

Title:

The discovery of a well in the Tower of the Pulci in Florence.

Word Count:

881

Summary:

Every tourist who comes to Florence ends up by visiting the square outside the Uffizi Gallery. This is partly due to the attraction of the wonderful paintings in the Gallery and partly to admire the original architecture of the palace itself, which Giorgio Vasari, commissioned by Cosimo I de' Medici, completed in just five years (1560-65).

Keywords:

hotels in Florence, accommodation in Florence, bed and breakfast Florence, B&B, bed & breakfast, townhouse suites, Florence apartments, guesthouses

Article Body:

It is in this horse-shoe shaped palace, whose two wings stretch from Palazzo Vecchio to the Arno, that actually creates the square itself; the porticoes on the western side open off into Via Lambertesca, a narrow street that leads right into the heart of the oldest part of the city, the mediaeval area that Vasari partly demolished to make room for his new creation.

It was here that the mafia car-bomb exploded on the night of May 27th 1993, on the corner between Via Lambertesca and Via dei Georgofili, killing five people and causing damage to the artistic heritage of Florence. The explosion seriously damaged the upper rooms of the Uffizi and disembowelled the ancient house and tower of the Pulci family beneath it, from 1932 the seat of the historic Academy of the Georgofili, specialized in agricultural studies and the conservation of the territory since 1753.

The tremendous sight is still a vivid memory for all the rescuers who first arrived on the scene after the explosion: this time the small palace of the Georgofili, which had survived so many wars and floods, seemed really to have suffered its death blow. One half of its facade (200 square metres) had been completely destroyed, shattered in the explosion, a huge pit, about ten metres deep, had opened up in the interior, while the whole of the south wall, which faced onto the Courtyard of the Caldaie, was in danger of collapsing, because it had been shifted 10 centimetres by the impact. The attic-flat that had been created at the top of the tower in the early 20th century had crashed to the

ground, covering the bodies of the four people who lived in it with rubble: the caretaker of the Academy, her husband and their two little daughters, one aged nine and the other only two months. The fifth victim was a student who lived in the house opposite, which was also directly hit by the explosion.

Florence has always replied to barbaric acts such as this by immediately getting on with mending her wounds and rebuilding everything that has been damaged "as it was and where it was". Once the huge patrimony of books belonging to the Academy (50.000 volumes plus 4.000 essays from the archives of the Georgofili) had been carried away to safety and all the rubble removed, the walls that were still standing were reinforced and the ones that had been destroyed were reconstructed. Traditional techniques were combined with advanced technological solutions: the roof and bent tiles were made by hand, the corbels and capitals carved by Florentine craftsmen but use was also made of mortar injections, chains, steel plates and bolts. Great care was taken during restoration to keep to certain basic rules which were to ensure that the newly reconstructed areas of the building could in some way be recognized from the original. Therefore a zig-zagging fracture line divides the floor of the huge Assembly Hall on the first floor, to delimit the area that fell to the ground, and another line on the facade, a vertical one this time, divides the ancient decorated walls from the new.

Two large canvases by the painter Bartolomeo Bimbi were unfortunately irreparably damaged and could be replaced. This catastrophe, however, led to some unexpected and extraordinary results, like the discovery of seven small rooms, which were once part of the State Archives, later walled up and forgotten and now available for the use of Academy of the Georgofili once more. Above all it revealed the existence of a well and staircase system that leads up from the cellars to the upper floors and which probably is the last trace of the house that the Florentine land register of 1427 noted as being the property of Jacopo di Francesco de' Pulci and father of Luigi, a friend of Lorenzo Il Magnifico and author of the poem "Morgante". The house and tower still bear the name of the Pulci family even today, in spite of the fact that the building appears to have passed to the Gherardini family after 1433.

The well and the staircase that winds around it and reaches the top floor of the Uffizi Gallery are now free of the walls and plaster that once hid them; the grey stone archivolt and steps have been restored in order to form a single and harmonious unit with the various rooms of the Academy.

Apart from being an unexpected reward for all those who worked on restoring the building, this discovery is yet another demonstration of Giorgio Vasari's skill in construction, as he managed to incorporate the ancient tower of the Pulci family into the revolutionary architecture of the Uffizi without destroying it.

In fact the original project included plans to expropriate and demolish at least 43 houses and towers in order to build the new palace of the "Uffici" or offices, but Cosimo de' Medici decided that this would be far too expensive in the long run and therefore the most of the buildings were spared though they were eventually incorporated into the new construction. The Tower of the Pulci and the results of this extraordinary restoration work can be visited daily during the hours in which the Academy of the Georgofili is open to the public and that is from Mondays to Fridays, from 3.00pm to 6.30pm.