

Visit to the Casa Museo

traduzione a cura di Samuele Rosazza Bertina

The Rosazza Bertina family

The building in which the Casa Museo is based is in the historic core of Rosazza and on the stone architrave of the front entrance there is a summary of the data of the second half of the 19th century, when the building was very probably renovated in a significant way. In particular, proceeding from left, the date 1876 refers precisely to the year in which the renovations were completed, the initials in the middle FRBE are the acronym of the houseowner family, *Fratelli* (Brothers) *Rosazza Bertina Emiliano*, and the 61 on the right is the street number of the time, as the minor streets hadn't a specific denominations, but the entrances were exclusively numbered starting from Concesio bridge moving on to Vittone hamlet.



The Rosazza Bertina family has very old origins and it's divided into several branches, who live both in Piedicavallo and in Rosazza (that was a hamlet of the Municipality of Piedicavallo until 1906). Giovanni Emiliano (1846-1914), mentioned on the architrave, had two sisters (Anna Maria and Maddalena Costanza) and three brothers (Giuseppe Antonio, Giovanni Battista ed Emiliano Giovanni, the last two of whom died at a very young age) and was a bricklayer. The wife Vittoria Rosazza Gianin gave him four children: a hand-embroidery made by the second-born daughter Clemenina after 1888 in memory of the deceased mother is housed in the bedroom. The last-born son Ernesto married Adelina Gianotti and the two had Maria Vittoria, the last owner of the family house who sold it to the Casa Museo (to trace back Rosazza Bertina family's line of descent cf. the Archive of the Municipality of Rosazza, where the population register is housed, with the individuation of family units and professions of every member, as well as birth and death certificates. Of paramount importance was Gianni Valz Blin's research, that reassembled a complete picture of the family trees, as well as the data available in the cemetery of Rosazza, where the family vault preserve the memory of the succession of generations and in particular of Rosazza Bertina Giovanni [Battista] and Maddalena [Rosazza Minghet]'s branch since the beginning of the 19th century. Two big portraits of Giovanni Emiliano and Vittoria are housed in the bedroom of the Casa Museo, on the wall in front of the bed, at the sides of the window. Giovanni Battista

Rosazza Bertina (1809-1874) e Maddalena Rosazza Minghet, parents of the above-mentioned Giovanni Emiliano, are photographed as well in a rare picture from the mid-nineteenth century.

The building

The difficulty to find pictorial cadastral maps supporting the mutation and transfer registers makes it difficult to countercheck the features of the buildings with what is registered in the descriptive volumes of the properties. It is therefore possible to underline the peculiarities of this building, that since 1985, when the Comunità Montana purchased it, accommodates the ethnographical museum of the Alta Valle del Cervo, only through a direct survey of the architecture.

The house shows the typical traits of the valley building tradition, as the use of local materials hunting for essentiality and functional efficiency of the rooms. To guarantee as little soil occupation as possible, the building is high-rise, with four floors above ground plus the attic, on the corner between 25 Pietro Micca Street and Mosca Moro street. The presence of two detached stairwells, with the first flights built in masonry and stone treads and the upper ones made of wood, suggests that the current distribution configuration is due to the unification of two originally detached units. The structure is built in stone bearing masonry, with wood horizontal elements and walls decorated with different ornamental patterns in the rooms from the first floor up, as flowers and repetitive stylized geometrical patterns that find expression in a multicoloured spirals strapwork on the ceiling of the bedroom.

The interior organization of the rooms follows a strengthened pattern, especially on the ground floor, where the presence of a kitchen and a stable, and a single access door, testify to the commixture between inhabitants and the few livestock; the bedrooms were on the upper floors, while above them was the hayloft. Moreover, the good state of preservation of the building, the fact that it has not undergone any renovation or restructuring interventions in the last century, and the considerable number of available rooms are parameters that certainly played an important role in the purchase phase, allowing the collective heritage to acquire a property that, in its simplicity, shows elements of value, whose significance lies not only in the aesthetic component but also in the cultural value of its new function as museum of the Alta Valle del Cervo community, within which unique objects and documents are housed. Collective passports, passes from the French revolutionary era, dowry documents of women about to marry next to tools of the harsh peasant life, and precision instruments for surveying and measurement used by valley entrepreneurs are just some of the precious testimonies that have brought new life to this house, which, although anonymously nestled in the building fabric, contains within it a content of memory and emotions.

We now start our visit to the 16 rooms of the Casa Museo, beginning from the ground floor, whose rooms will be described from left to right. Then, using the stairwell of the first residential, we will ascend through the building, continuing the visit floor by floor until we reach the attic. On each level, rooms will be described again from left to right.

Ground floor

1. The Kitchen

This was the room where the family gathered, prepared and ate meals, got warm, and welcomed friends on cold days for evening *vëggia*, during which collective matters were discussed, embroidery was done, stories were told, card games were played, and sometimes prayers were said. The vaulted room is illuminated by two windows with grilles overlooking the narrow street and furnished with mostly wall-fixed traditional wooden furniture pieces: the one-legged folding table (*taoulët*); the two-door cabinet with curtains for displaying the most exquisite dishes; the deep cupboard built into the thickness of the wall containing everyday utensils.

For heating the room, a cast iron stove (*potagè*), with a copper hot water boiler and a tap for dispensing water and a stone fireplace, were used; the latter contains the cauldron supported by a chain (*chejna dal fornèl*), which was held in place by a metal foot-shaped stopper during the stirring of the polenta. On the grooved stone shelf rested the water bucket (*sigèla*), taken from the fountain or the stream. Among all the everyday objects on display: the wooden and metal coffee and spice grinder made in Forgnengo, and the early 19th-century mannequin of the two deaf-mute painters, Mosca Moro di Rosazza, dressed in a woman's work attire.



2. The Stable

In every private building of the Alta Valle del Cervo, there was always a dual residential and rural function. The diet, based on dairy products and chestnuts gathered from the forests, was fundamental and almost exclusive in a territory poor in resources and rather scarce in agricultural products. In the houses, even those of the bourgeoisie, there was indeed a small stable that could house one, at most two cows; the entrance from the street was therefore shared by both the inhabitants and the livestock.

The room seems to be carved out of stone: the walls, the barrel vault, and the floor sloping from the hayrack (*grèpia*) towards the gutter for collecting animal dejection (*chintan-a*) are all made of stonework. Among the other work tools on display, representative ones are the wooden slatted milking bucket (*galèja*) and the three-legged milking stool (*scagn*).



3. The trades of man

Since time immemorial, the men of the Valley have combined the two professions of stonemason and master builder: they knew how to rough-hew and finish off the surface of the stone blocks they quarried or sourced from the river and then set them in the masonry. Since the sixteenth century, they have been appreciated for their technical skills and manual abilities in every construction site they worked: from the Milan Cathedral to the Certosa of Pavia, from the Savoy fortifications to the roads. Even after the unification of Italy, the valit continued their commitment in Italy and worldwide: the Frejus tunnel, numerous roads, tunnels, and railways in every region of the peninsula, and many other works in China, the United States of America, South America, Africa, Russia, and many other European nations. In this room, once used as a sand and wine storage, the tools of the mason, carpenter, and stonemason are collected. In particular, the work of the latter is also documented by a series of photographs taken at the Quarona quarry in San Paolo Cervo in the years 1950-55, where the Vercellotti company of Balma operated. Among the most characteristic objects are the variety of stone points and chisels (*ponce*, *ponciot*, and *scopej*), hammers and mallets (*testu*, *mazzèt*, *piciantun*, *mazza gema*), as well as the squaring tools, trowels (*catsòle*), templates for mouldings, and floats (*sparavél*).



First floor

4. The Valley Builders / Male Emigration

Since the 1700s, some of the most skilled stonemasons and master builders from the Upper Valley became renowned as master builders, especially in the construction of fortifications in Piedmont and Savoy (Exilles, l'Esseillon, Fenestrelle, Bard). During the reign of Napoleon I, associated companies from Rosazza, coordinated by Vitale Rosazza Pistolet and Giorgio Mosca Moro, won contracts and built the pass roads of Moncenisio and the Sempione. After the end of French rule, they marked out the roads from La Spezia to Parma and, in the latter city, for Maria Luigia of Austria, constructed the bridge over the Taro, the Ducal Palace, and the Royal Theatre. Under the unified state, they worked on the dry docks of La Spezia, the Sardinian railways, the Borgallo tunnel under the Apennines, and numerous other public works throughout Italy. During this period, transoceanic emigration began, first to South and North America, then to Asia and Africa.

The succession of departures and returns, once so regular that it set the social rhythms of the community remaining at home, ensuring that marriages were celebrated in the winter period after men's return to the Valley, became, over time, extremely variable and no longer seasonal as in the past.

In this room, alongside the topographical instruments from the Professional Schools of Rosazza, founded in 1869, are exhibited photographs of works carried out by local companies, union cards of stonemasons working in the United States, site notes, statements from institutions certifying the skills of local technicians, and a list of emigration-related deaths from the Rosazza Parish in the period 1800-2000, totalling 200 individuals.

5. The Valley Institutions

This room documents two of the three Workers' Mutual Aid Societies that operated in the Upper Valley: the one in Campiglia Cervo, founded in 1871, and the one in Rosazza, from 1892, whose archives are largely preserved in the Casa Museo. The two social flags are displayed here, and for Rosazza, there is also a commemorative diploma of the flag's christening with a photograph of the event taken by Simone Rossetti in February 1892, in which the writer Edmondo De Amicis, the godfather of the flag, is depicted in the front row.

Topographical instruments and photographs from the Professional Schools of Rosazza, with graphic diagrams, recall this important institution established in 1869, seven years after the one in Campiglia Cervo.

In the display cases are displayed passports of valley stonemasons from the first half of the 19th century and photographs of groups of contractors from Rosazza working in Sardinia on railway construction, young masons from Oriomosso working in 1866 on the Frejus tunnel, and some notable figures from Rosazza, including Senator Federico Rosazza Pistolet, a great philanthropist from the Biella area.

Among the various documents in the room are notebooks and syllabi from the Professional Schools, cash books and minutes of the Workers' Societies, statutes and regulations, along with a surveyor's decametre chain for measuring lengths and some lamps used during tunnel work.

Second floor

6. The Ages of Woman

The woman has been the cornerstone of valley society, handing down the teachings and the values of tradition in the absence of emigrated men. Engaged in agricultural and construction work and especially in transporting all kinds of loads with the *gerla* (a type of basket), she sustained her family with her heavy labour, while the man's earnings were used for extraordinary needs and savings. In this room, the cycle of life has been reconstructed: birth, marriage, and motherhood. On display are objects and photographs: the festive dress and some children's trousseaus, ancient dowry inventories, the walker in which a child could take a few steps back and forth (*andarin*), the cradle, a branding iron for wooden objects, particularly for the chest containing the dowry, swaddling bands, and children's toys. On the walls are two scenes from the same wedding, in its civil and religious versions, celebrated in the early 1900s.

7. Female Craftsmanship

The valley woman, during her free time from agricultural tasks and work at construction sites, particularly in the winter months, attended free cutting, sewing and embroidery courses at a seamstress of the village. She knew how to make *scapin* (the traditional type of shoes), shirts, and everyday clothes. She grew and spun hemp, gathering the stalks into bundles, drying them in the sun, beating them, and soaking them in water pools (*gorc dla canva*). At the Biella market, she bartered the thread for hemp cloth, woven in other valleys, which she hemmed and embroidered for the trousseau.

In this room, there are collected garments, photographs, a pedal sewing machine, and a six-sided cast-iron coal stove that kept irons hot and ready to be used. Additionally, there are tools used for processing hemp and wool, including a steel-toothed comb to card and break hemp fibres (*pècio*), wooden spindles for winding spun fibre, and a triangular spindle holder (*fus and fusera*).



8. The Bedroom

The room is furnished with a series of traditional furniture pieces, the most representative of which are the sleigh bed (*lecc*), the chest, the dresser, the washstand with the bucket and the jug, the copper bed warmers and terracotta foot warmers (*bojote* and *cruz*), the terracotta container to

hold embers (*coco*), as well as an embroidered picture made by Clementina Rosazza Bertina in memory of her deceased mother.

This room has the richest decorative apparatus, with intertwined scrolls in the ceiling paintings and stylized floral themes stencilled in a blue/salmon pink bichrome on the walls. The window design on the wall where the bed is located is also interesting: the asymmetric reveal is the result of a functional need to allow sunlight into the room in a very dense urban fabric, where the presence of natural light is limited to a few hours a day.



Third floor and attic

9. Fashion

In this room, a series of garments, primarily women's clothing, are on display, documenting the late 19th century fashion. Among them are two wedding dresses, one white and one black, paired with their respective footwear. The collection of bodices is particularly interesting, made of various materials and colours, some enriched with laces hand-embroidered by local women and buttons of various sizes. The pink silk suit is very elegant, whereas the material used for the coats is rougher. Men's fashion is represented by a cadet uniform from the Military School of Modena and two jacket-trouser suits, with cuts not very different from today's styles.

10. Elementary School

This room a classroom from the Umbertine period is reconstructed, modelled on a photograph (complete with a graphic scheme for recognizing the girls portrayed) that depicts a multi-grade female class, divided into two elementary cycles of three years each, for the school year 1891-92. The teacher of the municipal girls' elementary school in Rosazza, Caterina Borgarino, taught forty-six students divided into six courses. The same teacher appears in another photo twenty years later, with her mixed multi-grade class, divided now into five courses.

The desks come from the Montesinaro kindergarten (chosen for space reasons), while the teacher's desk, various furnitures, the teaching tools and the blackboard, which still retains an original drawing of the Rosazza castle dating back to 1937, were donated by the Rialmosso Elementary School. There are also collected a physical map of Italy, a wooden school bag, pencil

cases, inkwells, and fabric samplers with embroidered alphabets and numbers dating back to 1833 and 1876.



11. The Farewell Room

Descending back to the third floor, the visit concludes in the farewell room, where the various stages of making *scapin*, the traditional hand-quilted hemp cloth shoes, are documented. The skilled artisans of the Valley produced these shoes both for their families and for a broader external market.

On the walls is a collection of veils worn for liturgical celebrations (*queffa*) and colourful head and shoulder scarves that are part of the traditional costume, as well as a large collection of books and publications about the Casa Museo. The original first banner of the Comunità Montana Alta Valle del Cervo - La Bürsch and the embroidered banner of the *Gruppo Valëtta an Gîpoun* stand out. Various suitcases remind visitors of the destiny of the valley men.

This is also where the visitor says goodbye to their guide, can pick up brochures, informational material about the Casa Museo and surrounding thematic itineraries, and get information about the valley territory, its historical events, and the curiosities the visit may have aroused. This is also where the "guestbook" is kept, in which the tourist, now almost a guest, leaves a trace of his visit, sometimes just with his name and origin, and sometimes with phrases that, besides compliments and appreciation, reveal the emotion of a journey into the past and a sweet nostalgia for the times of the ancestors.

We now ascend to the Attic via the stairwell of the first residential unit. Once we have explored the attic and the "Cobbler's Corner," we will descend to the ground floor using the stairwell of the second residential unit. On each level during the descent, we will describe the room located on the right.

12. The Attic

The spacious attic area has been made accessible and safe after extraordinary roof maintenance work. Although this involved the insertion of a boarding beneath the stone slabs, altering the original configuration where the supporting structure directly supported the covering, it certainly

offers greater durability and stability. The various exhibition spaces are used to display another series of objects belonging to the tradition. First, all types of tools used in the Valley for shoulder transport have been collected: the *favera* and *scësta*, with a loose weave, and the *scistun*, with a fine weave, as well as the crava for transporting squared construction stones, all with twisted branch shoulder straps (*tórtè*). Two backpacks are placed on three-legged hinged stands (*cavalët*), made of ash, a tool useful for women for loading and unloading.

Also noteworthy are the measures for grain capacity and haymaking tools, while in another space, carpenter's tools are displayed, from various types of saws to special hammers used for carving wooden trunks to make gutters.

In the third set-up corner, bottling tools and objects such as the palette for spreading *miasce* batter (*purala*) and the mould (*fer da miasce*), two pairs of wooden skis, and rudimentary snowshoes are collected.

13. The Cobbler

On the intermediate landing before accessing the attic, the cobbler's workshop is reconstructed, with a shoemaker's bench crowded with tools and shoe lasts. The footwear is particularly interesting, including the hobnailed shoes worn by men and women throughout the territory at the beginning of the 20th century.

Third floor

14. The Rustic Storage (la strèja)

This space was used to store and dry chestnuts and other foods to be consumed throughout the year. It now houses a collection of precious black-and-white photographs depicting the most important rural buildings constructed outside the villages, at high altitudes, to be used as stables and residences by women during the period spent in the mountain pastures, which lasted from spring to autumn with successive ascents to different altitudes. The images were taken by Federico Hary, Alfonso Sella, and Gianni Valz Blin in the early 1960s and attest to the solidity and sober essentiality of this type of entirely dry-stone construction, typical of the valley. Only the corners and lintels were made of split stone, while the walls were made of irregularly shaped stones found on site. The floor plans drawn by Valz Blin, pinpointing each building, indicate how widespread rural clusters (almost always consisting of two or three constructions) were in each valley.

The images constitute a final testament to the poor pastoral economy of the *valëtta* women, which was abandoned precisely in the 1960s. The alpine pasture constructions, neglected due to disuse, have inexorably succumbed to the action of the weather, transforming the landscape so much that today, climbing the slopes, very few of the buildings documented here can be recognized.



Second floor

15. The "Nello Casale" Room

The room is dedicated to Nello Casale (1929-1997), mayor of Quittengo and president of the Comunità Montana dell'Alta Valle del Cervo a great administrator and a life mentor for many who drew example of social commitment and moral rigor from him. The room currently functions as a space for temporary thematic exhibitions, but it was originally intended as a video room where films about the Bürsch and the making of scapin were shown. On the walls, Casale's poems in the local dialect, with Italian translations, were displayed.

First floor

16. The processing of milk and laundry

The low-ceilinged, vaulted room with a fireplace on the wall was used for processing the small amount of milk produced in the stable by the few livestock kept for family consumption. A vent built into the terracotta floor, covered by a wooden board, allowed animal heat to rise from the stable below, supplementing the temperature of this room during the cold season. On the grooved stone slab, there are large stave containers with metal chain shoulder straps shaped like churns (*butz dal cheijne*) used for transporting water from the fountains or the stream to the home.

In the stone fireplace, supported by a chain, hangs a copper cauldron (*caudera*) used for curdling and cheese-making. On display are also butter moulds with sides and plunger-type (*marca dal bero*) and cheese moulds made of sheet metal, Ronco terracotta, and maple wood (*fraciët*). On the wall, a photograph from the late 1950s depicts two women (*uitte*) from Niel, a hamlet of Gaby in the Aosta Valley, carrying a load of dairy products in a basket, showing the intense trade of these products from the Gressoney Valley to the Cervo Valley through the Mologna Piccola pass.

In addition to the tools for milk processing (*fè la guija*), the room shows the method of washing laundry with wood ash. The most important tool was the stave washtub (*scanà* or *sciubbe dla boà*). It was filled with everything that had been soaped at the washhouse, placed carefully piece by piece in order of cleanliness: the dirtiest rags at the bottom, the garments on top. A white hemp cloth (*sciandrej dla boà*) was laid over the pile, topped by a coarser cloth, on which the sifted ash, fine as powder, was placed. Only special ash from beechwood, which was clear and without

tannin. From that moment on, there was always a pot of water on the stove or fireplace, which, once it boiled, was poured over the ash. This process continued until the water flowing out of the hole in the tub was as hot as when it was poured over the ash: the laundry was done. It was a long task, often finishing by evening. The next day, the women would carry the laundry to the washhouse with the scistun, to rinse the garments in the basin with cleaner water, and then hang them out to dry on the drying racks.

