



WESTERN LIVING // MARCH 2018

KITCHENS WE LOVE // WESTERNLIVING.CA



PM 40068973

12+ Kitchens We Love

The Designer Secrets Behind
a Dozen Stunning Rooms

Florence's *Bellissimo*
Indie Design Scene

PLUS Crave-Worthy Noodle
Recipes from Around the Globe

MARCH 2018

WL TRAVEL

THE WEST // WORLDWIDE // WEEKEND GETAWAYS // NEIGHBOURHOODS // ROAD TRIPS

Roots Revival

Ah, Florence—you well-touristed town. Do you have anything new to show us? Yes, it turns out. *WL* Associate Editor **Julia Dilworth** hit the Tuscan charmer hoping to suss out some artisanal finds in the city that spawned the Renaissance, and she found an ancient city full of thoughtful designers. From Banksy-esque street artists to in-demand textile gurus, the beating heart of all things crafty still pumps hard here—you just need to know where to look. For all the intel, turn to page 92.

Major Duomo

Florence has no shortage of big-time attractions, but it's the off-the-beaten-track spots we love.



Renaissance Redux

Florence, the birthplace of the Renaissance, is once again sparking that creative spirit with a new generation of artisans and designers who are smitten with the city's bounty of materials—and the inspiring views don't hurt either.

by JULIA DILWORTH

BWphoto.com

Ciao, Bella
The side streets of Florence hold many treasures—if you know where to look.

IT'S MY FIRST NIGHT ALONE IN FLORENCE and—cover your ears, Grandma—I'm waiting for a stranger in a dark alley. I suppose it's really more of a side street, with tall windowless walls flush up against its edges, but I'm definitely alone. In the dark. An Italian chap walks by, giving me a quizzical look. “*Buona notte!*” I chirp, trying to act casual while standing safely off the street, between two parked mopeds.

Tonight is step one of my search to find Florence's artisanal undercurrent, a new Renaissance of makers in a city that's now known mostly for its tourist hordes. I'm in the bohemian Oltrarno district to rendezvous with twentysomething jewellery maker Martina Loncar. Translated, *Oltrarno* literally means “the other side of the Arno River,” and this quiet strip feels miles away from the bustling, tourist-filled streets that pour north out of the Ponte Vecchio. And just as I'm about to bail for the comfort of streetlights, a door opens and out pops Loncar, wearing a big smile and oversized lime-green frames.

WHERE TO STAY • Redesigned last June by Florentine architect and designer Michele Bönan, the **Lungarno Hotel** is itself a piece of Florence’s design legacy. It’s owned by the Salvatore Ferragamo family—the Florentine shoe designer’s name is still synonymous with high-end fashion and elevated craftsmanship—and it’s a pedigree you can see throughout their four boutique hotels. The Lungarno sits right on the Arno River, and “North American spacious” rooms (which have traditional bones but modern touches like spa bathrooms and luxe textiles) have massive decks with views of the Ponte Vecchio. Art and beauty are paramount here, so the hotel also serves as a local gallery, with more than 400 original paintings and sketches from Europe’s canon of artists, including Picasso and Cocteau. You’re a two-minute walk to the Ponte Vecchio, and there’s a one-star Michelin restaurant (the Borgo San Jacopo) right downstairs.



New School
It was hard to walk away with just one pair of funky New Kid shoes—all handmade in small batches with everything crafted and sourced in Tuscany (inset, left). The tongue on this leather Monster brooch by jewellery maker Martina Loncar is an electroformed sage leaf (inset, right).



Stepping inside her studio, the Slovenian-born goldsmith tells me she shares this double-storefront space with five other permanent artisans: some local, one from America, another from Japan. As we settle into a pair of chairs, the industrial lights bounce off workstations decorated with hanging pliers, hammers and miniature saws. “It hasn’t been easy,” she says of starting her full-time business three years ago, following a goldsmith apprenticeship with local maestro Alessandro Dari. Florence is small, its jewellery market saturated, and yet this historic “hub for goldsmiths” has its advantages. Picking up a black leather-and-copper brooch from her aptly titled Monsters collection (a piece that looks exactly like the little open-mouthed xenomorph from the movie *Alien*), she says, “If I want to find a nice leather for these, I can walk down the street and have it in five

minutes. If I want thinner leather, I can walk another five minutes.” So many artisans in one place—from leatherworkers to metalsmiths to weavers—means you can source any material or collaborative insight. To further my education into this revival of Florence’s artisan roots, Loncar points to her silver-heeled black leather Chelsea boots and tells me I’ve got to check out New Kid shoes. “The designer’s Australian, but she came here quite a few years ago,” says Loncar. “She has a store and makes everything right here in Tuscany.” So the next morning, it’s off to Shoes and More, where designer Rachel Beagley sells her New Kid kicks. It’s on the far east side of town (about a 25-minute walk from the city centre), so I hop on the bus and sandwich myself between a pack of equally unimpressed teenagers and seniors. The problem is, I haven’t figured out how to pay, so I spend

Oltrarno literally means “the other side of the Arno River,” and this quiet strip feels miles away from the bustling, tourist-filled streets near the Ponte Vecchio.

the journey desperately trying to look nonchalant while simultaneously stressing about the *polizia* going easy on me. I find the simple shop tucked into what looks like the first floor of a North Vancouver office building. Inside, white block tables are covered in handmade, small-batch leather footwear. Pea-green buckle-ups with teal across the toes, brown suede slingbacks, black oxfords with cork and rubber soles—it’s a look Beagley calls “half old Italian man, half kooky art teacher.” All materials are sourced in the area between Pisa and Florence, yet prices are decidedly affordable, at 125 to 170 euros. In the corner, a sale bin of sample shoes and leftovers is marked at 30 euros a pair. “We just want them to go to a good home,” explains the salesperson. I’m not one to pass up a good sob story, so I feel compelled to leave with a pair of her original black Tuscan oxfords, which are perfect for skipping the bus and walking back into town—and, as a bonus, I’ve timed it perfectly to capture a sunset of saturated orange and flamingo pink firing over the Arno. I start my third day with new shoes and on a mission. I’ve lined up a meeting with La Serra MK Atelier textile designer Margherita Pandolfini—the only catch is that I have to find her first. I’ve been circling the same block for the past 15 minutes, and her door isn’t where it should be. Frazzled and confused, I take a few deep breaths and spot what I think is her studio’s lush inner courtyard inside an iron gate. Outside, the directory reads “Pandolfini.” Jackpot! But then, under that, Pandolfini, Pandolfini and two other Pandolfinis. My index finger is hovering over the panel when a man comes out and asks me if I need help. “*Per favore, dove Margherita Pandolfini?*” I ask. It turns out this man is also a Pandolfini, her cousin Jacob, and he takes me right to her door. My Pandolfini—an Italian with a fantastic London accent—and her business partner, Karl Jorns, have turned their 15th-century greenhouse into a studio and now design small lines of hand-dyed textiles (past clients include Bergdorf Goodman and a Saudi prince who needed a kitted-out tent for Burning Man). She’s also a part of the artisanal group Creative People in Florence, and the pair routinely use their space to host pop-ups to support and promote other designers. Like Loncar, Pandolfini teaches public workshops to share the craft—screen-printing and hand-painting locally made fabric totes and table linens. “Everything is handmade in Florence,” she says. “I couldn’t do that in a city like London”—which is where she grew up. “And I feel like there’s more of a

Bjork: Marina Denisova



Hidden Gems of Florence
Our insiders tell us their secret tips for finding the best local haunts.

MARTINA LONCAR, GOLDSMITH
Bjork
This blink-and-you’ll-miss-it concept store in the Oltrarno district houses hip men’s and women’s fashions and a wide range of art and culture publications (*Avante Garde*, *Kinfolk*, *Woth*, *The Gentlewoman*). They’ve got a cozy second-floor loft space they’ve set up for private reading sessions and they carry Italian designers like Federico Curradi, Sunnei and New Kid shoes. bjorkflorence.com



Black Spring Bookshop
Black and red walls with woodland creature murals, skeletal drawings and brick archways make this independent bookstore (and bar) look like it’s a wizard’s study. “It’s a bit dark,” says Loncar. “But I love their choice of graphics, and I can always find something that can be of inspiration—like old encyclopedias.” This counterculture spot also hosts workshops and artist events, plus there’s an entire corner dedicated to vinyl. blackspringbookshop.com



Brac
“It’s not typical Italian food,” says Loncar, but this popular space is a favourite. Order the tri-plate piatto unico (15 euros) and choose a salad, pasta and faggotino (a crunchy bread pocket with fillings like ricotta and spinach). This lunch/dinner resto-café and artist event venue has stellar natural light (vaulted domed ceilings, big windows) with an inner open-air atrium (decorated with living room furniture, streamers of hanging pastel fabric and bicycles), plus there are shelves of art books everywhere. libreriabrac.net





A Whole New World
Margherita Pandolfini (seen left) runs her textile studio out of a renovated palace greenhouse—or *la serra* in Italian—that looks out over a private courtyard. This is the actual hacked street sign the writer discovered on her trip by artist Clet Abraham (below).



community here,” attracting people from all over. “In France, the artisan creative is dying out, so the French embassy [in Florence] has been bringing students to Italy to show there are still artisan families and people who still make things with their hands.”

It also doesn’t hurt to have a city so visually inspiring. “What’s really beautiful about Florence is that, on an aerial perspective, Florence has the most hidden courtyards that you wouldn’t see at street level,” she says to me while I’m thumbing through a table of bespoke linens with fat blue and blush-pink brushstrokes. Once a year (around April or May, depending on the season), these private gardens and courtyards open to the public for Giardini Aperti (which means “open gardens”). “Anyone can come in; it’s quite special,” she says. Not everyone waits for the event, though, and Pandolfini laughs about how often she’s seen curious

Florentines in her private courtyard just poking around.

Walking the narrow sidewalk back to my hotel, I look up and see the ubiquitous red “do not enter” street sign, yet instead of the white stripe, it has two hands making a heart shape. “Clet Abraham!” I shout. Let me explain: researching local creatives pre-trip, I found images of Abraham’s hacked Florentine street signs online, some covered in flowers or depicting people chiselling sculptures or cartoon nudes. He’s like a French-born, Florence-based Banksy, and his work had been on my list to track down (but, like Banksy, seemed impossible to locate). And just like that, an original presents itself to me. I look at the image—equal parts cheeky and sentimental—and take a mental pic: there couldn’t be a better image to leave me with of Florence’s creative heart. **WLT**

Julia Dilworth



Mercato Centrale
This massive daily market (left) up in the north end of town is prime ambling territory with street stall after street stall of genuine leather, pleather and Prada knock-offs. Keep walking until you reach the large glass and cast-iron building that houses the food section of the market. Inside, smells from buckets of blackcurrants and dates compete alongside fresh fish and aged cheeses—a great place to pick up snacks. Don’t miss the five-euro plates of paper-thin homemade pasta at “street food” stall Pasta Fresca.

Secret Garden
Each spring Florence’s private gardens open up to the public for Giardini Aperti, but you can visit La Serra MK Textile Atelier (below) year-round by appointment.



Mercato Centrale: Arnold Fang; Garden: Olivia Magris; Portrait: Elizabeth Maxson



MARGHERITA PANDOLFINI, TEXTILE DESIGNER

Numeroventi
Pandolfini’s friends run this exhibition and artist residency space that’s on her street (Via Pandolfini) and inside a 1500s palace called Palazzo Galli Tassi. The gallery space is palatial, but the most beautiful parts are the apartments they rent to travelling creatives: bright lofts with six-foot arched windows, simple Italian mid-century modern furnishings, wide-plank oak floors and copper pendant lights. numeroventi.it/apartments

Designer Duo
Margherita Pandolfini and her La Serra MK Textile Atelier co-founder Karl Jorns.



Stibbert Museum/Museo Stibbert
The half-Italian, half-English Frederick Stibbert (also Pandolfini’s ancestor) was a prolific private collector of historic artifacts—all of which are on display inside his former 1800s estate for eight euros! “It’s really inspiring because it’s a bit eccentric,” says Pandolfini. The rooms show off everything from his lavish decor (leather brocade wallpaper, gilded rococo furniture and Murano glass chandeliers) to his 16,000-piece armour collection (complete with 14 life-sized 16th-century knights on horseback). Well worth the cab trip up the hill. museumsinflorence.com/musei/stibbert_museum