



Gaetano Cortese obtained his degree in Political Science from the “La Sapienza” University in Rome in 1964. In 1968 he received a Doctorate in International Law from the Law Faculty of “La Sorbonne” University (Docteur en Droit de l’Université de Paris).

After his military service, as Lieutenant of the Air Force, he sat for the Italian Diplomatic Career Examination and obtained a permanent post at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

At the Ministry he was first assigned to the Directorate General of Emigration and Social Affairs, and subsequently to the Office of the Undersecretary of State, to the Secretariat General, and finally to the Directorate General for Countries of the Americas.

He also served as Counselor Adjunct for Press and Information at the Presidency of the Republic.

On his missions abroad, he was assigned to the Italian diplomatic representations in Zagreb, Yugoslavia; Bern, Switzerland; Havana, Cuba; Washington D.C., USA; and Brussels, Belgium (European Union).

From 1999 to 2003 he was Ambassador of Italy to His Majesty the King of Belgium, Albert II, and from 2006 to 2009 Ambassador of Italy to the Kingdom of the Netherlands, and Italian Permanent Representative to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (O.P.C.W.) in The Hague.

Former Assistant for “International Organization and International Law” at the Faculty of Political Science of the University “La Sapienza” in Rome, he is the author of books and articles on European and International law.

- *De la doctrine Hallstein à la Ostpolitik, Pedone, Paris, 1969.*
- *La rupture des relations diplomatiques et ses conséquences, Pedone, Paris, 1972.*
- *La potenza protettrice nel diritto internazionale, Bizzari, Rome, 1972.*
- *L’Ambasciata d’Italia a Bruxelles, Colombo, Rome, 2000 (in Italian and French).*
- *L’Ambasciata d’Italia a L’Aia, Colombo, Rome, 2007 (in Italian and Dutch).*
- *Il Palazzo di Sobhialaan, Colombo, Rome, 2009 (in Italian and Dutch).*
- *Il Palazzo sul Potomac, Colombo, Rome, 2011-2012 (in Italian and English).*
- *La Villa di Inkognitogaten, Colombo, Rome, 2013 (in Italian and Norwegian).*
- *Il Palazzo sul Potomac, Colombo, Rome, 2014 (in English).*



# VILLA FIRENZE

## The Residence of the Ambassador of Italy to the United States

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Villa Firenze, the Residence of the Italian Ambassador to the United States, is an impressive construction on Albemarle Street deep in the city’s residential northwest quadrant. Its parkland surroundings and architectural elegance make it one of the capital’s most beautiful and prominent diplomatic residences.

The story of Villa Firenze begins in 1925, when Mrs. Blanche Estabrook Roebbling O’Brien, and her husband, Col. Arthur O’Brien, purchase 22 acres in the heart of Washington, DC’s Rock Creek Park. The couple contracts architect Russell O. Kluge and designer H.F. Huber to build a mansion on the site and the Tudorstyle structure in gray fieldstone is completed in 1927 and christened Estabrook. It immediately becomes a meeting place for Washington’s high society and hosts some of the city’s most prestigious events, from the societal debut of Mrs. O’Brien’s eldest daughter to receptions with prominent guests, including then-President Hoover.

In 1930, the property becomes the Residence of Ambassador John Peleny heralding the villa’s diplomatic future.

In 1941, the mansion is sold to Col. Robert Guggenheim and his wife Polly. A devotee of Italian art, Col. Guggenheim rechristens the villa with the name of his mother, Florence: Villa Firenze.

In 1977, the Italian Government purchased the property from Polly (Guggenheim) Logan. A series of restoration and reconstruction projects were undertaken to return the building to its former splendor, preserving its original artistic details. The restored manor has since served as the official Residence of Italy’s Chief of Mission.

At the same time, Villa Firenze was enhanced by select pieces of Italian furnishings and works of art whose ornamental values and artistry evoked our time-honored cultural traditions.

It was in 1977 that the impressive Villa became the Residence of the Ambassador of Italy to the United States of America and was officially inaugurated in July by then Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti on the occasion of his official visit to Washington.

This book is intended to highlight Italy’s Diplomatic Residence, detailing its architectural and artistic values, which are now part of the history of Washington, D.C.

Over the course of its diplomatic presence in the city, the Residence of the Ambassador of Italy in the U.S. has successfully projected and enhanced Italy’s image, adding luster to its prestige, all the while remaining true to the welcoming tradition that characterizes Italian diplomacy.

*Gaetano Cortese*

On the front cover:  
*Villa Firenze.* Photo Embassy of Italy, Washington.

On the back cover:  
*The Great Hall.* Photo Embassy of Italy, Washington.