The Art of the Italian

RENAISSANCE

Architecture Sculpture Painting Drawing

edited by Rolf Toman
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The architecture of territorial states, tyrannies and powerful families.

By the end of the 14th century, when Cesare Borgia wrote the above praise of Florence, most of Italy's cities had completed their major civic building complexes, paved their streets and built their last ring of city walls. Even the new territorial states, such as Florence, Milan, Venice and Rome, were beginning to shift their public building activities from initiating new projects to refining and expanding existing structures. This shift from new construction to refinement, expansion or reconstruction in the public culture can be attributed to a variety of factors. The large-scale projects of the 13th to 14th centuries had been largely driven and financially financed by the expanding populations and economies of Italy. The peak in population and wealth was around 1300, when Florence, for instance, had a population of 100,000. By 1400, the famous black failures and plagues of the previous century had cut this population almost in half. The wealth that had been accumulated in the cities still largely existed, but was concentrated in fewer hands, and was less capable of being augmented through local investment due to the drastic cut in the work force, which had itself become more expensive.

New public projects therefore became more rare, and were generally used to the generation of new institutions or to significant changes in existing ones – such as the replacement of communal regimes by tyrannies or the return of the papacy to Rome. One constant exception to the decrease in public expenditure on architecture was in fortifications. While cities were generally not building new city walls, new defenses being already too large for the decreased populations they enclosed, the conversion of the canons led cities to reinforce their existing walls. They added their bastions to the new city walls. The conversion of the canons led to the idea of incorporating new artillery and fortified towers into the city walls. These towers could provide vantage points for firing on attackers scaling the walls. The simultaneous rise of expanding territorial states, of tyrannies and of more sophisticated military technology and fortifications did not coincide with the concentration of wealth in larger centers allowed their rulers to finance large centers and expensive machines of offense and defense in order to expand and defend their territories and to pacify internal disorder.

The shift in focus of public architecture from primarily new public monuments and spaces to reconstruction, occasional new institutions, and fortifications did not undermine the continued tradition of monumental architecture during and into the 15th century. Architects were challenged to concentrate their energies on refining and refining decorative schemes applicable to old or new public structures. They turned increasingly to what they considered to be the more successful applications of the classical orders, which allowed them to express the same notions of Romanitas and empire of their predecessors more succinctly. Yet were the opportunities for applying this revived antique style limited to public structures. The more concentrated wealth in the hands of a few families, individuals, and – in the case of new tyrannies – despots, gave these patrons the means to build monuments to their own growing political and social aspirations. While private chapels and palaces had existed in the 14th century and earlier, their display of wealth and power had been constrained by sumptuary laws and by public-building ordinances regulating church, piazza and street construction. Though many of these ordinances remained in force throughout the 16th century, opportunities for magnificent individual expression grew. By the end of the 15th century, many families had constructed for themselves residences that stood out as dramatically in the cityscape as the tower houses of the 11th and 12th centuries, but now they expressed family power through the sophistication of their plans and the elaboration of their architectural symbolisms, rather than through their raw height.

The rise of new state and private patrons led to changes in the way architects did business. An architect in the period from the late 12th to the end of the 14th centuries might have expected to spend most of his career working on a few public projects in one or perhaps two communities. His counterpart in the 13th and 14th centuries needed to work on a series of smaller-scale projects for a number of public and especially private patrons. Architects therefore had to cultivate their own affairs, and they developed more sophisticated means for doing so. Architects probably took the lead in this process, since most of them had at least some background or training in the arts of painting and sculpture, which were the highest and most profitable means in all building.

[Image: The facade of the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence, designed by Filippo Brunelleschi, 1420-1429.]
capable of responding extremely quickly to changes in taste, and even of precipitating these changes, which more than anything else guaranteed them a continuous flow of commissions from a limited clientele. Archetypal styles had generally changed more slowly due to the expense and duration of projects, and, perhaps most importantly, due to the greater conservatism of patrons in expressing their taste in monuments displayed permanently before the public.

While architects continued to seek and find large-scale commissions, they succeeded in the 15th century in freeing themselves from these commissions as their primary means of experimentation, innovation, and self-promotion. Architects adopted various media that had previously been primarily technical or non-expressive, reinforcement models, drawings, and treatments, as their new means for exploring quickly and inexpensively new architectural styles, and for presenting them directly to potential clients. The advent of these media and the success architects met with in winning significant commissions precipitated a transformation of architectural culture, which now became equal to the culture of painting in its ability to change style, define expression, and reach new patrons. It also changed the status of the architect, whose fame became based as much on his ability to represent his ideas in words and images as on his capacity to build them.

The Rediscovery of the Antiquity in Fifteenth-Century Florence
Recent studies have argued that the rediscovery of the antique in 15th-century Florence was based at least as much on a rediscovery of the local building traditions of the proto-Renaissance and even Trecento as on close empirical observation of the ancient monuments of Rome. Brunelleschi, Michelozzo and Alberti adopted the geometrical schemes, proportions and ornamentation of buildings such as the Florence Baptistry, San Miniato, the Palazzo Vecchio, and Orsanmichele, as well of even more distant Mediterranean structures, from as far afield as the Veneto. Their innovations were as the critical approach to borrow from the past, and in their innovative compositional schemes. Rather than assimilating traditional elements directly, they did so through the matrix of what they considered the antique to be, either adopting only what corresponded to their notions, or correcting local practices according to them. However, their actual adherence to the antique was, limited by a number of factors. First, of all, they continued to return, whether consciously or unconsciously, specifically medieval building techniques and, particularly, geometric proportioning systems. Furthermore, they depended on antique models that were in fact Romanesque, most notably the Baptistery in Florence. Last of all, the one true architectural trait to which all referred, Vitruvian, presented considerable difficulties in its interpretation.

Nonetheless, what the architects of this period developed and then passed on to later generations of architects in Italy and thus throughout the world was a critical approach to tradition that eventually led to a rethinking of all aspects of building design.

Filippo Brunelleschi was the first to adopt this critical approach to design. His ability to distance himself from local building traditions can be explained by various factors. He was by training not an architect, but a goldsmith, and therefore was a member not of the somonio's guild but rather of the silk guild, which extended its membership to goldsmiths. It was due to his experience as a craftsman, not as an architect, that Brunelleschi was selected to compete for the project to build the most ambitious project of recent history, the cupola of Santa Maria del Fiore (p. 161). The challenge of winning this commission led Brunelleschi to depart from local traditions in order to devise a strategy for constructing this unprecedented span. It also helped him to enter the assistance of two of the most innovative sculptors of the day, Donato and Nanni di Bartolo, not for their knowledge of structural design but for their ability to produce, together with Brunelleschi, a convincing model of the proposed cupola.

The model that Brunelleschi, Donatello and Nanni di Bartolo constructed was indeed so innovative and so convincing that it appears to have won the commission for Brunelleschi before it was even completed. Though Brunelleschi was working on his design as early as 1417, the competition for the cupola was officially decreed on 15 August 1418. Less than two years later, well before the 12 December deadline, members of the commission came to watch the production of only one of the models, that of Brunelleschi. The explanation for this event is that Brunelleschi was alone among the competitors in insisting on building the project without the traditional scaffolding. While other competitors built their models with scale versions of the scaffolding supporting and entering the cupola from the ground, Brunelleschi developed a system for making it self-supporting.
Brunelleschi’s system consisted of four parts. First of all, Brunelleschi made the octagonal cups out of a double shell, the inner of which was too strong to support the outer but lighter shell. Brunelleschi stiffened each of the eight faces of the cups with a system of stone chains and exposed ribs, the vertical curvature of which he maintained with a series of curvature control templates. He then made both of the shells thick enough that, though octagonal, a circle could be inscribed in their walls. Brunelleschi’s study of historical domed structures showed him that the presence of a circular shape within a polygonal dome gave such a vault the same properties as a circular vault that every inward force was counterbalanced, rendering the structure self-supporting, aside from the outward thrusts at its base. Brunelleschi then applied that same concept on a smaller scale, that of the bricks coursing itself, which he devised as a series of perfect circles laid upon one another. He used the strength of each completed course to support the next under construction by improving vertical bricks at discrete intervals into each course. These intervals were short enough for the vertical bricks to sustain the weight of the bricks laid horizontally between them, up to the point that the next course, with its own corresponding vertical bricks, was complete and self-supporting. The visual result of this bricklaying technique was what has erroneously been called a herringbone pattern, as the juxtaposition of horizontal and vertical bricks only occurs periodically and not at every other brick. The practical result was the diminution of the enormous expected, delay, and obstacle of wood scaffolding and cranes. All of these techniques were present in the scale model of the project, which Brunelleschi made with full-sized bricks. The very process of making the model, therefore, was critical in convincing the operai of the Wool Guild of Florence, who were sponsoring the project, that the final version of Brunelleschi’s cups did not only as the model appeared, but also as it was made.

Brunelleschi began construction work on the cups in 1426. Despite the input of Ghishei and other competitiors, almost the entire project, its completion and consecration in 1436, followed the specifications that Brunelleschi had drafted with Donatello and Nanni di Banco when preparing this model in 1426. The overwhelming success of his cups was probably one reason why Brunelleschi won first place in a new competition, in 1436, for the lantern capping the entire composition. The writing of the judges enables it clear, however, that Brunelleschi had also succeeded in developing a design that not only resolved the structural problems presented by the lantern, but also appealed to the tastes of traditional and novel architectural fashions popular in early 15th-century Florentine society. "Filippo di Alessandro de' Medici because of the beauty and the perfection of said lantern...

The notion of the perfect whole as only achievable through its composition by perfect parts is a distinctly
scholastic motion, and had often appeared in similar forms in the 14th century. However, the creation of “perfections” for the parts had changed dramatically since the beginning of the cupola project, largely through the efforts of Brunelleschi himself. The model was now the antique.

Brunelleschi’s first project manifesting the mixture of traditional and original style prized by the judges in 1426 was neither the Tempietto nor the cupola, where major visual attributes, including its pointed Gothic form, had been established well before Brunelleschi in 1420. Rather, it was his founding hospital, the Hospital of the Innocenti (p. 103), begun in August 1419, a year after Brunelleschi began his collaboration with Donatello and Nanni di Banco on the final model for the cupola. The one classical lesson incorporated into both buildings was the perfect circle, whose form determined both the thickness of the cupola’s octagonal shafts and the curvature of the arches of the hospital arcade. While round – as opposed to pointed – arches had long been praised at Florence, buildings, and even in recent hospital projects in the area, they were seldom designed to be perfectly consistent in their curvature, width, and size. The arches, Brunelleschi took as an established prototype, in this case the Florence arcaded hospital type, and then rigorously refined its design and simplified its execution.

A clear idea of the novel architectural theory behind Brunelleschi’s design is expressed in a contemporary comparison between Brunelleschi’s original project drawing of the Hospital and the scheme as completed by Brunelleschi’s successors, after the master left the project in 1426 to devote himself exclusively to the cupola. The latter is Brunelleschi’s biography, Antonio Manetti. Among other things, he lists the final scheme for decorating Brunelleschi’s proportions of the entire facade, for greeting those entering the square windows at either end with pilasters, and finally for turning the architrave at the end of the south-western exterior of the elevations. As revealing as the idea of “correctness” in this critique is Manetti’s discussion of Brunelleschi’s drawing itself. It is “precisely measured in small scales” and only appears like a design, not the plan for the complex. The latter was not necessary, as it was laid out strictly according to the traditional geometric proportioning system of the classical orders for the columns and pilasters of the facade, however, a “precisely measured” drawing was essential for its execution. The precision of the drawing also indicates how important a scientifically accurate execution of the project was to Brunelleschi. His entire concept depended on an order consistency in all of the parts, right down to the width of individual columns and the standardization of the simplified Corinthian capitals, all parts of which were harmonically related to one another and to the dimensions of the arcade bays, and, in turn, to the entire façade.

Brunelleschi’s conception of his ingenuity on developing a systematic architectural vocabulary for the Foundling Hospital was consistent with the needs of his patrons, the Florentine Silk Guild. Unlike the Wool Guild sponsoring the Capella, who encouraged Brunelleschi’s structural ingenuity to complete a long-term, expensive project whose impact was primarily in its unprecedented scale, the Silk Guild appears to have been interested in the layout or demonstrating their philanthropy as quickly as possible with the minimum expense, and therefore in the aesthetic, rather than scale, impact of the facade of their hospital, its façade. Given the standardized plan of the complex and its consequent standardization of the arcades, Brunelleschi chose to articulate the individual parts in an alliterative style, the beauty of which could be achieved less through elaborate and varied ornamentation than through the consistency, harmony and simplicity of its execution.

One of the most remarkable aspects of Brunelleschi’s work at the Foundling Hospital is that he gave this fundamentally civic structure, exalted by his patronize’s, the architectural guise of a church. It substitutes one face of a cloister for the traditional urban arcade type, encouraging its eventual completion as a formal outdoor religious space. Brunelleschi did not distinguish between religious and lay architectural styles when designing monumental buildings. The roofs of San Lorenzo (begun 1415, p. 104) and Santo Spirito (begun 1436, right) share the arcing, frieze and fenestration rhythm of the Foundling Hospital, only with more elaborate capitals, with unannounced impact blocks inserted beneath the arches. The more vertical proportions of the resulting arcade give a more severe rhythm to the nave, directing movement along them rather than through them in an increasingly Christian and liturgically stanced such as at Santa Sabina in Rome (162–2) and S. Agnese in Classe, Ravenna (1534–49).

Brunelleschi further adapted his use of columns and arch in his centrally planned religious structures. In the Old Sacristy (1419–21/24) of San Lorenzo, Brunelleschi subdivided the walls with pilasters supporting a broad frieze, cornice and arches, and then inserted into the resulting framed spaces of the lower level orderless arches and pedimented doors. The repetition of the arch in this and his more refined Pozzi Chapel (1428–31) at Santa Croce (p. 103) is neither to direct movement through nor along, but upwards, towards the pedimented roundels and the cupola they support. He even applies his ordering principles to the capitals, where they become ribs emphasizing surface and its parts rather than entire enclosed volume. The effect of his applied ordering scheme is to reinforce the upward thrust of the arches and dome into a fagade of curves, lines and planes. Only within the remarkable legno of the Pozzi Chapel, with its coffered barrel vault and dome, does Brunelleschi achieve interior.
Brancacci and Perspective

Architects and patrons had already explored the problems of perspective by the time of Brancacci and Alberti, but the first due dates of works of a different nature emerged with two 14th-century Italian builders, Brunelleschi and Filippo Brunelleschi. Leonardo da Vinci had examined perspective in some of his earliest sketches, and his work influenced the development of perspective in the next century. Alberti wrote an essay called "On the Art of Perspective," which was a major contribution to the field.

The concept of perspective, as developed in the Renaissance, was based on the idea that objects appear smaller as they move further away from the viewer. This was a revolutionary concept, as it allowed artists to create more realistic and natural-looking compositions.

Brunelleschi's approach to perspective was based on the idea of using a grid system to help create the illusion of depth and distance. He used this system to create his famous "Stanza della Segnatura," which is still considered one of the greatest achievements of Renaissance art. Brunelleschi's use of perspective was radical at the time, and it helped to establish the foundation for the later development of perspective in art and architecture.

Brunelleschi's approach to perspective was also influenced by the work of Alberti. Alberti's essay "On the Art of Perspective" was a key text in the development of the field, and it provided a theoretical framework for understanding the principles of perspective.

Brunelleschi's use of perspective was not just a matter of technical skill, but also a way to express his ideas about space and form. By using perspective, he was able to create a sense of depth and distance in his work, which allowed him to create more realistic and dynamic compositions.

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Alberti’s other major church commissions, at San Francesco in Rimini (1450-1468, p. 113), San Sebastiano in Mantua (begun 1479, and San'Andrea begun 1471, p. 112) in the same city, all show qualities that extend beyond the mere narrow definition of the earlier, harmony and proportions in his treatment. As at Santa Maria Novella, where Alberti fused motifs from the earlier structure and from the older San Mattino, the humanist architect added onto an existing Gothic structure at San Francesco in such a way that complemented the established plan and forms, while incorporating references to another earlier monument in the city. The earlier structure was Rome’s Arch of Augustus, which Alberti freely adapted with elements of Rome’s Arch of Constantine, establishing what would prove to be a continued preoccupation in his work: the fusion of the classical triumphal arch with the basilical section. A model of the church by Maestro de’ Pasti, the local architect in charge, shows how Alberti intended to reconcile these two, with the same curved half gables that flank the temple front of Santa Maria Novella. The medal also reveals another of Alberti’s formal obsessions: it shows a gigantic – and probably unbuildable – semicircular dome spanning the entire nave.

Alberti continued his church design under the patronage of another tyrant family, the Gonzagas of Mantua. His first project for them was San Sebastiano, where he adopted a centrally planned Greek cross. This plan and its resulting simple section allowed him to develop a façade primarily as a temple front, overlaid with a broken pediment and dropped window, arguably adopted from the distant triumphal arch at Orange, France. Following Rudolph Wittkower’s reconstruction, a broad stairway extended across the entire façade, as in Verona’s or his own version of the classical temple, and as recently used in such church structures as the Romanesque and Gothic Cathedral of Massa Marittima in Tuscany.

The layout of Alberti’s major commissions brought him to his most compelling combination of classical building forms with contemporary traditions. His was San’Andrea in Mantua (p. 112). The layout is an adapted basilical plan, with a series of chapels in place of the customary side-sides of the nave. The church is located at the terminus of a series of important streets at the centre of the city, and is flanked by a market square. The elaboration of the church is not only on the interior and façade, however, the latter of which is nonetheless to plastic as to appear free-standing. It is instead more than a façade, an extraordinary hybrid of naves, porches, triumphal arches and temple front, all capped by a masonry, looming barrelvaulted projection that disappears upon approaching the entry. The entry is a round arch poised on top of orthodox Albertian Corinthian piers, which are in turn flanked by three tiers of windows and outer-corner Corinthian piers. The arch is capped by a wide frieze and broad pediment. The intrados of the arch simply continues within the depth of the façade as a barrel vault, with the piers similarly extruding inward, only to be broken by a smaller-scale repetition of the main arch running transversely. A low doorway breaks a large expanse of unadorned wall terminating the central façade barrel vault, and leads the viewer into a space that explodes in a height well beyond the pediment of the façade. The painted coffering of the barrel vaulted nave echoes the coffering of
the façade vaults, and encounters through the side chapels, each of which repeats the triumphal arch and barrel-vault motif of the façade. Only at the end of the nave is the linear geometry of the barrel vault changed into its purely symmetrical variant. Here a huge cupola crowns one’s view up to another unexpected leap in scale, and provides the centralized, ideal form of the early Renaissance, positioned between the massive supporting structures of nave, chapel and transept triumphal-arch vaults.

The explorations of Brunelleschi and Alberti with the classical orders, centrally planned spaces, and other temple-front or triumphal-arch forms, were adopted by members of the next generation of Tuscan architected, such as Francesco di Giorgio and Giuliano da Sangallo. In his S. Maria della Grazia al Catiniano in Cortona (c. 1448), perched upon the hillside looking up to the Etruscan oval town, the Sienna-Florence-Cortona nexus one of his extended Greek-cross structures, between 1484 and 1490. The open sited of the church allowed him to develop all of the elevations with classical plinths and pedimented windows, which he repeats across all sides of the octagonal dome. As at Brunelleschi’s cupola, the drum of S. Maria della Grazia al Catiniano served the reading of the cupola from great distances, with its windows establishing it as a third-storey harmonic in scale and articulation with the stories below. The façade has a contained verticality similar to that of the dome, terminating its simple new plan with an extended temple front divided by the same ground-storey frieze and cornice piers that run around the entire church, and punctuated at the center of the upper storey, below the pediment, by the same round window that terminates the other axes of the cross plan. Within, the church follows the scheme developed by Brunelleschi: piers stress pilasters against white walls supporting a broad frieze capped by generous semicircular arches. In extending these pilasters across the barrel vault of the nave, Francesco di Giorgio shows a tendency to emphasize discrete spatial subdivisions closer to spirit to Brunelleschi than to his apparent source for the barrel vault itself, Alberti.

A compressed version of this increasingly prevalent small domed church type appears for the first time as a purely centralized structure at Giuliano da Sangallo’s Santa Maria delle Grazie in Prato (1492), facing Frederic il’s classicizing Castello del Partenone (1265-69) (see p. 34). The history of Santa Maria delle Grazie (c. 1454) stands in unity with any tendency on the part of some historians to use the Renaissance as a period of secularization and rationalization. One day a young child saw tears in the eye of the paintings of the Madonna at a small tabernacle at the facade church’s right, looked by the town’s priests, so converts. She ran to tell her story, which was corroborated by witnesses including the bell ringer of the church. The town agreed that a church should be built to honor this miraculous painting, its architect to be chosen in a competition.

The local architect who won this competition never succeeded in building his project however. The reason lies in the intended reach of the Florentine Medici, the same family that had patronized the later works of Brunelleschi and many of the works of Michelangelo.
The first of these architects-theorists, Palladio, travelled from Florence to Milan in 1541 upon the recommendation of Pietro de' Medici, who had close political and banking ties to the new rulers (1535) of the northern city, the Sforzas. After a temporary stay, he settled in the city in the 1540s, concurrently beginning work on his treatise and on one of his most elaborate projects, the Ospedale Maggiore. Palladio's drawings for this northern version of Brunelleschi's Donning Hospital show an extravagance in scale and ornament unimaginable in the Florentine context, though his additive composition of classical elements gives it a distinctly Gothic character. This may have been a response to the firmly established Florentine and Gothic traditions of the city, although Palladio shows nothing but contempt for this "barbarous modern style" when he discussed it in his architectural treatise, the Iiarrotrn d'architettura (1570). The building's design is more restrained than the version drawn in his treatise. Despite its integration of ornament, the arcade has the proportions and elegance of form of the Florentine Hospital, and indeed succeeds in producing the unified cluster effect only implied by Brunelleschi's colonnade.

Another foreign architect, Bramante, adopted a similar mixture of local and classical styles in his work in the city. Bramante arrived in Milan between 1547 and 1548, when he began work on one of the most remarkable Greek-cross churches of the Renaissance, Santa Maria presso San Satiro, which was in fact a renovation of a centralised Early Christian monument. The fourth, free plan appears as long as the three-bay transverse wings due to a mixture of architecture and iconography. In fact, less than one bay deep, Bramante had placed the architrave and piers under some of the greatest perspectives of his time, Pietro della Francesca and Francesco di Giorgio, both of whom worked in Milan. His gift for scenography made his paintings and drawings powerful persuasive tools for advancing his architectural ideas, allowing his clients to imagine themselves in a Bramantesque setting. Nonetheless, even his more elaborate Santa Maria delle Grazie (built in Milan) shows the respect for the local tradition and the latter's influence. Its lower decorative elements reflects the 14th-century painting of Florence Cathedral. It is on the interior that Bramante begins to break with the hierarchy of either the Tuscan pediments in Milan or the city's tradition. The circle predominates, occupying all scales of decoration, plan and section, which are drawn together by the axes of the cupola itself. This geometric plan is transformed as the scaffolding of the nave arches and, most markedly, at the apses, into a powerful, very Roman means of spatial definition that shifts the circular mass from pilaster to massive, sculptural volume. These elements of Santa Maria della Grazie show Bramante's preoccupation with more explicit Roman forms, which he would
The Ideal City

The vision of the ideal city in Western Europe was encapsulated during the 13th century in the form of the city of Florence, modeled after the ancient Roman city. The city was planned and designed by Brunelleschi, who was inspired by classical models.

The plan of the city was laid out around a central square, the Piazza della Signoria, surrounded by grandiose monumental buildings.

In conclusion, the design of the Ideal City in Western Europe was characterized by a combination of classical elements and innovative architectural solutions, reflecting the intellectual and cultural climate of the 13th century.
example was never followed in domestic structures except in the increasingly frequent adoption of the central hall, which derives from the original dwelling-place of Roman Emperors on the Palatine hill in Rome. At early as the 13th century in Prato powerful citizens of the commune applied this urban form to their residences, but none showed any concerted attempt to adopt the ornament or plan of papal or imperial palaces, except in rare applications of pietroburgo or the more frequent use of graceful windows. The exception to this rule is Venice, where from very early times the protected nature of the lagoon and stable character of the Republic afforded the city the possibility of building elaborately decorated, symmetrical compositions that often derived from the Doges’ Palace itself, but never competed with it.

It should not be surprising that the first structures in Tuscany where the forms of church and imperial architecture began to be applied in a monumental fashion were the houses of powerful merchant and banking families. They had the funds at their disposal to engage in elaborate building projects, and their businesses could only benefit from architectural representation of the stability and lofty character of their mercantile or banking houses. Some early examples are in the palaces of Italy’s most prosperous banking cities, Lucca and Siena, such as the latter’s Palazzo Tolomei, Palazzo Chigi-Saracini, and, at the most sophisticated level, Palazzo Specoli, although the latter’s triforium windows were required by ordinance and are subtracted from the unified design of the Campana and facing the Palazzo Communale.

The tendency to emulate the major civic government palaces in domestic palace design was maintained in the first monumental private residence in Florence of the 15th century, the Palazzo Medici (p. 122), begun by Michelozzo in 1444. Like its predecessors in Venice, Lucca, and Siena, it remains more restrained than its civic prototype, the Palazzo Vecchio. This is not to say that something more ornate was not had imagined. Had the Medici adopted the project that Brunelleschi was reputed to have designed, they would have situated a more elaborate Medici Palace at a site recalling the original all-powerful bishop rulers of Italian cities, directly across from their church, in this case San Lorenzo, the patron church of the Medici – which Brunelleschi was redesigning, repute with a faience for the Medici family tomb. Michelozzo’s palazzo design produces its own magnificent effect despite its grayer restraint. It is a rectangular plan with a generous arcaded courtyard. Michelozzo articulated the exterior on the ground floor with similar rustication as at the Palazzo Vecchio. He then reduced this rustication in two stages on the upper floors, imitating the graded masonry of Frederick II’s Palazzo del Imperatore. The semicircular arches of the façade, the central pediments, and crenelle are the explicitly classical elements on this façade; the rounded bays of windows within the larger semicircular frames makes the overall effect, when combined with the rustication, closer to that of Tuscan broches’ palaces, the

The Renaissance palace

Though Brunelleschi’s Foundling Hospital was the first building to be articulated with the new antique style, it had few followers in secular architecture until later in the century. Brunelleschi was responsible for one other, the Palazzo di Pietro Goffi in Florence (begun 1412), to which he applied pilasters articulating the corners of each façade. Its pure rectangular plan, tall volume and generous windows recall the severity of all the guilds, Oronozanze, and finally that building’s prototypes, the Palazzo Vecchio and Bargello. These structures, together with the civic palaces discussed in the last section, show a far more restrained appreciation of ornamental forms and rigorous plan geometries than in the religious architectural tradition. The structures that most explicitly adopted ecclesiastical and classical ornament were the residences of the two institutions claiming the title of their Imperial Roman predecessors. These were the palace of the Popes in Viterbo, and the castles of the Holy Roman Empire, specifically of Frederick II, whether at Capo di Mioce, with its perfect octagonal plan, elaborate portal and grated rustication, or at Tuscan’s own Palazzo del Imperatore in Prato (p. 34), with its crystalline form, simple front portal framed by Corinthian pilasters, broken entablature and grated rustication, and, in the most extravagant way, the Doges’ Palace in Venice. Though these structures exerted a significant influence on civic architecture, their

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Bargello or the Palazzo Vecchio, than of the recent experiments in classicism by Brunelleschi or Michelozzo-himself.

The latter courtyard of the Medici Palace is quite another matter (p. 122, bottom). Here Michelozzo shows his debt to Brunelleschi, essentially wrapping the arcade of the Foundling Hospital around its four walls. The fact that Michelozzo completed a more elaborate version of this same classicizing courtyard within the Palazzo Vecchio indicates that the historical linkages between the Medici Palace and the city’s governing palace were more than coincidence. The Medici Palace was a de facto extension of the Palazzo Vecchio, not only because of the Medici’s powerful influence, but also because it did indeed provide the only suitable quarters in the city for accommodating visiting ambassadors and dignitaries. The layout and elaborate decoration of the interior rooms ideally served such a function, something that could only add prestige to the Medici’s original source of power, as a bank, a term that indeed derives from the long bench lining the façade of this and other banking residences. Here clients awaited their chance to meet with the powerful family, in order to arrange their financial affairs, joined by citizens from all levels of society seeking favours from the Medici court. Depending on their status, these proto-courtiers would arrive at various depths within the semi-public, semi-private space of the palace, most arriving no further than the Sala Grande, decorated with classicizing paintings by artists such as Uccello, Pollinino, and the Poliziano brothers. Only the most illustrious guests would penetrate into the more private domains.

The application of explicitly classical forms on the exterior, entirely public façade of a palace was quite rare in 15th-century Tuscany. The first example generally goes unmentioned, namely the Palazzo del Capitano del Popolo in Prato, built by one of Tuscany’s most successful international merchant bankers in the late 14th century. Shortly after Dati’s death, in the first decades of the 15th century, classical columns and bichrome window frames recalling the nearby Palazzo del Imperatore were painted onto the façade. It was not until after 1446, however, when Alberti began work on a palace for Giovanni Rucellai, that classical orders were to be applied in the actual masonry of the façade, and here only on pilasters. As with the Medici Palace, which was expanded by the Riccardi family in the 17th century, the structure visible today is more extended than the original. In the case of the Palazzo Rucellai (p. 123), it was the patron himself who went beyond the original design. The difference between the two projects reveals the difference in goals of architect and patron. Alberti compensated for the constrained setting and limited breadth of the palace’s ground plan by elaborating a façade with the same close attention to proportion, harmony and symmetry that he advocated in his De re aedificatoria. The Medici, on the other hand, only applied to the façade the orders that Michelozzo reserved for the interior of the Palazzo Medici, but also superimposes them on three levels. He varies them according to Victorian laws of progressive refinement, moving from the Doric
obscuring the property to complete the final, eighth bay, the existing composition would have broken with Alberti’s classical
rules by entering the elevation not only on a blank wall, but also on a piers. But, Rucellai, despite all its banking wealth and
political connections with the Medici, was never able to buy out the existing house of his neighbor, with the result that the final bay
of the building remains pathetically incomplete, betraying in its
fragments of arches and statuary the papal-ducal vision of
architecture which Alberti sought to transform a series of
simple dwellings into Florence’s most beautiful palace. The ruin
would have worked! had the patron supported Alberti’s project,
which was similarly designed by Rucellai’s decorators with
masterful designs of magnificent, classical
scale. However, Rucellai’s taste in local taste in
architecture, whether at the Medici Palace or its predecessors,
for which he chose his architect as having the best hands in the
city, is certainly an example of the interference of Alberti’s
design to its successors. In Rucellai’s time, the main façade of
Alberti’s ideal composition was
of art. With his church designs, Alberti’s one Florentine palace had
no followers until the next century. Though the city
was preserved with grand palaces over the next fifty years, they were all
based on the Palazzo Medici’s model, of a generally agitated
and violence, Tuscan Gothic exterior, with classical orders only
appearing in the courtyard and interior decoration. The palace of
Casino di San Gallo were typical, and they have a great
gap existed between those two types of houses versus churches. It would
be almost impossible to detect the same kind of imitations in the
palladian design of classical
orders and stone decorates with Santa Maria della Carceri
(p. 114). The only remnant is the symmetrical composition,
classicizing the original façade with stone and stones, and the
exploration of the freestanding site with a powerful cubic volumes.
The façade is indeed one of the most famous
models of the Renaissance in
and the heavy cornice by Il Cronaca.

As with innovations in church design, only three outside
republics of Florence proved fertile for classical experiments in palace
design. Even in the palaces of princes, however, architects met
the resistance to purely classical schemes. The palace in Urbino (p. 121)
of Alberti’s great humanist friend and warhorse prince, Federico di
Montefeltro, is a case in point. The structure is too vast in scale on
the superimposed Corinthian columns and classical
orders, the upper story achieving its refinement through the
fluting of the columns and floral bosses centered in the coffer squares.
The effect is to open to the prince and to
the Emperor the voice over his citizens
courtyard, beginning with the formal garden before the loggia,
and extending to the finest visible Aperennos. The prince, in turn,
is both visible to and distanced from his subjects. The classical
arches and columns provide a sense of the elaborate classical
treatment of the private quarters within the palace, most elaborate in
the remarkable studio. At the same time, he is protected by the
formal framing these arches. This view from Montefeltro’s gardens, as
well as the imperial orders he sought to convey, are both
documented in the remarkable portraits of him and his wife by Piero
della Francesca (p. 322).
contemporary Latin prose to its Ciceroan origins, only with an unmistakably religious overtone that indicates that the source is the Early Christian Rome of Constantine and his successors, not the Rome of the first Caesars. The loggia literally bridges the worldly—world religion’s mother church with the quasi-imperial residence of the papacy—imposed by decades earlier. It thereby provides the ideal vantage point for the Pope to bestow his blessing on his worshipful subjects in both of his personas, as the spiritual head to St. Peter and therefore to Christ, and as the temporal head of the ancient Roman emperors, underlined in the Pope’s title – pontifex maximus – as in his architecture.

The papyri thereby inferred Alberti’s forms with the ideological power it had been waiting to receive. They were quickly adopted and elaborated in the residences of cardinals, first in the courtyard of Cardinal Barbaro’s (later Paul II) Palazzo Venezia (below), again attributed to Alberti, though worked on by Giovanni da Sangallo between 1469–74. They next appear in the elevations and courtyards of Cardinal Raffaele Riario’s Cancelleria (before 1499–1517) and its nearby look-alike, the Palazzo Corner-Giramonti-Tronella. Both of the latter buildings show the head of a master profoundly influenced by Alberti. The remarkable evolution of the interior courtyards of the Cancelleria courtyard with double corner piers, and the similarity of this design to the courtyard of Santa Maria della Pace (p. 132), suggest some involvement of the latter’s architect, Bramante, freshly arrived in Rome from Milan. The formal convergence of palace courtyard with church cloisters indicates how far classical architecture had begun to penetrate domestic design, albeit for the house of a cardinal. This was just the beginning, however. Through these Roman residential monuments, whose theocratic aura was constantly being reinforced by the innovations in classical religious architecture, the style of all’antica began to be diffused back to the north, where it met success in direct proportion with the rewriting of civic institutions from the medieval republic to the Renaissance Empire.

The full convergence of classical church and classical palace design only occurred in the city of its origins, Rome, under the patronage of the city’s powerful cardinals and the Pope himself. By the time of Nicholas V, the papyri was beginning to strengthen its hold over the Roman republic and the city’s powerful families. One of the first documented applications of the classical orders to a Roman palace was at the Benediction Loggia of Old St. Peter’s, attributed to Alberti himself and completed before 1464, probably under Paul II. This three-story loggia comes down to us in a drawing by Maerten van Heemskerck, showing what appears to be the first truly superimposed classical columns (not pilasters) of the century, possibly Rejecting those already attributed to Paul II, as the cathedral of Pisa and the loggia – again overlooking the landscape – of his adjoining palace (see above on the ideal city, pp. 118–9), both attributed to Bernhard Rossellino, the same sculptor and architect who assisted in and expanded Alberti’s Palazzo Rucellai. The Benediction Loggia restored the arcaded-gallery type to its imperial origins as accurately as Alberti sought to restore
The codification of the villa as a monumental architectural form, if such types can ever be defined in so hard and fast a manner, avoided the regularization of their plans into symmetrical arrangements and the using of explicitly classical forms to their exteriors. The first tendencies in this direction were two of the palaces mentioned above, namely the palace of Federico da Montefeltro at Urbino and that of Leo II at Pisa, with their monumental classical loggias overlooking their domes. It was the achievement of the Medici, perhaps the most prolific builders of this type in western history, to crystallize a model that would influence all later villas, from papal villas to Palladian villas to Versailles to Jefferson's Monticello. In 1430, Giuliano de' Medici started work on the Villa Medici at Poggio a Caiano. He began with an arcaded plant supporting a perfectly symmetrical plan, intersected intensively with a remarkable barrel-washed space terminated with oculoi windows more recalling church interiors than any secular spaces built to date. His crowning achievement, however, was the entrance providing access perpendicular to this barrel-washed space. Fresh from work on Santa Maria della Carita, where he was commissioned by the church, he designed a portal of the Baroque Palazzo del Gianicolo, and applying it to the portal of his patron's villa, now with six columns rather than the two pilasters of Frederick II's Tuscan residence, and with a frieze within the pediment recalling ancient Greek architecture as much of ancient or recent emperors. All the structures that the Medici demonstrated in selecting Michelozzi over Brandenburg's design for their urban palace was here cast aside. As so often the case in the history of the villa, such as the antique Villa Adriana or the 16th-century Villa d'Este, this structure was a private statement of the imperial ambitions of the patrons, ambitions that were to be at first dashed, and then fully realized, in the following decades.