

# davide groppi

## Lighting Vittorio Emanuele's Flat at the Castle of Moncalieri

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The royal castle in Moncalieri stands tall on top of a hill near Torino.

It has been on UNESCO's World Heritage list with a few other residences of the House of Savoy since 1997.

Davide Groppi collaborated with architects Beppe Merlano (from Archeostudio) and Maria Carla Visconti (from SBAPTo), as well as a team of experts, to come up with a lighting solution that would provide dynamic illumination of the spaces in the flat, using special versions of Davide Groppi lamps and Totem for ambient lighting.

"The light in Vittorio Emanuele II's flat at the castle of Moncalieri was designed to tell a story and describe a space that unfortunately doesn't exist anymore.

The lamps used to illuminate the walls and the light present in each single room change cyclically in a dynamic manner so as to create the correct levels of contrast and therefore allow the viewer to read both what is there now and what was there before.

The light 'that comes and goes' is used to show first the true aspect of these rooms, which unfortunately have been severely damaged over time, and then to give a very specific idea of what they looked like before the fire."

Davide Groppi

Architectural Project: Arch. Beppe Merlano and Arch. Maria Carla Visconti

Lighting Project: Davide Groppi Projects Department

Lighting Devices: special Modulo variations and Totem

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PRESS OFFICE

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## ABOUT THE PROJECT

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### The Fire

Vittorio Emanuele II's flat at Moncalieri can be found on the first floor, or "piano nobile" of the castle, on the right side of the central sleeve. It extends all the way to the southeast tower.

Before the fire on 5 April, 2008, the disposition of the interiors was basically due to a redecoration project carried out by the architect Demenico Ferri around the middle of the 19th century, as requested by Vittorio Emanuele II himself and Maria Adelaide of Hapsburg.

The fire took place in the top portion of the southeast tower, but severely damaged the piano nobile as well, completely destroying several rooms beyond recognition.

The rooms affected by the fire directly were further damaged by water to put the fire out and the caving in of the upper floor. The only rooms that maintained some sense of their original structure, including the walls and the furniture, were the Queen's bedroom and the Wardrobe.

The treasured "Gabinetto di Toeletta" or the Queen's Dressing Room was completely destroyed, as was the adjacent "Sala del Proclama" (the Proclamation Room) and the King's Bedroom nearby.

The fact the condition of the rooms was so diversified after the fire created huge problems in determining a restoration project that could reconstruct what had been damaged in a philologically correct and coherent fashion.

While there were a few rooms that remained basically unaltered, the area around the tower where the fire had begun was completely destroyed beyond recognition, both structurally and decoratively. Furthermore, the interiors that had been damaged the most were in very different conditions. The Queen's Bedroom, the Master Wardrobe and the King's Dressing Room could be restored in a "traditional" fashion. However, the Queen's Dressing Room, the Proclamation Room and the King's Bedroom could not be restored in any conventional way. There simply was an insufficient amount of remaining material to get an idea as to how they looked before the fire. To make matters worse, there was little or no documentation about these rooms in the official archives.

A "where it was/how it was" reconstruction, even with the best of intentions, would in fact have been impossible, also considering the difficult task of how to manage residual portions of the fixed furnishings such as the chambranes, parts of the sculpted woodwork and the lower portion of the furnishings in the Queen's Dressing Room, which had survived total destruction and, in some places, even maintained their gold plating. A complete reconstruction meant necessarily having to remove all of these.

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### Restoration.

A restoration project was developed with the prime objective of saving all that was salvageable, starting from the wooden floors, most of which had survived the fire but nevertheless were in very bad condition.

The choice to preserve and consolidate everything that had not been completely destroyed led to experimentation with innovative techniques to treat all charred portions of the interiors. In a similar way, the paint that had remained on surfaces was also preserved and safeguarded. Traces of decorations dating back to the destruction of wall-paper and woodwork associated with the "modernisation" of the interiors as requested by Vittorio Emanuele II was also preserved.

Once how to restore and preserve the surfaces of the rooms had been established, the question was how to make these interiors presentable and pleasant without wiping out completely all traces of their prior history. The fire was not to remain as a central, dramatic issue.

An "evocative" restoration of the rooms that had been completely destroyed was done by displaying what had survived the fire, as well as using special PVC scrim, on which faithful reproductions of pre-existing wall-paper, woodwork, decorum, paintings, chambranes and furnishings on the walls and ceilings were printed in monochromatic tones. A special transparent covering was also put on the walls, allowing visitors to get a glimpse of their actual condition underneath.

A lighting system was placed inside the external support frame, allowing for both evocation of the lost disposition of the rooms or a view of what had remained and been restored after the fire, thanks to the switching on and off of lights connected to a dimmer.

Suggestions as to the predominate colour of each room was also provided by projecting delicate shades of light.

In the Queen's Bedroom and the Master Wardrobe, the PVC scrim were only applied for a visual reconstruction of the vaults. In the other rooms, the scrim were also used to recreate the walls and ceilings.

The rooms were also equipped with technological totems that provide, together with the controls for electricity, illumination and a safety system, touch screens with which it is possible to witness in a very detailed manner the final outcome of the restoration thanks to UHD photography taken before the "evocative" restoration.

These images were included in an interactive, educational project that allows the viewer to see what the rooms looked like before the fire with comments of explanation.

Design team for the "evocative" restoration:

Beppe Merlano (Archeostudio) and Maria Carla Visconti (SBAPTo)

Executive design in collaboration with the architects Nadia Ostorero (SBAPTo) and Stefano Galletti (Archeostudio)

Creation of lighting prototypes and technical studies for illumination:

Davide Groppi Projects Department

Construction: Dario Gusmini (FAP Resine) in association with Guerini (metal carpentry)

Graphic design: Mario Rota and Leonia Casaglia.

Special thanks to the Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali e del Turismo - Polo Museale Regionale del Piemonte.

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