

UNEXPECTED TREASURES TWO STEPS FROM THE WINE BAR 54 ROSSO

by Andrea
Sbandati

Around this wine bar, within 500 meters, there are some artistic treasures mostly unknown to tourists and Florence citizens too.



What may seem like an outside area of the touristic district of the city, actually preserves **some extraordinary pieces of history and art**, which must only be recognized, seen and appreciated.

A stone's throw from here or from your B&B.

Here is a quick list of the most interesting things, leaving aside the well-known artistic places nearby (San Marco, Santissima Annunziata, San Lorenzo).

1 - Via San Gallo, the Road of Charity, the Bonifacio Hospital

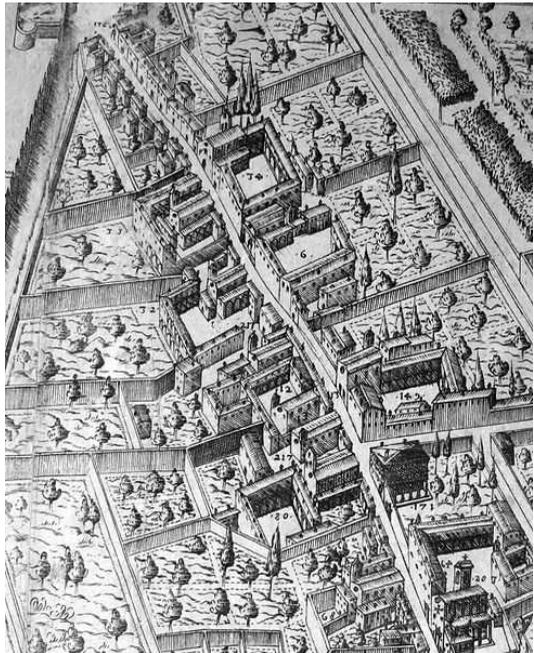
The road you see was an important communication route of the city, a continuation of the Roman *cardo* northbound, towards Bologna, up to the Porta di San Gallo.

In the Middle Ages via San Gallo (a preacher of Irish origin born in 560) was populated with hospitals, shelters, care centers for the sick of various kinds, alongside convents and monasteries. Hence the nickname "Road of Charity".

Many of these places have been destroyed but the hospital of Bonifacio, built in the 1300s (today you can see its eighteenth-century reconstruction), is still visible, there a plaque remembers the type of sick who were treated.

Outside Porta San Gallo there was the Monastery of San Gallo, built by Giuliano Giamberti who therefore took the name of Giuliano da Sangallo, destroyed in the siege of 1529/30.

In front of the Gate of San Gallo, in Piazza della Libertà, another Gate, from the eighteenth century was erected in honor of the arrival of the Lorena in Florence.



2 - The Casino dei Medici and the Medici Garden

The great ancient door (original) you can see from the tables where you are sitting is nothing more than the rear service entrance of the "Casino dei Medici", a place of delights built in the second half of the 16th century by Francesco I dei Medici, (Florentine prince fascinated by magic, alchemy, astronomy, pottery and typography).

The large building is visible from Via Cavour, going around the block, and it was built by the architect Bernardo Buontalenti.

The Medici family of which you can recognize the coat of arms above the door, spent periods of rest there, hosting artists and scientists.

It was a country house, in an unfinished area.

The Casino cannot be visited for now, the European University is carrying out within its own activities.

The Casino incorporated the famous "Orto dei Medici" built at the end of the 15th century to gather the Florentine artists scattered in their individual workshops.



It was Lorenzo the Magnificent who wanted this meeting place by hosting Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo.

Today a part of the Garden is visible from inside the Hotel "Orto dei Medici", while in Piazza San Marco you can see a plaque commemorating this place.

3 - The Pandolfini Palace

A few meters from your table you can admire a masterpiece of Florentine Renaissance architecture: Palazzo Pandolfini, designed by Raffaello and built by two members of the Sangallo family.



Still inhabited by one of the most important family- in Florence, the Palazzo was conceived at the beginning of the 16th century as a suburban villa, with a large garden accessible directly from the entrance door.

A place of delights in a still green area of the city, but close to the center.

This is the only case of a building designed by Raffaello in Florence, inspired by the interventions that the artist conceived in Rome.

The conspicuous Latin writing along the cornice recalls the role played in the construction of the building by the two Medici popes, Leo X and Gregory VII.



The Palace can be visited on request but certainly on the National Historic Houses Association day, in May.

If you are lucky enough to be in Florence on that date, the Count will delight you with his stories.

On the side of Via Salvestrina the Guelph cross windows typical of the time are still visible.

4- The Church of San Giovannino dei Cavalieri

Also a stone's throw from the table is a little-known church, but full of beauties: San Giovannino dei Cavalieri dedicated to the Baptist and his beheading.

A church with a long, very troubled history. Born as an oratory in the 1300s, it was entrusted in the 1500s to the Female Knights of Malta, the only female institution of this type, founded in 1491 and subject to the hierarchy of the Order of Malta (hence the coat of arms on the facade).

Particularly the vestibule with the wardrobes to change when entering on horseback and discarding the armor to enter the church.



Inside, visible from the entrance, a splendid crucifix by Lorenzo Monaco (goldsmith and painter of the early 15th century, you saw it in the Uffizi), paintings by Neri di Bicci (Coronation of the Virgin) and Bicci di Lorenzo (Nativity), a beautiful Annunciation by Michele Ciampanti (1490), a painting by Santi di Tito and the miraculous crucifix made with the wood of the Tree of the Miracle of San Zanobi.

A small museum with free access.

The church can only be visited before and after mass, on Sunday mornings, sometimes on Saturdays.

5 - The Scalzo Cloister

A half-block tour will take you in two minutes to a magical place: the **Chiostro dello Scalzo (Barefoot)**, built by Giuliano da Sangallo (the architect of the Medici Villa of Poggio a Caiano and of the Church of Santa Maria Maddalena dei Pazzi) which contains numerous frescoes in monochrome by Andrea del Sarto and Franciabigio from the early 1500s, dedicated to the life of St. John the Baptist.

The Cloister was part of a small oratory of the **Compagnia dello Scalzo** (the head of the Company walked barefoot during the processions) which was dedicated in poverty to the care of the sick and dispossessed.

Andrea del Sarto, who was a member of the brotherhood, painted in monochrome due to the limited availability of money of the brotherhood itself.

The Cloister can only be visited on some days (check the sign outside) and if you are lucky a young guide will show you the cycle of 12 frescoes.



6 - The Church of Santa Maria dei Battilani

Unfortunately, little remains of the ancient church seat of the Battilani, the wool carders also called "Ciompi" of which the "riot" of 1372 is famous.

On Via delle Ruote, a few steps from you, you will find the sixteenth-century portal of the side entrance of what was once a large church dedicated to the Madonna.

The portal now leads to the premises of a craftsman.

To see the church you have to go to via Santa Reparata 25/27 r to the Sala Battilani of the University of Florence, and ask if they let you visit the Auditorium, which is nothing more than the central nave of the old church, inside which little remained.



An opportunity to get acquainted with the Battilani Guild (whose "comb and trellis" coat of arms is visible in many places in the area), creator of the first "proletarian" revolt in history, which soon ended in blood.

For a short time they were recognized as official Guild, only to be persecuted and expelled from the city.

7 - The Cenacle of Sant'Apollonia

Around the corner with via XXVII Aprile you can enter the Cenacle di Sant'Apollonia for free, a small museum that contains, in addition to paintings and sinopias, the Last Supper by Andrea del Castagno (1447), an absolute masterpiece: rigorous perspective, care of details, full wall painting with the upper part dedicated to the Resurrection, Crucifixion and Deposition, and the lower part with the Last Supper. Built for the refectory of the cloistered Benedictine nuns of Sant'Apollonia, therefore absolutely secret and inaccessible, today it has been restored and can be visited.

It is one of the most important Last Dinners visible in Florence.

The small museum also contains paintings by Paolo Schiavo and Neri di Bicci, coming from the Monastery.



The Last Supper is open to the public only on special times and days, better look at the sign outside the entrance.

The Museum is part of the larger Monastery of Sant'Apollonia founded in the 1300s (the coat of arms, a pincer with a tooth, which recalls the martyrdom of the Saint) is visible in many houses on this street.

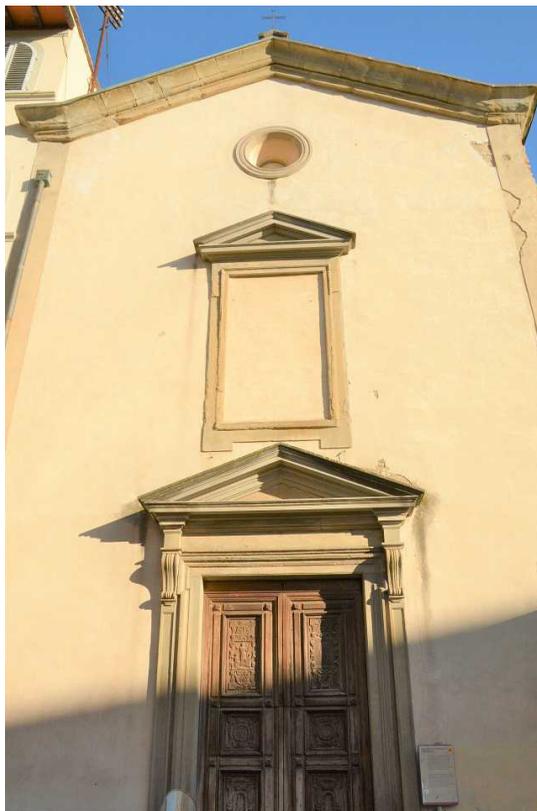
8 - The Oratory of Jesus Pilgrim (or of the Pretoni)

At the end of the road, going towards the center, **is the small Oratory built in the 1300s** as accommodation for priests on pilgrimage. It was then used as a hospice for the now elderly priests (hence the name Pretoni).

Remodeled at the end of the 16th century by Antonio Dosio (that of the Archbishop's Palace and Palazzo Larderel in Tornabuoni street), the walls were entirely frescoed in 1590 by Giovanni Balducci (an important painter who participated in the frescoes of the Dome of the Cathedral) and are still visible in their splendor.

Inside is the tomb of the parish priest Arlotto, famous for his jokes, with the motto "Pievano Arlotto had this burial done for himself, and for those who want to enter". Perhaps the external portal visible from via degli Arazzieri is made by Michelangelo.

Unfortunately, the Oratory is always closed, if you are lucky enough to find it open for work you will see a jewel of the late Renaissance.



9 - The Loggia of the Weavers

Going down towards the center you will find an imposing loggia just a few meters from the wine bar, today the seat of the Civil Engineers.

It is the **Loggia dei Tessitori**, with five arches, perhaps built by **Giuliano da Sangallo**, or from the **Cronaca** or perhaps by **Bernardo Buontalenti** at the beginning of the 16th century.

It was the seat of the **Company of Drapery Weavers**, enrolled in the Silk Guild, the coat of arms clearly visible on an internal portal and on the external wall. The weavers were first housed in San Marco (it can be seen still their coat of arms in one of the side chapels) then they built the Loggia in place of a previous hospice in an area of the city characterized by textile activities as evidenced by the contiguous via degli Arazzieri.

But soon, with the silk crisis, the weavers were forced to sell everything to the Medici, who owned the nearby Casino, hence the Medici coat of arms on the facade and the still legible inscription.



The interior is accessible as regional offices, but completely renovated in the first half of the 1900s.

10 - The Church of Santa Agata

Going up towards San Gallo Gate you will find on the right an ancient monastery, built in 1185, which was the seat of 12 different female monastic orders.

The church you see was financed in 1592 by Lorenzo Pucci, of the famous Florentine family (their coat of arms, the Moor's head, and the inscription reminding the family are still visible).

The church was built by Alessandro Allori, a Mannerist painter who expresses himself here as an architect. With the Lorena, everything was transformed into a military hospital.

Today the church and the monastery premises are closed pending an upcoming renovation.



The wooden doors of the portal, also by Allori, show the pincers with the breasts, symbol of the martyrdom of the saint and the shields with the Pucci coats of arms.

The church is a small museum: the Marriage of Cana by Alessandro Allori.

Then the Madonna and Child with Saints (about 1525-37) by Lorenzo di Credi, the Crucifixion of Sant'Andrea 'del Passignano, the Visitation of the Master of Serumido (about 1530), the Deposition by Mario Balassi, the Annunciation by Neri by Bicci (1442-1444).

Unfortunately the church is currently closed.

You can enjoy the Mannerist façade in gray stone, hence the strong visible degradation.

II - The Conservatory of the Mantellate and the Tabernacle of the Assumption

The last stretch of Via San Gallo on the left towards Piazza Libertà is occupied by a large monastic complex which has now been transformed into a residence and a private school.

This is the **Ancient Monastery of Chiarito**, founded in the 1300s and subsequently transformed after a fire in the 1400s.

He was famous for a miraculous crucifix to which Lorenzo the Magnificent attributed the grace of having saved him during the Pazzi's conspiracy.

The Lorena family entrusted it to the Mantellate Sisters to build a school there.

By asking the school secretary, it is possible to visit the picture gallery, which houses various works from the 17th and 18th centuries; the Martyrdom of Saint Catherine of Alexandria by Jacopo Ligozzi, Three Archangels by Fabrizio Boschi, Madonna and Child with Saints by Francesco Curradi, the Death of Saint Joseph by Anton Domenico Gabbiani and an Adoration of the Magi by Luca Giordano.



The internal church is dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin, a religious theme which is also dedicated to the splendid tabernacle visible just before on the other side of the road, on the facade of a medieval building.

The coat of arms of the Monastery (ears of wheat in a chalice from which the wine overflows) is visible on the entrance portal and on a building just ahead.

12 - The Tabernacles of via delle Ruote and the house of Santi di Tito

In via delle Ruote, the cross street of via San Gallo in front of you, there are three very interesting Tabernacles.



The first, visible from the outside tables of the wine bar, is a Nursing Madonna by Andrea da Bonaiuto, a very beautiful and well-preserved painting from the end of the 14th century, by a first class author, the one who frescoed the Cappellone degli Spagnoli in Santa Maria Novella. Further on, on the corner with Via Santa Reparata, you will find the Tabernacle of the Battilani, built at the end of the 16th century with a gray stone frame where the symbols of the wool carders stand out.

The image it preserves is a fresco from the end of the sixteenth century with the Madonna flanked by San Giovanni Battista and San Giovanni Evangelista, attributed to the school of Bronzino or perhaps of Alessandro Allori.

Further on, at the corner with via San Zanobi, a tabernacle that contains a painting by Domenico Puligo (painter friend of Andrea del Sarto) from 1526 describing the "Wedding of St. Catherine of Alexandria" (recognizable by the toothed wheel of his torture) with the emblem of the client Compagnia del Bigallo. Shortly before the house built by Santi di Tito and inhabited by him until his death.



A very prolific painter that you will find everywhere in Florence.
An opportunity to walk along Via delle Ruote.