

SAN PIERO A SIEVE

The village of **San Piero a Sieve** sits 8 kms away from Borgo San Lorenzo. Its old centre with its characteristic little streets is dominated by the **Fortezza Medicea di San Martino**, designed by **Buontalenti** for **Cosimo I de' Medici**. **Implanted before the year 1000**, the **Romanesque church of San Pietro** is worth visiting. Leonardo di Bernardo de' Medici, bishop of Forli, was a priest there between 1482 and 1529 and the family coat of arms can be seen on the main door. The Medicean patronage is responsible for the **spectacular baptismal font** made by artists from the **Della Robbia's workshop** in 1518, in glossy polychromatic terracotta and decorated with scenes of Saint John the Baptist's life. The **wooden Crucifix** on the major altar is attributed to **Raffaello da Montelupo**. Other precious works of art are kept in the presbytery which also contains a splendid room from the 16th century.



On the square in front of the church stands a *statue of S. Pietro Apostolo* sculpted in stone by Girolamo Ticciati in 1768 and restored in 1949 following the damage caused by the war.

The Medici family is originated from the region of San Piero a Sieve. The tradition says that they were very **poor people**, coalmen in the Mugello woods, until one of them became a medical doctor, giving his name and coat of arms to the family, with the “**palle**” (balls) representing pills or cupping glasses. **Cosimo de' Medici** was very fond of Mugello and put **Michelozzo Michelozzi** in charge of restructuring the villas of **Trebbio** and **Cafaggiolo**.

Villa del Trebbio



From San Piero a Sieve, we follow the **Via Bolognese** in the direction of Florence and then, just outside the village, we take the road to Barberino. Soon after, on the left, a dirt track leads to the **Castello del Trebbio** with its tower emerging from a thick wood of cypresses covering the hill. The **villa-castle** was built on the ruins of a medieval tower by **Michelozzo Michelozzi** on commission of **Cosimo de' Medici called the Elder**. Made of a massive quadrangular body with machicolation and with a crenellated tower overhanging it, it has kept its Italian garden on its west side and a large terraced vegetable garden in the south, with a lovely pergola on cylindrical pillars made with facing bricks. This place was much loved by **Lorenzo the Magnificent**, especially for hunting. The famous condottiere **Giovanni dalle Bande Nere** lived in the villa with his wife **Maria Salviati** and their son **Cosimo, future Cosimo I, Grand Duke of Tuscany**. **Amerigo Vespucci** who had fled Florence because of the plague was hosted there in 1476. The Villa del Trebbio remained a property of the Medici until it was sold by **Ferdinand II** for 113.500 ducats to the Florentine merchant **Giuliano Serragli**.

Only open by appointment and for groups: tel. 055 848088 - 339 3029697

Villa di Cafaggiolo



From Trebbio, following the road towards Barberino di Mugello, we find on the left the **Villa di Cafaggiolo** surrounded by hills and set in the middle of fields and meadows going down towards the **Sieve** river. This was one of Lorenzo the Magnificent's favourite residences. Like the Villa del Trebbio it was built by **Michelozzo Michelozzi** commissioned by **Cosimo the Elder** around 1451. The current appearance of the building is the result of many renovations done in the 19th century but some parts done by the architect Michelozzi are still visible. The crenels became a decorative element of the window cornices, held by consoles. The stone fireplaces in the ground-level rooms show the same characteristics. Lots of cheerful parties and hunting gatherings were held in the villa with **gentlewomen and merchants, military captains and intellectuals, artists, cardinals, princes and popes**. It was, above all, the summer residence of the **Medici family**. This is where **Lorenzo** composed some of his songs; **Poliziano, Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola** came to stay, even **Pope Leon X** stopped by there in 1515.

In 1576, young **Eleonora di Toledo** was stabbed by her husband **Piero de' Medici** in a room at the second floor. The young woman, who had lived in the Tuscan Court from an early age, had fallen in love with her uncle **Cosimo I** who, in haste, married her to his son Piero. Unfortunately, the marriage did not work out as the husband was vicious and prone to adultery to the point of totally neglecting his young wife who started to play around with other men. One of them, to distinguish himself in front of her, and as he was taking part in a game of *Calcio* in **Piazza Santa Croce in Florence**, abused one of his opponents who had mentioned their liaison. A quarrel followed ending in the miserable man's murder. Consequently the admirer was sent to jail to the fortress on the island of Elba where he continued to pursue Eleonora. When this was discovered, he was taken back to Florence and decapitated in the **Cortile of the Bargello**. Eleonora's husband then invited her to come to the **Villa di Cafaggiolo**, where he was staying and, in the middle of the night, he stabbed her several times. During the night of 11 July 1576, Eleonora's body was carried to Florence to be secretly buried in the **Cappella San Lorenzo**. It is said that the ghost of the unfortunate lady is still floating around the castle...

The castle became the property of the **Lorraine family** in 1778, then the Italian government put it into auction and it was bought by the prince Marcantonio Borghese. It also hosted the **earthenware factory** where the "**Vasai di Cafaggiolo**", working in collaboration with decorators from important ceramics centres like **Faenza, Deruta and Urbino**, produced prestigious works with great chromatic charm, often inspired by the style and the work of the greatest 16th century Italian artists. Many of these works are kept in the Bargello Museum in Florence. Behind the villa there is a vast wall-enclosed coppice woodland which was used for hunting by various members of the family.



The castle of Cafaggiolo was the Medici's first country residence located in the area where the family came from. It is a private property used for banquets, functions and other events. Thanks to recent renovations, including elegant decorations, the visit is made interesting with the display of portraits of members of the Medici family, ancient ceramics and models in Renaissance costume.



Opening hours for visits and bookshop:

15/04 – 15/10:

Wednesday 14.30-18.30

Friday 14.30-18.30

Saturday 10.00-12.30 – 14.30-18.30

Sunday 10.00-12.30 – 14.30-18.30

16/10 – 14/04:

Saturday and Sunday 10.00-12.30 – 14.30-18.30

COOKING SCHOOL: Chef **Michele Bosco** holds cooking classes to teach Tuscan recipes from the Renaissance era in the **Cucinone**, the large kitchen going back to the time of the Medici. The classes cover theory and practice with the possibility to taste the prepared dishes.



Nearby is the Convento di Bosco ai Frati which is only a short drive away, following indications to Scarperia and Panna-Galliano.

Convento di Bosco ai Frati



Initially a convent for Basilian Fathers (11th century), the **Convento del Bosco ai Frati** is set in an enchanting location. It was entirely rebuilt by **Michelozzi** for **Cosimo il Vecchio** who also owned the villas of Trebbio and Cafaggiolo in the neighbourhood. As he had done in Cafaggiolo and Trebbio, here also the architect mixed the characteristics of the new Renaissance taste with the experience of the medieval tradition. For the building of the choir, he used ribs, vaults and cornices referring to late Gothic style whereas in the cloister, the presbytery and the monks' cells he followed models of the new architecture which had matured in an urban environment.

In front of the façade of the church there is a small loggia lined with stone columns with Corinthian bases and capitals in *pietra serena* holding a terracotta roof. Inside (with a single nave) Michelozzi's mark can be noted in the groined vaults with ribs in *pietra serena* and the beautifully enlarged polygonal choir. In front of the choir stands an imposing 17th century altar frontal, made out of golden sculpted wood with the Medici coat of arms. The church was enriched by Cosimo the Elder with a magnificent altarpiece by Fra Angelico, called the *Madonna del Bosco ai Frati*, which can be seen today at the museum of San Marco in Florence.

Hours: from Monday to Saturday 10.00-12.00 and 18.00-19.00 Sunday 9.00-10.00 and 18.00-19.00



In the adjacent cloister the chapter house opens out, hosting a museum of sacred art. The Medici family made many precious donations to the convent, among which can be distinguished a **wooden Crucifix** attributed to **Donatello**, kept in this little museum. **Christ** is depicted in a dramatic way, naked and showing obvious marks of blows, in pain as death is near. He almost looks skeleton-like, with big bags under his down-cast eyes, after suffering the days of the Passion, his fine lips letting slightly through the breath of a man aware of his agony. **Vasari reports Brunelleschi's remark when he saw Donatello's crucifix: "It is a peasant that you have put on the cross"**.

The little museum was created in the 1960s, when a room of the convent was chosen to keep the most precious objects to preserve them from thefts. The works come from the convent and monastery of the Bosco ai Frati. In 1973, Father G. Sabatelli bequeathed some objects he owned to enrich the collection of the museum. The cloister links Michelozzi's refectory with a vegetable garden lined by the cells where the monks live.

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