

La Limonaia del Castèl

"El Castèl" lemon house

*Comune di Limone sul Garda
Provincia di Brescia*



The lemons in Limone: four centuries of history.

It is said that the cultivation of lemons on the lake Garda was introduced from Genoa in the 13th century by the monks living in the convent of St. Francis in Gargnano. From there it spread quickly to Maderno and Toscolano. Several travellers have written about the cultivation of lemons on the lake Garda. Grattarolo, in his *History of Salò* (1599), speaks of a lemon tree: "...long before factories were built, there was a lemon tree: when sailors would make it ashore in spite of stormy winds, they would go and talk to the tree."

To guard the plants and the lemons from occasional frost, special facilities were built since the 17th century. Fitting together on high walls and slim pillars were placed wooden frames with glass panels, so as to create a kind of temporary greenhouse, suited to protect the plants during winter, from November to March. During the first half of the 18th century most of the "Lemon houses" of Limone were built, notably the gardens of Garbéra, Reamòl and Nua, thanks to the Bettoni family of Bogliaco. From that time on, Limone became known as the town of the lemons.

The natural gulf of Limone was marked by these impressive structures, made famous in paintings and praised by poets and writers. J. W. Goethe was struck by the Limone landscape when on 13th September 1786 he was travelling from Torbole to Malcesine by boat: "It was a lovely morning, though cloudy and very calm at dawn. We passed in front of Limone where the terraced gardens planted with lemon trees have a very prosperous and beautiful appearance. The garden is made of rows of white square pillars, placed at regular distance from each other and climbing up the terraced mountain. Very strong beams are placed on top of the pillars to cover the trees during winter. There was nothing better than observing and contemplating this pleasant view while sailing by..."

In those days, Limone was the most northern place in Europe where lemons were grown for commerce: hundreds of thousands of lemons were exported every year mainly to Germany, Poland and Russia, bringing in good profits and employment to an otherwise-poor land.

In the second half of 19th century the cultivation of lemons declined due to the gummosis disease (1855), the unification of Italy (1861) that favoured the export of lemons produced in the south through an improved transport system and the discovery of synthetic citric acid. Cultivating lemons became less profitable by the turn of the century. During world war I the material used to cover the greenhouses was requisitioned for military needs. The exceptionally cold winter of 1928-1929 struck the final blow to an already ailing activity.

“El Castèl” lemon house

Many pillars and walls are still there to remind us of the florid past of the lemon cultivation in Limone. To keep alive this traditional way of life the City Council has acquired the ruins of the lemon house called *El Castèl* (the castle) and put it in working conditions. *El Castèl* is situated in the centre of the old village leaning on the mountain, between Via Orti and Via Castello. The lemon house is spread over 1,633 square yards of terraces (*cóle*), three on the left and four on the right of the main building (*casèl*).

The whole complex was built in the beginning of the 18th century and was owned by the various local wealthy families: the Amadei, the Bertoni, the Patuzzi, the Girardi and the Polidoro. In 1926 *El Castèl* was bought by Mr. Giuseppe Segala, whose heirs handed it over to the City Council in 1995.

The first interventions were the cleaning of the *cóle*, the replacement of the rafters (*sparadòs* and *canter*) (1997) and the renovation of the roof of the *casèl* (1999). The maintenance of the lemon house was subsequently continued with the sponsorship of the Council of Regione Lombardia, through the Comunità Montana dell'Alto Garda Bresciano as part of the Rural Development Plan 2000/6.

In 2002/3 the *casèl* was renovated, the irrigation ducts restored, the electrical system fitted and the roof of two *cóle* put in place.

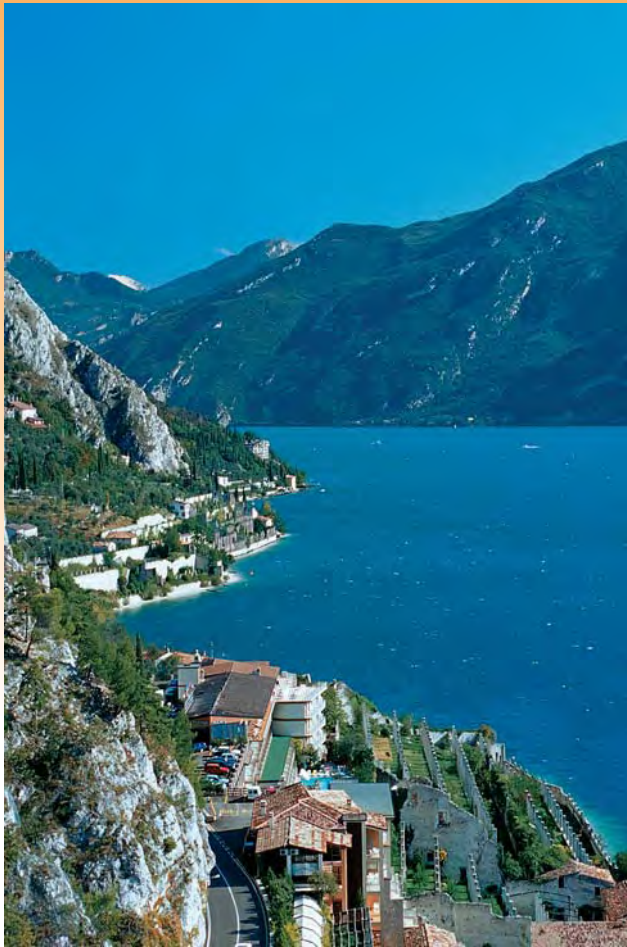
In April 2004 around fifty trees were planted: lemons, limes, grapefruits, tangerines, *Clementine* and many more qualities of citrus. The lemon house is open to visitors since 22 July 2004.





Regione Lombardia

*Culture, Identità e Autonomie
della Lombardia*



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