

Press Release

Italy's most beautiful garden 2014 is a Swedish cultural institution

For over a decade now the “Italy's Most Beautiful Garden” contest initiated by architect Leandro Mastria has singled out private and public parks and gardens that are open to visitors. The aim is to promote “quality green tourism” at the national and international level and thereby enable a wider audience to discover this asset – whose value is currently underappreciated.

In the twelfth edition of this contest, whose entries become more numerous every year, Villa San Michele on Capri was selected as the winner of the Private Gardens category and Real Bosco di Capodimonte in Naples as the winner of the Public Parks category.

The scientific committee, consisting of seven academics, experts and active gardening professionals, chose to reward two uniquely beautiful jewels of Nature via an assessment of their botanical and art historical interest, level of preservation, management and maintenance, accessibility, services and facilities, relationship with visitors and tourism-promoting measures.

In Villa San Michele's garden visitors can admire a large number of typical Mediterranean plants but also others which originate from other latitudes and which were specially selected by Axel Munthe for their special beauty or symbolic importance. The garden, with its long avenues, walkways and protected nooks, is perfectly created for strolling and meditation. The garden follows the design of its creator, Axel Munthe, and as the home of his dreams is “open for the sun and the wind and the voices of the sea – like a Greek temple – and light, light, light everywhere!” with a succession of blooms throughout the year. The main building opens out onto the greenery via a sculpture loggia, which is succeeded by the pergola, a colonnade consisting of 37 white *caprese* columns along the entire long side of the garden. Roses, jasmine and wisteria follow this path, which leads up to the lookout point with the mysterious Sphinx and a superb view across the Bay of Naples.

Flowerbeds of *Cineraria*, pansies and petunias, and groups of azaleas, hydrangeas and magnolias are everywhere. In terms of tree species we find various types of stone pines as well as palm trees and lemon trees plus an

ancient *Melaleuca armillaris*. A silver birch tree (*Betula pendula*) in the shadow of the cypresses reminds us of Axel Munthe's native land, Sweden. In the garden we also find a *Bassia saxicola* (also known as *Kochia saxicola* and in Italian as *granata rupicola*), which grows wild on Capri and which, with a few exceptions, is extinct in the rest of the world.

Today Villa San Michele is a Swedish cultural institution, managed by the San Michele Foundation under the leadership of the Swedish honorary consul Staffan de Mistura. He comments on the award with pleasure:

*“On behalf of both San Michele and the island of Capri we are proud that our garden is **Italy's most beautiful garden for 2014**. This is very largely due to the passion and knowledge with which our head gardener, Raffaele Scarpato, has succeeded in keeping this pearl of Nature intact and admired by our visitors, and we will all do our best to ensure that this important honour will be reaffirmed in the future as well.”*

With the aim of increasingly making the garden and museum a living environment, the cultural activities programme for the 2015 season will continue to encompass music, drama, film and literature.