

# VERANDA

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GLORIOUS  
SPACES  
*To Fall In Love With*





# RENAISSANCE TOWN

Florence glitters like a city and charms like a village. Federico Pratesi shows us how to soak in *la dolce vita* like a true *fiorentino*.

**W**e're castaways from the modern world, an oasis with the best art, food and fashion," says Federico Pratesi of his adopted Florence. The current head of his family's famed linen company—founded in nearby Pistoia by his great-grandfather in 1906—Pratesi's not just waxing poetic. When the sun sets here, the symmetrical stone facades

turn into walls of gold. The normally muddy Arno becomes a river of light, and the terra-cotta curves of Brunelleschi's dome glow pink above narrow medieval lanes. Doorways peek into workshops where artisans have tooled leather, chiseled marble or gilded wood for hundreds of years. Were it not for the near-constant *put-put-put* of *motorini*, you'd almost think you'd stumbled into another century.







A collection of frames on exhibit at the Stefano Bardini Museum; the blue walls were copied by Isabella Stewart Gardner for her own Boston museum.  
OPPOSITE: A view of the city from the Piazza Michelangelo.



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Which of course is all part of the allure. Because of its devotion to the past, this tiny Tuscan city of less than 370,000 people exerts an inordinately influential hold on the traveler's imagination. Florence rivals Paris or London in many respects, but unlike those major metropolises, it remains small and exceedingly easy to manage. No postmodern towers mar the pedestrian-scale streetscape. It's possible to walk from the Giardino della Gherardesca on one end of the burg to the

Giardino di Boboli on the other in well under an hour. In between—scattered throughout museums, chapels and palazzi—lies one of the world's most magnificent caches of art, chock-full of homegrown masterpieces by the likes of Michelangelo, Botticelli, Donatello and da Vinci.

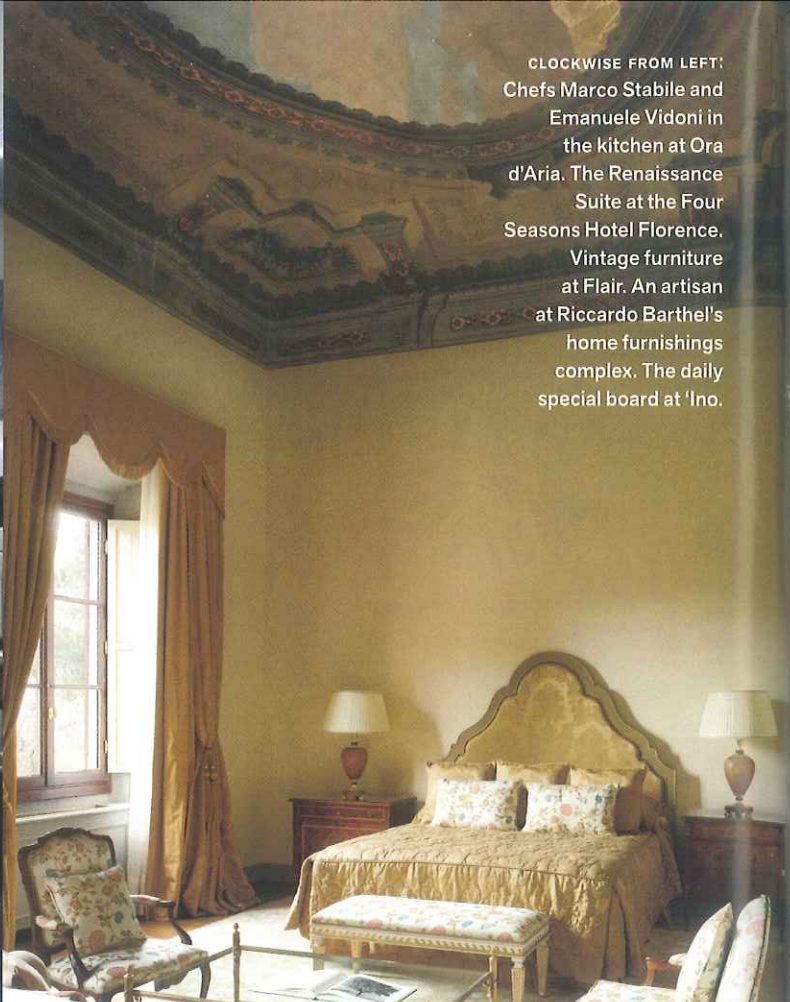
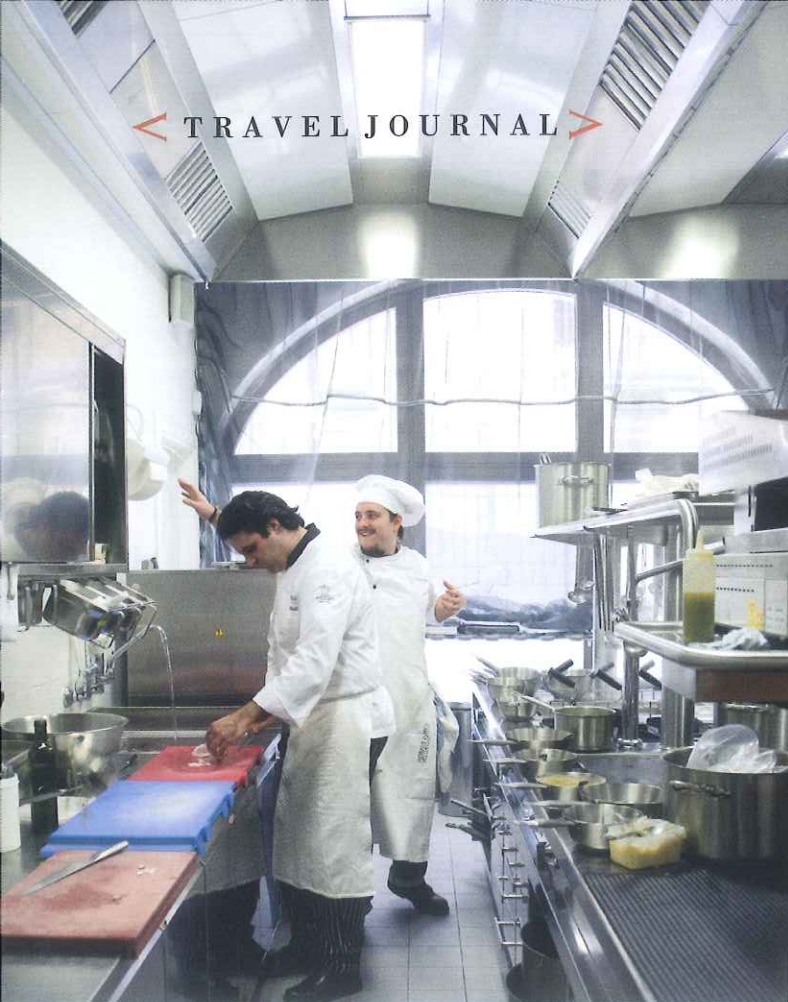
That rich artistic inheritance corresponds as well to an artisanal culture with roots in the Middle Ages. The tradition spans the Renaissance reigns of the luxury-loving Medici



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Federico Pratesi, who heads his family's linen firm. Mara Broccardi's shoe atelier. A tray at perfumery Lorenzo Villaresi. A work in progress at silversmith Paolo Pagliai. The dining room at Borgo San Jacopo.



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CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:  
Chefs Marco Stabile and  
Emanuele Vidoni in  
the kitchen at Ora  
d'Aria. The Renaissance  
Suite at the Four  
Seasons Hotel Florence.  
Vintage furniture  
at Flair. An artisan  
at Riccardo Barthel's  
home furnishings  
complex. The daily  
special board at l'Ino.

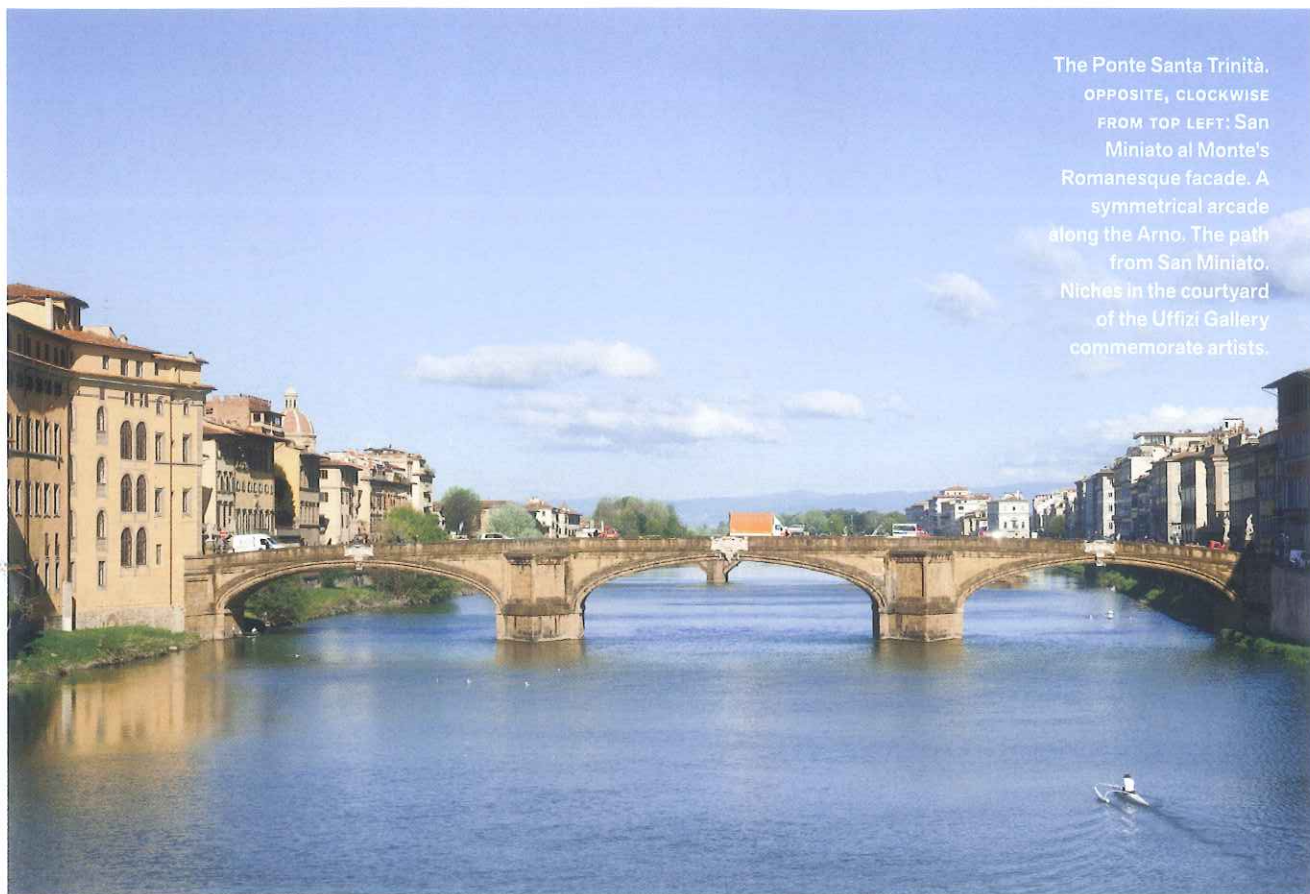
dukes and the 1950s birth of modern Italian fashion. (It's no accident that the labels Gucci, Ferragamo and Pucci, among others, were born here.) "Tuscans are obsessed with detail and quality," says Pratesi. He credits his family's success to the local dedication to handicraft: "You can still find three generations of artisans working on the same item under one roof. They're committed to that heritage—they don't like to work fast, and they don't like to make poor-quality goods." The

ethos colors Florence. "When you live here, you share that standard," whether it be for the best silver, shoes or panini. "A nobleman and a shop clerk will expect the same refinement."

That lifestyle might be the real reason the city endures as a compelling destination. In Florence, even the run-of-the-mill is elevated, and visitors get to partake. Of course, it helps to have a local's insight. Luckily for us, on the following pages, Pratesi is only too happy to share his favorite local haunts.







The Ponte Santa Trinità.  
OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE  
FROM TOP LEFT: San  
Miniato al Monte's  
Romanesque facade. A  
symmetrical arcade  
along the Arno. The path  
from San Miniato.  
Niches in the courtyard  
of the Uffizi Gallery  
commemorate artists.

## FEDERICO PRATESI'S FLORENCE

### HOTEL

•The **FOUR SEASONS HOTEL FLORENCE** has a beautiful setting, surrounded by the eleven-acre Giardino della Chierardesca, originally planted in the fifteenth century. The hotel itself is an updated palazzo that manages to be grand without ever getting stuffy. The staff makes everyone feel like a Medici. Rooms have soaring ceilings with crown moldings and bathrooms swimming in marble. Suites are spectacular—some, like the Renaissance Suite, feature restored quattrocento frescoes. *Borgo Pinti, 99; 011-39-055-26-26-1; doubles from \$423.*

### DINING

•Balcony tables at **BORG SAN JACOPO** are perched above the Arno and take in views of the Ponte Vecchio—it's like you're floating in a boat on the river. Dishes by chef Beatrice Segoni, such as caprese salad with blue Himalayan salt, are modern takes on Italian classics. *Borgo San Jacopo, 62r; 011-39-055-28-16-61.*

•Chef Marco Stabile does a very refined version of Tuscan cuisine at **ORA D'ARIA**. I still savor the incredible crostini topped with *lardo di Colonnata* I ate on my first visit. It's a delicacy of cured pork fat that might sound scary, but when done right it's pure heaven. *Via dei Georgofili, 11r; 011-39-055-200-1699.*

•The people I send to **'INO** still talk about it months later. You wouldn't believe that a panino can change the way you think about food, but those that Alessandro Frassica serves—such as one made from *robiola*, anchovies, sun-dried tomatoes and oregano—definitely will. *Via dei Georgofili, 3r-7r; 011-39-055-21-92-08.*

•**CAMILLO TRATTORIA** is an elegant brick vaulted restaurant where you'll find yourself surrounded by chattering, well-dressed Italians. The simple menu features standbys like an excellent *fritto misto* or delicious house made tagliatelle with fresh porcini. *Borgo San Jacopo, 57r; 011-39-055-21-24-27.*

### SHOPPING

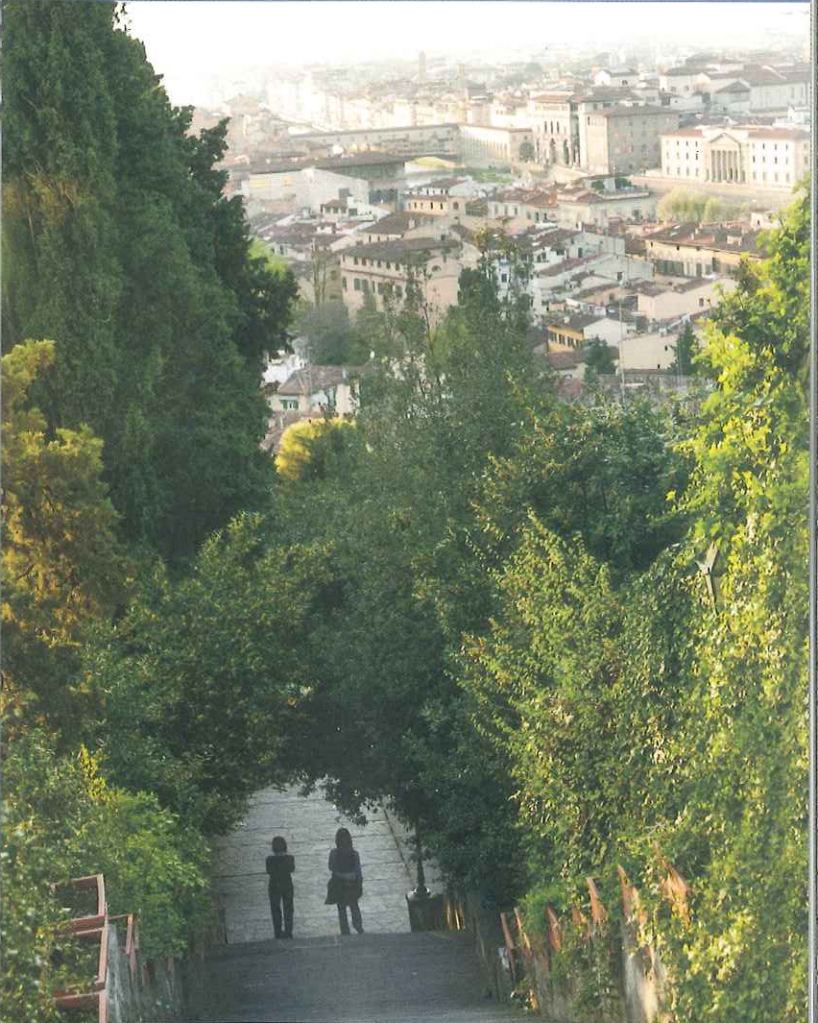
•**PAOLO PAGLIAI** is a silversmith who makes trays, cups and cutlery that are works of art. He is an expert at copies and repairs, and if you bring in a damaged heirloom he will fix it so you won't be able to tell it was ever broken. *Borgo San Jacopo, 41r; 011-39-055-28-28-40.*

•You can find everything from antiques to lighting and hardware at **RICCARDO BARTHEL**. It's like a chic bazaar where everything is well edited and well crafted. I'd buy all of it if I could. *Via dei Serragli, 234r; 011-39-055-228-0721.*

•A Renaissance man with a background in philosophy and Islamic culture, **LORENZO VILLORESI** is now a perfumer who's known as one of the best "noses" in the world. He's a resident genius who creates bespoke fragrances by appointment. *Via de' Bardi, 14; 011-39-055-23-41-187.*

•The merchandise at **FLAIR**—mirrored chests of drawers, leather armchairs, chrome lamps—spans all kinds of eras









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and styles, but owner Franco Mariotti pulls it together in a way that's both stylish and timeless. *Piazza Goldoni, 6r; 011-39-055-267-0154.*

• **MARA BROCCARDI** is an Englishwoman who apprenticed with shoemakers to learn the trade and then opened a jewel box of an atelier in the Oltrarno. She creates wonderful made-to-measure and ready-to-wear heels and flats from luscious materials like python, alligator and lizard. My wife Gaia loves them. *Sdrucchiolo de' Pitti, 17r; 011-39-055-267-0211.*

• The Florence **PRATESI** store is close to the company's heart. It carries a selection of extra items from the archives that aren't available anywhere else. *Lungarno Corsini, 38-40r; 011-39-055-28-94-88.*

• Family owned **MOLERIA LOCCHI** has been in operation since the nineteenth century and specializes in glass and crystal. They produce delicate candlesticks, gorgeously etched vases and glimmering decanters. They can also flawlessly recreate missing pieces from a table setting or meticulously restore a damaged antique. *Via Domenico Burchiello, 10; 011-39-055-229-8371.*

### ATTRACTIONS

• Named after the antiquarian who founded the space as a gallery in the late 1800s, the **STEFANO BARDINI MUSEUM** houses a collection of Renaissance works, including decorative arts such as gilded frames and architectural remnants. It's charmingly organized according to Bardini's sense of aesthetics. *Via dei Renai, 37; 011-39-055-234-2427.*

• From the center of town, it takes ten minutes to get to the Romanesque church of **SAN MINIATO AL MONTE**. But it's such a peaceful place, removed from the bustle and surrounded by a sublime expression of architecture and nature. *Via delle Porte Sante, 34; 011-39-055-234-2768.*

• In a town filled with centuries-old art, **GALLERIA BIAGIOTTI** specializes in the cutting edge. It's run by American Carol Biagiotti and her Italian-born daughter Caterina, and they have a reputation for finding contemporary artists on the rise. *Viadelle Belle Donne, 39r; 011-39-055-21-47-57. □*

Join *VERANDA* editors Oct. 17-23 for an insider's tour of Florence. For more info, call Valerie Wilson Travel, 212-592-1377.