

IL MONTALBANO

The **Montalbano** is a hilly area extending on a territory located between Pistoia, Prato and Florence plains in the north, the Fucecchio marsh lands in the south-west, Empoli plain in the south and the river Arno in the south-east. Etruscans settled there in the 7th-8th centuries B.C.; during the Middle Ages, it was the scene of wars between Florence, Lucca and Pistoia. During the Renaissance, once peace had returned, various Tuscan patrician families established estates there to cultivate the land. The Medici family, attracted by the beauty of its landscape and its hunting resources ended up buying all the lands in the region. With the end of the Medici dynasty in 1737 and the arrival of the Habsburg-Lorraine, the Montalbano lived through a period of important reforms. Woods were turned into cultivated areas, wet lands were dried out and a new impulse was given to agriculture and tenant farming until the end of World War II. In this territory the lovely chain of hills including the villages of Poggio a Caiano and Carmignano belongs to municipality of Prato under the name of “Montalbano di Prato”. The charm of these sweet and green hills, rich of vineyards and olive groves, brings calm and serenity; around there can also be found treasures of art and history. The most important centres are Poggio a Caiano, Carmignano, Artimino and Vinci.

TYPICAL REGIONAL PRODUCE



The typical products of this region are wine, oil and figs. Carmignano wine is the most famous, especially the *Carmignano Rosso*, said to be the oldest wine ever made in Italy. With the support of various archeological pieces found in tombs, it can even be said that the Etruscans initiated vine and olive culture. The Medici developed the wine production by importing grape varieties from France, like Cabernet for example. The special climate of this region, with its great brightness, determines the characteristics of elegant wines with some standing out like the *Carmignano DOCG*, the *Chianti Montalbano DOCG*, the *Vin Santo* and the *Vin Ruspo* both *DOC*. The *Vin Ruspo* is a sparkling rosé wine which must be drunk young between meals or with starters, fish and seafood. The *Vin Santo Dolce* is traditionally served with some “Cantucci di Prato” but in Carmignano, it is served with “Biscotti dei Fochi”, excellent produce from the Fochi pastry shop. The *Vin Santo* is produced with the best grapes, shriveled and dried on wicker racks made from reed in big and well ventilated rooms. Between December and January, the grapes are pressed and put inside middle-size containers where the wine will get mature for three to four years.

Olive culture follows traditional methods in small family farms to produce a high-quality oil. Figs deserve special attention as in the past they used to be an important component of the local agricultural production; the area was even called “Carmignano da’ fichi”. Fig culture was marginalized by the culture of wine and olives. Currently there are very few farmers producing dry figs but those who do it keep on using the traditional methods. In December is held the Dry Fig Fair.

ITINERARY: GATTAIA – POGGIO A CAIANO – CARMIGNANO – ARTIMINO – VINCI (105 Km) – VINCI – GATTAIA (97 Km)

POGGIO A CAIANO

At the foot of Montalbano, this village is known for its Medici Villa, the most beautiful of all those built by the noble family. Many important artists from last century like Armando Spadini and Ardengo Soffici were also fond of this place.

VILLA MEDICEA DI POGGIO A CAIANO (Piazza dei Medici 14)



Opening Hours: From Monday to Sunday:

8.15 – 16.30 in January, February, November and December

8.15 – 17.30 in March (18.30 daylight saving time)

8.15 – 18.30 in April, May and September

8.15 – 19.30 in June, July, August

8.15 – 18.30 in October (17.30 daylight saving time)

Closed : second and third Monday of the month, Christmas Day, New Year's Day, 1 May.

Free entrance.

Around 1485, **Lorenzo the Magnificent** asked the architect **Giuliano da Sangallo** (1443-1516) to plan the building of his new villa. The villa was enlarged by Lorenzo's son, Giovanni, future pope **Leone X** and then by the Grand Dukes. It became the *Medici family's summer residence* and the favoured place for wedding celebrations, like those in the honor of **Alessandro and Margaret of Austria** (1536), **Cosimo I and Eleonora di Toledo** (1539) and **Francesco I and Bianca Cappello** (1579). In fact the villa used to host all the new wives of the Grand Dukes where they accepted the tribute paid by Florentine aristocrats, before going to Florence. A tragic event occurred there in 1587 when **Grand-Duke Francesco I** and his spouse **Bianca Cappello** died, one day apart and probably poisoned. Dark suspicions arose about this double death; the main story mentioned a poisoned cake that Bianca would have made herself to kill her brother-in-law Ferdinando, who then made a clever move by asking his brother Francesco to have a first bite of the cake. Bianca, unable to live without her beloved husband would then have committed suicide. However archival documents say the cause of death was fever and congestion.

At the end of the 17th century, French princess **Marguerite d'Orléans**, cousin of Louis XIV and wife of Cosimo II was relegated there. In the early 1700s, with her son, Grand Duke **Ferdinando**, the villa became a very active cultural centre. When **Gian Gastone** the last of the Medici died, the villa went to the **Habsburg-Lorraine**, who continued to use it as a summer residence. During Napoleonic times, the villa was owned for a while by **Elisa Baiocchi Bonaparte**, **Napoleon's sister**, who became Princess of Lucca and Piombino and then **Grand Duchess of Tuscany** in 1809. She was the friend of the great violinist **Niccolò Paganini** who had many recitals there. When Florence became capital city of Italy **Vittorio Emmanuele II** and the royal family stayed there every now and then. As the king loved hunting, he had new stables built and had a few rooms redecorated on the ground floor. It is still possible to visit the king and his wife's bedrooms. In 1919, the king gave the villa to the Italian state.

The villa has a harmonious structure and is immersed in a big garden stretching out into a park at the back with large paths and waterways. The apparent simplicity of the building, a wonderful **example of the architecture of the Renaissance period**, recalls parameters of order and symmetry following the classical tradition about which **Leon Battista Alberti** had elaborated a theory in his Books on Architecture. Brilliantly inspired **Giuliano da Sangallo** managed to implement the Master's lessons combining them with innovative elements to create a **masterpiece**. Resembling the look of ancient Roman villas, two equal sized buildings are set on a platform supported by arches and they are linked together by a big room working as an internal courtyard. The **big classical staircase** from 1807 leads to the first floor and to the very beautiful loggia with architrave, decorated on the right hand side wall with a fresco by **Filippino Lippi**, representing *Il Sacrificio di Lacoonte*. At the front there is a beautiful glazed terracotta frieze by **Sansovino** and **Bertoldo di Giovanni**, it represents allegories inspired by mythological elements illustrating Lorenzo the Magnificent's philosophical and political concerns (here is a copy of the original displayed in a room inside the villa). At the ground floor, past the entrance hall we walk from the **theatre** into the **billiard room**. On the right hand side are located **Bianca Cappello's** elegant apartments (this noble Venetian lady was the lover and then the second wife of Francesco I) with the very beautiful marble fireplace decorated with two sculptures by **Bandinelli** and **Ammannati**.

On the first floor the hall was decorated with frescoes by **Luigi Catani** (1762-1840) for Elisa Baiocchi, illustrating the two main stories linked to the building of the villa: *Lorenzo che approva il modello presentatogli da Giuliano da Sangallo* (Lorenzo giving his approval to Giuliano da San Gallo's project) and the legend mentioned by Agnolo Poliziano: *la ninfa Ambra trasformata in roccia dalla dea Diana per sfuggire ai desideri del dio fluviale Ombrone* (the nymph Ambra transformed into a rock by goddess Diana to escape river-god Ombrone's desire; the rock having become the hill of Poggio a Caiano)._



From there we get access to the splendid **Salone Leone X**, with its fresco decoration started in 1521 when pope Leone X got the best artists of the time involved: **Pontormo**, **Andrea del Sarto**, **Franciabigio**. **Pontormo** is the author of the frescoes inside the famous lunette on the left with *God Ventumno and Pomona among citizens*. The mythological tale is illustrated by a country scene representing a fantastic world with elegance and lightness to glorify country life serenity. As the first commissioner of the villa, Lorenzo chose to build a house there precisely to enjoy peace and serenity. On the walls in the Salone, the frescoes resembling tapestries represent events from the Roman history alluding to facts in the Medici family's life. Such as the *ritorno di Cicerone dall'esilio*, by **Franciabigio** (1521) alluding to Cosimo the Elder's return from exile in 1434; *Siface di Numidia che riceve Scipione*, by **Allori** (1582) alluding to Lorenzo the Magnificent's trip to Naples in 1478 to meet Ferdinando di Aragona; *Giulio Cesare che riceve i tributi dall'Egitto* by **Andrea del Sarto** (1521), allusion to the presents made by the sultan of Egypt to Lorenzo the Magnificent; *il Console Flaminio al Consiglio della Lega Achea*, alluding to Lorenzo's success to change Venetian alliance against Florence, a work by Allori who also made the *Giardino delle*

Esperidi in the right hand side lunette. Still on the first floor we can visit the dining-room with its ceiling decorated with a big fresco by **Domenico Gabbiani** representing *L'opera di pacificazione di Cosimo il Vecchio* (1698). Also found there are the apartments where stayed King Vittorio Emanuele II and the Countess Mirafiori with the lovely **Sala da bagno** made in neoclassical style for **Elisa Baiocchi**.

Back to the entrance, we get out onto the Loggia and the **splendid terrace** surrounding the whole building to enjoy the beautiful panorama on **the Montalbano and the Apennines**. The garden is enclosed within the surrounding walls and their four small towers from the 16th century. There used to be an outdoor oven and a chapel (with the *Pietà con i Santi Cosma e Damiano*, patrons of the Medici family, by **Vasari**), the *palestra* (gymnasium) where to play “pallacorda” and the *guardia* (guards). The kitchens used to be in the building down below on the left hand side.

In the bottom right hand side, we can admire a neoclassical building by **Poccianti**: the **Limonaia** (1825). This is where the lemon culture started in Tuscany, with lemon trees growing in terracotta pots and set aside in this building during winter. The gardens we can see today around the villa were redesigned in 1811. Behind the villa, going towards the Ombrone river, there is an **English garden**, with large treed paths and characteristic spots. On the right there is an **Italian garden**, with a central pond and several paths with lemon trees. Lots of rare species grow in the gardens (sequoias, Californian palms, marshland cypresses) and there can also be found some statues like the terracotta one representing the *Ninfa Ambra catturata da Ombrone* (Ambra taken by Ombrone) as Lorenzo described it in his poem *Ambra*.

CARMIGNANO



From Poggio a Caiano, straight after the villa we take a left turn to take the road going up between tree-covered hills, olive groves and vineyards to reach after 5 km **Carmignano**, set on the east side of the Montalbano and where from we can admire a panorama of green hills with the city of Florence in the background. Carmignano was the object of a dispute between Florence, Pistoia and Prato. During the Grand Dukedom period, and under the government of the Lorraine family, the population grew significantly with a successful agricultural economy. The **Chiesa di San Michele**, in the centre of the village is a church from 1349 which was rebuilt several times. There are kept beautiful and rare paintings like the wonderful *Visitazione* by **Pontormo**, from 1530, a masterpiece of the Tuscan mannerist style, which is set near the second altar on the right hand side. On the wall to the right in the back we can also admire the large detached fresco *San Cristoforo* by **Andrea di Giusto** and a small painting of the *Annunciazione* by **Lorenzo Monaco**.

ARTIMINO



Getting out of Carmignano, we take the road to **Artimino**, driving through agricultural estates, olive groves and vineyards. **Artimino** is a lovely medieval village, with a population of a hundred inhabitants and not far from the Medici villa **Ferdinanda**. The view discovered from there is spectacular especially on a very clear day when in addition to Pistoia, the Apennines and Prato, it is possible to also see Florence in the distance. Originally Artimino was an Etruscan settlement which later became a Roman base. Immersed in a typical Tuscan scenery of olive trees and cypresses, the medieval village of Artimino has been for centuries one of these magnificent places in the plain located between Florence, Pistoia, Prato and the Arno river near Empoli. Part of the municipality of Carmignano, it was first mentioned in 998 with its **Pieve di San Leonardo**, a church which is a good example of the **Romanesque-Lombard architecture** in Tuscany. On the other hand, in the area between Artimino, the Arno river and the village of **Comeana**, archaeological digs conducted during the past fifty years have allowed to prove that Etruscans lived in these hills. Various pieces found to illustrate this statement are displayed in the Artimino archaeological museum.

The Medici family was also attracted by this village and had a villa built there, completed in 1581, a residence for hunters, designed by **Buontalenti**. The Medici did not choose the location by chance as they still enjoyed the villa of Poggio a Caiano built a century before. So when Buontalenti designed the **Villa dei Cento Camini** (Villa of the Hundred Chimneys), he situated it in the most fascinating area up the hills, with a south-east façade getting the sun all day long. From the park one can admire the panorama on Florence. Today, Artimino is the centre of archaeological digs but also a lovely place where you can enjoy the tranquillity and the beauty of the Tuscan countryside and a variety of artworks. A jewel of a village becoming more and more a tourist destination.

In the neighbourhood, on a hill facing the Villa dei Cento Camini, between cypresses and olive trees stands the **Pieve di San Leonardo**. Probably erected in the 10th century and partially restructured in the 12th century (as it raised the interest of Countess Matilde di Canossa, a noble lady residing in the area). Inside there is a version of the *Visitazione*; a polychromic terracotta group of figures from the 16th century, heavily repainted and damaged, in the Della Robbia style. Also inside is found a copy of the *Madonna del Pozzo* by **Raphael**, attributed to one of his students, **Franciabigio**.

MEDICI VILLA “LA FERDINANDA” or “VILLA DEI CENTO CAMINI”

Carmignano-Loc.Artimino, Via Papa Giovanni XXIII 5 - Visits by appointment

November to January: Monday to Saturday: 9.30-12.30; Sunday: 10.00-12.00

February to October: Monday to Saturday: 9.30-12.30; Sunday 10.00-12.00 free visits with guides

Closed: Wednesdays, 1 January, Easter Day, 1 May, 15 August, 1 November, 25-26 December

Cost: full price: € 4,00 ; reduced: € 2,00 (children, old people, groups); free entrance for guides.



After being owned by the House of Lorraine and then by the Maraini family, the villa is currently the property of a **private company** which organizes conferences, ceremonies and cultural events.

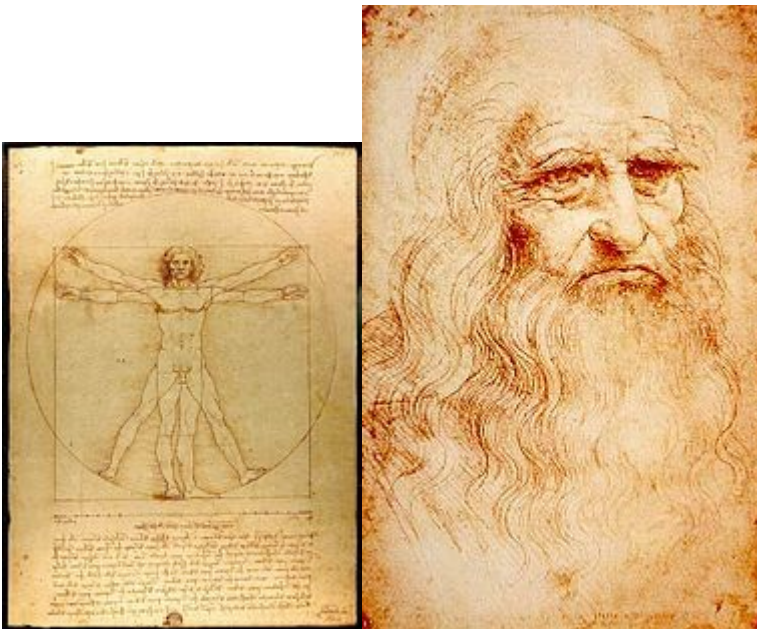
It is in **1596** that the imposing villa was commissioned to **Bernardo Buontalenti** by **Grand Duke Ferdinando I de' Medici**. It is known as "**La Ferdinanda**" or as the "**Villa dei Cento Camini**", because of the number of characteristic chimneys on the roof. Built to provide accommodation for hunters, the villa often hosted the members of the **Grand Dukes' Court**. On the outside, the house is characterized by its elegance and simplicity. The spectacular large **double staircase** with its banisters (only completed in 1930, following Buontalenti's design, by Countess Carolina Maraini), the angular foreparts, the front loggia demonstrate its unique Renaissance style.

Inside, the villa has fifty-six rooms connected according to an eccentric pattern: after the *Sala d'ingresso* (entrance hall), before the vast *Salone dell'orso* is a small refined chapel and then there are the *Sala di Cristina di Lorena* and the lovely "*ricetto del poggiolo*", a much decorated bathroom. The frescoes in the chapel and those in the small loggia are by **Domenico Crespi**, known as **Il Passignano**. It is in the "*Salone detto "delle ville"*" that were placed the seventeen lunettes representing the Medici villas, painted by the Dutch artist **Giusto Utens** in the late 1600s. This is when the villa with its iconographic collection became the ideal centre of the Medici possessions in the Florentine countryside. The villa is also a "**luogo galileiano**": from 24 June to 23 August 1608 the Court stayed at Artimino and **Galileo Galilei** went there in August, invited by Ferdinando I to teach Mathematics to his son, the future Grand Duke Cosimo III. Lots of experiences were also conducted there by the **Accademia del Cimento**. In September 1657, atmospheric humidity was measured, using a condensation moisture meter. In addition, academicians made various experiments in the surrounding countryside to check on variations of the atmospheric pressure according to the altitude.

VINCI

Getting back on the road to Prato-Carmignano-Empoli and leaving behind us the territory of the province of Prato, we quickly reach the small town of **Vinci**, where the famous **Leonardo** was born **on 15 April 1452**. Illegitimate son of Ser Piero, a notary, he spent part of his childhood at **Anchiano**, where his father owned houses and plots of land, as well as at his paternal grandmother's home in Casa Toia, an old house which is still there, immersed in the green countryside not far from Bacchereto.

The building of Vinci castle, dominating the village, goes back to the High Middle Ages, and it is traditionally known as the "castello della nave" (ship castle) because of its long shape and tower reminding of a sailing boat. Around the year 1000, the Counts Guidi took possession of the village but it was subdued by Florence on 12 August 1254 and transformed into a "Comune". Located on the west border, Vinci was the cause of fights between Florence enemies and got involved in many difficult political issues. Under the walls of the castle stationed Ugucione della Faggiuola's troops of soldiers (1315), those of Castruccio Castracani's (1320-26) and of John Hakwood's, called the Acuto (1364), an English mercenary working for Pisa. After many vicissitudes and many renovations the castle became property of the municipality of Vinci in 1919.



IL MUSEO LEONARDIANO

The Leonardo da Vinci museum presents one of the biggest and original collections of **machines and models** created by Leonardo the inventor, expert in technology and engineer. Each reproduction is described with precious references to the artist's sketches and notes. The machines displayed there cover a variety of sectors and there are also quantities of drawings where Leonardo represented its intuitions, many drafts of machines and mechanisms according to 15th century technical knowledge. The idea of a **real museum dedicated to Leonardo** on his native land arose in 1919 during the celebrations for the 400th death anniversary, when the Guidi castle was given to the town of Vinci. In addition to the museum a library was created, the Biblioteca Leonardiana, which officially opened in 1928.

After the restorations conducted in 1939-1942 and thanks to a generous donation from **IBM** to Vinci, the museum located in the castle opened on 15 April 1953, following the celebrations of Leonardo's 500th birthday anniversary. At the time a complete series of models based on the artist's drawings was displayed. Since then the collection increased with a number of models given by scholars and donors and also thanks to the investments made by the municipality of Vinci and public and private companies in order to make the collection as large as possible. After the restructuring of the museum in 1986, a major extension was done during the summer 2004 and thanks to the Tuscany Region's contribution, **linking Palazzo Uzielli to the Counts Guidi castle**. This initiative allowed the creation of a new visiting route established in two different places and not far from the historic centre of Vinci. The Palazzina Uzielli, in addition to the ticket office and new sections, has a big room on the ground floor where are held educational programs and on the second floor there are spaces for temporary exhibitions. The creation and the development of the museum are based on the conviction that Leonardo's drawing books of machines and mechanisms, found in large numbers and extremely complex, are essential for the knowledge they provide about the history of technique at the end of the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance period. With the extension works completed in 2004, the museum engaged in a new phase to offer to the visitor a place where Leonardo's experience as an engineer, an architect and a scientist would be documented. The Renaissance techniques are illustrated thanks to a display of models and experiments taken out of manuscripts and reinterpreted on the basis of updated technical analysis through a variety of medias. Both the museum and the **Biblioteca Leonardiana** constitute a centre of documentation on Leonardo da Vinci and his time, focusing on his engineering skills.

Opening Hours: Everyday: November to February: 9.30-18.00; March to October: 9.30-19.00. Full price: 5,00 euros; reduced for young visitors 6-14: 2,00 euros; groups over 15 people and young visitors 14-18: 2,50 euros; audio-guide: 2,00 euros. Free entrance for children under 6 and guides. Tel. 0571 56055 - www.museoleonardiano.it



LEONARDO'S NATIVE HOUSE:

Anchiano 50059 Vinci
tel. 0571 56519 - 0571 56055

Opening Hours: Everyday March-October: 9.30-19.00; November-February: 9.30-18.00. Free entrance.

About 3 km from Vinci, in the hamlet of Anchiano you find the **Casa Natale di Leonardo**. According to an old tradition, Leonardo was born in this farm on 15 April 1452. The building is surrounded by the same landscape Leonardo would have been able to contemplate when he was a child.