

Observations on Gio Ponti in Tehran



Villa Nemazee, designed 60 years ago by the Italian architect and industrial designer Gio Ponti for a site in Tehran, is facing demolition. Situated in the northern district of Niavaran, the villa stands among many other remarkable modern homes that date from the reign of the shahs. The royal family itself used to spend summers in Niavaran, which is unique in Tehran for its wealth of private parks. Now speculative interest in the area has grown, including a proposal to demolish Ponti's villa and replace it with a 20-story five-star hotel. The only resistance to the plan has come from local architects and "the people's committee to protect

Tehran's public houses," an anonymous group working online.

Designed in 1957 for a businessman with commercial ties to the United States, Villa Nemazee, Ponti's third villa, is synchronous with Ponti's work on the Pirelli Tower in Milan (1956–61). In contrast to his skyscraper, though, the villa is a highly concentrated and distilled work of architecture that exemplifies Ponti's eye for detail. The walls around its courtyard feature dozens of small trapezoidal windows, some with colored glazing reminiscent of the chapel at Ronchamp, which Le Corbusier had finished only two years prior. The courtyard

Gio Ponti, Villa Nemazee, 1957. Interior courtyard, featuring ceramics by Fausto Melotti. Photo © Gio Ponti Archives.

is also decorated with ceramics by abstract sculptor Fausto Melotti, one of the many artists Ponti promoted in the magazines Domus and Stile, which he founded. Ponti even designed the furniture for Villa Nemazee, making it an example of true collaboration among the arts and a showcase that simultaneously engages international and Persian aesthetic sensibilities. Its demolition would be a loss not only to Niavaran and Tehran at large, but to the history of modern design as well.

– Manuel Orazi