

Clarence's Description Of The Creation Of Casa Fontanalba

Box 2. # 131 of Marcus Bicknell's family collection. Transcribed from photocopy Of Clarence's "Notes on Casa Fontanalba".

The cottage after a design by Robert MacDonald was built in the summer and autumn of 1905 by Sr. Lanteri of Tenda, with the assistance of Sr. Arturo Pellegrino. The cemented terrace was done in the spring of 1906 and in June we came to inhabit it. The woodwork both outside and inside was repainted afterwards, part of it in 2 summers by G.B. Olivia of Bordighera, and the rest by his nephew Angelo Oliva later.

A woodshed was put up by my factotum Luigi Pollini, and garden paths, bridges, the water course, etc. arranged by him. He also planted mountain ash, alpine laburnum, firs and pines & made beds for currants, strawberries, and vegetables. My nephews, E, J & A Berry & their wives gave much assistance in the beginning, by helping to clear the builders' rubbish away, and fill up the bad places with earth and turf. In 1910 a little more land was [acquired] and a wire netting fence put up to protect the garden from cows and goats. When we came there were only a few young larches which had not been more or less injured by the goats, but since then the trees have grown rapidly and great numbers have sown themselves. After 10 [years] beside the 8 large trees, there were about 450 larches and Scotch firs (*Pinus silvestris*) of various sizes from 1 ft high upwards. Some Siberian apples & plum presented to me by Prof. [Wolfgeot?] of Lausanne died the first winter, and the cherry trees we have put in have not succeeded. Red & black currants, also strawberries have been a thorough success. Potatoes, carrots, turnips, beetroot, leeks, lettuce, celery, spinach, cabbage have done well, but peas, beans and gourds of different kinds have produced their fruit too late and in small quantity. Among the edible plants growing wild in the garden are strawberries, raspberries, bilberries, gooseberries, various species of sorrel, King Henry (*Chenopodium bonus Henricus*), dandelion, caraway, and we have planted rhubarb and brought in from the neighbourhood [Monte's] rhubarb (*Rumex alpinus*). Both of these are very useful. About 450 species of flowering plants and ferns have been in the garden since 1906, including those introduced from the neighborhood, but many of these latter have disappeared. Many others also have been choked by the growth of the larger plants, and the numbers well established and likely to remain is about 350. It is interesting to note that *Junipera Sabina* (a rare plant of the Maritime Alps), *Prunus Mahaleb* (known in the surrounding region), as well as *Allium fallax*, *Hypochaeris maculata*, *Epilobium Dodonaei* and others are in the garden.

The house has been furnished as simply and inexpensively as possible, with wooden bedsteads, plain wooden tables, made by the Tenda carpenter, common chairs and American folding ones, without wardrobes, carpets, or hangings, the only exceptions being some cushions given by a friend for a sofa-bed, and some small mats (7 in number) made by ourselves with horn patterns. 64 horns in all. As the house was built to enable us to continue our studies of the prehistoric rock figures in the valleys here, the half of which, some 6000 or more, represent horns of various forms and sizes, and which without doubt had to the sculptors a special religious or symbolical meaning; horns have [been] painted in all parts of the house (106 in all), inside and out, and especially over doors and windows to prevent the entrance of evil spirits, goblins, witches, etc.

Nearly every year some part of the house has been decorated with rough or conventional representations of wild plants, and with proverbs and sentences mostly written in Esperanto.

There follows a summary of these decorations, 12 pages, yet to be transcribed. The pdf copy is 2mb large and is available on request from info@clarencebicknell.com.