

edited by Chiara Valerio

The arches of Mantua

a guide to exploring Mantua
with children of all ages



WHAT IS MANTOVA PLAYGROUND?

Mantova Playground is a project promoted and supported by the Comune di Mantova and is born with the aim of transforming the city into a playground that children will use to approach the complexity of the world. Workshops, maps, events to help discover the city from unusual and unexpected viewpoints or to rediscover what you already know by suggesting a new perspective.

website mantovaplayground.it fb [mantovaplayground](https://www.facebook.com/mantovaplayground)



Mantova Playground is sponsored by

The following have helped in the writing of this guide: Radiobase, the Biblioteca Mediateca G. Baratta and the Cinema del Carbone

Illustrations by Noemi Vola

The typeface of the texts is Biancoenero®, by biancoenero edizioni, high-readability font, designed by graphic designers Riccardo Lorusso and Umberto Mischi · biancoeneroedizioni.com

FILMS RECOMMENDED BY THE CINEMA DEL CARBONE

The Secret of Kells by Tomm Moore and Nora Twomey, Belgium/France/Ireland, 2009, 75'

What happens when three-dimensional architectural volumes are transferred to paper? It leads to the beautiful drawings of mediaeval miniatures whose colours and details still intent and captivate. This is exactly what happens in the story set in a small Irish Abbey, when brother Aidan, a famous miniaturist arrives, bringing a magnificent book with him, which immediately arouses the wonder of the young monk Brendan. Brendan's extraordinary journey with the art of miniature becomes dangerous and filled with adventures, in such a precious magic crystal, buried deep in the enchanted forest, where magical and cruel creatures are waiting for the monk... Vikings!

Labyrinth by Jim Henson, UK/USA, 1986, 102'

A film about growth and transition in which Sara, a young dreamer who still surrounds herself with dolls and teddy bears, must endure a series of adventures and obstacles order to rescue her brother who has been kidnapped by Jareth, the Goblin King. Sara must conquer a strange labyrinth which will turn out to be very difficult to cross, filled with puzzles and tests, to reach the Goblin King's castle. It is an adventure in which doors, arches and walls speak to the viewer, arousing emotions such as anxiety and fear, as well as wonder and joy.

BOOKS RECOMMENDED BY THE BIBLIOTECA MEDIATECA G. BARATTA
H.O.U.S.E. by Aleksandra Machowiak and Daniel Mizielinski, Comma 22, 2009

A book describing houses that seem to have come straight from children's imagination, when in fact they're the products of the genius of contemporary architects from all around the world. An overview of ironic, funny and colourful contemporary architecture. Doors, windows, dimensions, heights, materials and colours: all of these features of the home have meanings... and this book will help reveal those hidden secrets.

Le case degli altri bambini by Luca Tortolini and illustrations by Claudia Palmarucci, Orecchio Acerbo, 2015

It's easy to say home, but every child has their own special rooms, corridors, walls and balconies become the unique and special framework for games, memories and dreams. Giacomo lives in the city centre and he can see the whole city from his windows. The secret while Lorena's seems like a museum. Then there's Lillo's second home, which is close to the sea. Ottavio, on the other hand, plunges into films: he lives above a cinema. Marco's house is a hotel, there are always sunny people coming and going. Mimmo's house smells of boiled cabbage while Claudia's is full of brushes and pencils.



THE ARCHES OF MANTUA

Arches are an idea. And they sometimes they have a key, even if they are open. A turnkey. And then, there was once an arch. I've always liked them. I passed under them, tried to build them with Lego and I managed to do so even if they were stepped arches. They had the idea of an arch. Which is exactly what arches are. An idea. Rainbow and treasure. Bow and arrow for adventures. An electric arc which gives off sparks. And the reflex arc, which means that when we put our hand on a flame, we immediately move it away, I like arches because they're everywhere. Look around.



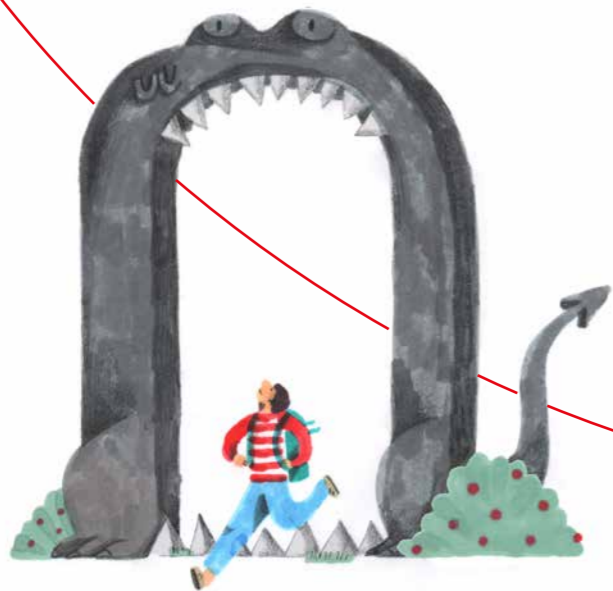
Chiara Valerio was born in Scauri (Latina) in 1978. She has a Ph.D in Mathematics from the University of Naples Federico II. She is a columnist for "Nuovi argomenti" and "Nazione indiana". For the publishing house Nottetempo, she is editor of "narrativa.it", which is dedicated to the emerging talents of Italian literature. She has written several novels and short stories collections, including: *A complicare le cose* (2003); *Nessuna scuola mi consola* (2009); *La gioia piccola d'esser quasi salvi* (2009) and *Spiaggia libera tutti* (2010). She writes for "L'Unità", "Vanity Fair", "Il Sole 24Ore" and is a contributor to the radio show "Ad alta voce" and the TV programme "Pane quotidiano".



A FAN MADE OF STONE

Via Fratelli Bandiera 17

The arch of the doorway looks like a thin woman who is holding a fan made of stone. A fan made of iron. A thin, very strong woman. I wonder if she fans herself when she's hot.



A DRAGON AT THE GARDEN

Giardini Nuvolari, viale Piave

The arch of the gardens on viale Piave is the mouth of the dragon. And the dragon is mine (and he had to put the brace in because he had crooked teeth) I left him in Mantua many years ago – I was nine – and my mother told me that I couldn't keep him in the house. So, I tied him to my bike I said to the dragon, my dragon, "Dragon! Take a deep breath, very deep, as if you need to go underwater." The dragon did so and it rose from the ground, starting to look like a kite. And so, racing on my bike with the dragon disguised as a kite, I came to the gardens So don't be scared about passing under the arch. Dragons don't eat children. Thanks to me.



THE SECRET ARCH

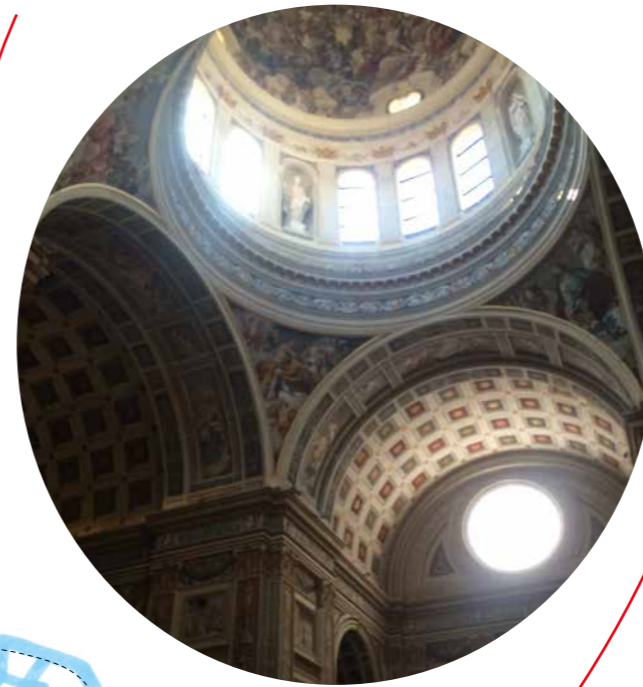
Passaggio tra piazza Andrea Mantegna e piazza Leon Battista Alberti

The secret arch is missing a piece. I have never quite understood if it is secret because it is hidden, even if it's stupid to hide itself because its teeth are all falling out. Or if it is secret because, with that missing piece, that front tooth, many people don't recognise it as an arch. Yet it is an arch, a round one and under it, it holds, protects and hugs an arched doorway, but the door is not a perfect arch, it is flattened. And so, every time that I pass in front of it I ask myself if when the door is open, you can see other smaller arches. Who knows.

THREE-DIMENSIONAL ARCHES

Basilica di Sant'Andrea, piazza Andrea Mantegna
www.santandreamantova.it

Inside the church of Sant'Andrea, the arches have three dimensions. You enter the church of Sant'Andrea and it's like seeing 3-D film at the cinema. The three-dimensional arches are called "dome" and "vault".



A MATRYOSHKA OF ARCHES

Rotonda di San Lorenzo, piazza Erbe
☎ +39 376 322297 · www.casandreasi.it

The San Lorenzo Rotunda is like a matryoshka of arches. Arches which contain small arches which contain even smaller arches which contain tiny arches. The rotunda itself is made from the union of two arches, one stuck to the other. A circle, like the plan of the rotonda, is made up of two arches that are sharing a kiss. The strange thing is that when, from the centre of the rotonda, if you look at it looks like a well. A well that flows upwards.



CLIMBING ARCHES

Tempio di San Sebastiano, largo XXIV Maggio
€ +39 376 288208 · www.turismo.mantova.it

You can climb in front of the church of San Sebastiano, but it's quite dangerous. I never do it, but I always think about it. I always think about claiming the railing, getting up over it, and arriving right in front of the central arch, falling along the column like a bright green lizard and getting to the window above which is an arch, but a rectangular one. Arches can, in fact, also be rectangular.

