

# FIRENZE EXPERIENCE & IMPRESSION

SFU ITALIA DESIGN 2007 WAYNE LO

## Transcendent Moments

A transcendent moment to me is the instance of experiencing something that extends beyond the ordinary and gives an indescribable feeling of excitement and pleasure. These moments could be unexpected and out of nowhere, or something you've worked to find. Throughout our whole time in Rome, the Tuscan Hill towns, and of course Florence, these moments have become more and more evident. Perhaps it's the city (Florence is truly an inspiring place) providing these moments, but these moments captured by each individual of Gruppo IV each capture a particular magical sense of this transcendence. My personal moments range from the little things that are intriguing to moments that are built up and truly fulfilling.

## Santa Croce

One of the things I enjoy most about entering Basilicas is just the transitional space between the outside world and the interior of the church. What I particularly liked about this Basilica was the cloisters within them. When entering the main Basilica, I immediately felt the sense of space it provides. The high ceilings and the natural light pouring in, together with the simple yet appealing ceiling displaying the structural elements that hold it all together. After exploring the basilica, we went onto the first cloister, where the large open area just hit me. Gone were all the loud tourist groups and the sounds of the outside world. Like the courtyard of St. Cecilia in Rome, I was surprised at how these spaces were able to separate the outside world with just the sounds of the wind blowing, together with the birds hovering around the cloister.

At this point I was already in a calm state, but walking around the area made me appreciate the architecture of the columns, that central path that lead right to the Pazzi chapel. After viewing the cloister from a few different angles, we then ventured off into the inner cloister, a work designed by Brunelleschi during the development of the adjacent Pazzi chapel. At this point, the transitional spaces had taken me from the large Piazza where tourists were starting to gather to a space that just got us away from everybody. A place which was truly unappreciated



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by many as they just walked in, looked around, and walked back out. The thing about these spaces is that you have to really just sit there and absorb what you see to experience it all; the purpose it initially served, the subtle contrasts in the colours chosen, and the proportions of the columns in relation to the arches all made me experience this calmness and appreciation of this carefully thought out space. To top it off, I visited the Pazzi chapel right afterwards which really fit the pieces together. My transition back to the realm of urban reality was the amount of tourists that had started coming in, literally every 5 minutes having another swarm of tourists entering the chapel, snap some photos and leave right after to their next destination. The moment had come and gone, but when leaving Santa Croce through the first cloister, I was reminded once again with the birds chirping and the light pouring into the area. Once out the gate it was back to the piazza where it was then peak time for people to visit.



## Boboli Gardens

Before arriving in Florence I already knew that one of my own key destinations was the Boboli Gardens. What attracted me to this space was the sheer size of the area and how there is the large green space that has been preserved all this time. In a way it was like a Battery Park for Florence in my mind. I decided to get no map and just wander around for a couple hours.

Upon entering, the huge amphitheater quickly caught my attention. The main walkway lead uphill, a climb that made my knees shake a little, probably because the previous day I biked quite a bit and was sore from it. Nonetheless, the walk up had to be done and I was sure whatever was on the top was worth it. Heading uphill, I stopped many times to look back and appreciate the views the garden provided. With so much green space, it felt like being back home for awhile. Just sitting down in the shade every couple of levels was very nice. It made me appreciate the weather, despite the blazing hot afternoons, when there is shade it's a great breeze.



About mid way up the main axis, there was a fountain

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of Neptune, with his trident spearing downwards. This made me remember some research I had previously done about the place and how they had to develop an elaborate conduit system to bring water in because there was no natural water flow to the area. Upon reaching the top of the hill, there was a small round building with two staircases on either side that wrapped around it. At this point I was quite exhausted. I gave myself a moment to look back and see how far I had walked, which was quite a bit.



I then ventured up the right set of stairs and as I slowly went around the building and looked at the top, I saw the whole space open up. Since it was the top of the hill, there weren't many other trees in the way, just open sky. In the middle was another fountain, but what made my jaws drop was the view at the opposite side of the stairs. Opening up to the north side of the Oltrarno region, I saw a glimpse of San Miniato in the distance. The space was absolutely overwhelming for me, partially because of the journey up and also because the view was so unexpected. To describe this moment in one word would be serenity, seeing this other side of Florence was a treat. The colours of the sky in Florence have always been so lively and vivid, but it truly came to life as I just sat on the bench and watched the clouds go.



I absorbed this moment, and then walked towards the stairs again. There was a vantage point to view all the way down, where I saw where I had begun and it once again reaffirmed the immense scale of this place. I then wandered to the large portion of the gardens, which seemed like a large maze to me. All downhill, there were multiple paths that weaved and curved. While walking, I noticed what seemed like little paths that were kind of like shortcuts downwards. Since I was in the mood for exploring I decided to go down one of the paths and I eventually got sort of lost as the paths weren't particularly straightforward, and then I found myself kicking the branches just to advance forward.



After about five or ten minutes I found myself in this empty area, with no one else around. It had a fountain in the center, with four benches on four corners. I sat down, wrote in my journal about my day, and just absorbed the

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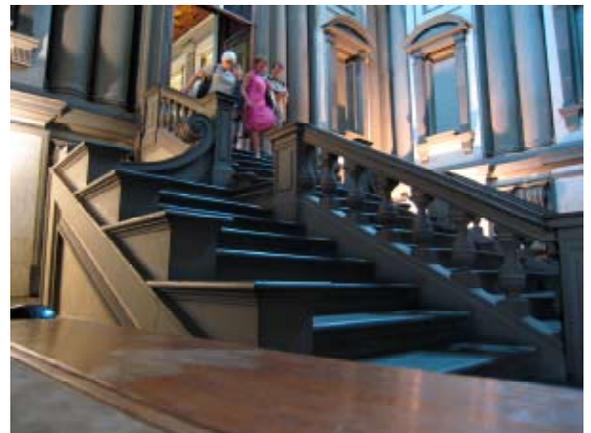
space. I found this place to be amazing. I think that for this trip for the most part I haven't had a lot of alone time, and this little trip of mine had really paid off. Time alone was what it was, and getting to the spot was quite fun as well. I was surprised I could experience two of these moments, all within the small time frame, but it's just these unexpected instances of calmness and peacefulness one can find anywhere.

I eventually left the area, but not before it was etched in my mind, something I could look back on later and get the same feeling. I found the main path, and what I realized was that there was a little 'normal' path all along to the space, but nobody went! This was a little odd for me, but I was glad to have that space to myself for the time. At this point I was physically and mentally exhausted, so I decided to take in whatever I could then leave. The space was good to me and gave me the time by myself to reflect, and I didn't realize how much I needed it until I had it.

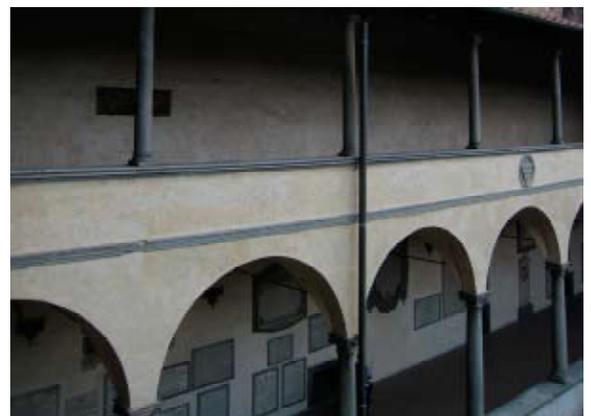


## Laurentian Library

When arriving at the church of San Lorenzo, I decided to go to the Laurentian Library first. Upon entering I immediately came across Michelangelo's stairs, which immediately filled me with a feeling of great awe. Unfortunately, no photos were allowed to be taken. It was one of those museums where the ladies were a little strict. However, we were allowed to attempt quick sketches, and I did manage to sneak a photo.



What struck me about these stairs was their shape, with the center ones having an elliptical shape and detailed with an almost top-of-column-like shape on the ends of each stair. This was definitely different than all the other stairs I have seen, and shows the mastery of his work. The whole area goes together well, with Brunelleschi's cloister outside and the staircase transitioning into the library. Walking into the library made me imagine, that the idea of a library some 500 years ago conceptually was an amazing idea. Imagining people sitting in the reading seats really gave me a powerful sense of the space, especially with all the light coming from the stained glass windows all around.



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## The Little Things

There were also the little moments being in Florence that, while not as significant as the previously mentioned moments, will be etched in my mind for a long time to come.

One of the experiences came when stumbling by a park in the Gavinania region. It was about 10pm at night but there was a lot going on in the park, so we checked it out. It turned out that the park, similar to a piazza, had multitudes of activities going on. Street dancing (Capoeira), playground spaces, and a glowing amphitheater stage with a diffuse lights all around. There was a play going on for children. What amazed me was that this was 10pm on a Wednesday! I have seen nothing like it, but I was glad to just sit and watch the play.

Other things such as hacking at the Pitti Palace with strangers, celebrating my birthday with the Gruppo and having a decent meal, all are just some of the moments I've experienced in the short time when we stayed in Florence. With the trip just passing the halfway point, there's bound to be more of these moments that will just happen, unexpectedly and in short spurts.

