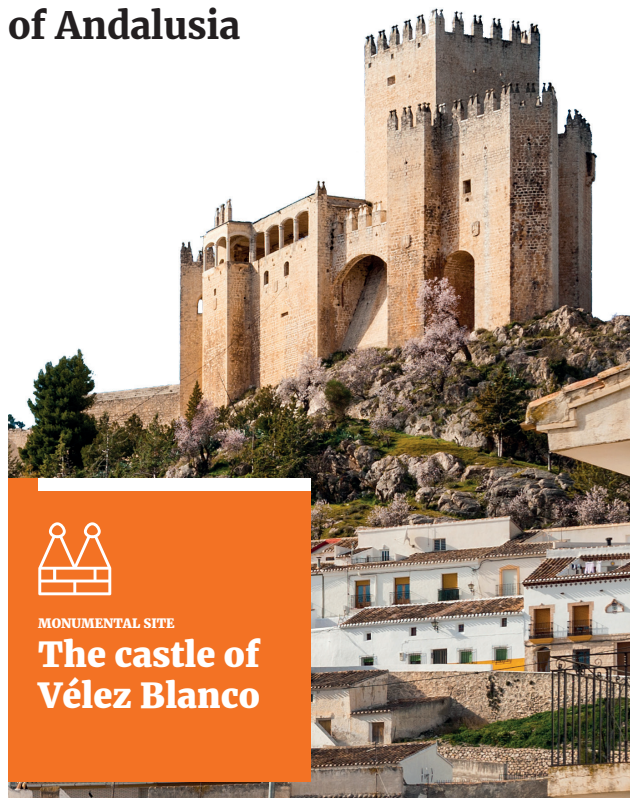


Archaeological and Monumental Sites of Andalusia



MONUMENTAL SITE

The castle of Vélez Blanco

↑ General view of the castle with the town of Vélez Blanco at the foothills.

The castle of Vélez Blanco is an emblematic example of Spanish Renaissance architecture. It combines both military and palace aspects in a building that is now the hallmark of the town of Los Vélez in the region of Almería.

HISTORY

Don Pedro Fajardo y Chacón, Adelantado Mayor (Governor) of the Kingdom of Murcia and first Marquis of Los Vélez in 1507, arrived in Vélez Blanco in 1505 to establish his home there and the capital of his dominion, having been forced, in 1503 by Isabella I of Castile, to trade Cartagena for Los Vélez, Cuevas del Almanzora and Portilla. The first thing he did when he arrived, was to start building the castle at a time when new strongholds were not allowed to be built, to prevent the aristocracy from accumulating a great deal of power. To avoid this prohibition, he argued that he was simply restoring the old Moorish alcazaba (fortification) that still existed.

In 1506 he started to build the castle. The project, costing 80,000 ducats, was completed in 1515. The Italian architect, Francisco Florentín, is thought to be the author of the work, with the collaboration of Martín Milanés and the supervision of Francisco Salazar, warden of the castle between 1503 and 1511.

The castle was used as a home by Mr Pedro Fajardo and by his son, Luis, but when the latter died in 1574, the marquesses lived mainly in the court, seldom visiting the castle between the 17th and 19th centuries.

During the 18th century, although it still retained a large part of its decorative opulence and represented a symbol of territorial power, the use of its materials in other buildings such as the church in Vélez Rubio was allowed, reusing the bronze cannons as bells and the ancient lead roofing. This destruction would be accentuated with the French invasion and the War of Independence. From then on, it would be subjected to all forms of pillaging and looting; the interior layout was altered and it was used as a home by vagrants.



← Merlons topped with double pinnacles crowned with pike shaped motifs.

A PATIO IN NEW YORK

At the beginning of the 20th century, there was a renewed interest in the castle, both in Spain and abroad, particularly by collectors. In 1904, the owner of the castle, the Duke of Medina Sidonia, sold the decorative elements of the Renaissance patio and the friezes and bronze door of the stall and they were sent by sea to Marseille, the Hispanic Society was interested in acquiring this complex.

In 1913, the banker George Blumenthal acquired the marble to be laid in his luxury mansion in Park Avenue, New York. As president of the Metropolitan Museum, among other works of art, he donated the Patio to this institution, where in 1964, after conducting a preliminary study of the Fajardo family, the castle and the courtyard were installed by the art historian and curator, Olga Raggio. The layout is not exactly the same as the original, as some changes had to be made in order to adapt to the museum space. In 1931, the castle was declared a National Monument, but despite this, it remained abandoned and continued to be destroyed. The first maintenance and restoration interventions were carried out between the '60s and '80s. The area was cleared up, the access ramp was built, and some frameworks were rebuilt since, at the time, the building did not have any form of roof.

In 1982, works resumed, however, the restoration lines that had been followed until then changed. During the initial phase, work was carried out on the Keep (**Torre del Homenaje**) and ancillary buildings and during the second phase, between 1994 and 1998, work was carried out on the courtyard known as the **Patio de Honor**. The aim of this second phase was to enable the castle to be used for tourism and cultural purposes and it included recovering the original volumes of the Patio and its adjoining rooms. The missing frameworks were reinstalled with a vertical structure with steel columns to serve as an anchoring point for the pieces that would be executed during future decoration phases. In 2005, the castle was acquired by the Regional Government of Andalusia and in 2008 the Patio was scanned in the Metropolitan Museum.



↑ Castle Patio in the Metropolitan Museum in New York.

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FREE ADMISSION



Agencia Andaluza de Instituciones Culturales
CONSEJERÍA DE CULTURA Y PATRIMONIO HISTÓRICO

SEE AND UNDERSTAND THE CASTLE OF VÉLEZ BLANCO

The castle of Vélez Blanco is made up of two buildings connected by a drawbridge, leading to the second enclosure. The first space, built on the ancient Moorish fortress, is an extremely simple quadrangular fortification with potential as an artillery fortress. The second is a towered place, presided over by a keep. It appears to be a fortress from the outside, but the interior layout and function is that of a palace. This typology can also be seen in the castle of La Calahorra, built by Mr Rodrigo Vivar de Mendoza, Marquis of Cenete, and which Pedro Fajardo visited in 1512. It has the shape of an irregular hexagon, extended from North to South with ashlar and masonry walls. This shape, which adapts to the irregularities of the land, is intended to create angles to provide greater defence in the event of a siege.

1 Drawbridge

The original access to the castle was via a drawbridge. The bridge has now been replaced with a fixed platform installed in the original location.

2 Temporary exhibition

An exhibition reflecting the history of the castle is being held in this hall with two models of the monument. Two marble gargoyles are also on display, originally located in the patio, decorating the drain pipes.

3 Patio de Honor

Of all the castle's spaces, the one that best represented the decorative type of building, was the Patio de Honor. This patio was decorated in white Macael marble and could be found on pillars, arches, balustrades and door and window frames, reflecting the refinement of the first Italian Renaissance of the end of the 15th and the beginning of the 16th century. It has an elongated layout, measuring 16 x 13 metres, with a lateral bend entrance. The South



↑ Upper floor of the castle's Patio de Honor. METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF NEW YORK.

wall was made up of a gallery with five segmental arches. On the same side was the main entrance to the Patio, next to which was a staircase that led to the second floor. The East wall, without arches or doors, ended on the second floor with a six-arch gallery, while the West wall had three pairs of windows with richly decorated marble frames. The North wall ended by the **Homage Tower**, and it was a smooth wall, only interrupted by a small window and a coat of arms. One of the most prominent features of the patio is the inscription etched in capital letters that runs along the cornice, proclaiming the name and titles of the founder, and the date on which the castle was built.

Among all the architectural elements of the patio, those that most accurately reflect the classic models that inspired them, are the capitals, with a wide variety of motifs, with the most characteristic of these being the models created by Lombard artists, who often introduced motifs of animals and fantasy motifs. A unique feature of the castle is its merlons topped with double pinnacles crowned with pike shaped motifs.

4 The Homage Tower

This is the castle's highest structure, standing 25 metres tall. It is an independent defensive structure within

the enclosure, prepared to be isolated in the event of a siege, which is why it has a cistern at its base. It also served to coordinate the castle's defence, as it controlled the access to the enclosure's ramparts.

5 Main Rooms

The castle's main rooms, known as Triunfo (Triumph) and Mitología (Mythology) halls, were decorated with wooden friezes, on which *The Triumphs of Cesar* were represented in bas-relief, based on the paintings of Andrea Mantegna and *The Twelve Labours of Hercules*, inspired by the engravings of Giovanni Andrea Valvassori.



↑ Homage Tower with the Fajardo coat of arms.

6 Gallery

On the second floor of the castle's East wing is a covered



↑ Detail of La Hidra de Lerna on one of the palace's friezes. PARIS MUSEUM OF DECORATIVE ARTS.

gallery with six arches that looks out to, on the one side the **Patio de Honor** and on the other, the town and meadows of Vélez Blanco, which enabled the most private aspects of palace life to be enjoyed while also connecting with the castle's exteriors.



↑ East wing gallery with views across the meadows of Vélez Blanco.

