

# At Four Seasons Hotel Firenze, Art Is All Around

Four Seasons Hotel Firenze is a living museum of art history, set within the walled tranquility of Florence's largest private garden. The Hotel comprises two Renaissance palaces, whose previous residents include a Pope, an order of nuns, Italy's first railway company, five centuries of Florentine nobility and a Viceroy of Egypt (who sold it when his harem was barred from moving in). Today, the Hotel's colorful history unfolds through its ornately painted and crafted interiors, which have returned to their original beauty following seven years of painstaking restoration.



The Hotel is located on the edge of Florence's historic centre and occupies two protected buildings: the 15th century Palazzo della Gherardesca and the "Conventino", a 16th century Palazzo, which was once a convent. Between them lie over 11 acres (4.5 hectares) of botanical gardens – the Giardino della Gherardesca – one of the most beautiful and undiscovered green spaces in town.

Behind its classical but unassuming façade, the Hotel offers its guests the rare opportunity to view 15th – 19th century artworks in their original context. Frescoes, bas-reliefs, stuccoes and silk wallpapers have been carefully restored to reveal vivid detail dating back over five centuries. Original works of art and architectural detailing can also be found in several of the Hotel's 116 bedrooms, suites and bathrooms.

The restoration of the Hotel has been strictly overseen by Florence's Superintendant for Artistic Historical Patrimony, Ministry for Fine Arts and Culture and Department of Fine Arts. One of the roles of these governmental agencies was to determine to which period artistic and cultural artifacts should be restored. As such, the artworks throughout the Hotel are testament to the many revolutions of artistic taste throughout the Palazzo's and Conventino's long history.

The Hotel's imposing 15th century courtyard Lobby with its intricate bas-reliefs and stuccoes is illustrative of the Renaissance tendency towards public displays of wealth. The courtyard bas-reliefs, the property's most valuable artwork, comprise 12 symmetrical sections depicting a cycle of classical and mythological events. The courtyard is flanked by porticoes and barrel-vaults, decorated with an ornamental coffered ceiling, comprising thousands of painted, sunken panels.



The pictorial works in the courtyard were commissioned in 1555 by Alessandro de Medici to Jan van der Straet (1523–1605) (aka ‘lo Strandano’), a Flemish Mannerist artist. Strandano was also responsible for the frescoes depicting the Nativity and Adoration in the Palazzo’s chapel (now the Hotel’s Reading Room) and the vaulted stairway leading to the Hotel’s first floor.

The theatricality of late Baroque art is demonstrated in the highly decorated suites on the first floor. Commissioned in the early 17th century, these frescoes were painted by Baldassarre Franceschini (1611–1689) (aka ‘Il Volterrano’) and include *The Human Mind’s Blindness Lit by the Truth* – a fine example of the Rococo style of decoration favored by the nobility of the time. Il Volterrano’s most well-known works can be seen in the cupola and back wall of Florence’s Santa Croce Chapel.

During the 18th century, the Della Gherardesca family commissioned a series of paintings depicting their own family history, another popular trend of the time. These frescoes, seen in the Hotel’s Della Gherardesca Ballroom and the Gallery, were painted by late baroque artists Vincenzo Meucci (1694–1766) and Giovanni Domenico Ferretti (1692–1768). Meucci also painted frescoes for the cupola of the Basilica di San Lorenzo, one of Florence’s largest churches, while Ferretti’s frescoes can be seen in the Duomo’s Chapel of San Giuseppe.

The former church of the Conventino has been restored to its 19th century design, its towering, vaulted ceiling and painted walls creating an impressive backdrop for banquets and galas. The Conventino offers the privacy of a ‘hotel within the hotel’, and also features first floor frescoes and wall paintings. An impressive lacunar ceiling, crowns the main public areas.



Nineteenth century art is also represented in the Hotel by the beautifully–restored Chinese wallpapers found in the Volterrano Suite, one of the Hotel’s historical Suites. Previously the Palazzo’s ‘Chinese Room’, the wallpaper in the suite depicts a scenic panorama of trailing flowers and exotic birds. This delicate and rare example of Chinese decorative art has been restored to the vibrant beauty of its original design and illustrates one of the historical fascinations of the 19th century nobility for all things

Oriental.

Throughout the property, the coats of arms of Scala and the Medici and Della Gheradesca families feature in paintings, stuccoes and stained glass and serve as further reminders of the building's illustrious past.

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