



SHERATON

Diana Majestic Milan

Our History



Telling the story of the Diana Majestic means talking about the habits and the customs of the middle to upper class Milanese who made this elegant hotel their rendezvous to eat in the restaurant, to swim in the pool, to dance or even to see a theatrical production.



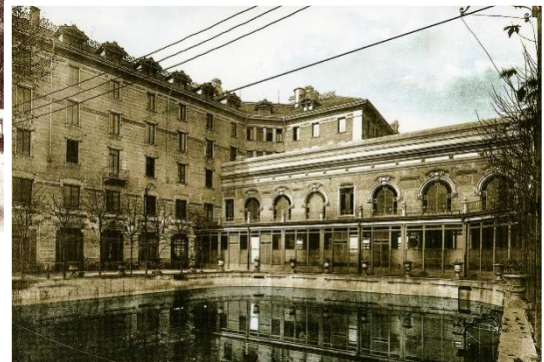
General view of the building

To begin the story we need to go back to 1842 when, near the East Gate of the city, Porta Orientale (which today is Porta Venezia), the first public swimming pool in Italy was opened: “Diana’s Bath”. The pool was 100m long and 25 wide and constructed around it were 120 changing rooms, showers, party rooms, billiard rooms, restaurant, coffee shop and garden.

In actual fact there was very little of “public” about it, since access was granted only to a certain class of Milanese families. To maintain the bon ton, two people surveyed the pool: the spectacled Mr. Febo Franchi, who managed the property for forty years without ever having a swim; and Bacioch, the lifeguard who was always armed with a long stick which he extended to any swimmers in difficulty.

The rules were few but precise; the ladies could have access to the pool only in the morning, it was forbidden to raise one’s voice above a level that could be considered as good manners and, whoever entered the coffee shop was not allowed to sit by the windows to watch the swimmers.

Next to the establishment, shows or theatrical productions were organized which attracted many people. An event which made history was without doubt the hot-air balloon flight driven by Carlo Rossi on May 2nd. 1847. Later on, in 1877, a large square of ground was covered in asphalt and the owners imported a large number of roller skates directly from England. This novelty was very popular with the habitués of Diana's Bath who could once again count on an exciting innovation.



In 1904 the Hotel Diana was inaugurated and even this represented a first: it was the only building that was constructed specially as a hotel. In fact, up till then, all the grand hotels were older buildings originally built for other purposes and subsequently converted into hotels.

However the date that the true birth of the Diana is remembered by is 1908, when it was decided to construct a new recreational complex (all of 15.000sqm). This was in order to provide the Porta Venezia area with an elegant amusement center; hence the birth of the Kursaal Diana.

The buildings were all constructed around the pool, which then with time became gradually covered and replaced by an open games park. This subsequently included the theatre, the artists' dressing rooms, the hotel-meuble, a restaurant and a sphere court for pelota.

In 1920, just a few steps away from the hotel, the Fiera Campionaria (Trade Fair) was inaugurated and from that moment the Diana became the place to stay for generations of important Italian and foreign industrialists who attended the fairs. In addition, the jewelers who exhibited at the fair considered it unsafe to display their goods in a wooden stand, so a suitable arrangement was set up for them in the dining room of the Diana.

On March 23rd. 1921 the name of the Kursaal Diana made history because of a tragic event. A bomb exploded during a theatrical performance causing the death of 21 people and wounding 80. A few years later in 1928, the theatre was converted into the more up to date Cinema Diana; this however did not survive to the present time.

Another important date, which this time consecrated the prestige of the Diana is July 29th. 1953, when Orio Vergani reunited 13 people at a table in the restaurant. This group was made up of journalists, editors and presidents of important companies in order to found a gourmet club for lovers of haute-cuisine. This encounter laid the foundation for what was to be named later "The Italian Academy of Cooking".

Vergani purposely chose the restaurant of the Hotel Diana both for the cuisine, which boasted specialties of the best Milanese tradition, and for the large garden. Still today one of the most exclusive characteristics of this hotel is in fact the garden, considered a true rarity in Milan.

However the Diana is also well known as a hotel of high fashion. One could say that in the past it testified to the birth of Italian designers, which are today world-famous and even now continues this tradition by lending its reception rooms for fashion shows.



Refurbished in 1998, the hotel has retained the architectural imprint of the past; in fact a good part of the period furniture can still be found in some reception rooms.

