

Fig. 17. Casa del Frutteto. Sampling areas and colour code.

I 9, 5 Casa del Frutteto

“A consistent phase of 3rd style decoration of high quality characterises rooms 10, 11 and 12. The atrium (2) however preserves an earlier phase of 1st style plasterwork. Room 13 has a fragment of 1st style decoration “captured” behind a subsequently inserted floor. It would be very helpful to know if the atrium and room 13 decoration are similar.”

Plasters and phases

There are only two decoration phases in this house. The 1st style plasterwork in room 13, made of a plaster belonging to group A, and the 3rd style decorations in three rooms i.e. 10, 11 and 12, made on a plaster belonging to group E. Traces of the earliest period were found in several rooms, either as plaster seams behind later constructions or layers below the present floor level. Remnants of the plaster type E were found in all rooms sampled. Further, a *cocciopesto* layer along the former stairs to the second floor, applied on the 3rd style decoration, may be attributed to a later period, probably to the last years of Pompeii. Finally, there is a long and narrow area of brown plaster in room 12 where the decoration butts against the mosaic floor. Or rather, the mosaic floor continues below/behind the wall. This restoration, which imitates the wall decoration, could be modern or antique. My guess is that it is modern restoration.

Having only two decoration phases, this house still presented a problem. The problem was related to the decorations of the 3rd style, and was *how* to interpret the two samples, F 4 and F 6. Did they represent two plaster types or were they of the same kind? The difference between the samples is with regard to the quantity of lime and the grain size of the filler; the composition of the filler is the same, which is confirmed by the analyses performed at the ICVBC.¹ F 4 is fine-grained with much lime and F 6 is the large-grained variety with little lime. There is no place with a stratigraphy that reveals that these layers belong to different periods, i.e. nowhere is one of the plasters applied upon the other. They exist side by side. Therefore, I regard them as being part of the same decoration programme. I explain the differences as variations in the plaster mixture, which may be related to circumstantial conditions, such as different craftsmen at work, or refer to spaces for which a finer or rougher preparation was required. The decorations may have been created on two different occasions but within a limited period of time.

The fine-grained plaster appears in rooms 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 12, 13 and 14, and the large-grained plaster in rooms 10A, 10B, 11, and 16. However, in this study, the plasters are considered as belonging to plaster group E.

Plasters and styles

Three rooms still have their decoration preserved.² Room 8, by Richardson called “*the ladies’ dining room*”,³ with paintings alluding to the cult of Isis-Osiris, the black *triclinium* 11 with large mythological landscapes inserted in a geometrical design, and *cubiculum* 12, the fruit orchard, where a fig tree, birds and a winding serpent are the central motifs.

¹ See appendix.

² On the house and its decorations, see e.g. Bragantini et al 1981, Bragantini & Parise Badoni 1985, Della Corte 1965, 339f., Ehrhardt 1987, Jashemski 1993, La Rocca, & de Vos 2002, PPM 1983, Richardson 1988, 224f., Richardson 2000.

³ Richardson 1988, 225f.



Fig. 18. Room 8, the blue *cubiculum*. Details, showing surface changes.

These garden paintings are generally regarded as fine examples of 3rd style painting. Jashemski considers them to be among the most beautiful paintings of gardens and orchards that have been found in Pompeii.⁴ Richardson, discussing the pictorial differentiations in suites of rooms during the 3rd style, brings to mind the different visual effect in rooms 8, 11, and 12 in Casa del Frutteto.⁵ La Rocca and de Vos, explain the motifs and the blue colour in the Egyptianizing room as being typical for the last phase of the 3rd style, and consider the decorations in the three rooms contemporaneous.⁶ Ehrhardt dates the Frutteto paintings to the late Claudian period.⁷ Comparing the black *triclinium* paintings to those in the Casa del Bell'Impluvio, he finds that these decorations, in spite of stylistic similarities and resemblance in ornamental details, were not made contemporaneously, nor were they made by one workshop, as suggested by De Vos.⁸ The *triclinium* vignettes and the mythological paintings, *Diana and Actaeon*, *the duel of Eteocles and Polynices*, *the fall of Icarus*, and *the punishment of Dirce*, are attributed to the "Boscotrecase painter".⁹ Richardson considers these paintings to be later than the pictures in Boscotrecase.¹⁰ The garden painting in the peristyle at Casa di Cerere is also attributed to this painter, and supposed to be an early work of his hand.¹¹

⁴ Jashemski 1995, 74, figs. 117, 118, 120-126.

⁵ Richardson 2000, 4 f.

⁶ La Rocca & de Vos 2002, 230. The 3rd style is generally dated between c. 20 BC and AD 45.

⁷ Ehrhardt 1987, 138. Claudian period: AD 41-54.

⁸ Ehrhardt 1987, 135 f.

⁹ Bragantini & Parise Badoni 1985, 259, Richardson 2000, 39.

¹⁰ Richardson 2000, 39.

¹¹ Richardson 2000, 41.



Fig. 19. *To the left*: Room 11, the east wall, detail.



Fig. 20. *To the right*: Room 12, the east wall, detail.

Plaster samples from the black rooms in Casa del Bell'Impluvio and Casa del Frutteto were compared. The *triclinium* in Casa del Bell'Impluvio was made on a plaster that belongs to group D, while the *triclinium* in Casa del Frutteto was made on a plaster belonging to group E. There is a perfect correspondence between the plasters of the 3rd style paintings in Casa del Frutteto and in the *tablinum* in Casa del Bell'Impluvio.

Discussion and concluding remarks

To me it seems that there were different artists responsible for the paintings of foliage and birds in the garden rooms and for the linear architectural composition with mythological centrepieces that adorn the walls in the *triclinium*. The stylised fruit-yard paintings are made with a precision and an easy touch that is lacking in the “stiff” black *triclinium*. The “orchard painter” was a master of painting graceful decorative plants, fruits and little animals in well-balanced compositions. There is no impression of ease in the composition in the *triclinium*. The *triclinium* plaster belongs to the larger grained group while the plaster in rooms 8 and 12 has finer grains. This might illustrate different craftsmen at work, a possibility suggested above.

Unfortunately, the blue room has undergone a disastrous transformation, leaving few areas for contemplating the beauty of colours and composition. Could this be the result of a modern restoration? An opaque white film is spreading over the lower parts of the walls in the room with the fig tree – or are the colours just gradually fading, bleaching away? This room has been restored not too long ago. Summing up, this house was originally decorated with 1st style plasterwork. There is no indication of any changes until the house was redecorated with 3rd style paintings. Modern restoration materials ought to be removed – if possible.

I 9, 5 Plaster types, groups, locations

Room 2

Earliest phase: type F1, group A. East wall: grey plaster layer framing door to room 9, covered by type F 4.

Last phase: type F 4, group E. East wall, continuing over NE corner and on north wall; areas on west wall, over the corner to south wall, and the pilasters at north and south walls.

Room 4

Earliest phase: type F 1, group A. East wall: plaster blocked behind the stairs, and plaster seam, covered by type F 4.

Second phase: type F 4, group E. East, north and west walls: remains of plaster, covering type F 1

Last phase: *Cocciopesto*. East wall: red plaster at upper level, covering type F 4.

Room 8

Last phase: type F 4, group E. 3rd style decoration on all walls (Egyptianizing room).

Room 10A

Last phase: type F 4, group E. East wall: layer behind the mirror, continuing in the entrance to room 11/12.

Room 10B

Earliest phase: type F 1, group A. East wall: plaster seam, covered by type F4.

Last phase: type F 4, group E. Covering large part of east wall, over SE corner.

Room 11

Last phase: type F 4, group E. 3rd style decoration on all walls (black *triclinium*).

Room 12

Earliest phase: type F 4, group E. 3rd style decoration on all walls (the fruit orchard).

Last phase: North wall: repair.

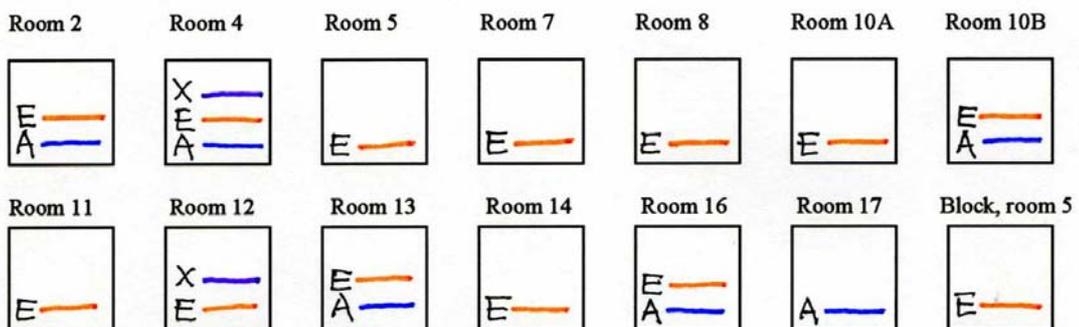
Room 13

Earliest phase: type F 1, group A. East wall: upper level, 1st style decoration.

Last phase: type F 4, group E. East wall, continuing on south, west and north walls, covering type F 1.

Plaster type F 4, group E, was found also in room 5, west wall; room 7, south wall; room 14, east and south walls and in room 16, north wall, covering a layer of type F 1, group A.

A small area of plaster type F1, group A, was found in room 17, south wall.



List of examined plaster samples

I 9,5 Casa del Frutteto (F)

2003 – 2004 - 2005

Nr	Room	Sample location in metres	Order of layer	Brief description	Decoration	Remarks	Type	Group
1 CNR	13	East wall H. 2.80, 0.02 from SE corner.	1 st with red decoration.	Black and white, small grains. Some very large grey and black grains.	1 st style decoration covering upper level of E wall.	Very hard. Much lime. Lots of crystals.	F 1	A
2	13	East wall H. 3.00, 0.32 from NE corner.	1 st layer, cornice.	Small grains between large. Few bright yellow "flakes".	1 st style decoration.	Frail.	F 1	A
3	13	East wall H. 3.15, 0.80 from SE corner.	1 st layer, upper cornice.	Yellow paint layer? Sample to CNR.	1 st style decoration.	Very hard stucco.	F 1	A
4 CNR	13	East wall H. 2.65, 0.70 from SE corner.	2 nd layer. Covering F 1.	Most medium size grains. Many yellow.	Applied on E wall, continuing on S and W walls + N wall.	Frail Much lime, airbags.	F 4	E
5	4	East wall H. 0.45, blocked behind stairs.	Black and white, dirty lime.	Similar to F 1, larger grains.	Jan.04: checking all samples, this is a variety of F 1.	Small between large.	F 1	A
6 CNR	2	East wall, between rooms 8/9 H. 1.58, 0.17 from NE edge. H. 1.15, 0.23 from NE door.	1 st layer covered by F 8.	Large and small grains, many yellow, red, beige. Many large.	Remains on E wall, pilasters at N and S walls. (Ex. F 6).	Porous lime with lumps.	F 4	E
7	2	East wall, between rooms 8/9 H. 1.57, 0.15 from NE edge..	1 st layer covered by F 8. At the door frame	Mainly black grains, clean lime.			F 1	A
8	2	East wall between rooms 8/9 H. 1.55, 0.19 from NE edge.	Layer covering F 6 and F 7.	Many colours. Many yellow grains	Areas on E wall, continuing on N wall. Areas on W wall, over the corner to S wall.	Same as F6.	F 4	E
9	2	South wall, E pilaster H. c 1.57 at the edge North wall, W pilaster.	1 st , 2 nd 3 rd and 4 th layers.	Large and small grains, many colours. Porous lime.		Same as F6.	F 4	E
10	10A	East wall H. 1.30, 0.15 from NE corner.	1 st layer, behind the mirror (removed).	Large and small grains, many colours. Some very large grey and beige, grains porous lime.		Same as F6.	F 4	E
11	10A	East wall H. 1.30, at the NE corner.	2 nd layer, around the mirror. Layer continuing in the opening to room 11.	Large grains, many colours. Many yellow, orange, red grains. Lack of small particles.	E wall, continuing in entrances to rooms 11/12.	Clean lime. Same as F6.	F 4	E
12	10 B	East wall H. 1.20.	1 st layer going behind E wall.	Black and white. Small and large grains. Few green crystals. Dirty lime.	F 1 with unclean lime. Frail.	Very frail. Similar to F 1, dirty lime.	F 1	A
13	10 B	East wall H 1.20.	2 nd and 3 rd layer continuing behind E wall.	Many colours. Same as F 11.	Same as F6.	Lack of small particles.	F 4	E

Nr	Room	Sample location in metres	Order of layer	Brief description	Decoration	Remarks	Type	Group
14	10B	East wall H. 1.85, 0.19 from S edge. H. 1.63, 0.74 from S entrance to room 14.	Upper layer. Covering F 12 and F 13.	Many colours. Same as F6.	Covering the E wall and NE edge to room 10A.	Lack of small particles.	F 4	E
15	10A, 10B	East wall H. 1.30 at the NE edge at entrance to room 11, and H. 0.64 at S edge of entrance.	Upper layer.	Unclean lime, lots of red "dust". Same as F 11, F 6. more colours than F 4. Yellow and orange grains.	Dirty lime. Reused?	Same as F6.	F 4	E
16	11	South wall H. 1.14, 0.04 from SE corner.	Layer with decoration.		<same as F 6.	3rd style decoration, all walls	F 4	E
17	12	H. 0.69, at the SE corner.	Layer with decoration.	Some broken black. Small grains.		3rd style decoration on all walls.	F 4	E
18	12	North wall, at floor level and at SE corner.	Repair with decoration.	"Red" plaster.		Repair.	F 18	
19	8	West wall H. 1.29, 0.09 from entrance to room 2.	Layer with decoration.	Same as F 17, F 4.		3rd style decoration on all walls.	F 4	E
20	4	East wall.	Upper layer. Repair (?) Covering plaster type F 4.	"Red" plaster, <i>cocciopesto</i> . Same as F 18.			F 18	
21 CNR	7	North wall H. 1.07 at the entrance to room 8.	Upper layer.	Very similar to F 4.			F 4	E
22	2	West wall, two samples. H. 1.63, 0.09 from NE corner. H. 2.35, 2.14 from NE corner.	2 layers.	Lime, crushed brick and a few sand grains.		Same as F6.	F 4	E
23	4	East wall, blocked door?		Powder. Lumps of lime.			F 1	A
24	5	Freestanding decorated block.					F 4	E
25	2	West wall H. 1.08, 1.18 from NW corner.	Plaster seam.	Small between large. Few large grey.		Solid.	F 1	A
26	10	East wall 0.80 from entrance to room 14, wall between 14 and 15.	1 st layer, below floor level.	A few very large pale grey. Small and large grains.		Lumps of lime.	F 1	A
27	10	East wall 0.80 from entrance to room 14, wall between 14 and 15.	2 nd layer, below floor level.	A few very large grey grains.		Same as 26.	F 1	A
28	5	West wall H.1.10, 0.20 from pilaster.	Upper layer.			Same as 21.	F 4	E
29	4	East wall H. 1.60, 1.30 from S door.	Layer covered by F20.				F 4	E
30	4	East wall H. 1.35, 1.20 from S door.	Layer close to 29, slightly higher.	Same as F29? Yes. Nice sample.			F 4	E