



Originally called **Palazzo della Signoria**, getting its name from the Signoria or Lords of Florence, this impressive town hall, now called Palazzo Vecchio overlooks the Piazza della Signoria, next to the Loggia dei Lanzi.

During its long history the Palace had gone under other names including Palazzo del Popolo, Palazzo dei Priori, and Palazzo Ducale, depending on who was using the palace at the time.

The building we see today is the result of three various re-building stages that took place between the 13th and 16th centuries. Its original plan is attributed to Arnolfo Di Cambio, the same architect of the Florence Dome and the church of Santa Croce, who began the project in 1299 but after his death, shortly after beginning the project, work was carried on by his successors and was finished in 1314.

Palazzo Vecchio was built on the ruins of two other palaces once owned by the Uberti family but the original ancient tower, 94 meters in height, named after its new designer Arnolfo, that was found there was incorporated into the new facade by Di Cambio.

The tower contains two small holding cells which once held Cosimo the Elder as a prisoner in 1435 and later in 1498 Girolamo Savonarola. The large clock was originally built by the Florentine Nicolò Bernardo but was later replaced with a clock made by Vincenzo Viviani.

The Palace is built in stone and has two rows of Gothic windows, each with a trefoil arch with added decorative bas-reliefs of a cross and lily, the flower of Florence, in the spandrels between the trefoils. The building is crowned with a crenulated embattlement that is sustained by small arches and stone brackets, or corbels and a series of nine painted coats of arms of the Florentine republic are found under the arches, some of which were used as embrasures to keep away invaders.

From 1540 to 1550 Palazzo Vecchio, named Palazzo della Signoria at the time, was the residence of Cosimo I of the Medici's. During his stay he had the architect Giorgio Vasari enlarge the palace which was more than doubled in size with the addition of a new quarter in

the back. Vasari also built an above-ground walkway from the palace, through the Uffizi, to the Palazzo Pitti.

The name of the palace was officially changed to Palazzo Vecchio after Cosimo moved out and took residence at the Pitt Palace., but the square itself kept the name of Piazza della Signoria.

Later, Cosimo I also moved the seat of government to the Uffizi and between 1865 and 1871, the palace regained importance when it was the seat of United Italy's provisional government while Florence was the capital of the Kingdom of Italy.

Today, the Palazzo Vecchio still houses the office of the mayor and the city council in the Hall of Two Hundred but the rest of the palace has become mostly a museum for all to visit and admire.

There are many things to be admired in the Palazzo Vecchio where the original statue of Michelangelo stood at the entrance in the piazza from 1504 to 1873 until it was moved to the Accademia Gallery and replaced by an exquisite replica in 1910.

It has three courtyards. The first was designed in 1453 by Michelozzo, the second, also called "The Customs" was built in 1494 by Cronaca and contains massive pillars which were needed to sustain the great "salone dei Cinquecento" or the Hall of Five Hundred, on the second floor. Between the first and second courtyards, the massive stairway leading up to the Hall was done by Vasari along with other frescoes found on the walls.

The third courtyard was built to house offices.

The public can admire the Hall of the Five Hundred, the little Study of Francesco I and the four monumental apartments: the Quarters of the Elements, the Quarters of Eleonora of Toledo, the Residence of the Priors and the Quarters of Leo X, where the reception rooms of the mayor and the council that governs the city are situated today.

All of these halls and rooms boast a patrimony of frescoes, paintings and statues.