



ENGLISH



# THE EARTH HOUSES OF VILLA FICANA ECOMUSEUM



Guide in easy to read  
and easy to understand

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## Easy to Read guide of the Earth houses of Villa Ficana Ecomuseum



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# About Villa Ficana

Villa Ficana is an ancient neighbourhood of Macerata. Macerata is a city in the Marche region.

The district is located outside the historical centre of Macerata in the district of Santa Croce.

Villa Ficana is a place very important for the city of Macerata. Today it is an ecomuseum.

An ecomuseum is an open-air museum that:

- studies
- communicates
- preserves

the history, the traditions, the environment and the nature of a place with the people who live in it.

In the neighbourhood of Villa Ficana there are many small earthen houses.

The houses of Villa Ficana are particular. The houses of Villa Ficana are also called atterrati. Atterrati means earth houses.

In the past, the houses of Villa Ficana were built with raw earth.

Raw earth means that it is made from earth and water.

To the earth and water was added straw.

# When the neighbourhood of Villa Ficana was born

The neighbourhood of Villa Ficana was built many years ago, in about 1850.

In 1862, about about 50 earthen houses.

Before the houses of Villa Ficana in this place there was countryside and earth caves.

Earth caves are places where people take materials such as sand, stone or earth.

All these materials are used to build roads, houses or other things.

Some houses over the years have collapsed or become ruined. About 25 houses were restored in 2005. 25 houses.

# Who built the Villa Ficana district

Some rich farmers in Macerata  
built houses to host  
the farmers and their families  
to work on their lands  
and to earn money.

In the houses of Villa Ficana the farmers  
lived in rented accommodation.  
To rent means to borrow  
for some time  
and in exchange for something.  
The farmers  
gave in exchange  
their work on the lands  
and money  
to live in the houses of Villa Ficana.

The farmers who lived in Villa Ficana  
were also called casanolanti.  
Casanolanti in Italian means “abitanti delle case a nolo”  
which means inhabitants of rented houses.

The builder of the houses in Villa Ficana  
is called mastro di atterrati.  
Mastro di atterrati means master of the earthen houses.  
The mastro di atterrati  
built the houses of Villa Ficana  
with the help of other inhabitants of the village.

# How the neighbourhood of Villa Ficana is built

The houses in the neighbourhood of Villa Ficana were built with earth, water and straw.

The dough was worked with hands and feet. Loaves of earth were created called massoni and oval in shape.

The master of atterrati built the walls of the houses of Villa Ficana by placing the massoni on top of each other still damp, crushing everything with his hands and with tools.

On the outside, the walls were covered with lime plaster. Lime plaster is a type of 'skin' that is put on the walls of houses to protect them from heat and the cold and make them more beautiful.

Lime is a powder made from water and sand. When lime is put on the walls, it dries and becomes hard as stone, but without being too heavy.

The outer walls in the lower part are covered with baked bricks to protect them from rain and wind.

Inside, the floor was made of rammed earth

The earth houses of Villa Ficana were:

- small in dimension
- close to each other
- square in shape
- with an internal or external staircase
- with only two floors
- with only a kitchen and a bedroom
- without a bathroom
- without electric light,  
gas for cooking and heating  
and flowing water from the tap  
for cooking and washing.

The houses of Villa Ficana

were built in this way

because the farmers didn't have much money.

To illuminate the rooms they used:

-sunlight

which came in through the windows

and through the front door

-candles and lamps in the evening

when everything becomes dark

The residents of the neighbourhood a long time ago

and for a long time

to cook, wash clothes

and wash themselves

went to fetch water from the fountain

that stands just outside the village of Villa Ficana.

The residents would put the water into pots.

The residents of Villa Ficana used to light the fireplace to warm themselves and used two objects called nun and priest (la monaca e il prete).

The nun and the priest are objects from many years ago that were used to heat the rooms and the bed.

The nun is a ceramic pot that contained the embers.

The embers are the remains of the wood still warm from the fireplace and were placed inside the nun.

The priest is a wooden structure that was used to hold the nun inside.

The nun with the embers of the fireplace inside and the priest were placed under the sheets to warm the bed and without burning anything and before going to sleep they would take them off.

# The neighbourhood of Villa Ficana in the past

The residents of Villa Ficana were very poor.  
The residents of Villa Ficana to earn money  
and live,  
many years ago  
some of the jobs  
they did were:

-farmer

The farmer is the person  
who works the land  
to cultivate plants  
and care for the animals.

-mastro di atterrati

The mastro di atterrati is the person  
who builds earthen houses.

-laundress

The laundress is the person  
who washes clothes by hand  
for her family  
and for rich families.

The laundress also made soap manually.

- carpenter

The carpenter is the person  
who works wood  
to build  
or repair things such as furniture, doors or windows.

In the past, living in the neighbourhood of Villa Ficana was very difficult.

The houses were small, cold and dark and the inhabitants were poor.

The residents of Villa Ficana were not well seen by the other residents of Macerata and neighbouring villages because of their situation of poverty.

For these reasons many residents of Villa Ficana have decided to go and live somewhere else.

Between 1960 and 1970, the neighbourhood of Villa Ficana , about 100 years after its construction, was abandoned by some inhabitants.

In the neighbourhood of Villa Ficana for some time only a few inhabitants lived and many houses left alone and uncared for were beginning to become old and dangerous.

Many people think that the neighbourhood of Villa Ficana cannot be saved and want it to be destroyed.

# The neighbourhood of Villa Ficana today

In 1997 the primary school Fratelli Cervi elementary school in Macerata participated in an important project called 'the school adopts a monument'.

A monument is a construction or statue that is made to remember a person, an important event or a special place.

The school has chosen to adopt the earth house of Villa Ficana.

The students studied the earth houses and did a lot of work.

At the end of the project a book was produced and an exhibition

to make the neighbourhood of Villa Ficana known to the inhabitants of Macerata.

The neighbourhood of Villa Ficana abandoned by some inhabitants and ruined for many years returns to being important for people.

The ruined houses in the neighbourhood of Villa Ficana are no longer destroyed, but in 2005 it is decided to restore them.

The neighbourhood of Villa Ficana is reborn.

Today in the neighbourhood of Villa Ficana  
earth houses are more liveable,  
they have electric light  
gas,  
flowing water  
and sanitary services.

No longer do the farmers and their families live there,  
but many other people  
who do other jobs.

Since 2016 in the neighbourhood of Villa Ficana  
there are also the people  
who work at the Ecomuseum  
and the many visitors  
who come to visit it.

# The ecomuseum of the Villa Ficana Earth Houses

In 2016 was born the Earth Houses of Villa Ficana Ecomuseum with the help of the City of Macerata and the Gruca ONLUS Association, the Cultural Association OZ and the International Raw Earth Cities Association.

The three associations working at the Ecomuseum of the Earth Houses of Villa Ficana are concerned with:

- social and environmental sustainability
- realising educational and artistic activities for schools
- research activities on raw earth structures and dwellings
- promoting the use of raw earth in building construction

The ecomuseum of Villa Ficana operates nine earthen houses. Five earth houses house the museum and the visitor centre of the Villa Ficana museum. The other four earth houses are used to accommodate young people who do voluntary work.

The ecomuseum of Villa Ficana manages a real museum.

A museum is an enclosed place where objects and exhibits objects, works of art tools and other interesting materials to make known the history, culture and traditions of a people or a period.

In the museum of Villa Ficana ancient rooms have been set up of the earth houses.

There are two rooms:

-kitchen

-bedroom

Today in both rooms there is no electricity, like the environment of the old earth houses when in the past did not have electricity.

At the museum of Villa Ficana you will also find the mural room.

In the mural room you will find on a large wall a bas-relief made of earth and straw and painted that represents a fire that occurred in 1891 in the neighbourhood of Villa Ficana.

At the museum of Villa Ficana  
is also located the Officina dei Mestieri.  
The Officina dei Mestieri exhibits some ancient objects  
that, in the past, the inhabitants of the neighbourhood  
used to work.

The Villa Ficana Ecomuseum organises :

- guided tours
- exhibitions
- creative workshops
- theatrical visits

The Ecomuseum of the Villa Ficana Earth Houses carries out other projects, including:

-Atterrati! Call for Art: a cultural exchange initiative allowing artists to exhibit their works at the Eco-museum

-Archivio progetti Terra Cruda: born from an international Call for Project on earthen construction, in collaboration with various associations and institutions

-The Universal Civil Service is the opportunity for young people to volunteer at the Ecomuseum for a period of 12 months

-European Solidarity Corps is the European Union programme offering young people from all over Europe the opportunity to volunteer at the Ecomuseum for a period of 12 months

-Research grants PR Marche ESF+ 2021-2027 offer the opportunity for recent graduates to carry out a research project at the Ecomuseum to promote the skills of graduates

-Festival Ficana Terra di Mezzo-Piccolo Festival della Sostenibilità promoting socially, culturally and environmentally sustainable lifestyles

-Orto Insieme is a vegetable garden shared with the Nuovi Amici Association that deals with disability

# Contacts

For more information,  
you can visit the Ecomuseum's website  
by writing on the Internet  
Villa Ficana Ecomuseum.

You can contact the staff of the Ecomuseum

-by e-mail at [info@ecomuseoficana.it](mailto:info@ecomuseoficana.it)

-by telephone on 0733.470761

The Ecomuseum of the Villa Ficana Earth Houses is a  
unique place that embraces history, architecture and  
nature and is looking forward to having you as a guest!

You can visit us in person Monday to Friday from 9 a.m. to  
1 p.m. from November to March  
and Tuesday to Saturday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.  
from April to October.





## OPENING HOURS

(April/October) : from Tuesday to Friday open from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.  
Saturday open from 14:00 - 19:00.  
Sunday open by advance booking only.

(November/March) : from Monday to Friday open from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.  
Saturday and Sunday open only with advance booking ( until Friday).

## VISITS

Guided tours are free of charge.  
Workshops are subject to a charge.  
Contact the museum for more information on workshops.  
Every day free tours of the village accompanied by audio guides that can be downloaded free of charge from the app izi.TRAVEL.

## FOLLOW US

Follow us and share your photos taken at the village on our Facebook, Instagram and YouTube channels.



See our website

<https://www.ecomuseoficana.it/>

If you have any comments, advice or suggestions please write to [info@ecomuseoficana.it](mailto:info@ecomuseoficana.it).

## OUR TEAM

The Ecomuseum Villa Ficana is a project supported by Municipality of Macerata and Macerata Musei, managed by the Gruca Association with the OZ Cultural Association as coordinator of the educational\ workshops .

The technical-scientific partners are Associazione Internazionale Città della Terra Cruda and Associazione Terrae Onlus.

## CONTACTS

Borgo Santa Croce, 87  
62100 Macerata (MC)

E-mail: [info@ecomuseoficana.it](mailto:info@ecomuseoficana.it)

Telephone: 0733.470761

This guide was realised by Dr. Gloria Bontempo within the framework of the research project 'Borgo Ficana per tutti' (Borgo Ficana for everyone) for the Villa Ficana Ecomuseum with the Marche Region for the PR Marche ESF + 2021/27.