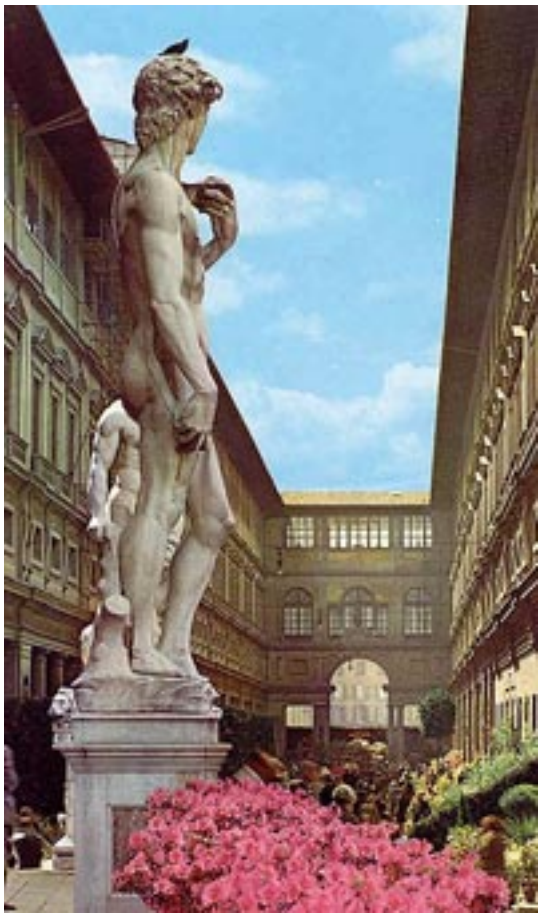

The **Uffizi Palace** is a major point of interest in Florence and we recommend it highly, when suggesting places to see, to our guests at Hotel Orto dei Medici.

It was designed in 1559 by architect Giorgio Vasari, who finished it in five short years. It was during the period that the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Cosimo of the Medici had also achieved his rise to power. The buildings of the Uffizi (the word uffizi means offices) run from Piazza Signoria to the Arno River connected to Palazzo Vecchio by a passageway above Via della Ninna and to the Pitti Palace by the Vasari Corridor. This horse shaped complex was designed to house the offices, mostly on the first floor, of the thirteen judges who were in charge of city administration.

The ground floor was designed instead, to hold workshops and studios for the court artists and artisans who specialized in working with metals, precious stones, glass, ceramics, and tapestries.

The antique government "mint" where the former coin of Florence, the 'florin' was produced, once situated on the West side, and the 'fonderia' (meaning pharmacy) which specialized in the distillation of perfumes, medicines that were supposed to be miraculous, and poison were incorporated into the structure of the Uffizi. Many of these artisan activities can be seen illustrated in paintings, mostly done by art students of Vasari, on the walls in a studio, which once belonged to Francesco I, found in Palazzo Vecchio.

In order to make room for the new structure, Vasari had all of the houses, in what was then the Baldracca quarter, knocked down. Only the church of San Pier Scheraggio was spared and delicately incorporated into the complex. The Romanesque church, consecrated in 1068, had been used for the City Councils up until the construction of Palazzo Vecchio.

Restoration work on the church in 1971 led to the discovery of earlier remains and stratifications, including traces of a frescoed room, perhaps a tavern, dating to the Roman

"Florentia") and of a church of Longobard style. Today this area, which is situated beside the entrance to the museum and used for conferences, contains detached frescoes by Botticelli (Annunciation, 1481) and Andrea del Castagno, (the series of Famous Men from Villa Carducci at Legnaia, mid 1400's). Considered to be Vasari's finest masterpiece, the design of the huge Uffizi building is based on the contrast between the white plasterwork and grey local stone, taken from Brunelleschi's Hospital of the innocent. It was also strongly influenced by Michelangelo's design of the Laurentian Library (window frames in relief and strongly marked moldings). A large number of decorative elements unite to the wholeness of this building; from the ground-floor loggia with its columns and pilasters, the mezzanine floor with its small square windows placed between corbels, the first floor with its formal, large, and balconied windows, to the parapet and columns of the upper loggia and lastly the great overhanging roof. The square of the Uffizi, created in the interior of the rectangle, is very similar to a courtyard. When Vasari died in 1574, architects Alfonso Parigi and Bernardo Buontalenti continued the project up until its completion in 1580. It was adjoined to the Loggia dei Lonzi on the west side, where they created a hanging garden on the roof and a little loggia, that was later destroyed in 1840.

In 1581 Francesco I ordered Buontalenti to close the upper loggia and transform it into a gallery to hold the Grand Duke's art collection. Buontalenti also did the Tribune in 1584, and the Medici Theater in 1586 where many famous performances were staged. The theater was demolished in 1889 and today, in its place, there are two floors of the Gallery of Prints and Drawings.