

The Golden Age of Florence From Brunelleschi to Michelangelo

September 20 - 26, 2024



An Insider's Tour of Renaissance Florence With the Bestselling Author Ross King

We have partnered for this tour with a beautiful new boutique hotel, the [Stella d'Italia](#), centrally located in the Palazzo San Niccolò on Via Tornabuoni.

Stella d'Italia

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Florence: La Bella Città

Firenze, the melodic Italian name for the city of Florence¹, is the birthplace and cradle of The Renaissance, thriving since the 14th century until the present day. It is home to some of the greatest works of art ever created, where you can walk in the footsteps of Leonardo, Botticelli, Michelangelo, and Raphael; admire Brunelleschi's majestic dome that dominates the entire city; and stroll across the charming Ponte Vecchio to visit Oltrarno artisans working much as they did during the Renaissance. You'll come face-to-face with Michelangelo's David, perhaps the most perfect expression of the human spirit ever created, and visit a range of extraordinary museums and churches, filled with magnificent art.

On this tour, you will experience the beauty and romance of the Italian Renaissance, led by author Ross King and Paola Vojnovic, an art historian who knows the city like the back of her hand. But Florence is more than just those familiar artworks and buildings – it also embraces the most incredible secrets and undiscovered gems, which we'll share with you. Our focus is on two of the greatest figures of Renaissance Florence: Filippo Brunelleschi and Michelangelo Buonarroti. But as we trace their steps, you will also get to know the Medici, the ruling family of Florence, as well as the artists' friends and rivals, and learn some of the fascinating tales of everyday Renaissance life while walking the cobbled streets of Firenze.

As a special treat, Paola has reached out to her cherished friends to secure invitations for unique experiences. You will meet historian John Farrell, and many extraordinary people who call Florence home, including a contemporary artist whose ancestors were among the most important nobility of the Renaissance. You'll meet artisans in the Oltrarno quarter, and a sculptor working in the style of the masters. As a special treat, you'll meet the internationally renowned pianist and performer Hershey Felder at his spectacular *castello* just outside Florence.

But no one can visit Florence without sampling its world-famous cuisine! You'll taste delicious Florentine specialties (including bistecca alla fiorentina) and sip Tuscan wine in fine restaurants and charming trattoria. On your last night, as we say farewell, you will enjoy a very special dinner in Hershey's 900-year-old Tuscan castle. Of course, we have left some free time for shopping, meals, and independent sightseeing, and Paola will be delighted to share with you her exclusive insider recommendations for the very best places in town.

Museums, architecture, historical sites, great food, great wine, and scintillating company. What could be better? Join us for an unforgettable experience in what many consider *La città più bella del mondo*: Firenze.



¹ The name "Firenze" comes from *Florentiae*, a form of *Florentia*, which is a name conveying good luck, from Latin: *florēre*, lit. 'to blossom'. <https://www.theflorentine.net/2022/11/04/name-florence-firenze-meaning/>

Your Hosts: Ross King & Paola Vojnovic

Art Historian Paola Vojnovic with Special Guest Host Ross King



Ross King is the author of bestselling books on Italian, French and Canadian art and history, among them: *Brunelleschi's Dome*, *Michelangelo and the Pope's Ceiling*, *The Judgment of Paris*, *Leonardo and The Last Supper*, *Mad Enchantment: Claude Monet and the Painting of the Water Lilies*, and *The Bookseller of Florence*. He has also published two novels (*Domino* and *Ex-Libris*), a biography of Niccolò Machiavelli, and a collection of Leonardo da Vinci's fables, jokes and riddles. His newest book is ambitious – *The Shortest History of Italy: 3,000 Years from the Romans to the Renaissance to a Modern Republic—A Retelling for Our Times*. Ross is an active arts supporter and a passionate lecturer and tour guide. He serves on the Council of Academic Advisors for Friends of Florence, and has participated in numerous study tours throughout Italy, including in Rome, Assisi, and Milan. He is a regular participant in the Italian Renaissance seminars at the Aspen Institute, and has given Impressionist tours of Paris, Normandy, Brittany, and Provence. He has lectured in many American museums, including the Art Institute of Chicago, the Frick Collection, and the National Gallery. When not traveling for work or pleasure, he lives in the historic town of Woodstock, near Oxford, England, with his wife Melanie. Ross received his undergraduate and Master's degrees from the University of Regina, Canada, and his PhD from Toronto's York University, specializing in 18th century English literature.



Paola Vojnovic is an art historian specializing in the Italian Renaissance. She has spent more than two decades researching and writing about Renaissance art and artists and brings an exceptional level of expertise and passion to her work. She has been published in magazines, books, and periodicals, and is the creator and host of [Paola's Studiolo](#), a virtual meeting room for the leading scholars, museum curators, writers, and thinkers of our time. The series is inspired by the Renaissance concept of a studiolo (little studio), a room in 15th-century palaces specially designed for study and contemplation. Among many media appearances, she was a part of "When the World Answered," a PBS documentary about the 1966 Great Flood of Florence, and

appeared in Hershey Felder's film, *Dante and Beatrice in Florence*. As one of the most sought-after official tour guides in Florence, Paola has intimate knowledge of every corner of the Renaissance city and is widely recognized as an exceptional guide. In that role, she has had the privilege to meet people from all walks of life in addition to powerful influencers from the worlds of entertainment, media, and politics, including James Ivory, Beyoncé and Jay-Z, and Anthony Bourdain. Paola is a member of the Renaissance Society of America, and often acts as a liaison between museums and clients to provide special behind-the-scenes access. Paola holds a Master's degree in Renaissance Art History from Syracuse University, and a second Master's degree in Preservation and Management of Archaeological, Historical, and Artistic Heritage from the Università di Siena; she earned her B.A. in art history from Arizona State University. Read more about her in [The Florentine](#). Since leaving her home in Scottsdale, Arizona, Paola has since lived in Florence and in Viareggio, Tuscany.

Guest Lecturers and Speakers

Vittoria Colonna, John Farrell, and Thor Larsen



Vittoria Colonna is a contemporary artist who comes from one of Europe's oldest and most illustrious dynasties. In her family tree are popes, cardinals, men of arms, and important cultural figures, including the "original" 15th c. Vittoria Colonna, for whom the contemporary Vittoria is named. Her celebrated ancestor was one of the most prominent

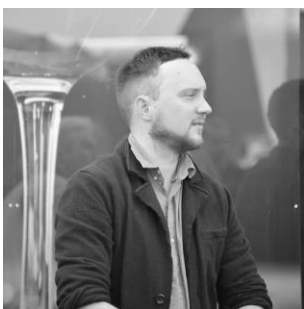
females of her time, daughter of a Montefeltro who herself was connected with important families in feudal Italy. She was a talented poet and a muse to Michelangelo, with whom she enjoyed a deep and reciprocal friendship. Today, in a Florence studio in the heart of the historic Palazzo Bartolini Salimbeni, lives her descendant Vittoria Colonna, who inherited from her famous Renaissance ancestor not only her name and her beauty, but also her attitude to art, spirituality and freedom. A screenwriter, artist, singer and director, Vittoria grew up in Ireland and Italy before studying fine art at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Rome. She trained as an opera singer in Tuscany, then continued her studies at the Gaiety School of Acting in Dublin. She exhibits her artworks at galleries around the world, including Florence.

<https://www.colonnavittoria.com/>



John Farrell is a writer, professor, and historian who over the past 20 years has researched and studied the life of Filippo Brunelleschi and the world of 15th century Florence. As a young man, John traveled around the world on a motorcycle for three years, visiting 46 countries and writing about his travels for newspapers around the U.S. Fluent in Spanish, he spent his early life in Argentina. He is the author of books and magazine articles and has taught history at UCLA and other colleges. John was a Fulbright Scholar, served as President of PEN USA West, and has written a historical novel about Brunelleschi, Donatello, and Renaissance Florence, as well as other nonfiction and fiction works. An experienced lecturer, he received his PhD in History

and two master's degrees from UCLA; and his B.A. in English Literature from the University of Michigan. John has been to Florence numerous times with his wife Anne, an arts fundraiser who worked with Paola Vojnovic to raise money to restore Michelangelo's tomb in Santa Croce. John and Anne live in Del Mar, California.



Thor Larsen is a sculptor, stonemason, and artist who was born in Copenhagen, Denmark, and now lives in Florence. He received his education at the renowned Rudolf Steiner School. After graduating he followed his passion for art, and studied goldsmithing with a master goldsmith, after which he entered training to be a stonemason. Wanting to study academic sculpture, he came to Florence, Italy, where he attended The Florence Academy of Art, graduating from the Sculpture Program in 2013. Larsen currently works from his private studio in

Florence and is a Principal Instructor in the Sculpture Program at the Academy. He is a principal instructor, specializing in figurative sculpture. <https://www.thorlarsen.net/gallery>

Itinerary: September 20 to 26, 2024

Day 1 Friday, September 20th

Independent arrivals to Florence; settle into your room at the [Stella d'Italia](#).

6-7pm Welcome Aperitivo in the historic Palazzo Bartolini Salimbeni, the home of artist Vittoria Colonna. We will have an opportunity to meet Vittoria and see her artworks, as well as meet Ross King and learn more details of the upcoming itinerary.

Day 2 Saturday, September 21st

9:30am **Walking Tour of Florence.** This leisurely stroll through the city center is the perfect outdoor introduction to Florence. We will visit the most important piazzas and medieval churches, the Ponte Vecchio, and the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore, crowned by Brunelleschi's famous dome.

1:00pm **Lunch**

2:30-5:00pm Visit to the [Museo del Opera dell' Duomo](#) with Ross King, author of "Brunelleschi's Dome." This extraordinary museum houses most of the major artworks that were in the cathedral and the baptistry, including masterpieces by Michelangelo, Donatello, Brunelleschi, Ghiberti and countless others. Displays explain the intricacies and mechanics of Brunelleschi's innovative design for the dome, which even today astonishes architects and engineers.

5:00-7:00pm Free time, return to hotel

7:00-9:00pm Welcome Dinner at [Regina Bistecca al Duomo](#), located in a historic building just steps away from the Duomo, that was once a cultural salon for famous painters and artists over 100 years ago. They are known as one of the finest restaurants serving "bistecca alla Fiorentina," the Chianina beef steaks for which Florence is known worldwide.

Day 3 Sunday, September 22nd

Morning: Time on your own in case you want to explore the city, attend a religious service, or just relax in the hotel.

11:00am Visit to [La Galleria dell'Accademia di Firenze](#), home of Michelangelo's iconic statue of *David* as well as other works by the master.

1:00pm **Lunch**

3:30pm Visit to [Le Gallerie degli Uffizi](#), considered one of the greatest art museums in the world. The collections of paintings from the 14th-century and Renaissance period include masterpieces by Giotto, Simone Martini, Piero della Francesca, Beato Angelico, Filippo Lippi, Botticelli, Mantegna, Correggio, Leonardo, Raffaello, Michelangelo, and Caravaggio, in addition to many German, Dutch and Flemish paintings.

Dinner on your own. Paola can make recommendations for some of her favorite places in town.

Day 4 Monday, September 23rd

10:00am This morning is dedicated to the magnificent [Basilica of Santa Croce](#), where we will visit the tombs of some of Italy's greatest artists, writers, musicians, scientists, and thinkers, including Michelangelo and Galileo. Paola worked at Santa Croce for eight years, accomplishing special projects such as restoring the tomb of Michelangelo and Brunelleschi's Pazzi Chapel, and writing a guide, "*The Basilica of Santa Croce: American Reflections*," that focuses on the history of American visitors to Santa Croce, starting with Mark Twain and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Paola also co-authored "*Santa Croce in Pink*," a guidebook focusing on the women who are buried or celebrated in Santa Croce, and organized an exhibition, "*Sisters in Liberty*," about the relationship between America's Statue of Liberty and Santa Croce's "*Liberty of Poetry*" sculpture by Pio Fedi.

We will then make our way behind Santa Croce to the [Scuola del Cuoio \(The Leather School\)](#). Leather work is one of the signature crafts of Florentine artisanal traditions, and this school was founded after World War II to help preserve the craft. It remains the leading academy for bespoke leather bags and accessories and has a beautiful shop for purchasing the leather goods made there.

1:00pm **Lunch**

3:30-5:00pm Visit to the [Dominican Church of Santa Maria Novella](#), where you will see one of Brunelleschi's greatest artworks – his wooden *Crucifix* (1410-1415). You will also have a once-in-a-lifetime chance to get up-close to Masaccio's *Trinity*, which is in the process of restoration. This work by a protégé of Brunelleschi, is considered one of the earliest masterpieces of the Renaissance.

Free evening Paola will share a list of her favorite bars and restaurants.

Day 5 Tuesday, September 24th

10:00am This morning, we'll explore the district called "**Oltrarno**," literally "across the Arno." This is the quieter, creative, and some say more authentic quarter of Florence. We will focus on this most Florentine of neighborhoods, where many artisans, artists, and writers live and work. Paola is organizing visits so you can see how they work and have a chance to meet them. Included will be a visit with Giuliano Ricchi, a master of the art of silver and goldsmithing, in his tiny studio in Piazza Santo Spirito.

1:00pm **Lunch at the local family-run Trattoria del Carmine** (Piazza del Carmine 18), home of great traditional Tuscan cooking in a casual atmosphere.

3:00-5:00pm After lunch we will visit the magnificent Brancacci Chapel with the frescoes by Masaccio, Masolino, and Filippino Lippi, recently superbly restored thanks to the Foundation. After cleaning decades of soot and grime, the frescoes now have an intense radiance, making it possible to see very clearly these artists' work – from the serenity of Masolino's *Temptation of Adam and Eve* to the excruciating agony of Masaccio's *Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise*.

On our way back to the hotel, we will step into the [Basilica di Santo Spirito](#), for which Brunelleschi began designs in 1428 but died before its completion. Inside, you will see Michelangelo's *Crucifix*, created when he was only 17, as well as many other extraordinary artworks by Renaissance masters.

Dinner on your own.

Day 6 Wednesday, September 25th

9:30 am Depart the hotel and walk to the [Basilica di San Lorenzo](#)

10:00am **San Lorenzo** is where all the principal members of the Medici family are buried and it served for generations as the parish church for the Medici. In 1419, Giovanni di Bicci de' Medici offered to finance a new church to replace an 11th century Romanesque building, and commissioned Filippo Brunelleschi to design it; it was not completed till after his death. You will see Brunelleschi's Old Sacristy, and the later Medici Chapel and New Sacristy where Michelangelo's magnificent tomb sculptures are found.

12:00 noon We will visit the working [Studio of sculptor Thor Larsen](#). Born in Denmark, Thor is a graduate of the Florence Academy of Art and has a thriving sculpture studio in Florence where he produces works of realistic figurative sculpture and teaches sculpture workshops.

1:00pm **Lunch is on your own**, with free time to wander around the city, shop, and enjoy the ambiance. The area around San Lorenzo is filled with wonderful trattorias as well as the Central Market which has a lively food court upstairs.

7:00pm Depart the hotel for our very special **Farewell Dinner**, hosted by [Hershey Felder](#) in his own 900-year-old castello located just outside of Florence. He is an internationally renowned pianist, actor, and producer known for his brilliant theatrical and film portrayals of composers, writers, and artists. Canadian-born to European parents and with a "European heart," Felder is now a proud citizen of Florence along with his wife Kim Campbell, former Prime Minister of Canada. The trip by a taxi should take about 30 minutes. This promises to be an evening you'll never forget.

Day 7 Thursday, September 26th

7:30am Final buffet breakfast at the hotel to say farewell to your fellow travelers, followed by morning departures. *Arrivederci!*

The Cost

\$3,980 / €3,637 per person

The Tour Price Includes:

- 5 full days' participation in an exclusively-designed, bespoke tour program, plus a welcome aperitivo when you arrive, and final breakfast buffet on the last day
- The services and knowledge of Ross King and Paola Vojnovic as your personal expert guides as well as other distinguished lecturers throughout the tour
- Every participant will have their own headphones to make touring easier while on city streets or in museums.
- Two pre-trip Zoom talks with Paola Vojnovic and Ross King
- All visits and museum reservations and admissions, as per the itinerary, including special guides as indicated.
- A buffet breakfast is served daily if you are staying in Stella d'Italia hotel. These lunches and dinners are included:
 - 4 lunches in very special trattorias and ristoranti.
 - 2 dinners, including the Welcome Dinner at Regina Bistecca di Duomo and the Farewell Dinner at Hershey Felder's private Castello

The Tour Price Does Not Include:

- Your hotel stay in Florence, at the Stella d'Italia, (or elsewhere of your choosing), city tax
- Your air travel to and from Florence
- Your transport to and from our initial meeting point if you are not staying at the group hotel
- Any meals not included in the itinerary
- Personal expenditures (such as minibar, laundry, extra private transportation), and travel insurance (highly recommended).

About Stella d'Italia

This elegant, unique boutique hotel, the [Stella d'Italia](https://stelladitaliaflorence.com/), has a rate of €471/\$520 per night.

You must book by March 25, 2024, in order to secure the preferred rate and they require a 50% non-refundable deposit at the time of booking.

- The Stella d'Italia is located on the Via Tornabuoni, one of the poshest and most central streets of Florence (and in the same palazzo as one of Florence's oldest private clubs, *Circolo dell' Unione*). For more information and room descriptions, please visit their website: <https://stelladitaliaflorence.com/>. **Use code PAOLA2024 when you make reservations.**
- **Note that the Stella d'Italia room prices are the same for single or double occupancy.**
- A buffet breakfast is offered in the hotel's frescoed lounge from 7:30 AM to 10:30 AM, with a selection of typical Tuscan products, as well as sweet and savory options in a comfortable and elegant setting.
- The City of Florence now charges €7 a day per person for City Tax.

Information That's Good to Know

- **Alternate accommodations:** You are welcome to stay anywhere else you would like in Florence; however, you just must plan to meet us each morning at the Stella d'Italia hotel before we begin each day's touring.
- **Arrivals:** We highly recommend that you have arrived in Florence **no later than mid-day Friday, September 20th**, so that you can join us for the welcome reception that evening. It will be a chance to meet your fellow participants, Ross King, John Farrell, and Vittoria Colonna, and learn more about Paola's itinerary for the week.
- **The Activity Level for this tour is "Moderate" in terms of walking.** All our days are organized in one neighborhood or area of Florence, to make it easy to reach the listed sights and venues. Florence has an excellent taxi system, and some participants might want to consider sharing a taxi with other group members in order to get to the initial meeting point of the day, or to return to our hotel in the afternoons.

Weather & Attire

- Late September is always one of the best times to visit Florence. The weather is milder, the crowds are sparser, and prices are lower than in peak season. Average September temperatures in Florence range from a high of 80°F (26°C) to a low of 58°F (14°C), and can be changeable.
- We recommend bringing layers of clothing, scarves, and especially comfortable shoes, which are essential for daytime visits. Remember that Florence is still an ancient city, and many of the streets and sidewalks are made of cobblestones or uneven pavement. For our dinners, cocktail attire is appropriate.

Confirming Your Participation: Reservations

This tour and its pricing are based on a minimum number of 10 participants; the tour will only take place if at least that number signs up.

To confirm your interest in joining the trip, please respond ASAP to Paola Vojnovic at paola50122@gmail.com and you will be sent a Registration Form.

The price per person is \$3,980. To guarantee your spot, a 30% non-refundable deposit (in dollars or Euros) of \$1,200 (€1,099) per person is required by March 25, 2024. The final 70% \$2,780 (€2563) per person is due no later than August 20, 2024. As noted, the minimum number of reservations for this tour is 10 people; if the trip must be cancelled because there are not sufficient reservations, your funds will be returned, less a 10% administrative fee (\$398/ €366).

By email, Paola will explain how you can safely transfer funds/or mail a check in the U.S.

Please note that hotel arrangements are separate; you must make your reservation yourself and pay the hotel directly, use code PAOLA2024.

Please be aware that the itinerary may be subject to slight changes depending on unexpected circumstances. The final itinerary will be sent to you via email two weeks before the start of the trip.

Terms of Service

Paola Vojnovic acts only in the capacity of agent for the tour participants. She in no way represents nor acts as agent for travel service suppliers such as hotels, restaurants, sightseeing attractions, or transportation. She accepts no responsibility or liability caused by the defect or negligence or default of any company or person engaged in carrying out or performing any of the services involved. She cannot be held responsible for events beyond her control, such as (without limitations) acts of God, declared or undeclared war, strikes, government restrictions, terrorist activities, defects in vehicles, breakdown of equipment, delay, or cancellation of or changes in itinerary or schedule. She shall not be held liable for personal injury, death, property damage or loss suffered by a tour participant in connection with this program, whether due to the negligence of tour staff or others. She reserves the right to make changes in the published itineraries whenever, in her judgment, conditions so warrant, or if it is necessary for the comfort, convenience, or safety of tour participants.

Acknowledgement: Your partial or full payment for this tour acknowledges your consent to all provisions of the conditions and general information listed here.

Travel insurance covering medical assistance, travel, and hotel cancellation is highly recommended.



I so look forward to seeing you in Florence this September!! *Benvenuti!!*



Paola Vojnovic

**Renaissance Art Historian
Consultant for Culture in Italy, Official Guide of
Florence**

MA in Renaissance Art History, Syracuse University,
NY |
MA in Management of Artistic Heritage, Università di
Siena

www.paolavojnovic.com

