been covered by brick barrel vaults, supported by reinforced concrete pillars, concealed from view by the cladding in salvaged bricks.

Even the creation of the dining room has recreated an old-fashioned ambience, with vaults in old bricks and wooden coffered ceilings. In the rooms of the Palace, the wooden ceilings that did not





fulfill the requirements of the law were put in safety and where necessary they were redone and reconstructed according to the methodologies and theories of philological restoration.

The building has been equipped with state-of-the-art equipment, with the aim of encouraging both the comfort for guests and the possibility of management and control. The design of the equipment was a crucial

element of the project that required particular care and attention to detail, with extreme attention to the respect of the elements of the original architectural structure and of the surviving decorative apparatuses.

The thermal and hydro-sanitary systems are supervised by a "Building Automation" system that allows access both locally and remotely. Supervision ensures the regulation of plants, the management and forwarding of alarms and the processing of information, to produce, both in real time and periodically, analyzes and statistics to support management and in particular energy efficiency actions.



All electrical systems are governed by a domotic supervision system, based on an open communication protocol (KonneXion) that allows the integration of different technologies. In particular, the home automation system consists of about 400 input devices (commands) and about 130 output devices (actuators with 4 and 8 channels) that regulate the lighting of the rooms, the access control badges, the emergency commands of the baths, presence detectors and control cameras. The distribution of electrical equipment has been developed with a high selectivity, based on hundreds of switches (divided into about 60 switchboards) whose possible untimely click is detected in real time by the home automation system, allowing the management of the hotel to intervene promptly anticipating any service problems. All the domotic management, together with the fundamental controls of the "Building Automation" system, is displayed on dedicated pages accessible both from the company computers and on touch-screen terminals located in different areas.

The restoration of the building, after particularly demanding years for the structural works, led to the inauguration of the new hotel in successive phases: in the summer of 2009 the Restaurant and the Lounge Bar, in November 2011 the first 14 rooms of the hotel and in July 2012 the completion of the hotel, with the last 10 rooms, the Cigar Room and the Spa.

Also the restoration of the church, financed and personally followed by the property of Palazzo Righini, has brought back to the ancient splendor and returned to the community a prestigious artifact of history and art, which from the early 60s was left in a state of degradation and abandonment . The church is now a comfortable environment, with underfloor heating and air-conditioned air exchange and with all the technological systems necessary for its function as a convention center, all made with home automation technology. All equipment was inserted in a non-invasive way,

minimizing the impact on the structure. For example, the vents for air exchange are located in the floor, in positions hidden by the pillars, while the boxes for electrical connections have been completely eliminated, instead placed in compartments originally present at the base of the side altars, covered by antique planks of wood.

In the church have been restored to perfection some valuable artifacts, such as the beautiful wooden choir, the entrance inner door and



four old chandeliers, recovered and made compliant with security requirements by reconnecting one by one thousands of slides and customizing new candles surmounted by striking bi-spine light bulbs.

The restoration of the church was completed at the end of 2019, with the inauguration of the new Sant'Agostino Congress Center.

The description of Palazzo Righini project, born from a great passion for the recovery of the artistic heritage, from the desire to enhance a rich culture of hospitality and gastronomy and more generally by the desire to promote the taste of beauty, it would not be complete if we do not mention some fundamental values that have guided it: quality, the continuous pursuit of excellence, especially in customer service, innovation. These are all values that are realized thanks to people: their competence, dedication to work, the passion for things well done and the service provided to their customers.

These values are the "fil rouge" that has combined the years of work on the building site with the subsequent opening period of the hotel and which continues today with the continuous recognition that Palazzo Righini receives from its customers. In seven years the construction site has produced hundreds of thousands of hours of work, involving numerous artists and master craftsmen who, with passion and attention to detail, have unearthed innumerable beauties of the ancient noble house.

Then, after the opening of the hotel, a team that has gradually grown to almost 40 resources, all very young, a team put together by the two founding partners on the basis of a common vision: to give space to younger collaborators of value, stimulate them to grow and also to be able to replace those who arrived before them, understanding that this is not a risk, but a great opportunity, because it allows you to build a team capable of achieving ambitious results.

So, for the long effort of restructuring the building as for the subsequent activities of the structure, they always sought resources capable of taking on the problems beyond their responsibilities, able to put the enthusiasm and passion for their work before the economic interest. Only in this way it is possible to aim for superior quality, guaranteed by the atmosphere of the building and by the competence, passion and dedication of the staff to please the customer, attracted by a unique and memorable experience, by good taste and by the satisfaction of being able to feel host of a reborn noble house of the past. Basically: a unique service based on professionalism and experience, without stifling spontaneous naturalness.

Two examples of the fundamental contribution to the project, based on the combination of competence, professionalism, passion and love for beauty, are that of Michela Curetti, the internationally renowned interior designer who has given her unique touch to the atmosphere of the building, and the sculptor Marco Gas, the artist whose work, Anteo, dominates the courtyard.

The aim of Michela's intervention was to give life to a historic building to offer everyone the possibility of being hosted in a noble context reviewed in a contemporary way. The search for detail and materials has been the leitmotif of the design of each environment. The different elements (precious materials, such as brass, marble and silk, trompe l'oeil decorations, the palette of warm and dusty colors and the use of natural textures that enhance the materiality of woods, plasters and fabrics) have allowed to link the history of the building to the contemporary style, building an ideal bridge between the richness of the past and modern "cleaning". As in haute

couture, all these elements were used ad hoc so that each of the 24 rooms had its own soul and that the guest could feel in a home atmosphere and not in the usual standardized uniformity of the hotels.

The sculpture of Marco Gas has been



designed expressly to insert in the courtyard space a form with a great visual impact, which does not alter but rather enhances the balance of the inner courtyard. The sculptor has vertically developed the lance-shaped

form of the work, which exploits a minimum encumbrance on the ground, instead occupying space upwards. The huge leaf, slender, seems to be born with vigor from the stony ground of the courtyard. The name is taken from Greek mythology: Antaios is a figure who gets his invincibility from contact with the ground. In fact, his mother is Gea, the earth: placing his feet on it, Antaios finds and regenerates his strength.

Returning to values, if the central one for the project is the Work, there are other key words: school, continuous learning, continuous challenge to always learn something new, to have to do something every day that you were not able to do the day before. And then others: art, history, harmony, elegance, territory. These values were taken into consideration when creating a photographic exhibition that accompanied the opening moments of Palazzo Righini and whose panels remained to mask the construction site over the long term (late 2009 - early 2012) of overlapping of the renovation works and the first activities of the hotel and in particular of the restaurant.



The photos of Davide Dutto are a tribute to the work that unites those who worked in the construction site with those who began to work in the kitchens, with a story of the passion and talent of craftsmen, cooks, stucco workers





and carpenters who have worked to give life back to life noble residence.

In an artistic, suggestive and poetic way we wanted to make the future Customers participate in what has been accomplished, underlining the values on which the achieved result is based.

The mission of Palazzo Righini is to revive an ancient noble house by opening it to the territory, to offer its guests environments rich in history, taste and beauty: a way of promoting the culture of the territory by creating a bridge between past and present.

