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VIRTUOSO LIFE

BEST OF
THE BEST
HOTEL AWARDS
PAGE 201

UNDER
PATAGONIA'S
SPELL

THE WOW ISSUE

YVES SAINT LAURENT'S MARRAKECH > THE NEW AMERICAN WEST
TIMELESS JORDAN > THE JOY OF TRANSATLANTIC CRUISING



Falling for Florence

Art history and high style in Tuscany's capital city.

BY ELAINE SRNKA PHOTOGRAPHY BY SUSAN WRIGHT

GO FOR La dolce vita gets even sweeter in the fall, when summer's heat – and crowds – begin to dissipate. Eminently walkable, the cradle of the Renaissance is an open-air gallery, with centuries-old architecture and a picturesque location along the Arno River. While wandering is part of its charm, "Florence is a city behind closed doors," says David Lowy, a travel agency executive based in Vancouver, British Columbia. "You need someone to open the doors for you." He turns to Virtuoso on-site tour partners such as Florentetown to arrange after-hours viewings of Michelangelo's *David* at the Accademia Gallery, private **terrace tours at the Duomo**, and, when it reopens next year, access to the Vasari Corridor, the Medici family's secret passage above the Ponte Vecchio.

near the Ponte Vecchio, **Trattoria 4 Leoni** (*Via de' Vellutini 1r*) serves delicate pear pasta with asparagus; fried zucchini flowers; and beautiful salads. You can't go wrong with the house Chianti Classico.

Sip a complimentary glass of prosecco during the inevitable wait at **La Giostra** (*Borgo Pitti 12r 10/18R*), a lively spot where hundreds of white lights twinkle overhead and the eclectic owner works the room like a celebrity. Try the pappardelle with wild boar or the famed Florentine steak.

"No acqua, solo vino" reads the sign at **Enoteca Pitti Gola e Cantina** (*Piazza Pitti 16*), a wine bar stocked with small-production gems. Directly across from the Pitti Palace, its patio makes a perfect people-watching spot.

EAT Nestled in a quiet piazza

SHOP Founded by monks 800

Clockwise from top right: Florence's famed skyline, Enoteca Pitti Gola e Cantina, Ponte Vecchio, pear pasta with asparagus at Trattoria 4 Leoni, and Santa Maria Novella's ancient elixirs.





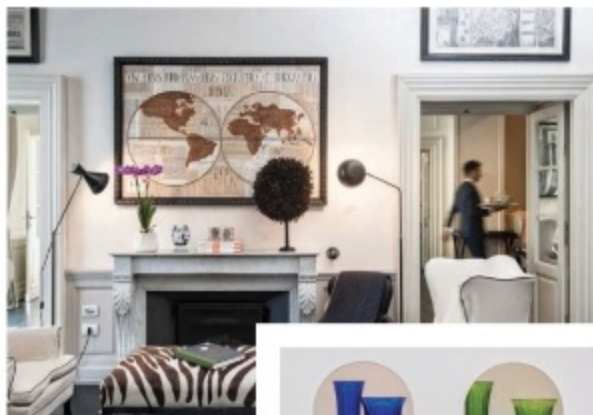
years ago, **Officina Profumo-Farmaceutica di Santa Maria Novella** (Via della Scala 16) is thought to be the oldest pharmacy in the world. The palatial apothecary is full of pricey potions and perfumes based on ancient herbal recipes.

To dress like an Italian, start with the right tailor. Shirtmaker **Simone Abbarchi** (Borgo Santissimi Apostoli 16) crafts reasonably priced, made-to-measure (and discreetly monogrammed) men's shirts. Stop by his tiny bottega for a fitting or two, and he'll mail the finished pieces home for you.

Florence-born **Mario Luca Giusti** (Via Della Spada 20r) designs housewares in vivid "synthetic crystal," from festive wineglasses to faceted Champagne buckets.

Find designer deals on Gucci, Ferragamo, Bottega Veneta, and more at **The Mall** (Via Europa 8, Leccio Reggello), a luxury outlet 30 minutes southeast of the city (you can take a shuttle). Virtuoso guests receive additional discounts on certain purchases, a welcome gift, a complimentary beverage at Gucci Caffè, and priority access at the tax refund office.

STAY Owned by the Ferragamo family, the 63-room **Hotel Lungarno** recently reopened after an extensive refurbishment. It retains its chic nautical style, impressive art collection, and incredible location directly on the Arno River. *Doubles from \$583, including breakfast daily and a one-way airport transfer.*



Clockwise from left: Villa Cora's grand salon, cozy seating at J.K. Place, a rainbow of glassware at Mario Luca Giusti, and shirtmaker Simone Abbarchi.

Also owned by the Ferragamos, the 37-room **Portrait Firenze** possesses a contemporary, masculine decor that sets it apart in a city of old-world tradition. Spacious suites offer well-stocked kitchenettes; request one overlooking the Arno with views of the Ponte Vecchio. *Doubles from \$815, including breakfast daily, a bottle of wine, and a one-way airport transfer.*

Working fireplaces and stacks of books lend a stylishly homey feel to 20-room **J.K. Place Firenze**, located on the same piazza as the Basilica of Santa Maria Novella. The atrium courtyard's family-style table beckons you to linger over a long lunch with friends. *Doubles from \$584, including breakfast daily and a \$100 dining credit.*

TIP

"I love the Italian men's 'uniform': dress shirt, jeans, and a jacket – no ties! Women, take note: Wear flats for walking over cobblestoned streets."

– David Lowy,
Virtuoso travel advisor,
Vancouver, British Columbia

Set above the Boboli Gardens, minutes from the city, 44-room **Villa Cora** feels like the opulent residence it once was, brimming with frescoes, fine art and furnishings, and lots of formal swagger. Its heated outdoor pool is a welcome respite after a day of sightseeing, and the seasonal Sunday brunch is a must. *Doubles from \$470, including breakfast daily and a \$100 dining credit.* **V**