



Above. Only rough unmown grass, a few spring bulbs and clumps of iris surround the orchard trees at Palazzo Soranzo Cappello, giving it a rustic, unkempt charm.

Below. At Palazzo Soranzo Cappello scented climbing roses cover a combination of old and new, but old-style brickwork. While the two blend, each is still distinct.



A GARDEN IN THE SEA

My garden tour of northern Italy begins in that most romantic of locations, Venice. It's not a city usually associated with gardens, but they are there, tucked away behind the shabby-chic walls of an ancient palazzo, or just visible through a grille of elegant but rusty wrought iron. As Venice heaves with the daily off-loading of thousands of tourists from a convoy of cruiseships, my comparatively small tour group escapes by boat to the garden of the Palazzo Soranzo Cappello. Land in Venice has always been at a premium, with the devastating aqua alta tides able to destroy productive land with an influx of saline water, so the luxury of land that can be gardened, rather than built and lived upon, seems impossibly extravagant. Although historically these Venetian gardens were filled with intricate parterres and meticulously tended, now, the gardens are allowed to show a degree of abandonment and disorder, even though they have been restored. Italians aren't afraid to let premium space remain quiet and unfilled. Like all old Australian gardens, there's the quandary of deciding in which period you 'fix' its restoration. At its most elegant, at its most historically relevant, or at what you can afford? When there's more than four centuries on offer, the decisions become blurred, and it's atmosphere rather than historical mimicry that works best. For Palazzo Soranzo Cappello, romance infuses its seemingly untended beds, unmown grass, broken plaster, ivy-covered trees and dilapidated brickwork,