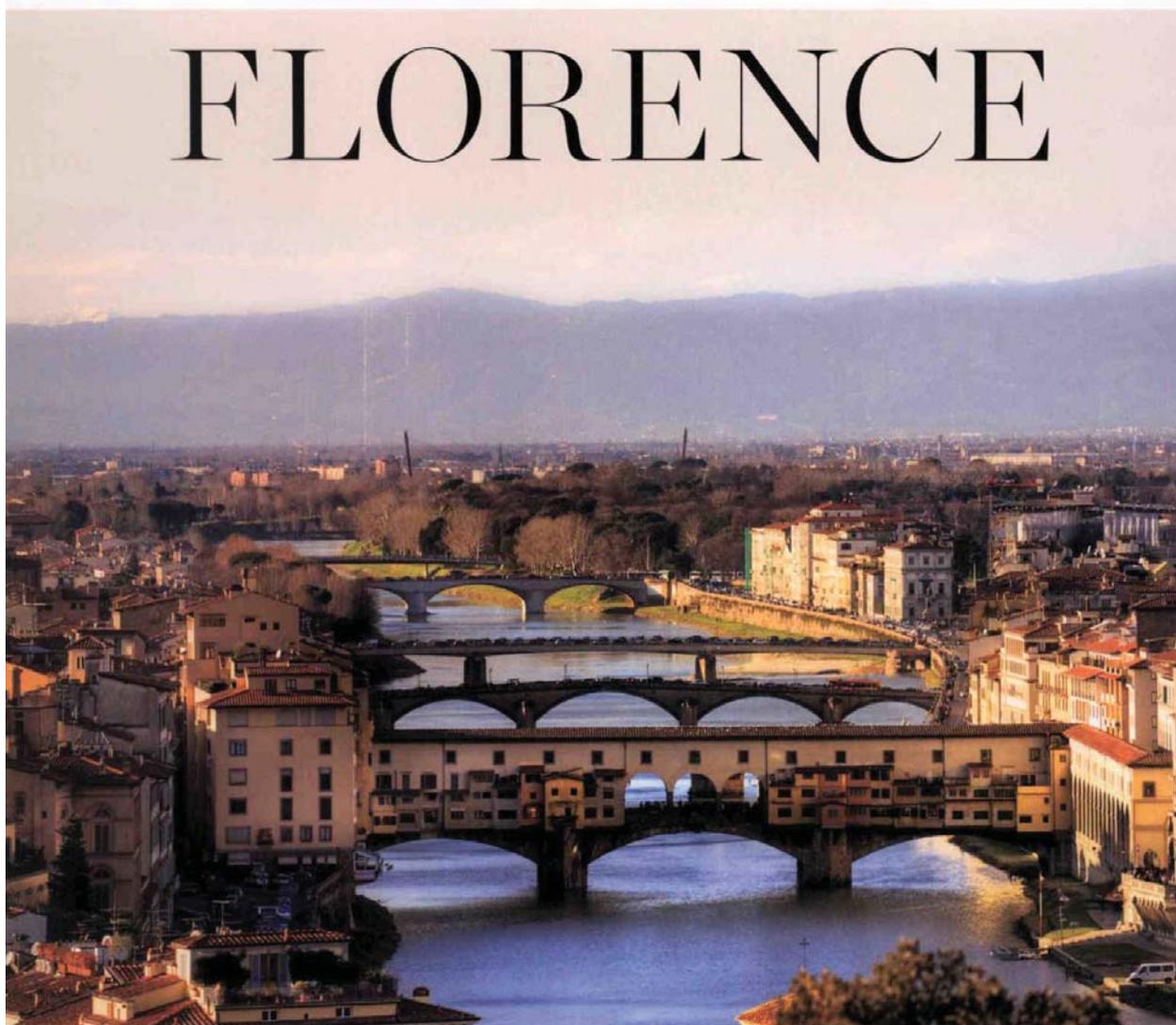


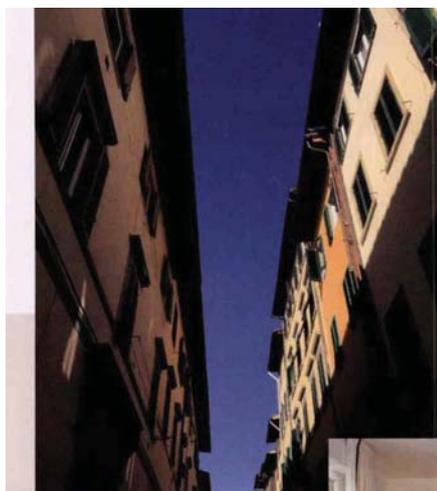
Ferragamo's FLORENCE



Italy's cultural hub makes for a particularly stylish retreat when seen through the eyes of a famous Florentine fashion dynasty

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“Surely in this beautiful city, with its centuries of wealth in art and its long traditions of noble leatherwork, I can find the answer to my problem.” Such was the hope of Salvatore Ferragamo who, in his autobiography *Shoemaker of Dreams*, tells of his arrival in Florence, where he hoped to fulfil his ambition of owning a bespoke shoe shop. His eponymous label was born in 1927, and by the time he died in 1960, his small-town store had become a global fashion brand with a workforce of some 700 shoemakers, who handcrafted more than 350 pumps a day.

In Florence, Ferragamo's influence lives on in more ways than one. One of the city's top financial supporters, the designer helped to fund the restorations of the Fountain of Neptune, eight rooms at the Uffizi Gallery and the riverside road Lungarno degli Acciaiuoli.

It's on this street that you'll find the medieval Palazzo Spini Feroni, which has been synonymous with the designer ever since he bought it in 1937, just 10 years after his company was founded.



Today, it remains the site of the label's flagship store and museum.

A few doors down from here are three more nods to Ferragamo's legacy: a trio of hotels owned by his family, and on the other side of the river, a fourth: Hotel Lungarno.

Claiming to be the only hotel in Florence that sits directly on the Arno River (meaning if you jump out of the window, you're going to get wet), the luxury inn is dressed accordingly, with royal blue nautical-themed furnishings, navy pinstripe carpets and gaping windows that make you feel as though you're floating on the water itself.

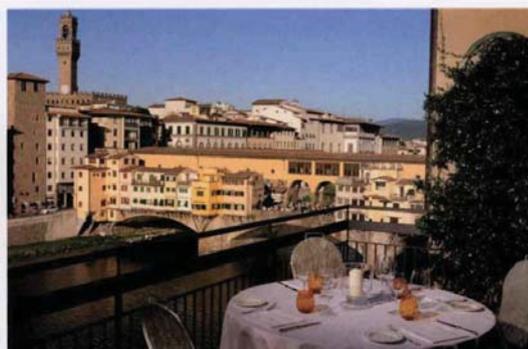
Even the crockery has anchors on it.

My riverside studio suite is spread across two floors, with balconies on each and postcard-worthy views of the Ponte Vecchio. The walls are decorated with Italian artwork and fashion illustrations hang above the bathroom sinks for sartorial inspiration. In fact, the hotel is something

of a monument to Italian art and style, with works by Bruno Cassinari and Antonio Bueno (to name a couple), and sketches from the Giorgini Archive, an organisation dedicated to early Italian fashion. There are 440 pieces of art overall, and guided tours with artist-specific itineraries on offer.

The maritime theme continues in the hotel's PictEAU Lounge, where breakfast and lunch are served. The latter includes traditional Tuscan soup, Bolognese tortellini and thick spindles of tagliatelle, all served with very generous shavings of parmesan.

Dinner is less conventional. At the restaurant Borgo San Jacopo, potatoes are on the menu – and not just in your standard mashed, roasted or jacket varieties. Instead, head chef Peter Brunel has crafted a seven-dish tasting menu around the humble spud. Among the highlights are Campari-soaked crisps



TRAVEL

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: STREETS OF FLORENCE; PICTEAU LOUNGE; VIEW OF THE PONTE VECCHIO; BORGO SAN JACOPO; PICTEAU LOUNGE

OPPOSITE PAGE: ARNO RIVER

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⊙ served with a negroni chaser and potato 'pasta' spirals drizzled with a creamy carbonara sauce.

It's all a bit Heston, and each dish is served with a similar side of showmanship – a nod among waiters signals it is negroni o'clock and our miniature Camparis are opened with a unified cracking sound, a brief moment of eye contact indicating when it is time to pour.

Such finesse, delivered with both style and substance, is to be expected from a hotel owned by the Ferragamo family – but for all the pomp and ceremony, it is the location that truly excels. Found on the quieter southern side of the Arno River, **Hotel Lungarno** strikes the balance between city break and luxury escape, giving its guests the opportunity to enjoy the more relaxed side of **Florence** while still being within walking distance of its buzzing historical centre.

This is a combination that I take full advantage of, strolling around the city during the day and retreating to the comfort and cocktails of the Picteau Lounge at night. Compact enough to explore on foot, Florence

lends itself to a ditch-the-map attitude and after a few days I find I can navigate the city without difficulty – and without my phone's temperamental GPS.

I travel in November, and despite a chill in the air it is gloriously sunny. I make the most of it, juggling cultural activities with strolls through the city centre, popping to see Michelangelo's David at the Galleria dell'Accademia one morning (go early to avoid the queues), and admiring the ivory, mint and terracotta facade of the striking Duomo di Firenze on another.

On a rare grey day, I explore the Misericordia Museum's private archives, a tour of which can be arranged exclusively through Hotel Lungarno. Thought to be the world's oldest charitable initiative, the Florentine Misericordia was founded in 1244 and the records of its work assisting ailing patients or accident victims provide a unique history – of not just the charity, but the city itself. Tucked away in a box room

at the back, I'm shown snippets of this precious library, presented by two enthusiastic volunteers who buzz with excitement as they don white gloves and thumb through the crisp pages, laughing as they discover doodles drawn by bored scribes some 800 years ago.

On my last day, I make the climb up to the Piazzale Michelangelo, which offers an unrivalled view of the city. Looking out at the Arno River, the terracotta Duomo and the bell tower of the Palazzo Vecchio basking in the last of the day's sunlight, I'm reminded of Salvatore Ferragamo, and his first impression of the city: "As I strolled through the summer night and felt the impact of its great beauty, I thought perhaps in Florence I had found my dream." 📍

From £240 per night, room only, lungarnocollection.com

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: PRESTIGE DOUBLE RIVER VIEW ROOM; VIEW FROM HOTEL LUNGARNO; FLORENCE

