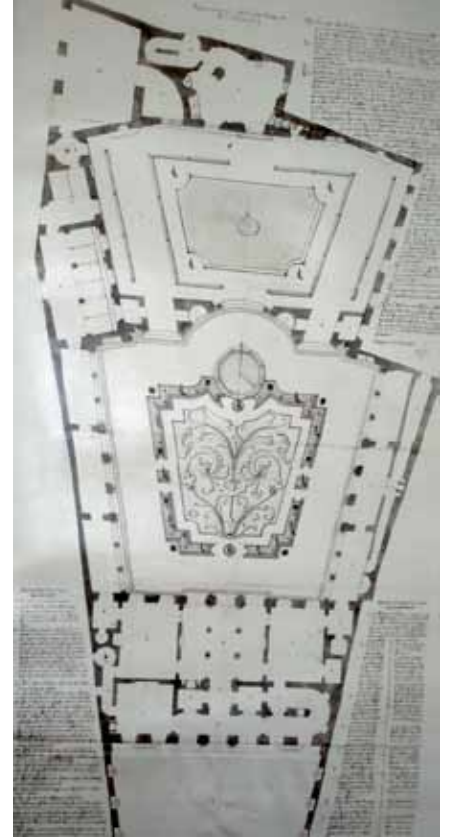
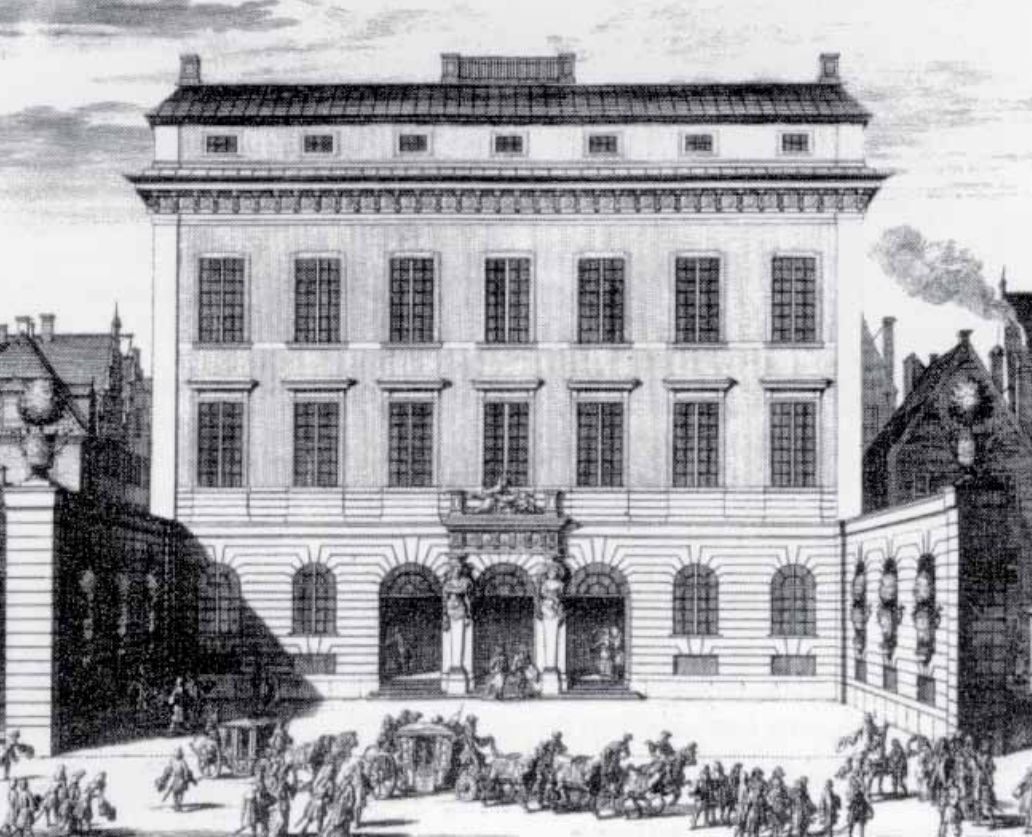




Tessin Palace

Residence of the County Governor



Designer of castles builds a home

On the slope of Slottsbacken in Stockholm's Old Town stands the magnificent Tessen Palace. On an area not much larger than that of a normal sized villa plot, the architect Nicodemus Tessin the Younger, some 300 years ago, erected a home for himself and his wife, the queen's maid of honour, Hedvig Eleonora Stenbock.

The palace is particularly interesting since there remain today few buildings preserved from this period which were built by the artists or architects themselves, entirely after their own taste.

Architectonic experimentation

Working on his private palace, Tessin was able to give free rein to his own enthusiasm for architectonic experimentation. He was much inspired by his study trips in France and Italy.

The impressive facades and gardens of the Roman Renaissance and the interior decoration of Louis XIV's Versailles captivated him. Although it has to be said that the area that Tessin had at his disposal naturally made Versailles proportions too ambitious. Instead, he received many fruitful ideas on his visits to the smaller but equally magnificent private mansions in Paris.

In the midsummer of 1697 Tessin was in a position to move into his new home. At the same time he was assigned the task of building Stockholm's new castle on the other side of Slottsbacken.

Decor in line with trends of the era

The building has three floors. The lowest floor is powerfully and rustically designed. It is dominated by a hall of columns with high doors that Tessin kept open in summer so that the public were able to glimpse the palace garden in the background.

On the ground floor there was also a kitchen and space for the servants while the living quarters for the family were to be found on the first floor. The wings housed a library and gallery.

On the top floor Tessin built his 'little state apartment' for which the custom of the time dictated a 'Salle', an antechamber, a bedchamber and a small room at each end. This apartment is largely preserved as it looked back then, with extensive ornamental paintings carried out by French artists. Tessin chose paintings instead of costly Gobelin tapestries in order not to provoke unnecessary envy.

Themes reflected in the paintings

Each and every room follows a theme that is reflected in the paintings.

The décor of the large Salle comprises a view of a rolling Italian landscape with ruins and harbours. There are also figures that depict architecture, mechanics, sculpture and painting to underline the fact that the owner of the house was an architect. The ceiling of the Salle is dominated by a painting of Apollo, the protector of the Arts, and the Muses.

The theme of the bedchamber is Night and Sleep with gilding and colours that subtly suggest dawn, dusk and evening. In accordance with the ruling fashion in Paris, mirrors were set up on the pilasters of the bedchamber.





An exterior with a Roman stamp

When it came to the building's exterior, Italian architecture was the foremost ideal of Tessin the Younger. The facades of the Tessin Palace are inspired by the palaces of the Roman Renaissance, designed by Michelangelo and Bernini – the same inspiration sources that also characterized the new royal castle construction.

A hidden garden

The inner courtyard is ingeniously designed to give an impression of greater depth than actually exists. The beautiful Baroque garden has an artful planting of box hedges.

The furthest part of the garden is screened off by two free-standing walls with niches which in Tessin's era were equipped with grating and functioned as bird cages.

Behind the walls there is a smaller garden which was formerly surrounded by a stable and carriage house, high enough to conceal the buildings outside the garden.

Towards Slottsbacken there was originally a forecourt framed by walls and iron gates.







Rebuilding and restoration

Following Nicodemus Tessin's death in 1728, his son Carl Gustaf inherited the palace. In 1755 he was forced to sell for financial reasons and the building was purchased by the Crown. Several years later the building was sold to the City of Stockholm and put in order as the residence for the then governor-general. The building was renovated without major changes but the forecourt walls were pulled down.

Words of a bishop

In a submission to the Secret Committee of the Swedish Parliament in 1772, the Bishop of Strängnäs described the palace as follows:

This house is built in accordance with all the Orders of Architecture; it is the only building in the whole of this realm that is regarded by foreigner of all Nations as a masterpiece of the Art of Building, and the same rank in the Vitruvian tradition as houses in Italy that one pays money to view

Since that time frequent rebuilding and renovations have been carried out. Tiled stoves have been replaced when worn out and wall coverings have followed the trends of the time. Around 1860 two rooms on the accommodation floor were merged to form the state dining room that remains today.





When the Swedish state took over the building in the 1960's the entire palace was renovated and modernized while the paintings were conserved. The garden, fallen into decay, was restored in accordance with Tessin's original drawings. Vanished marble sculptures that adorned the garden were replaced by box hedges clipped into figures.



Chris Heister
County Governor of Stockholm
Photo: Mikael Sjöberg

Tessin Palace today

Today, there is no castle architect in residence at the Tessin Palace, but a County Governor who keeps the building's history alive. The palace is a protected historical building, managed by The National Property Board, and used both for representation purposes and as a home by the County Governor. Since 2012 Mrs Chris Heister is the County Governor.

The County Governor is the head of the County Administrative Board, located in Stockholm city.



Detail from a painting on the ceiling, preserved from the years of Tessin.



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