



Dante statue, Piazza Santa Croce, Florence

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"Giorgione" Barchiesi (right)

A Day with Giorgione at Villa Selva

When my *nonna* visits me in Rome, she spends as much time as possible with her notebook and pencil in front of the television, writing down our favorite chef's recipes while he broadcasts on the Italian *Gambero Rosso* channel. One chef has captured her eye, and her stomach, more than others with his home-grown ingredients and his lack of measuring cups in the kitchen. Just like my *nonna*, *Giorgione*, is a fan of "a drizzle" of this or "a handful" of that.

Giorgione is the affectionately given nickname of *Giorgio Barchiesi*, a favorite in our house. He's a farmer, a chef and an advocate for the regionality of Italian cuisine. Born in Rome, the chef lived there until the age of 19 when he decided to leave to study veterinary sciences and traded the metropolis for Umbria. He began to produce olive oil in the *Montefalco* and by 2006, he opened his first restaurant called *Alla Via di Mezzo*.

Unlike other Italian chefs who are cultivating an avant-garde, modern Italian cuisine, Giorgione knows if the recipes and tastes ain't broke-why fix 'em? His food plays on tastes that have been loved and admired in Italian cuisine for centuries like fresh

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following in Dante's footsteps

Although millions of people have followed routes related to Italy's artistic and cultural heritage since before the beginning of the Grand Tour, the country still preserves little-known routes and itineraries. A favorite of mine follows one of the best known and greatest Italian writers of all time: *Dante Alighieri*.

The Great Poet was born in 1265 in Florence and since he was the first to write in Italian vernacular, he is considered the father of Italian language. His most known work is the *Divine Comedy*. After the Bible, it is the most translated work in the world. He was also the author of *Convivio* (The

Banquet), *De Monarchia*, *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, *La Vita Nova* (The New Life) and *Le Rime* (The Rhymes).



In the *Divine Comedy*, Dante takes us on an imaginary trip through the human spirit, denouncing corruption, dividing the souls of people of his time into *Hell*, *Purgatory* and *Paradise*. His guide through Hell and Purgatory is Virgil, while in Paradise he is guided by Beatrice, his unreachable love and inspiring Muse.

In modern times, Florence still has a very strong connection with the figure of Dante. The city was, after all, *the fair*

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Dante is the father of the Italian language.



it is said that Dante used to sit on a stone
near his "beautiful San Giovanni" (Dante Alighieri,
Hell, xix, Line 17) baptistery and watch
the construction of the cathedral.

sheep-fold where Dante slept as a lamb, (Dante Alighieri, *Paradise*, XXV, line 6) and he never forgot it. The Florence we know today, rich in art and architectural treasures, is the result of the Renaissance, but, walking along its streets, we still can find many references to Dante's time.

So... just for a while, put on the Dante literary glasses and walk in his footsteps!

HOMETOWN FLORENCE

Let's start from Florence's *Piazza del Duomo* (www.museumflorence.com), where he was baptized.

In his time, only the Baptistery was built. The baptismal font is no longer the one in which Dante was immersed. In fact, in the Medieval Age, baptism was practiced by immersion.

Interestingly, in 1576, for the baptism of the male heir of the *Gran Duke Francesco I*, the *Medici* family decided to abolish this tradition because it was too dangerous. Until the early 20th

century, the Baptistery continued to be the only place where the Florentines were baptized.

It is said that Dante used to sit on a stone near his "beautiful San Giovanni" (Dante Alighieri, *Hell*, XIX, line 17) *baptistery* and watch the construction of the cathedral. The stone is no longer there, but if you stand with your back to the cathedral, with the Baptistery on your left, you will see on the wall, among the shops, a plaque with the inscription "*Sasso di Dante*" (Dante's Stone).

He never saw the cathedral completed, but inside it, among its beauties, there is a painting of him by *Domenico di Michelino*. In *Dante e*

setting of the *Divine Comedy*. On the left is Hell's door, then the Mountain of Purgatory and in the background, Paradise.

If you want to follow Dante's footsteps, you just have to walk through *Via dei Calzaiuoli*, a pedestrian-only street in the very center of Florence, until you find the *Orsanmichele Church* on *Via dell'Arte della Lana*. This area is the heart of ancient Florence, and a two-minute walk from the town hall, *Palazzo Vecchio*. In Dante's time, Orsanmichele was a covered wheat market and it still preserves, in the pillars, the opening in which the wheat descended from the upper floor.

Step onto *Via dei Tavolini* and continue up to *Via Dante Alighieri*. In *Piazza San Martino del Vescovo* you will see the *Oratorio di San Martino*.

Today it hosts a charity association, but in Dante's time it was a church. In this very church, Dante married his wife, *Gemma Donati*.

In front of it you will see *Torre della Castagna* (Chestnut Tower), one of

the few medieval residences preserved in Florence. It is where the representatives of the executive power in Florence used to meet beginning in the 13th century. Its name is due to the



Plaque marking Dante's rock



Ceiling of San Giovanni



Baptistery and the Duomo

il suo poema (Dante and his poem) the painter portrays the Poet outside the Florence walls in the

The Divine Comedy is divided

fact that chestnuts were used to make voting ballots.

A few steps from here is the entrance to Dante's house (www.museocasadidante.it). Standing near the *Torre della Castagna*, you can imagine its long black shadow lengthening, every morning at sunrise, along the narrow

street of *Santa Margherita*, joining the house of Dante Alighieri to that of *Beatrice Portinari* on Via del Corso.

Beatrice and Dante only met twice, but she was the inspiration behind one of his greatest works, his *Vita Nuova*. In the third book of the Divine Comedy, *Paradiso*, Beatrice also appears as a character who guides Dante on his journey. Although today the latter is a private building, a plaque remembers that once this was her birthplace:

in white veil with olive wreathed,
A virgin in my view appear'd, beneath
Green mantle, robed in hue of living flame

(Dante Alighieri, *Purgatory*, XXX, lines 31-33)

In his *Vita Nuova*, the Poet describes their first meeting when they were children. His heart

"began to tremble so violently when she appeared dressed in noblest color, restrained and pure, in crimson, tied and adorned in the style that then suited her very tender age."

Here began that tremble of Dante's spirit, which inspired all his works. The House Museum of Dante is not the original one, but it contains documents and objects of his time and precious editions of his works. It was rebuilt in 1911 on the remains of the old buildings of the Alighieri family, so it is not an ancient house, but is worth visiting it for the documentation, video and models of the city in Medieval times.



Orsanmichele Church



Museum of Dante



Dante's House

Further along on *via Dante Alighieri*, the *Chiesa di Santa Margherita dei Cerchi* houses the tombs of the Portinari family. A plaque in this church is dedicated to Beatrice, but her body is buried with her husband in the Church of Santa Croce (www.santacroceopera.it). Santa Margherita dei Cerchi is a very little chapel, but devotion to Dante's inspiring Muse brings visitors here. In front of Beatrice's plaque, a basket collects letters that people have written for her. The love of Dante and Beatrice was not lived in reality, but rather is an immortal love that will forever live in his poetry.

Our itinerary continues towards Santa Croce. Along the streets you will see other buildings that existed in Dante's time, such as *La Badia* (the Abbey) or the church "which calls her still to matin prayers and noon," (Dante Alighieri, *Paradise*, XV, line 93).

The Church of Santa Croce is the Pantheon of great artists, musicians, scientists and religious figures related to the city of Florence. Names such as *Michelangelo*, *Galileo Galilei*, *Machiavelli*, *Ghiberti* and *Dante* can be read on monuments of great beauty. The one consecrated to Dante was built in 1829 to house the remains of the poet that Ravenna lovingly holds. But his ungrateful homeland has never had the honor of receiving the remains of its son.

Dante in exile

In 1300, Florence was politically divided in Guelphs and Ghibellines: they respectively supported the Pope and the Emperor. Guelphs were then divided in white and black. Dante was a White Guelph and when the Black Guelphs rioted, he was banished from

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into three separate books.

if you Listen Carefully, you will hear the echo of the divine comedy, while



the rivulets that from the verdant hills
of Casentino descend down into Arno,
making their channels to be cold and moist.

(Dante Alighieri, *Hell*, XXX, Lines 64-66)

the poet in pisa

The city of *Pisa* also brings Dante to mind as the setting of his tragic account of *Count Ugolino*. Ugolino was betrayed, captured, and imprisoned with his children and grandchildren in the *Torre della Muda* (the tower in which once eagles were closed for molting of feathers) (www.sns.it/torreugolino). They were detained with charges of treason and died of hunger. Later, following Dante's verses, the tower became the Tower of Famine:

A small grate
Within that mew, which for my sake the name
Of Famine bears, where others yet must pine,
Already through its opening several moons
Had shown me, when I slept the evil sleep
That from the future tore the curtain off.

(Dante Alighieri, *Hell*, XXXIII, lines 21-26)

Dante introduces Count Ugolino as a traitor of the motherland. In Pisa you can visit the remains of the tower in Piazza dei Cavalieri, the remains of the household of



Tower of Famine, Pisa

The Casentino Valley, between Florence and *Arezzo*, is an area in which, every step you take, you find out how his spirit of place is vivid and alive. The Sacred Forest of the *Casentino* hide fascinating monasteries and castles. Through these forests the echoes of ancient battles could still be heard among Saint Francis' words and Dante's steps. Here, time seems immutable: the history of the territory is well rooted, anchored to rocks, monasteries, abbeys and castle that define the landscape. Modernity didn't reach this area.



Casentno Valley

This is the valley in which the Arno rises from *Monte Falterona* and descends through the cities of Casentino. If you pay careful attention, you will hear the echo of the *Divine Comedy*, while "the rivulets that from the verdant hills / of Casentino descend down into Arno, / Making their channels to be cold and moist" (Dante Alighieri, *Hell*, XXX, lines 64-66) remind us of when, with their song, they comforted the poet's sorrow.

Florence, on pain of death. So begins his forced journey through Italy, in search of hospitality.

It is said that, in those times, he had already written the first seven chapters of the *Divine Comedy*, and that he continued writing it during his life and exile.

Forced to move from his beloved Florence, Dante wandered for the remaining 19 years of his life, passing under the protection of the local lords who offered him hospitality and protection: the Marquis Malaspina, the *Counts Guidi* and *Oderlaffi*, the *Scaligeri*, to name a few. Many places keep a vivid memory of his passage, and at the same time, they gave inspiration for the cantos of the *Divine Comedy*. There are landscapes, monuments and buildings that even today, after seven centuries, evoke his lines that, thanks to their immortality, become famous in the collective memory.



Casentisi Forest

Annello Tarteri, flickr

April 2019

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Three was Dante's lucky num



Castello di Gradara

Count Ugolino, recently brought to light, as well as the chapel in the Church of San Francesco that preserves his bones and those of his children and grandchildren. Dante writes:

When I awoke,
Before the dawn, amid their sleep I heard
My sons (for they were with me) weep and ask
For bread. Right cruel art thou, if no pang
Thou feel at thinking what my heart foretold;
And if not now, why use thy tears to flow?
...

The horrible tower: whence, uttering not a word,
I look'd upon the visage of my sons.

(Dante Alighieri, *Hell*, XXXIII, lines 35-46)

STAR-CROSSED LOVERS

Paolo Malatesta and *Francesca da Polenta* are two lovers whose story is told in the fifth Canto of Dante's *Inferno*. Francesca was deceived: she was made to believe she was marrying the love of her life, Paolo Malatesta, but she was in fact promised to Paolo's brother, *Gianciotto*.

Dante places Paolo and Francesca in Hell, amongst the lustful. He tells how the two lovers were inspired to kiss after reading the story of Lancelot and Guinevere:

One day,
For our delight we read of Lancelot,
How him love thrall'd. Alone we were, and no
Suspicion near us. Oft-times by that reading
Our eyes were drawn together, and the hue

Fled from our alter'd cheek. But at one point
Alone we fell. When of that smile we read,
The wished smile so raptuously kiss'd
By one so deep in love, then he, who ne'er
From me shall separate, at once my lips
All trembling kiss'd. The book and writer both
Were love's purveyors. In its leaves that day
We read no more.

(Dante Alighieri, *Hell*, V, lines 123-135)



Paolo and Francesca

Gianciotto discovered the adulterers and killed them. A legend tells that in 1581, in the church of *St. Agostino* in *Rimini*, two bodies were found in the same coffin: a man and a woman with the same sword wound, probably Paolo and Francesca. They lay embraced, in an eternal love they could not live in life.

To discover more of the tragic history of two of the most known lovers in literature, you should also visit the Malatesta Family's Castle of Gradara (www.castellodigradara.org), in the region of *Le Marche*. Here you will see the setting in which their tragedy occurred.

DANTE IN RAVENNA

Dante's final journey was to the city of *Ravenna*. This city is doubly sacred, because it was the cradle of Francesca and holds the tomb of Dante. He died after about three years in the city, in 1321, on the night between September 13 and 14. Since 1908 in the mausoleum of Dante in Ravenna a votive lamp burns, donated by the

Florentines, a little gesture to honor the famous citizen once banned from the city. Every year, in September, on the occasion of his death, the representatives of Florence bring the oil for the lamp that will burn for another year.

In front of his Ravenna Mausoleum the atmosphere is solemn: a huge and deep feeling of reverence pervades the visitor. Here the inscription above Dante's mausoleum reads "*Onorate l'altissimo Poeta*" and begs the world to bow its head to honor the Great Poet. Ravenna was Dante's final stop and concludes our innovative literary itinerary. The Great Poet was inspired by the tragedies and the charms of these places, and by visiting them accompanied by his own words, you will be, too.

— **Raffaella Cavalieri**

Raffaella Cavalieri is an author of essays, guides and literary itineraries in Italy that follow in the footsteps of the great authors and travelers of the past. On this theme she wrote L'Italia con gli occhi di Dante: Guida del Viaggiatore and re-edited and introduced Mrs. Colquhoun Grant Through Dante's Land: Impressions in Tuscany. For more information, visit www.raffaellacavalieri.it



Dante's Mausoleum



Dante's Tomb

1€ = \$1.13 at press time

ber, considered to be divine.

Rome's Neighborhood Oranges

Money may not grow on trees, but in Italy's capital, opportunity surely does.

If you have ever visited Rome and strolled down its tree-lined streets, you will have seen branches heavy with bitter oranges hanging over city sidewalks and property railings. I've often wondered if this fruit was edible and if there was a way to utilize it as a means other than food for the birds of the city that peck and knock the fruits to the ground.

For the past four years, cook, food stylist, and writer Alice Adams, an Australian expat, has found a way to use the urban-grown oranges of Rome in a sustainable project called *Neighborhood Oranges*. She was inspired by a similar project by *Frutta Urbana*, which collects fruits from public parks and gardens around Italy's cities, maps the harvest sites, and gives the fruits to non-profits, farmers' markets, and organizations that help needy people around Italy.

In collaboration with SPRAR (*Sistema di Protezione per Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati*) Immigration Network in Rome, refugees and immigrants could partake in the project and learn to transform the collected fruits into marmalade and other sellable products.

When Alice first started Neighborhood Oranges at her *Latteria Studio* in the *Monteverde* neighborhood of Rome, she worked alongside two Nigerian immigrants named James and Ruben. James later got a job and Ruben started

studying, so Alice decided to expand her team. She reached out to two women named Joy and Pamela, two African immigrant women who were working odd-jobs, like sweeping the streets, around the neighborhood. These women have been in Italy for about three years, and Alice calls them



Pamela, Joy and Alice



Orange marmalade

"fantastic; young, enthusiastic, full of initiative."

With Alice, Joy and Pamela collect the oranges from around the city or are given them by friends. They transform the Roman fruits into a Scottish-style marmalade called "bitter orange marmalade." Usually, the marmalade is made two to three times a month in the winter, less in the summertime when the orange supply is lower.

Alice is hopeful that in the future these women will be able to find work easily in Rome and that they can put their exponentially improving Italian

language skills, their newfound knowledge on the ins and outs of running a productive business, and their prowess in making marmalades to good use, perhaps working in a kitchen or in a bakery in Rome.

In Alice's kitchen at *Latteria Studio* (see the November 2018 issue about cooking lessons) the ladies turn the city oranges into a delicious spread. The studio not only provides a beautiful space to learn and work, but it funds the jars and the label printing for the project. The motto of the project is "start small, think big" and these ladies are doing just that.



Orange trees on the Palatine Hill



Making marmalade

As a city dweller constantly hearing warnings of bad air quality on the news, I wondered — is it safe to eat the oranges that grow on the busy, traffic-filled streets of Rome? Luckily, the orange trees don't absorb any of the city smog or pollution. When the oranges are washed and analyzed, they result in tests as organic!

The Neighborhood Oranges project currently sells their marmalade by word-of-mouth to friends, to families at Roman schools and to a handful of GAS (*Gruppi di acquisto solidale*) groups to whom the jars are sold in bulk. The jars are 330 grams each and cost 4.50€. If you order five or more jars, they each cost only 4€. For anyone visiting Rome, do not hesitate to contact Alice to find a time when you can pass by the studio to get a few jars of your own. Email her at alicekiandra.adams@gmail.com.

Oranges are prominent in

MARIGOLD ROMA

The Micro-Bakery Rome was Missing

From the moment I stepped into *Marigold Roma*, Rome's new micro-bakery/café/restaurant, I felt like I was visiting the home of a chic, Scandinavian friend with excellent taste in décor. Tucked on a side street in the *Ostiense* neighborhood, a short walk from *Testaccio* and the massive, seemingly out-of-place Pyramid, this area feels like a new Rome. A Rome that has been remodelled and redecorated. Industrial chic with rainbow-colored buildings and graffiti of the *Madonna* taking a selfie, Marigold's neighborhood is very much reflective of the vibe inside the café.

Marigold's wide tall windows and an open door invite you inside but the smell of the fresh baked cinnamon swirl buns and sourdough bread is what begs you to stay awhile.

The menu is innovative for this city — there is not a *cacio e pepe* in sight. They offer breakfast and lunch daily, dinners on Friday and Saturday and brunch on weekend mornings — a true rarity in Rome. Brunch options range from savory to sweet, from homemade pastas or avocado toast on sourdough bread to warm scones with butter and jam.

An expert *barista* mans the front counter and can whip up a variety of coffee drinks, most of which are most familiar to an English-



All photos by Ryan Neeven

Clockwise from top left: Inside Marigold Roma; stracciatella and artichokes; cinnamon swirl buns; and Marigold's bakery case

speaking client such as their delightful "flat white." Marigold's *cappuccino* served in a handle-less green cup with a small cookie treat on the side is one of my favorites in the city. An assortment of teas and fresh-squeezed juices are available at breakfast time and throughout the day, while beer and wine make an appearance on the lunch and dinner menus.

As an homage to their new home, the chefs at Marigold Roma value and appreciate Italian ingredients but add fun Danish twists to their menu. *Sofie*, one of the creators behind Marigold, is a pastry chef and self-taught bread maker originally from Denmark. Her fresh hot cross buns, carrot cake with swirls of creamy frosting, morning buns packed with *Valrhona* chocolate and the Marigold staple — cinnamon swirl buns, radiate her Danish influence from the display

case of baked goods at the main counter.

Domenico, inspired by his family's Calabrese heritage, masterfully turns seasonal produce into fresh and innovative dishes. Homemade *tortelli*, filled with sheep's milk ricotta, served in a lemon and Tuscan kale pesto will make your mouth explode with flavor.

Stracciatella cheese served with grilled marinated artichokes (we *are* in Rome,

after all) and marjoram are fresh and filling and taste just like Spring. Perhaps one of the best parts of *Domenico*'s dishes is that they are so beautiful upon arrival at your table thanks to hand-painted Apulian plates, that you are already satisfied with the dish before taking the first bite.

Both *Sofie* and *Domenico* often leave the kitchen and enter the dining room equipped with the beautiful plates and smiles. They are both fluent in English and are more than happy to have a chat and share their vision for this unique eatery they have created.

Both inside and outside of the micro-bakery, the atmosphere is new, it's exciting, but like the artichokes popping up on the menu or the SPQR water fountains sprinkling the block, you *know* you are in the Eternal City if you pay attention to the details.

Marigold Roma
Via Giovanni da Empoli, 37
(39) 068 7725679
www.marigoldroma.com
Open Tuesday to Thursday
8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Friday from
8 a.m. to 11 p.m., Saturday
9 a.m. to 11 p.m. and
Sunday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Closed Monday.

—Danielle Abbazia

Rome during the winter.

olive oil, soft homemade pastas with rough, less-refined flours and an array of pork products like *guanciale* (pork cheek) that will never go out of style.

His dishes are either made with ingredients he grows himself or that he buys from trusted local farmers and fishermen. The recipes on his TV

show *Giorgione: Orto e Cucina* reinforce the title of the program in that most ingredients pass directly from his *orto* (garden) to his *cucina* (kitchen).

After years of admiring his ever-present denim overalls and dreaming of tasting his dishes, my family and I take a day trip from Rome to visit his *Villa Selva Country House* in *Gualdo Cattaneo* in the province of *Perugia*. Winding country roads guide us up the hills of the surrounding Umbrian countryside until we see a beautiful stone building set behind an iron gate. The 90-minute drive has felt like a pilgrimage for us and we arrive at 1 p.m., hungry and excited, and oh yes—wearing Giorgione’s staple denim overalls.

Villa Selva is a restaurant and an *agriturismo* with rooms for rent and a pool for summer months. It is run primarily by Giorgione’s three children, *Giuseppe*, *Michele* and *Maria*. They have certainly inherited their father’s gift for creating dishes perfect to be had in company, full of flavor and jam-packed with quality ingredients. Everyone on the staff can tell you who the farmer or



Villa Selva Country House

Via Loreto 1
Gualdo Cattaneo
(39) 074 2951321
www.villaselva.it

Rates: Double rooms range from 82 to 120 € per night; apartments start at 170 €
Open Thursday to Saturday for dinner and Saturday and Sunday for lunch. The restaurant is closed Monday to Wednesday.

winemaker was for whatever you are eating or drinking.

Giorgione’s image is all over the restaurant on clocks, on paintings and table markers. The fire is on in the inviting dining room and our waitress seats us close enough to feel the warmth. The Sunday lunch menu we are about to enjoy is a price-fixed 29.50€, excluding beverages, and it includes an *antipasto* buffet, two family-style pasta dishes, two family-style meat dishes, and two desserts.

Around an alcove I see the wait staff is beginning to prep the antipasto for the lunch. What seems like hundreds of jars and slabs fill the buffet corner containing stuffed peppers, bean salads, *focaccine*, *prosciutti*, different types of *salami* and cheeses, soups — like a hearty bean soup and a *pappa al pomodoro* made of tomato puree and softened bread, *patè*, veggies in olive oil and baked breads stuffed with meats, sauces and cheeses. We dig in.

Within a few minutes, the pasta arrives... *Tagliatelle* with a goose *ragù* and *ravioli* filled with *ricotta* and

covered in a sauce of zucchini and *guanciale*, which is cured pork jowl, are on the menu today and they arrive on heaping platters. I take the final ravioli after winning a rock, paper, scissors game with my husband. Victory is sweet! Or savory in this case.

Today’s specials are braised beef in a *Sagrantino* wine sauce made of the wine from the nearby *Montefalco*, and guinea fowl in a truffle sauce. The smell of the truffles fills the entire dining room when the platters exit the kitchen and my family actually applauds when the dishes are placed on our table. The meal is complete with a berry cheesecake and a *panna cotta* accompanied by coffees and digestive liquors.

Villa Selva Country House is a place to visit on an empty stomach. You will fill up on the delicious plates, the warm atmosphere, and the fresh, clean Umbrian air on the surrounding grounds. If you are lucky, you will end your meal with a serenade of classic Italian songs, sung by Giorgione himself!

—Danielle Abbazia

Umbrian cuisine has Etruscan roots.