

PALAZZO BUONTALENTI

or the Medici Casino of San Marco

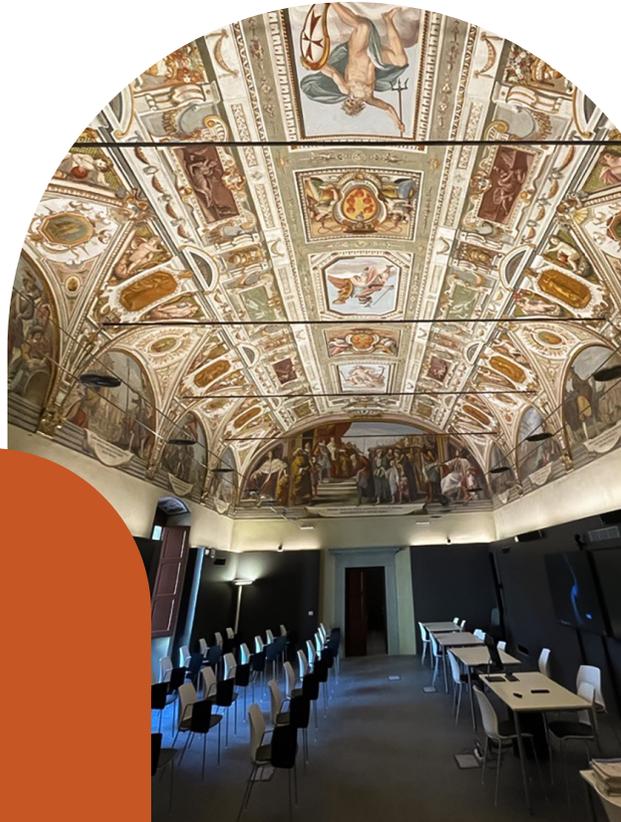
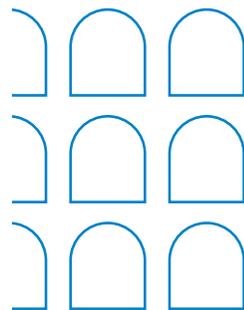


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1. THE ORIGINS

Palazzo Buontalenti, named after the architect who designed it, Bernardo Buontalenti, is better known as the Medici Casino of San Marco, due to the indissoluble link to the family that dominated Florence for over three centuries. The palace began to flourish during the spiritually and intellectually vivacious period known as Humanism, of which Florence was the undiscussed cradle during the 1400s. Each reference to the Medici family in Florence creates a connection with the fame and splendour of this glorious house, whose support and love for the arts and knowledge contributed throughout the centuries to the transformation of Florence into an immortal icon of beauty and culture.



The first building on these grounds was a small house with a garden, which belonged to Ottaviano de' Medici. Ottaviano, a member of the cadet line of the family and distant cousin of Lorenzo il Magnifico, married Francesca Salviati, daughter of Jacopo Salviati and Lucrezia de' Medici, who, as daughter of Lorenzo il Magnifico, was part of the main family line. The building bordered the famous Orti Medicei (Medici Gardens), a XV century Academia where the most famous artists and thinkers of the time were funded by Lorenzo il Magnifico to teach design, painting, and sculpture to the "poor" artists of the city. Many young artists of that memorable generation convened in the Orti—including a young Michelangelo, according to Giorgio Vasari's *The Lives*—to learn from the masters or by admiring the large collection of antiques put on display by Lorenzo.

The connection between Palazzo Buontalenti and the buildings that are currently part of the European University Institute campus does not end with the family ties between Ottaviano de' Medici and Jacopo Salviati (owner of the

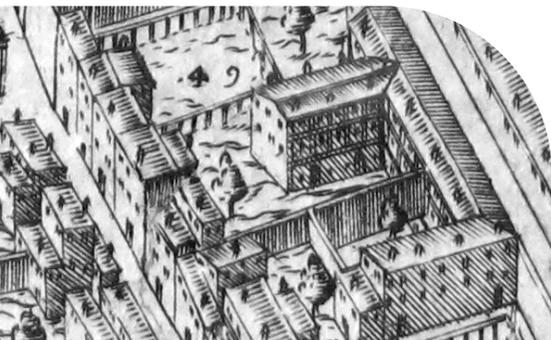
famous Villa in Via Bolognese), as the former was the son-in-law of the latter, having married his daughter Francesca. Instead, this connection takes us back to Lorenzo il Magnifico, who included an "orto" (among the land signed over to his wife Clarice) which, according to the land registry he signed in 1480, was located in front of the San Marco Convent. Lorenzo purchased this land from the monks of the Badia Fiesolana as a gift to his wife.

Ottaviano de' Medici resided in the buildings that were part of this complex from 1524 to 1546, becoming the administrator of the Medici fortune in 1524 and the sole member of the Medici family formally recognized as the fiduciary of the Medici estate.

2. FRANCESCO I AND THE MEDICI FOUNDRY

Following the death of Duke Alexander in 1537, Cosimo I de' Medici rose to power. Ottaviano de' Medici therefore handed the entire Medici estate over to Cosimo I, after having managed it for the previous two decades. The firstborn of the Grand Duke, Prince Francesco, had been using the old Laurentian academy for his experiments in physics and chemistry (his true passion), which led him to spending a large portion of this time in the San Marco property. It was precisely during his daily crossings of Piazza San Marco on horseback that Francesco first saw his future lover and second wife, Bianca Cappello—a Venetian noblewoman famous for her beauty and sophistication, but deeply hated by the Florentine community and the Medici family. Inspired by the space, Francesco entrusted an illustrious architect of the time, Bernardo Buontalenti, with the construction of a casino, or city villa. The villa, built in the years 1568-1574, is C-shaped: the noble floor was placed on the ground floor (unlike most of the noble buildings of the time, in which the rooms inhabited by the nobility were on the first floor), which allowed Francesco to conduct his alchemy experiments, while expanding the collection of precious metals in his foundry.

The Casino, a reflection of Buontalenti's true mannerist style, was the hub of the famous Medici Foundry. The foundry was a laboratory where alchemists studied the transformation of metals and the distillation of plants for medicinal use (such as the search for the Philosopher's Stone to transform metals into gold and the elixir of life to cure all diseases), which set the foundation for the further development of the scientific method which took place in the XVII century. Francesco would exhibit the results of these experiments (such as the famous Medici porcelain) in his Studiolo in Palazzo Vecchio—one of the first examples of Wunderkammer—or he would present them as gifts to royal families across Europe.



Il primo palazzo nella pianta del Buonsignori, 1584

The Casino therefore became a quasi-mythical place, a research centre in which to mould the new Renaissance man. It is worth noting, that in the XVI century, alchemy was considered a science and a philosophy and was not associated with the ideas of magic and mystery that we often attribute to alchemy today.

The Foundry was moved to the Uffizi in the 1580s, near the Tribuna, as Francesco de' Medici wanted Palazzo Buontalenti to become the residence of Don Antonio—the son he had with his lover, Bianca Cappello, who at the time was already his second wife. The Palazzo also had a vast collection of artistic masterpieces (mainly sculptures by Giambologna and Cellini, but also paintings by Botticelli, all of which are currently preserved and exposed in Florentine museums), while the garden was decorated with fountains and grottoes, and included a small theatre. For a short time in 1588, Palazzo Buontalenti also became the headquarters of the Opificio delle Pietre Dure.

3. THE 1600S AND CARDINAL CARLO

Towards the beginning of the 1600s, Cardinal Carlo de' Medici (the son of Grand Duke Ferdinand, and brother of Cosimo II) inherited the Palace, transforming it into a true aristocratic residence, and commissioning, among other things, a cycle of celebratory frescoes. Cardinal Carlo entrusted the frescoes depicting the conquests and triumphs of the Medici Grand Dukes to a group of Florentine painters who were rather famous at the time: Ottavio Vannini, Matteo Rosselli, Jacopo Vignali, Michelangelo Cinganelli and Anastasio Fontebuoni.

When Cardinal Carlo formally took possession of the Palace in 1621, he radically transformed the interior. He enlarged the building (most likely commissioning the work to architect Gherardo Silvani) and, most importantly, enriched it with the aforementioned series of frescoes and with an exquisite and carefully selected collection of ancient and “modern” paintings.

Cardinal Carlo resided in the Casino of San Marco throughout his entire life and continued to expand his collection with precious objects and artistic masterpieces that would in time increase the artistic patrimony of Florentine Galleries.



The fresco cycles in the Medici Casino focus on the grand-ducal epic of the Tuscan sovereigns: from Cosimo I to Francesco I and subsequently from Ferdinand I to Cosimo II, who died in 1621. It celebrates the male genealogy of the commissioner, Cardinal Carlo himself, and is considered the vastest and most detailed celebration of the Medici family history, second only to Vasari's pictorial decorations in Palazzo Vecchio. Carlo's unofficial objective was primarily political: to legitimise his newfound role as head of household after the premature death of his brother Cosimo II—which had left a worrisome power vacuum due to his legitimate heir, young Ferdinand II, being underage.

During the last months of his life, Cosimo II strongly considered bestowing political power onto his brother Carlo, worried about the international repercussions that could have stemmed from the rise to power of their mother, Cristina di Lorena (a Francophile), or Cosimo II's wife, Maria Maddalena d'Austria (loyal to the Hapsburgs).

Nevertheless, court politics and schemes forced a dying Cosimo II to assign the throne to his firstborn and the regency (overseen by a council) to his mother and wife, who controlled the young Grand Duke for seven long years. This socio-political choice makes the frescoes in Palazzo Buontalenti even more clear: Cardinal Carlo glorified the lustrous power that the men of the Medici family held in Tuscany throughout past decades. The frescoes exclude all historical female figures—unlike those commissioned by Maria Maddalena in the Poggio Imperiale Villa, where most of the paintings focus on queens, female saints and martyrs, biblical heroines, and personified examples of female virtues.

4. THE FRESCOES (1621-1623)

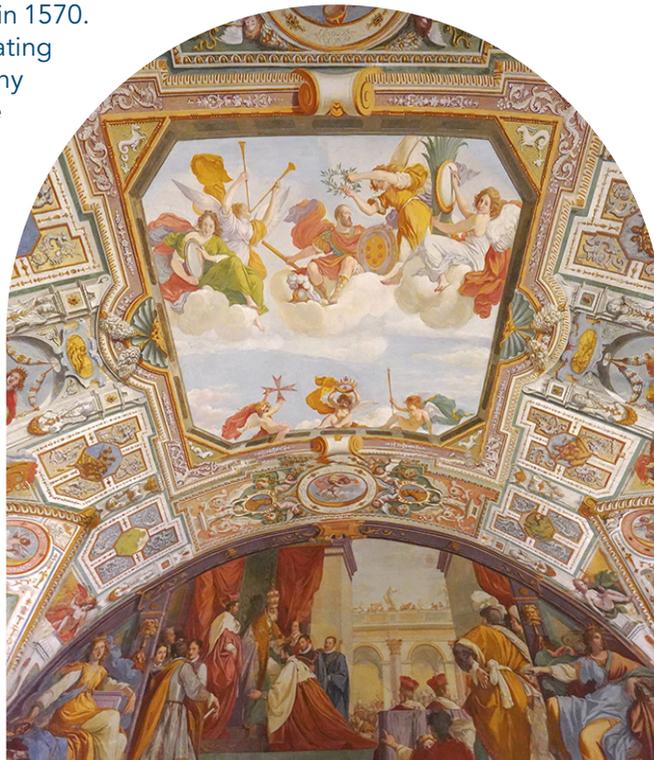
I. The Cosimo I Room

This room celebrates the head of the grand-ducal Medici dynasty and its military successes—specifically the victories of Cosimo I against Siena (whose conquest is depicted in the bezel situated above the entry door) and the consolidation of his political power. The last room (or first room, according to the itinerary) in the apartment devoted to the celebration of the Medici dynasty was in fact dedicated to Cardinal Carlo's grandfather, Cosimo I.

Cosimo I was a Duke-warrior who consolidated the Tuscan territories through a series of battles, as depicted in the secondary bezels (Montemurlo, 1537; Scarlino, 1554; Marciano, 1554; Montalcino, 1559), alongside doubling the extension of the territories by annexing Siena and its fertile lands in 1555. Cosimo I literally and metaphorically crowned his rise to power with the concession of a grand-ducal title by Pope Pius V, celebrated with great pomp in Rome in 1570. This event was crucial in consolidating the hereditary Medici power in Tuscany and was therefore exalted in the large bezel opposite the entrance.

The vaulted ceiling shows The Triumph of Cosimo I, which depicts the Grand Duke sitting on a throne of clouds like a pagan god, with a baton in one hand and the Medici shield in the other. He is surrounded by Prudence, Fame, Glory, and History. The three cherubs depicted in the lower part of the fresco are holding the Cross of the Order of the Knights of Saint Stephen, the grand-ducal crown and the sceptre.

The frescoes are almost entirely attributed to Anastasio Fontebuoni and his workshop.



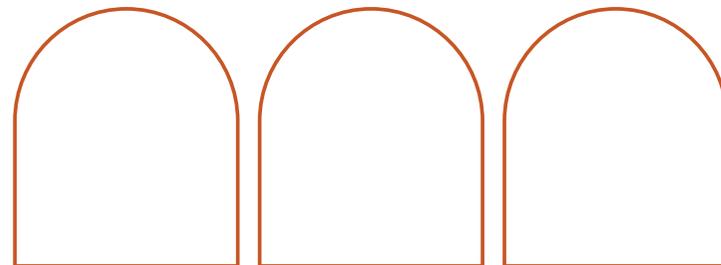
1 Frontal scene: Pope Pius V's Coronation of Cosimo I as Grand Duke of Tuscany in 1570. The grand-ducal title was conferred to the Medici in Rome in 1570, and the fresco background is the same one used on the base of Giambologna's famous equestrian statue in Piazza della Signoria. The female figure on the left holding the sceptre is the personification of Medici power. The second figure, followed by a fox, represents Cosimo I's cunning and strategic capacity that brought him to the throne.



2 (In front): Siege and Conquest of Siena by Medici Troops in 1555, divided in two moments: assault and conquest of the city walls, with a Medici flag waving above the fortifications. A true "nocturnal" masterpiece that hints to Vasari's representation of this historical episode in the Salone dei Cinquecento in Palazzo Vecchio.

The lateral bezels depict the four key battles won by Cosimo I (Montemurlo, Scarlino, Marciano, and Montalcino). The towered cities in the background appear to be imaginary, as they are not a replica of where the battles took place. The battle scenes evoke the so-called *battaglisti*, a type of painting popular in Florence at the time—but demonstrate the connection to Flemish art, which influenced many Florentine artists during the 1600s.

Above the Siege and Conquest of Siena are the portraits of the Medici Popes, Leo X (1513-1521) and Clement VII (1523-1534). Above the Coronation of Cosimo I are the portraits of Pope Pius V (1566-1572) who had crowned Cosimo, and Leo XI (1605), who was also a Medici Pope (Alessandro, son of Ottaviano).



II. The Francesco I Room

The decorative programme of this room centres on life episodes of the second Grand Duke, Francesco I, between 1564 and 1577. It completely excludes events that took place after his marriage to Bianca Cappello in 1578, as the court considered it to be scandalous and the Medici family never recognised it as valid.

The events represented in the frescoes end in 1577, although Francesco I died ten years later, in 1587. The omission is because after the death of his first wife Giovanna d'Austria in 1578, Francesco I married Bianca Cappello, who was despised by Florentines and the Medici family, who refused to recognise her title of Grand Duchess. Therefore, according to the Medici historiography, the Grand Duke's public life ended in 1578.



The frescoes in this room are attributed to Ottavio Vannini and his workshop. The ceiling is adorned with grotesque decorations, while the background is delimited by a balcony. In the centre of the balcony, we can admire two cherubs holding the Medici crown. Below is the representation of all virtues—six majestic allegorical figures: Faith, Justice, Abundance, Prudence, Fortitude, and Peace or Temperance.

The sequence of bezels begins with the portrayal of Grand Duke Cosimo I, father of Francesco I:



1 An elderly Cosimo I includes his son, Francesco I, in the Medici government. The complete title of the fresco is The Homage that Young Prince Francesco, Joining His Father's Throne, Receives from the Florentine Senate.



2 Francesco wears the Gown of Great Master of the Order of Saint Stephen.



3 Francesco I nominates His Brother, Don Pietro, General of the Tuscan Sea (1569)



4 The Battle of Lepanto. The Battle of Lepanto (1571) was the first great victory of a Western Christian army or fleet against the Ottoman Empire.



5 The Placing of the Statue of Justice on the Piazza Santa Trinità Column



6 Francesco's Triumphant Entrance into Florence as Grand Duke of Tuscany. The fresco is a celebration of the rise of Francesco I to the Tuscan throne in 1574. In the background, we can admire the Florentine city walls and Giotto's belltower.



7 The Building of the Palazzo Pitti Courtyard, completed in 1577.



8 Francesco I, on the Throne, witnesses a procession dedicated to Bacchus. Francesco I witnesses a carnivalesque party (the convent of San Marco and its belltower are in the background)—a joyous commemoration of a popular festivity connected to the ottobrate (October celebrations), particularly appreciated by Cardinal Carlo.



9 Bernardo Buontalenti Shows Francesco I the blueprint of a Fortress (possibly Livorno) in 1576

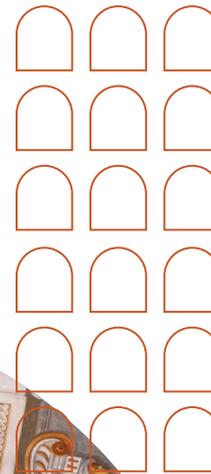
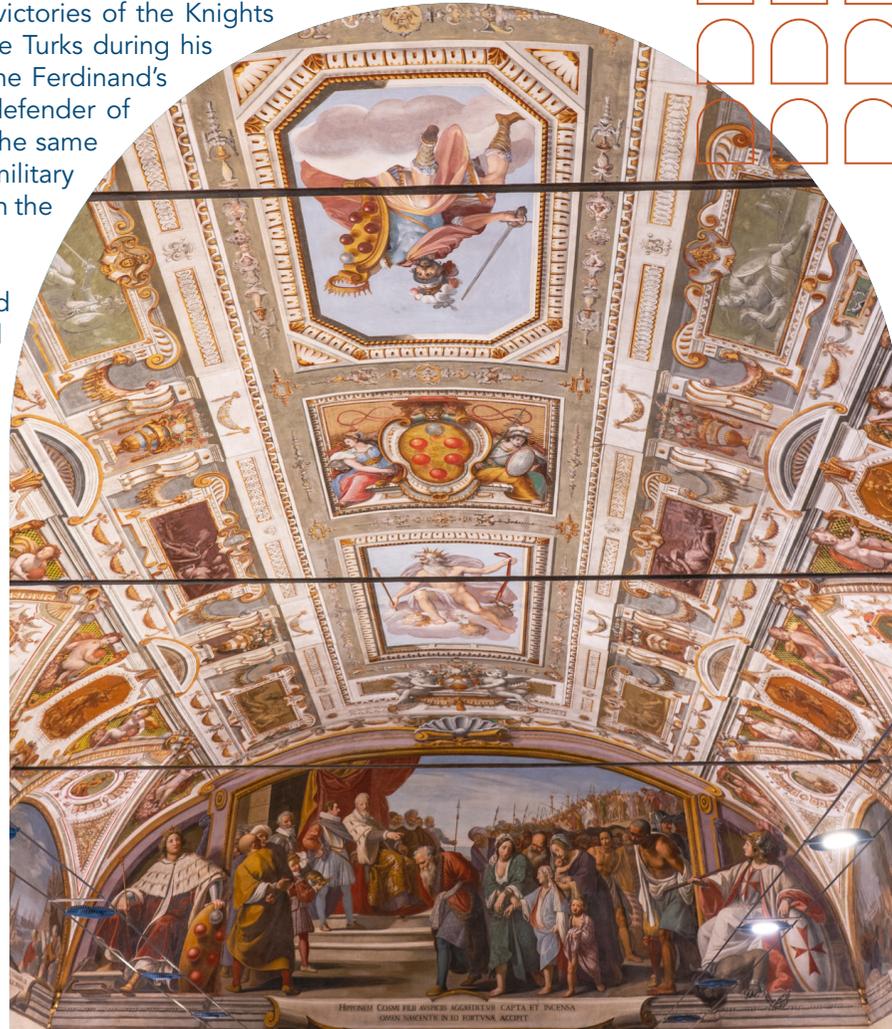


10 Dignitaries Pay Homage to Francesco I on His Throne. A homage to the Grand Duke.

III. The Ferdinand I Room

Cardinal Carlo dedicated the third room of the Casino, and the largest one, to his father Ferdinand I (Grand Duke from 1587 to 1609), exalting his military virtues. Fresco captions are still present in this room, bearing witness to the chronological succession of the fresco narration—clockwise starting from the Port bezel. The room is mostly dedicated to the grand actions of Grand Duke Ferdinand and to the victories of the Knights of the Order of St. Stephen against the Turks during his reign. The narration's aim is to underline Ferdinand's decisive role as State guarantor and defender of his people from a foreign menace. At the same time, it stresses the political and military growth of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany in the Mediterranean chessboard.

The frescoes are attributed mainly to Matteo Rosselli and Michelangelo Cinganelli. The vault's central portion presents five pains, one of which depicts a warrior with an unsheathed sword, the grand-ducal crown and the Medici coat of arms (most likely the personification of Mars, god of war). On each side of this figure, two virtues (Tameless and Prudence / Justice and Strength) support the arms of Cardinal Carlo, surmounted by a cardinal's hat. The segment ends with the representations of Aeolus slowing down the winds, and Neptune, god of the seas, holding the coat of arms of the Order of St. Stephen—a Medici military order commanded by the Grand Dukes and that played an important role in the battles against "the Turks" (an allusion to Tuscany's power over land and sea).



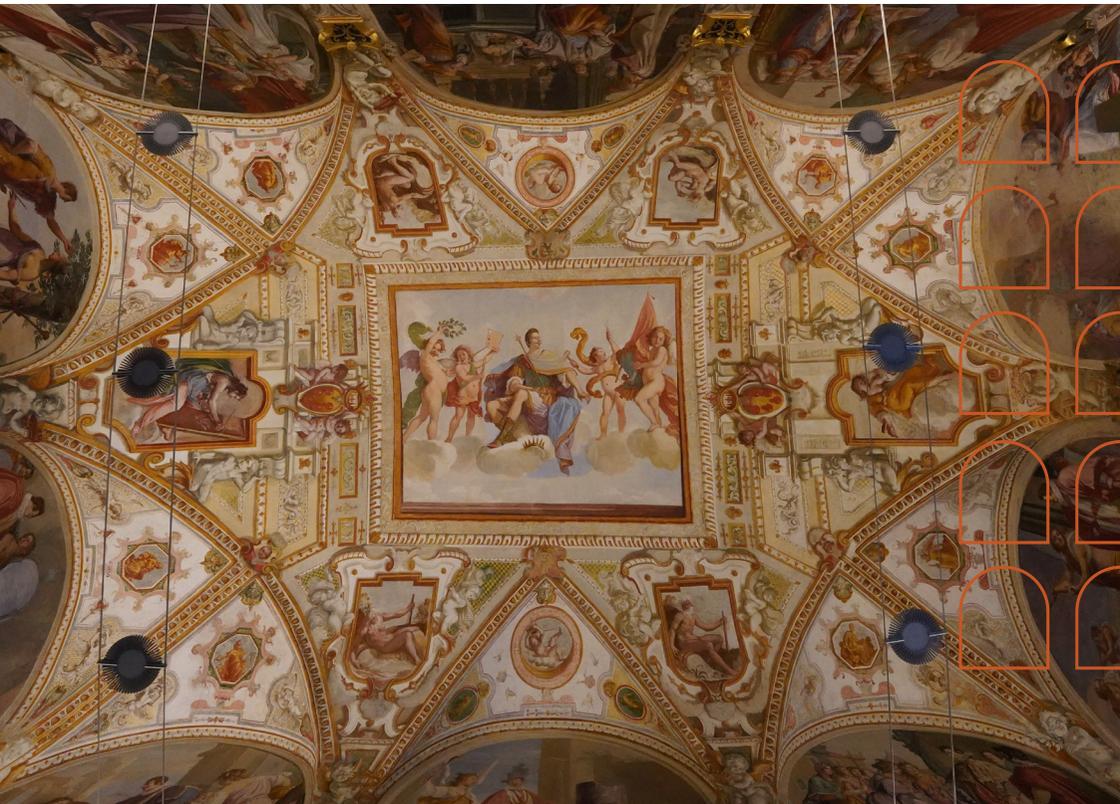
Bezel chronological narration, starting from the largest one above the entrance:

1. Renovations of the Leghorn (Livorno) Port by Ferdinand I. The outer parts of the fresco shows mythological representations of the sea and River Arno, while the background depicts the port at the time in which Ferdinand I rose to power in 1587. The expansion of the Leghorn port was a civil and military engineering feat wanted by the Grand Duke to ensure that Tuscany had a secure and impenetrable sea outlet. The outlet was necessary for commerce and international communication and became one of the most important stopovers in the Mediterranean in a matter of decades.
2. Conquest of Aperras, in Asia Minor, by the Knights of St. Stephen.
3. Medici Troops Guided by Don Giovanni de' Medici Assist Hapsburg Emperor Rodolfo II against the Turks in Hungary. Don Giovanni de' Medici was the natural son of Cosimo I (born out of wedlock) and half-brother of Ferdinand I.
4. The Knights of St. Stephen Conquer the Island of Chios (Chium, Greece, 1599).
5. Support Given to Archduke Ferdinand of Austria in the Siege of Canisza (Kanizsa or Nagkanizsa, Hungary).
6. Ferdinand I Purchases Wheat in Southern Russia (Sarmantia) to feed famine-stricken families in 1601-1603. The port of Leghorn and its lighthouse are in the background. The bezel depicts the arrival of said goods in the Leghorn port, which had been recently expanded and fortified. A close-up shows Turkish slaves as they unload sacks of grain, while Tuscan galleys rest at sea in the background.
7. Bona Prisoners Parade in front of Ferdinand I. The Bona feat in Numidia (Algeria), known in Latin as Hippo Regius, was an important victory for the Grand Duchy. On September 16, 1607, an important battle between Genoese and Turkish troops took place—the former assisted by Tuscan galleys of the Order of St. Stephen—which ended with the sack of the city and the capturing of many prisoners. The allegorical representations of the House of Medici and Order of Knights of St. Stephen can be seen on the left and right side of the fresco. To the right of Ferdinand I, his son and future Grand Duke, Cosimo II.
8. Conquest of the Algiers Port by the Knights of St. Stephen.
9. Celebration of the Fight against the Famous Head of Pirates, Amurath Rais, who infested the Mediterranean (with a special reference to the battle of the Strait of Bonifacio).
10. Siege of Prevesa or Nicopoli, which corresponded to Roman Emperor Octavian's Azio, in Greece. The reference to Emperor Augustus is not accidental in this heroic re-enactment of great feats (also creating a celebratory connection with Ferdinand I).
11. The Laiazzo Endeavour in the Alessandretta Gulf (a city founded by Alexander the Great) in Asia Minor, by the Knights of St. Stephen.
12. Commemoration of the Terrestrial Actions against Namur, Laiazzo, and Finica, three cities along the southern coast of Anatolia.

IV. The Cosimo II Room (Part 2)

This room celebrates Cosimo II as protector of arts and sciences, and the frescoes are attributed to Anastasio Fontebuoni and his workshop.

Cardinal Carlo wished to dedicate an entire room to one of the most distinctive aspects of Cosimo's short reign—his guiding role in the “rebirth” and protection of the arts, letters, and sciences (in fact, Cosimo was widely known for his role as patron). In the centre of the ceiling, we can admire the Grand Duke's Glory, surrounded by four cherubs holding an oak crown, the symbols of painting, the symbols of sculpture, and an enormous Medici flag.



The bezel sequence starts with the celebration of Cosimo II on his throne and continues to the right:

1. Cosimo II on His Throne, Surrounded by Justice and Abundance, receives the Gift of Tuscany. It is a good omen for the recently settled sovereign. An alternative title for the fresco (proposed by art historian Anna Rosa Masetti) is Justice, Abundance, and Power Bow to the Grand Duke.
2. The Grand Duke's Homage to Music / Cosimo II Crowns Clio, Muse of History (or, alternatively, Erato, Muse of Lyric and Amorous Poetry). In the background, Apollo plays his instrument for the other muses, divinities who artistically inspire intellectual expression, tutelary deities of Cosimo's cultural interests, and a good omen for his reign focused on Art and Peace.
3. The Grand Duke Visits an Artists' Workshop (possibly the Casino with painters, sculptors, architects, and a self-portrait of the fresco painter, Fontebuoni, on the left). This episode, pleasantly realistic in its depiction on an interior space occupied by artisans, justifies and legitimizes the three subsequent bezels, which aim at promoting the Grand Duke's involvement in the support and rebirth of the arts.
4. Cosimo II, Assisted by Munificence, Awakens Sculpture—or, according to the aforementioned Masetti, Cosimo II, Assisted by Munificence, Awakens Science. Some attribute this bezel to Giovanni da San Giovanni.
5. Cosimo II, Accompanied by Fame, Awakens Painting (Painting is blindfolded). The solemn elegance of the prince, who is wearing the gown of the Order of St. Stephen, is noteworthy.
6. Architecture, Surrounded by Its Sister Arts, Presents the Grand Duke with the Project of Enlargement of the Casino (completed by Gherardo Silvani, most likely the character on the far right). The sovereign appears to be approving a project under a Loggia, with the Florentine Dome in the background.
7. Astronomy Shows Cosimo II Jupiter's Satellites. The awakening of Florentine culture that Cosimo II envisioned did not end with visual arts and also encompassed science. This fresco celebrates Cosimo II's interest in Astronomy. The Grand Duke was a pupil of Galileo Galilei, and later became his protector and patron. Galileo, to express his devotion and gratefulness towards Cosimo II, dedicated his Sidereus Nuncius (1610) to him, and named four of Jupiter's satellites that he discovered in 1609 to members of the Medici family (medicea sidera). It is also worth noting that Cosimo II played an important role in protecting his former teacher and protégé from the Roman Inquisition after its first attempt to condemn the Tuscan scientist.
8. Ruined bezel. It is probably dedicated to Cosimo's maritime successes—the only detail that is still visible is that of a boat and its passengers on the right-hand side. The title is perhaps Military Valour Pays Homage to Cosimo II.
9. The Grand Duke Delivers the Grand Ducal Crown and Sceptre to Faith—a symbolic gesture by a young and ailing Grand Duke (condemned to an early death) that places the Tuscan State under the protection of God Almighty, and the Church, after his demise. Cardinal Carlo made a controversial iconographic choice, given his opposition to Cosimo's appointment of his wife and mother as regents after his death. In fact, Cardinal Carlo believed he was a better candidate.
10. Mangled Virtues Gather Round the Grand Duke's Tomb. The Grand Duke's death ended a happy season of peace and cultural rebirth. Tuscany, with Pisa, surrounded by the Arts, shed tears on the sovereign's tomb.



V. The Cosimo II Room (Part 1)

The first of two rooms dedicated to the recently deceased Cosimo II (Grand Duke between 1609 and 1621, and son of Ferdinand I and Cristina di Lorena) focuses on the long-lasting fight between the Order of St. Stephen and eastern pirate fleets—as was strongly desired by Cardinal Carlo. At the time of writing, the room is under restoration and is not open to the public (February 2022).

The frescoes are mainly attributed to Michelangelo Cinganelli and Ottavio Boschi. The central vault depicts Fame sitting on clouds, surrounded by a balcony which is open towards the sky. Alongside the railing, puttos hold the symbols of power.

The bezels depict the following events:

1. Aid Sent by Cosimo II to his Brother-In-Law, Ferdinand II Hapsburg (brother of his wife, Maria Maddalena of Austria) in 1618.
2. Relief Sent to the Duke of Mantova under the Command of Prince Francesco.
3. The Capture of Two Turkish Vessels.
4. Feat of Glimur in Carimania.
5. The Two Gallies Returned by the Heir of Murat Rais (Ottoman Admiral).
6. Taking of Siman Rais' Galley.



The large bezel facing the window—located on the longer side of the room—contains the most celebrated fresco of the entire series: Cosimo II greets an Oriental prince (most likely Emir Fakhr al-Din II), assisted by the personifications of Justice and Abundance. The scene also contains a self-portrait of the artist (in the left-hand corner), the Grand Duke's brother, Don Francesco (on the right, wearing the gown of the Order of St. Stephen), and perhaps future Cardinal Carlo (to the left of the Grand Duke). This diplomatic event, prelude of an alliance between the Grand Duchy of Tuscany and the powerful Emir, was the first step towards a Christian Crusade led by Cosimo (which never took place) and the subsequent re-conquest of the Holy Land.

VI. San Giuseppe Chapel

The final room is the so-called Cappellina (little chapel), with frescoes by Filippo Tarchiani (1622), that depict Stories from the Life of Saint Joseph. The newfound interest in St. Joseph (long neglected by theologians and medieval iconography and limited to the Holy Family context) is attributed to Pope Gregory XV who, in 1621, imposed the celebration of the feast of St. Joseph, which had been set for 19 March.

Filippo Tarchiani's 1622 commission and decoration of the Cappellina, located on the ground floor of the Medici Casino, is the first testimony of Florence's and the Medici's interest in this saint. It is not by chance that Cardinal Carlo's commission came shortly after the Pope's decree—which played a crucial part in the fame that Saint Joseph's life story went on to receive. The iconographic narration in the Chapel shows one of the first representations of the Death of the Saint (surrounded by evangelists Mark and Matthew), placed opposite to Betrothal of the Virgin (accompanied by evangelists Luke and John), with The Assumption of Saint Joseph on the vault (encircled by Faith, Hope, Charity, and Justice) and other minor figures. It is one of the first representations of this subject in Florence, and certainly one of the most prestigious since it was commissioned by the Medici for one of their palaces.

Unfortunately, the room has been deeply altered in its lower portion, as it was whitewashed and covered in plaster. The representations originally showed four scenes from the life of St. Joseph, each one accompanied by a saint: Saint Charles, Saint John, Saint Cosma and Saint Damian. One of the scenes is still slightly visible today: Joseph doing woodwork, Mary sewing and a young Jesus sweeping, while the other three scenes have been completely erased.

An interesting curiosity is that a second representation of The Death of Saint Joseph (a subject that is not largely present in Florentine churches) happens to be in another historical EUI building: the Badia Fiesolana. An eighteenth-century painting by Niccolò Nanetti can be admired above the altar of the last right-hand chapel in the Church (the Portinari Chapel) in the Badia Fiesolana.

5. THE LAST MEDICI AND THE HAPSBURG-LORRAINE ERA



Following Cardinal Carlo's death, his great nephew, Prince Cosimo, was nominated his sole heir. When Cosimo became Grand Duke of Tuscany with the name of Cosimo III, he moved all statues and busts to the Boboli Museums and Gardens, as well as to Villa di Castello and Villa della Petraia. He also transferred paintings and tapestries from the Casino to the Uffizi Galleries and bought cabinets and furniture to Palazzo Pitti.

For many years, the Casino of San Marco remained closed, while the surrounding garden was abandoned and stripped of all its embellishments. During the reign of the last Medici Grand Duke, Gian Gastone, the empty Casino served as a warehouse and as headquarters for the cavalry guard, the so-called Guardia dei Cavalleggeri, which honoured the sovereign during public ceremonies.

During the Hapsburg-Lorraine era, the new Grand Duke Francesco Stefano and his son, Pietro Leopoldo, reformed this specific guard by calling it Guardia Nobile (Noble Guard) and allowed it to keep its headquarters in the Casino until 1846. During this period, the building underwent numerous changes to accommodate troops and stables.

During the brief period of French occupation, the Medici Casino was considered as a potential location to host army officers. The paperwork and documents produced for the sake of this project uncovered many of the

building's characteristics in 1813. In 1846 the entire building was destined to the Florentine Custom Offices (hence, the nearby road called Via della Dogana—the word dogana means “customs” in Italian), which up until that date had its headquarters in the basement of Palazzo Vecchio, which was heavily damaged by the 1846 flood.

New buildings began to host offices and warehouses, occupying a large portion of the outer grounds, and giving the building its current shape and structure. The garden was almost entirely destroyed to erect storage facilities. Only a small portion of the garden remained (but has since been lost) and was used to cultivate a wonderful collection of roses that were renowned for their beauty in the public exhibits of the time.

6. FROM THE UNIFICATION OF ITALY UNTIL TODAY

When Florence became capital of the Kingdom of Italy in 1865, the Customs Office moved to Porta al Prato and the Medici Casino (now formally called Palazzo Buontalenti) became the temporary headquarters of the Ministry of Finance. This stripped the building of its past grandiosity: the large rooms were meticulously split up to host an increasing number of bureaucrats and functionaries. The entire building was deeply transformed. The vast salons became small offices and the facades were modified to include new windows. This was the time in which Baron Bettino Ricasoli was the Italian Prime Minister and Giuseppe Poggi began transforming Florence with his grandiose (albeit, at times, questionable) urbanistic changes.

When Rome officially became the capital of Italy in 1870, the Palace hosted the offices of State Property (Demanio), and subsequently the Court of Appeal and Criminal Court. These Courts remained in Palazzo Buontalenti until 2012, when they moved to the new Palazzo di Giustizia [Justice Palace] in the Florentine neighbourhood of Novoli. The section destined to the Criminal Court included the rooms that were frescoed as requested by Cardinal Carlo de' Medici. Great care was taken to preserve the frescoes and the environment: one of the rooms was allocated to Juror meetings, while two of the smaller ones were reserved for judges.

On 19 October 2018, the undersecretary to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation signed an addendum to the Headquarters Agreement between Italy and the European University Institute for the use of a portion of the Medici Casino by the EUI, called Lotto Zero (Lot Zero). This space would become the headquarters of the School of Transnational Governance (STG), an ambitious project for both the EUI and European Union. On 25 June 2019, maintenance work for the renovation and repurposing of the space began.

After the agreement was signed, the Italian Government declared: "Italy happily puts its real estate patrimony at the disposal of such an important project, which will contribute to bring new life to a space that has remained empty for far too long."



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School of Transnational Governance

www.eui.eu/stg

SCHOOL OF TRANSNATIONAL GOVERNANCE

European University Institute

Palazzo Buontalenti, Via Cavour 65

50129 Florence, Italy

Tel. +39 055 4685 399