

Basic trail - Purple route

The Castello: the splendour of the Renaissance among villas and gardens

Viottolone del Vivaio - Piazza delle Lingue d'Europa - Via Accademici della Crusca - Via di Castello - Via della Petraia - Via Giuliano Ricci - Via dell'Osservatorio - Via di Boldrone - Via della Quiete - Via Dazzi - Via del Gioiello - Via dell'Osservatorio - Via di Boldrone - Via della Petraia - Via S. Michele a Castello - Viuzzo del Gondo - Via del Gondo - Via Giovanni da San Giovanni - Via di Castello - Via degli Accademici della Crusca - Piazza delle Lingue d'Europa - Viottolone del Vivaio

Near to the border with Sesto Fiorentino, we turn off **Via Reginaldo Giuliani** and head down **Viottolone del Vivaio** (which is now part of the **Mario Luzi Park**, named after the great poet who died in 2005). At the end of this street, we see **Villa Reale di Castello** towering dramatically over **Piazza delle Lingue d'Europa**.



The façade of Villa Reale di Castello



Hercules and Antaeus, by B. Ammannati (copy)



The Grotto of Animals, by Tribolo



The Citrus Garden

Villa Reale di Castello - Also known as Villa del Vivaio (since there used to be fish tanks where the semicircular grassy square now stands), this villa is surrounded by one of the first and most extraordinary Italian gardens which Tribolo ever built for Cosimo I de' Medici (it had been in the family's possession since 1480, when Lorenzo and Pierfrancesco bought the 14th century villa from the Della Stufa family). It became the model and source of inspiration for all the garden art to come (the Boboli Gardens by Tribolo in Florence trace back to this work). It is formed of three terraces sloping towards the back of the villa. One almost seems like an extension and is divided into 16 flowerbeds with the sculpture "Hercules and Antaeus" by Bartolomeo Ammannati in the centre (now replaced with a copy). The second terrace (known as the "Citrus Garden") has an amazing collection of 500 rare and precious varieties of citrus trees, created by grafts and experiments on all the species known since the times of the Medici. While the third terrace features the "Grotto of Animals", a masterpiece of mannerist art by

Tribolo (possibly finished by Vasari), which is a metaphor for the universal peace granted by Cosimo I. It is decorated with sculptures by Giambologna (some of which are in the Bargello National Museum) and its beauty has been charming generations of illustrious visitors for centuries.



The statue of "Appennino" by Bartolomeo Ammannati



View of the Villa's façade from the Garden



Part of the Hercules and Antaeus Fountain (a copy)



One of the interiors



The Crusca dictionaries



The Accademia della Crusca in the Sala delle Pale (the Hall of Shovels)



The Accademia's glazed shovel



The Crusca Library with its 120,000 volumes on the linguistics and history of the Italian language

The garden is full of statues, hedges, plants, extraordinary potted citrus trees and fountains (the playful hydraulic systems created by Piero da San Casciano and Benedetto Varchi must have been amazing). It was commissioned and designed to celebrate the splendour and the power of the Prince, employing a magnificent and ingenious use of iconography and symbolism, as we can see with the symbolic map of Tuscany (Ammannati's "Appennino" statue at the top, the statues of the Mugnone river with Fiesole and the Arno, and the fountain of Venus-Fiorenza (now transferred to Villa della Petraia). Once the Medici family line had ended, the villa passed on to the new rulers, the Lorraines, then to the Savoys (who preferred Petraia) and finally to the Italian State in 1919. Nowadays, it is the permanent home of the Accademia della Crusca, the national institution founded in 1583 for the defence and study of the Italian language.

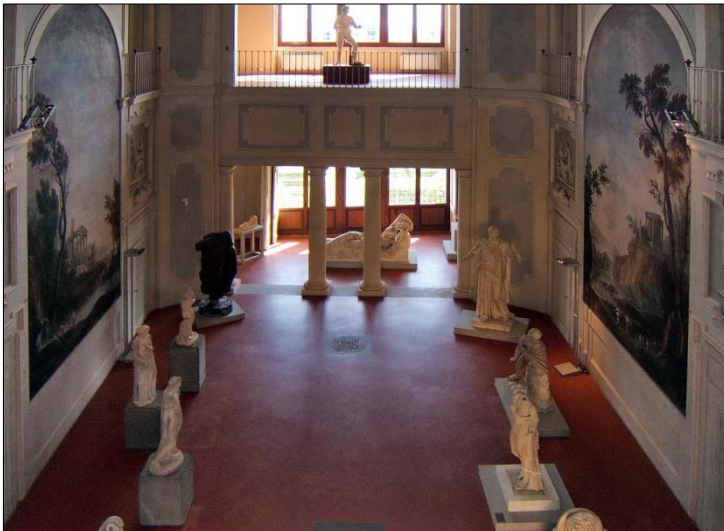
We take a right from the Villa onto **Via Accademici della Crusca** before turning right again onto **Via di Castello**. From here, we once again turn right onto **Via della Petraia**. At the crossroads between these two streets, we suddenly see the dramatic Baroque façade of **Villa Corsini**.



View of the façade of Villa Corsini



Statues in the antiquarium



View of the Main Hall



Apollo "the archer", Roman sculpture

Villa Corsini - This villa once belonged to Palla Strozzi before he was forcibly exiled for his opposition to Cosimo the Elder. It was originally a rural residence, featuring a huge stretch of land for olive trees, vines and a vegetable garden. In the late 1400s, it was extended and altered by the Rinieri family, who commissioned Tribolo to renovate the villa and its gardens. After it had changed hands several times, it became part of the many properties which the Grand Duke, Cosimo II, owned in the area. In 1697, it was purchased by Filippo Corsini, the advisor to the Grand Duke, due to its proximity to the Medici Villa di Petraia. It was Giovan Battista Foggini who added a new Baroque framework to the sixteenth-century building. The garden is arranged into three beautiful environments: one is an Italian garden, another one features a wooded area to the north, and the final one is the semicircular "Four Seasons" garden decorated with pillars and statues of the four seasons. In 1968, Galliano Boldrini donated it to the Italian State and since 2006 it has been part of the Special Superintendency for the Museums of Florence. Nowadays, it houses a collection of archaeological pieces belonging to the Tuscan Archaeological Superintendency (including the wonderful "Apollo The archer", which once possibly decorated a Roman pediment). The villa also includes a section dedicated to the history of the Florentine plain from the 7th century BC up to Roman times, featuring discoveries from the Mula Tomb and the Etruscan settlement of Gonfienti.

Standing in front of the façade of Villa Corsini, we take the street to our right and then take the next left heading down the narrow **Via Giuliano Ricci**. This is a typically rural street, enclosed by walls to different properties (the street widens out at the gate to No. 12, which features two eagles on either side and marks the final part of the gardens to Villa Corsini). We then turn left down **Via dell'Osservatorio**.

This is also a typical example of an ancient Tuscan rural lane (with dry-stone walls, villas, noble homes and farmers' quarters), bearing witness to this area's agricultural traditions which, like almost everywhere in Tuscany, were based on a sharecropping system. This feature will become all the more evident during the section which climbs up to Quarto (see the connected trail). As we stroll down Via dell'Osservatorio (at **No. 19** there's a recess in the wall to one of the ancient workers' homes, which contains a Madonna with Child and an engraved prayer) we reach the crossroads between two streets. We take a right down **Via di Boldrone**, which features the **tabernacle** of the same name that once held three frescoes by the great Pontormo (they have now been moved to the Academy of Art and Design). There is a private home nearby featuring an ancient sign for an old bakery.



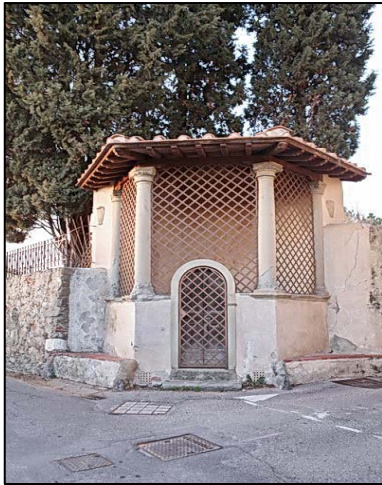
Via dell'Osservatorio in between ancient houses and the countryside



No. 19, Via dell'Osservatorio, a short prayer for the month of Mary ("Pray to the Lord for all the guilty, but alas, oh Mother, I am guilty too")



The old Quercioli Bakery - Salt and Tobacco, on Via di Boldrone, nowadays a private residence



The tabernacle at Via di Boldrone



Frescoes by Pontormo that have been detached and are now kept at the Academy of Art and Design

As we continue along Via di Boldrone, we find the **Monastery of S. Giovanni Evangelista di Boldrone**

Monastery of S. Giovanni Evangelista di Boldrone

Originally a hermitage, this monastery was founded in 1200 by the French monk Boldrone, and was then passed on to the Benedictine monks.

Since it was so close to Villa La Quiete, Christina of Lorraine had a passageway built when she stayed here (similar to the Vasari corridor), which connected the two buildings so she didn't have to walk down on the street. This passageway was much appreciated by Eleonora Ramirez de Montalvo and the secular order which she founded. Later on in 1686, Vittoria della Rovere built a chapel onto the villa, which is now the Church of Montalve.

The Monastery of Boldrone was then abolished by Napoleon's government and sold to private owners who converted it into residential buildings. Sadly nowadays, it is difficult to see the original purpose of the building.



Façade of the Monastery of S. Giovanni Evangelista di Boldrone



Via di Boldrone: to the left, part of the passageway connecting the Monastery with Villa La Quiete

When we arrive at No. 2, we find the Church and entrance of the beautiful **Villa La Quiete alle Montalve** (only open to the public on special occasions). This building is owned by the University of Florence, although it had long been the home of the Congregation of Montalve nuns, established as a religious order in 1939.



View of Villa La Quiete from the centre of the garden



The interior decorated with frescoes



The ancient apothecary



Giovanni da S. Giovanni, "Quiet calming the winds" (1633)



Ridolfo del Ghirlandaio and Michele di Ridolfo, part of "Magdalene and Dominican sister"

Villa La Quiete alle Montalve - This ancient noble home used to belong to the Orlandini family, then to Niccolò da Tolentino and finally the Medici. It had its greatest moment of splendour in the 17th century under Christina of Lorraine, before it was passed on to Eleonora Ramirez de Montalvo, who used it as a school for young noble girls in the mid-17th century. The Church and the parlours (once used as the rooms of noble guardians, facing the garden behind the Church) house many masterpieces (by Giovanni della Robbia, Ridolfo del Ghirlandaio, Baccio da Montelupo, Neri di Bicci and others), as does the gallery on the top floor (including the fresco by Giovanni da San Giovanni "Quiet calming the winds" which gives its name to the villa). There is a beautiful Italian garden to the south which slopes towards the plains and is surrounded by high walls with several niches. It took the fancy of Anna Maria Luisa de' Medici (the Electress Palatine), the last descendant of this family, who chose the villa as her residence in 1724. Notably, the garden has almost managed to retain all of its original 18th century features and, in particular, the *ragnaie* (nets hung in between trees to catch birds) which were usually taken down. The ancient apothecary is also very interesting. It has been kept exactly how it was in the 17th century, featuring albarellos and glass containers with interesting samples of spices and herbal remedies.

We now turn right onto **Via della Quietè** and then left onto **Via Dazzi**. We then take another left, heading down **Via del Gioiello**. We stay on this road until we take another left onto **Via dell'Osservatorio**. Once we've strolled down the first section, we turn right to head down **Via di Boldrone**. At the end of this road, we bear to the right onto **Via della Petraia**, where we find the beautiful **Villa La Petraia**.



View of the front of Villa La Petraia



The panorama from the terrace in front of the Villa



The façade with the Réposoir in the background



View of the garden's central axis

Villa La Petraia
Dating back to the 14th century, this villa once belonged to the Brunelleschi, Strozzi and Salviati families. It was bought in 1544 by Cosimo I de' Medici. In 1588, under Grand Duke Ferdinando it underwent major renovation work, which involved the entire hill (which was very stony, hence the name Petraia) being excavated and transformed into a beautiful series of terraces overlooked by the villa. The villa itself was restructured around the 14th century central tower, which was converted into a panoramic viewpoint. Unlike Villa di Castello, which was mainly used for entertaining, Petraia was an actual residence. As such, we find plants that could be used and very few statues or fountains.



The courtyard featuring frescoes by Volterrano



Venus by Giambologna



Hercules and Antaeus by Ammannati



Part of the reception hall



The Old Chapel, a copy of Raphael's Madonna dell'Impannata



The games room



The Bella Rosina bedroom

The villa's courtyard is decorated with extraordinary cycles of paintings (including "Moments of Glory of the Medici family" by Volterrano), which were commissioned by Don Antonio de' Medici in 1609. It houses a priceless art gallery collected by Don Lorenzo de' Medici, however, the villa gradually fell into disrepair until the Lorraine family took over. During this time, they moved Tribolo's statue of Venus-Fiorenza from Villa di Castello to the garden at Petraia. The villa was then passed on to the Savoy family, who compiled an inventory in 1911 of all the furnishings, which was used to recreate the modern museum. In 1919, it was donated to the Italian State which gave it to the Opera Nazionale Combattenti (National Veterans' Association), but it was returned to the State in 1960. Since 1984, when the National Museum was established, there has been a slow and complex restoration process to recover parts of the structures and the furnishings.

We take left from **Via della Petraia**, heading down **Via S. Michele a Castello**, where we find the **Church of San Michele a Castello**.



The Church of S. Michele a Castello as seen from Via della Querciola



To the left, the secondary gate of Villa Reale di Castello



The interior



Pacino di Bonaguida

Church of S. Michele a Castello

This church has a panoramic view and was probably of Lombard origins. It was originally built from a building with a single nave, but was then extended with the construction of the Chapel of Compagnia dei Battuti. It was popular with the Medici grand ducal family due to its proximity to their property in the surrounding area. In the seventeenth century, with the renovation work by the grand ducal architect, Mechini, it became a key feature on the landscape between Villa di Castello (the driveway gate of Villa Reale opens out at the side of the complex) and Villa La Petraia. Mechini added the portico and the beautiful churchyard, which gave a greater perspective to the space, while Giulio Parigi built the new bell tower in 1624. It was restored and renovated several times during the 18th and 19th centuries and it was almost completely rebuilt in 1817. Many people are buried in the cemetery here (from the late 1700s), including Lorenzo Maitani (responsible for the 19th century façade of the Cathedral) and the poet Mario Luzi. The Renaissance-style interior contains many works of art, including “Madonna with Child on a throne between St Stephen and St Lawrence” by the 13th century painter Pacino di Bonaguida.

From here, we turn right and continue down **Viuzzo del Gondo**, which gets its name from a farmstead owned by the Gondi family (who were Ghibellines, bankers and marquis). Their family archive is kept along with many others at the Villa La Quiete alle Montalve. We then turn left down **Via del Gondo**.

On Via del Gondo, at the crossroads with Via Giovanni da San Giovanni, we find **Villa del Gondo** (although it is not clearly visible).

From here we take **Via Giovanni da San Giovanni**, where at No. 12 we are faced with **Villa Il Pozzino**.



Villa Il Pozzino



Villa Il Pozzino, the loggia



Villa del Gondo

This is a typical fifteenth-sixteenth century suburban villa with a beautiful loggia and courtyard.



Villa Il Pozzino, the façade



Villa il Pozzino, the gardens

Villa Il Pozzino

Originally a fifteenth-century building, its seventeenth-century appearance was the work of the Grazzini family, who were also responsible for the grotesques on the turret and the courtyard (1619). The paintings on the courtyard walls (featuring satyrs, nymphs, rural scenes and mythological characters), most of which are in bad condition, are the work of Giovanni da San Giovanni. He also worked on the nearby Villa La Quietè and painted some of the frescoes in the main reception hall on the ground floor of Palazzo Pitti (now in the 4th hall of the Argenti Museum). The villa features a walled garden to the east, an Italian park to the west and woods to the north. The building takes its name from a well found inside the courtyard ('pozzo' is the Italian word for a well).

At the end of **Via Giovanni da San Giovanni**, we take another left down **Via di Castello** which will take us back onto **Via degli Accademici della Crusca**. From here, we come back to **Viottolone del Vivaio**, which is where we started and will now finish our walk.

Technical information

Trail distance	5.9 km
Height difference	68 m
Maximum gradient	22%
Average journey time	Walking: 1h 45' - Running: 53'
Difficulty	***

Technical and sporting features

Road conditions and surface	There is no sidewalk along this trail which winds through narrow streets usually covered with asphalt. Pay attention and always run against traffic, around bends you should always keep the angle open so you can see what's coming.
Suitable for	Walkers of all levels Runners with a good level of fitness who can run the whole trail Beginners should alternate between running and walking (in the more difficult sections).
Type of training	The features of this type of layout allow you to train on specific strength work due to the continuous alternating climbs and descents.
Footwear	Walking shoes and in particular running shoes

Directions

Ataf Lines	<i>With stops directly at or next to the start of the trail:</i> line 2 stop Sestese 05 (Sesto Fiorentino - Station SMN) line 28 stop Sestese 05 (Station SMN - Sesto F.no - Calenzano)
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Places to visit

Villa Reale di Castello

Free admission. The villa and garden are open every day (except for the second and third Mondays of the month, Christmas, New Year's and 01st May). Opening hours:
November, December, January and February: 8:15 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
March : 8:15 am - 5:30 p.m. (with daylight saving 6:30 p.m.)
April, May and September: 8:15 a.m. - 6:30 p.m.
June, July and August : 8:15 am - 7:30 p.m .
October: 8:15 am - 6:30 p.m. (with winter time 5:30 p.m.)
Info: tel: +39 055 452691
<http://www.polomuseale.firenze.it>

Accademia della Crusca

Limited access.
Info: +39 055 45 42 77.
<http://www.accademiadellacrusca.it>

Villa La Petraia

Free admission. The villa and garden are open every day (except for the second and third Mondays of the month, Christmas, New Year's and 01st May). Opening hours:
November, December, January and February: 8:15 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
March : 8:15 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. (with daylight saving 6:30 p.m.)
April, May and September: 8:15 a.m. - 6:30 p.m.
June, July and August : 8:15 a.m. - 7:30 p.m.
October: 8:15 a.m. - 6:30 p.m. (with winter time 5:30 p.m.)
Info: tel: +39 055 452691
<http://www.polomuseale.firenze.it>

Villa Corsini

Free admission. Opening hours:
From 1st April to 30^o September:
1^o and 3^o Friday and each Saturday of each month: 2:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m. - 2^o and 4^o Sunday of the month: 9:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
From 1^o October to 31^o March:
2^o and 4^o Sunday of the month: 9:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
Info: tel. and fax: +39 055 45 07 52
<http://www.polomuseale.firenze.it>

Church of S. Michele a Castello

Weekdays: 8:30 a.m. (during Mass); Sundays and public holidays: 8:30 and 10:30 a.m.

Design, creation and coordination

Project

Text, layout and coordination	Municipality of Florence - Department for Culture, Tourism and Sport: Carla Giannini
Route layout	Municipality of Florence - Department for Culture, Tourism and Sport: Paolo Mangini
Technical and sporting features	Training Consultant: Fulvio Massini
Photos	Municipality of Florence Department for Culture, Tourism and Sport: Giulio Monasta and Carla Giannini
<i>Special thanks</i>	The Special Superintendency for Historical, Artistic and Ethno-anthropological Heritage for the Museums in the City of Florence Managers of places of art, faith, nature and culture <i>for their kind permission to reproduce the images and for their collaboration</i>
Thanks	Ataf Presidents of the Commissions for Sport in the Districts of the Municipality of Florence
<i>For the layouts</i>	Bardazzi Andrea, Bardazzi Giulia, Bugetti Stefano, Verzieri Daniele and Gensini Marco

Maps and Mobile Apps

Coordination and development	Municipality of Florence - Department for Information Systems : Gianluca Vannuccini, Enrico Castagnoli, Leonardo Ricci, Elena Marrassini, Stefano Gecchele and Annita Bandini Contributi: Giacomo Scarzanella Linea Comune S.p.A.: Bianca Maria Beconi and Gabriele Andreozzi
Mobile App:	Geoln S.r.l.