

WHERE TO STAY



Location and pedigree: the Ponte Vecchio Suite at Portrait Firenze, a Ferragamo family boutique hotel

PORTRAIT FIRENZE

THE Ferragamo family dominates Florence's fashion and social scene so it is only fitting that their boutique hotels are the epitome of Florentine style.

Their Lungarno Collection comprises four hotels – but it is Portrait Firenze that is the most-visited among them.

Celebrated Florentine architect and interior designer Michele Bonan used the birth of Italian couture in the Fifties as his inspiration for the interiors.

A grey, black and gold colour scheme offers understated sophistication. Handcrafted furniture supplies the mid-century modern injection and, in the modernist spirit of functional luxury, some of the rooms have kitchens, discreetly hidden behind glossy doors with brass handles.

Iconic photos are seen throughout the six floors of suites and public areas, with images taken from the Locchi, Giorgini and Alinari archives. Spot the image of Salvatore Ferragamo dressing Audrey Hepburn, or Brigitte Bardot and Grace Kelly holidaying in the city. Also look out for large-scale works from Florence-based master of interiors photography Massimo Listri.

Tailored to be a home away from



home, you'll find no check-in desk at Portrait Firenze, just a lounge to relax in, coffee in hand, while you wait to be escorted to your room.

The hotel's Caffè dell'Oro is the place to go for a lovely breakfast before you head out to explore. Fortunately, the hotel is just a few steps from Ponte Vecchio and Piazza della Signoria.

Portrait Firenze offers a three-night stay from £968 per person, based on two sharing, booked through Red Savannah (01242 787800, redsavannah.com). Included are three nights in a Portrait Studio on a bed-and-breakfast basis, return Gatwick-Florence airport flights with Iberia, and private return airport transfers.

Find design and style in Florence

BUILT on architecture and fashion, Florence is a must-visit for design inspiration. From secret hideaways to the hottest restaurants in town, here is a guide to exploring this stunning Italian city in style.

WHERE TO EAT

LA BOTTEGA DEL BUON CAFFÈ

THIS super-chic restaurant is the place to be seen for Florence's hip crowd. Tables are draped in grey linen, while exposed brick walls and quirky chandeliers create a cool, rustic look. It is the latest project from Danish husband-and-wife team Claus and Jeanette Thottrup, who run residential and commercial property design practice PN Homes. They moved to Italy in 2001 from London, their adoptive home, and fell in love with the architecture. They have been developing historic buildings for 20 years but decided to combine their property expertise with hospitality.

Their magnificent boutique hotel in Tuscany garnered such a strong reputation that they opened a sister restaurant in central Florence this year. The blend of Scandinavian style and Italian food and drink is divine.

"As most of our ingredients are forested wild, or farmed by us, I wanted the interior to reflect this with rustic wooden and forest green decoration," Jeanette tells me. "All materials are natural and most are created by artisans from Tuscany or Europe, including the lamps, tables and the stone finishes and paintings on the walls. The restaurant also features sottopiatte (placemats) from the Italian navy."

Executive chef Antonello Sardi, 36, is lauded as one of Tuscany's rising stars, leaping from washer-up to Michelin-star chef in 10 years. You can watch him prepare his incredible dishes in the open-plan kitchen. This is quickly becoming one of the best restaurants in a city built for foodies – so book a table while you can. ■ borgointhecitey.com.

Florentine fine dining: watch incredible food being prepared at La Bottega del Buon Caffè, below, where Michelin-star chef Antonello Sardi is in charge



With designer hotels and shops, plus fine art and architecture, this is the go-to city for interiors inspiration, says **Amira Hashish**

IL PALAGIO AT THE FOUR SEASONS, FLORENCE

FOR an elegant evening there is no better place than this exquisite restaurant in the Four Seasons Hotel. Michelin-star Italian cuisine, 400 superb wines to choose from, and an indoor-outdoor setting make for a glittering destination.

Friendly executive chef Vito Mollica and his team have earned international acclaim for thoughtful preparation of the freshest local fare. Coveted ingredients include Paolo Parisi eggs and artisanal Amadei chocolate.

Order the tasting menu featuring lobster salad or risotto with seasonal porcini mushroom, chorizo and Bettelmatt cheese. Then ask the enthusiastic restaurant manager Gabriele Fedeli, formerly of The Ritz London, for one of his signature rum cocktails, set alight and served with pizzazz. ■ ilpalagioristorante.it

LE BISTROT AT VILLA CORA

PALATIAL Hotel Villa Cora, built as a residence in the 1870s by Baron Oppenheim for his wife, is a love letter to architecture and art. Unashamedly opulent, it strikes the perfect balance between good taste and extravagance.

The interiors reflect the passion between the baron and his belle, conjured by roses, the Orient, ornate parquet and frescoes. The hotel is also home to the only heated outdoor pool in Florence, and dinner is served between April and October.

Marble tables sit beneath a smart white canopy and as evening draws in, the lights twinkle. The authentic Tuscan tasting menu takes you on a tour of the region's signature dishes. Delicious in every sense of the word. ■ villacora.it

LA TERRAZZA

WHEN the smart set fancy cocktails with a view, they head to La Terrazza. This buzzing bar on the top floor of the medieval Consorti tower of the fashionable Hotel Continentale offers views of the Arno, Brunelleschi's Dome, San Miniato, Palazzo Vecchio and Forte di Belvedere.

WHERE TO VISIT

A TRIP to Florence isn't complete without perusing its most famous attractions including the Uffizi Gallery and Galleria dell'Accademia



Shop for cool gifts: right, street sign art by CLET, upcycled sculpture and washable paper bags by Essential, all at Mio; below, pitchers from Mario Luca Giusti, priced from about £43



furniture in a cute setting (mio-concept.com). **FRILLI GALLERY:** the best antique and contemporary bronze sculptures (frilligallery.com). **GALLERIA BELLINI:** the best-known spot for modern art (galleriabellini.com). **PRATESI:** the place to go for fab Florentine linens (pratesi.com). **MARIO LUCA GIUSTI:** striking glassware that won't break the bank (mariolucagiusti.com).

Enjoy a cocktail, drink in the vista: La Terrazza bar, left, at the top of the medieval Consorti tower of the Hotel Continentale; above, striking glassware at Mario Luca Giusti

OPERA DUOMO MUSEUM

FOLLOWING a major overhaul, the museum opened its doors again this year. More than 750 Renaissance masterpieces are reunited in one grand space.

■ museumflorence.com

FIRENZE YES PLEASE

ELEVEN five-star hotels have joined forces with an Italian publisher to set up a website called Firenze Yes Please which is launching imminently, and is aimed at those seeking exclusive access to city sites.

Contact the organisers to set up a tour of Michelangelo's secret room under the Medici Chapel, which is usually closed to the public. Only discovered in the Seventies, this tomb-like space is where the artist took refuge, and his sketches remain on the walls.

■ firenzeyesplease.com

GUCCI MUSEUM

HOUSED in a 14th-century building, the museum charts the fashion empire's 90-year history.

■ guccimuseo.com

WHERE TO SHOP

THE MALL: from Pucci to Prada, find top brands with bargain price tags at Tuscany's luxury outlet. Well worth the 40-minute bus ride from the city centre (themall.it).

BJORK FLORENCE: a concept store with Scandi-style fashion brands and books. One for the scenesters (bjorkflorence.com).

SELFHABITAT: from 20th-century masterpieces and design classics to the latest in contemporary furnishings, including some coveted



Timeless skyline: above, the Duomo di Firenze, the dome of the Santa Maria del Fiore cathedral

Ultimate room with a view: below, the River Arno from Ponte Vecchio Suite sun terrace at hotel Portrait Firenze

– but there are some brilliant alternatives for those seeking interiors inspiration.

ANTICO SETIFICIO FIORENTINO

ONE of the last workshops for silk manufacturing in the world, Antico Setificio Fiorentino was founded in 1786, and its hand-operated and semi-mechanical looms weave beautiful fabrics, embellished using a machine designed by Leonardo da Vinci. Tours of the factory are by appointment only. Book to see



inspiring craftswomen in action. ■ anticoseificiofiorentino.com

MUSEO SALVATORE FERRAGAMO

JUST below the flagship store, the museum is devoted to the luxury footwear and fashion firm's history and the life of its founder, Salvatore. The latest exhibition, Across Art and Fashion, questions whether fashion is a cultural movement and features incredible pieces from Alexander McQueen to Andy Warhol. ■ ferragamo.com/museo

Ancient skills: above, book to see silk weaving at the historic Antico Setificio Fiorentino workshop

LIVE THERE

KNIGHT FRANK is selling this recently revamped two-bedroom ground-floor apartment, left, in Via Cavour for £646,000. In a palazzo that was once a convent, it is a fusion of traditional and contemporary design. Visit knightfrank.it.

Savills has a two-bedroom house, Casa Moderna, for sale in a small, quiet residential complex a few minutes from the centre of Florence for £765,270 (savills.com).

For sheer luxury, at Palazzo Tornabuoni, 27 private flats are offered under freehold whole ownership in a restored 15th-century palace in the heart of the city – or you can join the residence club and use one of 10 selected flats. Owners can treat their flats as their main or second home, and all residents can use the Four Seasons Hotel spa. There are no flats for sale right now but annual residence membership is available from £418,000 (palazzotornabuoni.com).



Take it from our collections though. Like the new Wardley chair. Its most defining features seem quite apparent but what you can't see are the traditional foxtail joints that bring them all together. They're the mark of true craftsmanship. In solid oak, £285. In hand-painted birch, £255.

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