



Florentine Palaces

Defence, humanism, magnificence and beauty

28 January–1 February 2026

(MM 878)

5 days • £2,980

Lecturer: Dr Michael Douglas-Scott

An examination of one of the most fascinating aspects of the Florentine Renaissance, the private palace.

Medieval, Baroque, Neo-Classical and 19th-century examples as well.

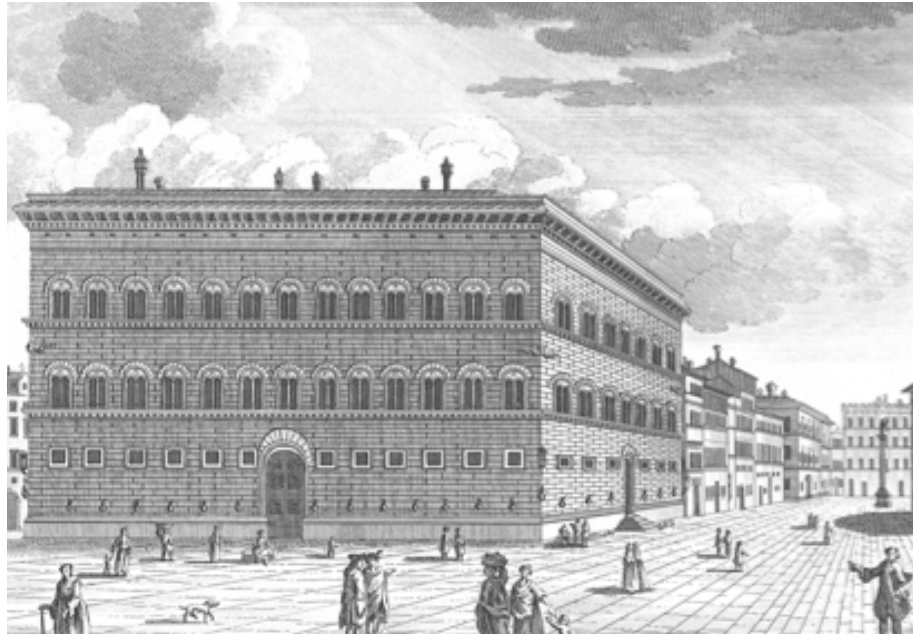
Several special arrangements to see palaces not usually open to the public.

Renaissance Florence experienced one of the most spectacular property booms of all time. From the second half of the 14th to the beginning of the 16th century as many as 100 private *palazzi* were built throughout the city. The period was also one of the pivotal moments of western architecture, witnessing a design revolution that was to have an impact on the rest of Europe and the Americas for 500 years.

In the preceding couple of centuries, intense clan and class rivalries required *palazzi* to be highly defensible structures. Like many Italian cities, Florence bristled with tower houses, of which several stubs can still be seen, and the massive Palazzo Vecchio, the town hall, retains its fortress-like aesthetic. While an intimidating monumentality remained a design feature of the Renaissance palace, decreasing lawlessness and increasing wealth fortuitously combined with new humanist concepts of 'magnificence' and 'virtue', by which the elite were required to demonstrate their greatness with 'fitting expenditure'.

Constructed on a magnificent scale, three times the height of a three-storey building today, the typical palace's spread was equally expansive, frequently swallowing up a multitude of smaller dwellings. And the design of these high-fashion mansions represented a dramatic shift in architectural language. The credit for their creation, however, remained the patron rather than the architect. A Renaissance *palazzo* was intended as a statement of dynastic ambition, its façade emblazoned with coats of arms, its interior trumpeting the family name in every visual detail.

Fortunes were spent – and lost – keeping up with the Medici. Many palaces remained unfinished through lack of funds (neither the Gondi nor the Rucellai were complete at the time of their founder's death); and even more – including the Pitti and the Davanzati



Palazzo Strozzi, copper engraving, c.1770.

– changed hands through financial necessity within a generation.

By the end of the 16th century, the Florentine *palazzo* was being adapted to accommodate more elaborate households and lifestyles, but splendour remained their defining characteristic. Certainly no Renaissance patron would have felt embarrassed by the endeavours of his 17th- and 18th-century successors, such as Alessandro Capponi or the Corsini family.

Itinerary

Day 1. Fly at c. 11.30am (British Airways) from London City Airport to Florence. Visit the Palazzo Vecchio, a sturdy fortress at the civic heart of the city with outstanding interiors and lavish frescoes by Ghirlandaio in the *sala dei gigli* and by Bronzino in the Chapel of Eleanor of Toledo.

Day 2. Visit Palazzo Davanzati, built in the second half of the 14th century in one of the oldest quarters of Florence. See Palazzo Strozzi, a late 15th-century construction of formidable proportions. In the afternoon visit the privately-owned Palazzo Corsini al Parione (by special arrangement), a vast baroque *palazzo* with views over the Arno. See the exterior of the 16th-century Palazzo Lanfredini, with

handsome *sgraffiti* on the façade. Visit also the chapel in the Palazzo Medici-Riccardi with exquisite frescoes by Benozzo Gozzoli.

Day 3. Visit the Bargello, a medieval *palazzo* housing Florence's finest sculpture collection with works by Donatello, Verrocchio and Michelangelo. Following this see Palazzo Marucelli Fenzi, built in the 16th century for the Castelli family by Gherardo Silvani and later enlarged by the Marucelli family. It contains paintings by Sebastiano Ricci. Also visit the Palazzo Corsini al Prato (by special arrangement): begun in 1591 to designs by Bernardo Buontalenti, the *palazzo* was acquired in 1621 by Filippo Corsini and most of the palace and gardens date to his refurbishment. An aperitivo and dinner here (or lunch), hosted by the owner.

Day 4. Begin at the Uffizi, which has masterpieces by every major Florentine painter as well as international Old Masters. In the afternoon, visit the privately-owned Palazzo Gondi (by special arrangement), designed in 1490 by Giuliano da Sangallo, the favourite architect of Lorenzo de Medici. There are remarkable views of the city from the terrace.

Day 5. In the morning visit the redoubtable Palazzo Pitti, which houses several museums including the Galleria Palatina, outstanding

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continued

particularly for High Renaissance and Baroque paintings. The afternoon is free. Fly from Florence to London City Airport, arriving at c. 9.15pm.

The tour is dependent on the kindness of many individuals and organisations, some of whom are reluctant to make arrangements far in advance, so the order of visits outlined above may change and there may be substitutions for some palaces mentioned.

Lecturer

Dr Michael Douglas-Scott mixes scholarship with accessible discourse, wit with reasoned opinion, and is highly sought-after as an art history lecturer. He has lectured for New York University (London campus) and Birkbeck College, University of London, specialising primarily in 16th-century Italian art and architecture. He studied at the Courtauld and Birkbeck College and lived in Rome for several years. He has written articles for *Arte Veneta*, *Burlington Magazine* and the *Journal of the Warburg & Courtauld Institutes*.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £2,980 or £2,530 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £3,270 or £2,820 without flights.

Suggested train itinerary: London – Paris – Milan – Florence: c. 12 hours.

Included: flights (economy class) with British Airways (Embraer 190); travel by private coach; hotel accommodation; breakfasts; 3 dinners with wine, water, coffee; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Accommodation. Hotel Santa Maria Novella, Florence (hotelsantamarianovella.it): a delightful 4-star hotel in a very central location. *Single rooms are doubles for sole occupancy.*

How strenuous? The tour involves a lot of walking in the town centre where the ground is sometimes uneven and pavements are narrow. It should not be attempted by anyone who has difficulty with everyday walking and stair-climbing. Fitness is essential.

Group size: between 8 and 18 participants.