

ITALIAN TERRACED GARDENS

The first Italian terraced gardens – inspired by Roman and Neapolitan gardens – were built on hillsides along the Arno River in and around Florence. These gardens reached new heights of sophistication during the Renaissance and continued to evolve under Baroque influence. A typical Italian garden is associated with hilly landscapes, slopes, and terraces. They emerged from strict geometrical designs, where all components were interrelated and harmoniously arranged. The residential buildings in such gardens were often positioned at the highest points, while additional structures – such as *parterres en broderie*, *giardinetti*, *salae terrenae*, grottoes, and *theatra* – were also present.

Broderie refers to ornamental fillers for garden parterres, which from the 17th century were planted along the edges and in lines, usually using low-growing boxwood (*Buxus*). These fillers were adorned with various colourful materials, ranging from pebbles and sand to soot, shells, crushed bricks, and ceramic roof tiles.

Giardinetti denotes small ornamental gardens planted with decorative flowers. They are small segments within or at the edges of a larger whole.

A **sala terrena** is usually a richly decorated entrance hall (vestibule, foyer, or other space) on the ground floor of a building, with one wall opening into a garden. Other parts of the building can be accessed from the *sala terrena*.

A **grotto** is an artificial cave or sculpture within an architectural feature designed to provide shade. Grotto decoration was dominated by historical, mythical, and biblical themes (e.g. *Grotta di Adamo ed Eva* in Boboli Gardens in Florence).

A **theatron** is a circular arrangement within a garden composition that also functions as a theatre. These circular features could include arbours, tunnels, and mazes formed by vegetation, making them more than just a garden theatre. Grottoes could also be constructed in the form of a *theatron*. The regularity of these Italian-style gardens was starkest in the arrangement of the paths, which introduced a commanding geometric element. The designers often toyed with scenic effects and enjoyed creating various backdrops. Ancient Rome provided inspiration in the form of amphitheatres, the artistic shaping of shrubs, and, of course, the omnipresent classical-style sculptures. Even the smaller garden architecture echoed the ancient style.



ITALIAN TERRACED GARDEN AT STEKNÍK

The garden terraces here were probably created during two construction phases. The older, High Baroque garden aligned with the main axis of the original Baroque residence of Jan Jiří Kulháněk, and represents the western part of the garden. The south-facing garden likely emerged later, when the southern wing and the castle chapel were added in the 1770s. This reflects the style of the Italian Baroque garden, characterised by a central axis formed by a main path leading to the centre of the garden façade. The garden along this axis comprises levelling terraces reinforced by walls and staircases. Italian gardens were typically established on relatively small plots, essentially extending the castle's living space, and were enriched by whimsical structures – terraces adorned with artistic features, glories, *salae terrenae*, and other works. While living plants did not play a prominent role in Italian gardens, they were, of course, necessary, and their natural appearance was valued, especially in long-distance views. The side parterres were often adorned with sheared evergreen shrubs, *broderie*, and later trellises with climbing plants. Our garden also features various nooks and resting terraces (which clearly reflect the refined Rococo period).

The western garden comprises five terraces connected by an ingenious system of staircases and resting places, culminating in a lower level, known as the parterre, which featured a small pool with a statue of *Neptune Astride a Dolphin* (the statue was relocated to the castle's interior after restoration). This area is accessible via symmetrically designed gates integrated into the enclosing wall. Only the gardens on the western slope are axially symmetrical, contrasting with those on the southern slope. Their axis aligns precisely with the centre of the *avant-corps* on the castle's façade, which ends in sculptures depicting a figurative composition that expresses the contrast between faithful, selfless love, represented by embracing cupids, and love associated with betrayal and ruin, represented by the sculpture of Samson and Delilah.

