

# FIRENZE EXPERIENCE & IMPRESSION

SFU ITALIA DESIGN 2007 Paul Brokenshire

## Florentine Cortile

Finding personal transcendent experiences when one is traveling with a large group is not always an easy thing. This was not the case so much in Rome and Tuscany but here in Florence I have found that it is the quiet moments when I have escaped from the group when many such experiences occur. The spaces in Florence where moments of harmony seem to occur almost without fail were within the cortile of the churches and palaces of the city.

For those who have never been to Florence the photographs will allow you to get a small sense of what these courtyards are like but unfortunately they cannot capture the feeling of actually being within one. And it is the feeling of course that is most important in these situations so I will make an attempt at describing it. Try to create this space in your mind - a small, square outdoor space, ringed on all sides by an arched portico. The portico is lined by a low stone wall along the edge where it meets the garden, making a perfect bench, while the columns provide a place to rest your back. The stone of this wall that remains in shadow is cool to the touch, a welcomed contrast to the blazing heat of the city outside. Beyond the portico, in the garden, the sun falls upon the shrubs and the central orange tree, illuminating the green of the leaves which contrasts with the brown stone of the church wall rising above. Despite the fact that this space is in the heart of the dense fabric of the city, the cortile is silent but for the sound of footsteps and birds.

Many of these cortile were bustling spaces that the families of the palazzos used for commerce and entertainment, but the cortile of the monasteries and churches were often far more contemplative and were, for me, the most moving. Of my time in the cortile of Florence, sitting in an old wooden chair in the monastery of San Marco and listening to the compositions of Hildegard of Bingen was the most memorable by far, but my time at Santa Croce and San Lorenzo will also stay with me for a long time to come.



Cortile at Chiesa di San Lorenzo



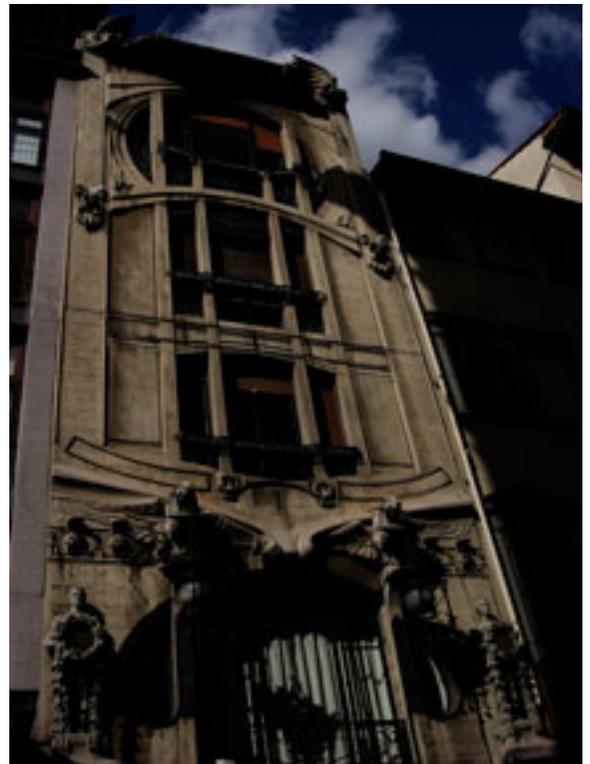
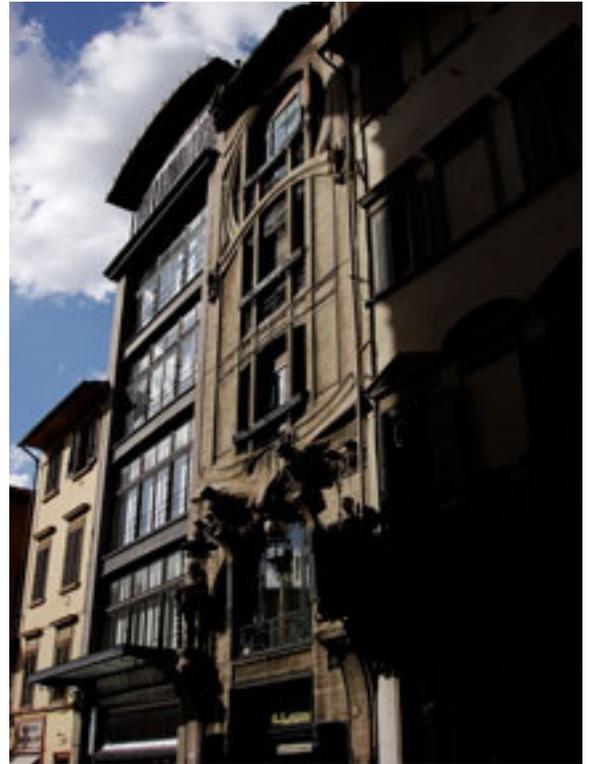
# FIRENZE EXPERIENCE & IMPRESSION

SFU ITALIA DESIGN 2007 Paul Brokenshire

## Giovanni Michelazzi

A different kind of experience that occurred for many of us at different times during the trip came as a direct result of the preparation and research that we did before we left. Each of us researched a wide array of buildings, people, and moments of history before we came to Italy and during that research we each found particular portions that inspired us. One such set of buildings that inspired me back in Vancouver was the Stile Liberty buildings of Giovanni Michelazzi in Florence.

Upon reaching the city I resolved to locate the ones that I could find as soon as possible and this opportunity came up during the afternoon of our second day in town. The complicated thing was the fact that I had forgotten my map at the apartment. Seeing this as an opportunity as much as it was a hindrance though I quickly lost myself within the streets of Florence, steadily moving in the general direction of where Russell had said the Casa Galleria Vichi was located. Slowly, as I zigzagged through the cramped streets, the search for this building became one of the more memorable experiences for me as I began observing the buildings and streets I moved through in order to keep my bearings. During this wander I also reached the Arno river on foot for the first time and enjoyed the rare cooling breeze that was coming in off the water. After walking west down the river for some time (and now with only the foggiest sense of exactly where I was) I chose to step into a piazza that I was walking past in order to look at the facade of the church that faced it. While I walked through the piazza I noticed that off to one side, 4 buildings to the right of the church lay the Michelazzi facade that I had been moving towards the whole time. The unexpected discovery of it heightened my delight and although the joy of finding the building and studying every piece of it that I could once I got there was everything I could have hoped for, it was the process of reaching it that has stayed with me since that day.



# FIRENZE EXPERIENCE & IMPRESSION

SFU ITALIA DESIGN 2007 Paul Brokenshire

## San Miniato al Monte

The day that I spent wandering around San Miniato al Monte was definitely one of my favorites of the trip so far and is an example of my own preferred method of visiting sites when in a foreign country. I prefer to take my time with most places and really enjoy and get to know them rather than blitzing my way through 10 sights a day so that I can check them off in some mental list. The day that I went up to the basilica was one of the first times since I got to Florence that I truly had the time to do this and San Miniato was definitely the place to choose. It was a day of an extended series of unexpected and harmonious moments as I wandered throughout the gardens and the cemetery that surrounded the basilica. In addition, the day was one of the first where I had the time to just sit, enjoy, and sketch the sculptures that surrounded me. After my wanderings I stepped into the basilica itself just as a small mass was starting in the lower section of the basilica. While I am not myself a devout, the sound of the monks singing that rose up into the basilica fit the mood that I had gotten into during my wanders and acted as a perfect capstone to the experience.



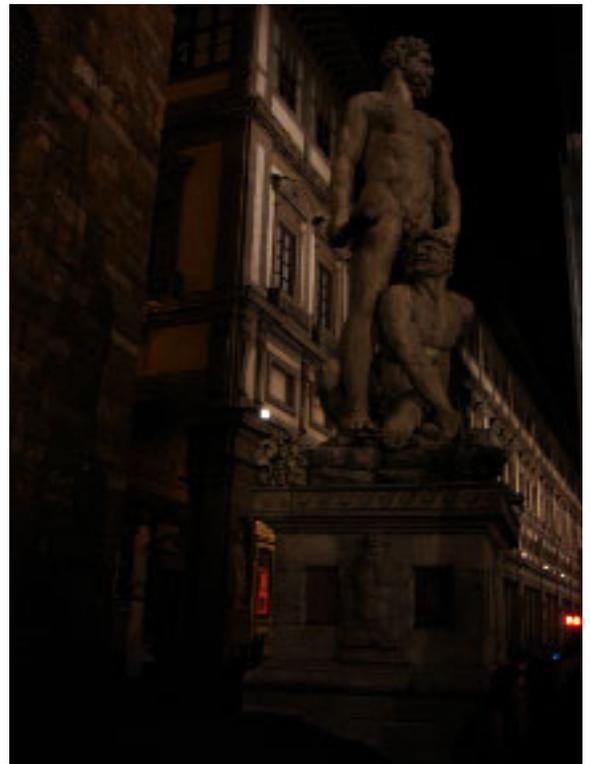
# FIRENZE EXPERIENCE & IMPRESSION

SFU ITALIA DESIGN 2007 Paul Brokenshire

## Night in the Uffizi and Piazza della Signoria

One of the smaller moments that occurred in Florence happened while I was walking through the city center in the late evening, watching the people on the streets and in the piazze. Of these piazze, the Piazza della Signoria is one of the most vibrant and alive at this hour so it was the location that I kept circling back to. It is often the site of outdoor concerts and live music which, along with the enormously powerful activity nodes of the Loggia de Lanci, the brightly lit restaurants, and the Palazzo Vecchio draws a wide variety of people to the site at night. Unfortunately for our group this year, a giant stage for a dance exhibition was placed in just the right place in the piazza so that it completely blocked all access to the loggia, which became the personal porch of the 3 security guards tasked with the protection of the stage (an affront that angered far more people than just our group, including more than one apoplectic Italian gentleman.) The result of this incursion, which sat unused for 3 days prior to the aforementioned dance, was that the people and musicians who often inhabited the space spilled into other zones around the area, one of which ended up in a corner of the pedestrian street of the Uffizi gallery.

In my wanderings through the area I had passed him by while he was setting up without really noticing him but he had chosen a location with acoustics that allowed his music to reach the far end of the Uffizi and into the Piazza della Signoria as well. The music reached me as I stood halfway down the street staring up at the deep cobalt sky, framed through the cornice line of the Uffizi's walls and the various experiences blended perfectly in just the manner that Jayme described in his own paper. I sat for the next hour or so in the piazza, near enough to be able to hear the music, studied the statues as best I could, and watched the crowds that moved, or stood, or sat around the piazza until a break in the music occurred and the moment faded, at which point I continued on my way south towards the river to collect my bike and walk home.



# FIRENZE EXPERIENCE & IMPRESSION

SFU ITALIA DESIGN 2007 Paul Brokenshire

## Absurdly Good Dinners

The experiences both personal and profound that we have had while in Florence are powerful and important but one should never forget that each of us is traveling in the company of 12 other extraordinary people and many of the simplest moments with the whole group often result in experiences that may not be transcendent, but are often both powerful and memorable. The dinners we often have as a group, both in our own apartments before Florence as well as the many trips out to restaurants in the cities, are often the only times when we have the opportunity to sit as a group and talk and enjoy our time while absorbing the atmosphere of the city around us and the food in front of us.

I have read that smell and taste are often far more powerful memory triggers than images can ever be and it is at these dinners that the smells and the tastes are the most powerful. As a result of this the taste of many pastas, prosciutto, porchetta, and the myriad flavours of the various vino de casa we have sampled will forever remind me of my time here and the group of people that I shared it with.

