



## A Tribute to Sally and Carl Gable

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### Abstract

Bruce Boucher prefaces the special “Palladio Century” issue of the Nexus Network Journal with a tribute to Sally and Carl Gable.

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I am grateful to Steve Wassell for the opportunity to pay tribute to Carl and Sally, whom I have known since the early 1990s when I was at work on my *Andrea Palladio: The Architect in his Time*. Our acquaintance came shortly after they acquired the Villa Cornaro at Piombino Dese in 1989. The chance spotting of an ad in *The New York Times* led the Gables to one of the most perfect of Palladio’s creations, and the tribulations of negotiating with the Italian state as well as the challenges of conserving a historic building have been well chronicled in Sally’s enchanting book, *Palladian Days*. As Sally wrote, “Life is opera, as every Italian knows, and if ordinary routine does not provide the requisite drama, then drama must be contrived”.

I had, of course, known the Villa Cornaro much earlier under previous owners, but I found the atmosphere more welcoming and positive with the advent of the Gables. Their devotion to that marvellous villa is reflected in the story of how they became respected members of the local community of Piombino Dese, commuting there each fall and spring from their native Atlanta. Nothing is ever simple in Italy, but their love for the villa and its environs shines through the pages of the book as, indeed, in all of their endeavours. In addition, Carl delved deeply into the history of the villa and became an authority on its architecture and on freemasonry, which, he has argued, informs its eighteenth-century frescoes by Mattia Bortoloni. Certainly, they left the Villa Cornaro in an excellent state of repair when they sold it last year.

I got to know Carl better when I came to the University of Virginia as director of its art museum in 2009. Carl asked me to join the board of the Center for Palladian Studies in America, of which he was then chairman. This may have come about

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through our mutual friend, the late and lamented Mario di Valmarana, but I was glad to join in the work of such a cause. More than a booster group, the Center played a significant role in focusing the study of Palladian architecture in America since its founding in 1979, especially through the series of scholarly publications that appeared under the rubric *By the Book* as well as support for Douglas Lewis's *The Drawings of Andrea Palladio* (2000) and major touring exhibitions such as *Palladio and His Legacy* (2011). A great connector of people and projects, Carl helped to make those works possible and proved an adept fundraiser. He was primarily responsible for the revival of the publication series of the Center, which was re-founded as the Mario di Valmarana Memorial Series with the publication of Peter Hodson's *The Design and Building of Bremo* in 2012. After 10 years as president, Carl retired in 2014, when I took over from him for 2 years before my own "translation" to London. Fortunately, Carl remains in touch and still follows the Center's work from Atlanta.

One of Carl's most endearing qualities is his unassuming nature, a remarkable trait when one considers the breadth of his achievements and the number of boards he has graced with his presence. All of us who value Renaissance architecture will remain grateful to Carl and Sally for their stewardship of the Villa Cornaro and for the ideals that it embodies.

Bruce Boucher, FSA,  
Director, Sir John Soane's Museum,  
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**Bruce Boucher** Became Director of Sir John Soane's Museum in May 2016. He taught for over 20 years at University College London before entering the museum world as curator and head of European Sculpture, Decorative Arts, and Ancient Art at the Art Institute of Chicago (2002–2009). He subsequently served as Director of the University of Virginia Art Museum (2009–2016). He is the author of a number of books, among them: *The Sculpture of Jacopo Sansovino* (1991), *Andrea Palladio: the Architect in his Time* (1994, revised, 1998 and 2007), *Italian Baroque Sculpture* (1998), and *Earth and Fire: Italian Terracotta Sculpture from Donatello to Canova* (editor, 2001).