



30. The staircase.



31. Detail the staircase.

The grand staircase is the heart of the house. It creates a beautiful opening to the upper floors and it gives an impression of importance and a strong identity to the building. (figg. 30-31)

At the bottom of the staircase there are a nice giltwood console of the second half of the eighteenth century, probably Sicilian, and on the same wall a Florentine Baroque tapestry representing a *Virtue* within a simulated frame surrounded by a complex architecture and crowned by a cartouche.

These tapestries, which have the typical character of Florentine art of the second half of the seventeenth century, were probably woven by Giovanni Battista Termini, but it is not clear who designed them. From the sides of the fictitious frame hang two garlands of flowers, which appear also in another tapestry, probably again by Termini after a cartoon by Francesco Nani¹².

Some marble busts decorate the stairs. Two of them are very fine late 17th-early 18th century female busts after the antique (fig. 32), another is a classical piece with large later restorations, and another two are again after the antique, of a good quality. (figg. 33-34)

What characterises the stairs, though, are the tapestries that hang on the walls.

There are six of the same subject, all Florentine of the 17th century, with a central medallion of a young woman, a putto, and a goat in the background, distributed along the stairs from the ground floor to the private apartments. (fig. 35)

To the same series as the *Virtue* probably woven by Termini belong a *St. John the Baptist* (fig. 36) on the first floor landing, a second example of the *Virtue* on the second floor landing, a different *Virtue* on the same landing (this one wears a red mantle and is accompanied by a putto in the background raising a

¹² See M. Stefanini Sorrentino, *Arazzi medicei a Pisa*, Florence, 1993, p. 124, cat. no. 25.



32. A late 17th century bust after the antique in the staircase. 33. An antique bust (with restorations) in the staircase.

burning lamp), and a figure of *Faith* hanging on the wall of the stair at the second floor. (fig. 37)

But of course the attention goes to the enormous *Chariot of the Sun*, signed and dated in 1642 by Pierre Lefèvre (Antwerp, 1579-Florence, 1669), who italianised his name to Pietro Fevere after he became tapestry weaver of the Medici in 1630. (fig. 38).

The cartoon for this tapestry was designed by the painter Lorenzo Lippi (Florence, 1606- 1665) and the work, together with the mysterious *Allegory of Night* which hangs nearby, was made by Fevere between 1641 and 1643.



34. A bust after the antique in the staircase.

The fame of Fevere was such that he was portrayed by Giusto Sustermans, the official portraitist of the Medici, and he was later called by Cardinal Mazarin to Paris, where in 1648 he was given the post of *Tapissier du Roi*¹³.

¹³ On Fevere and these tapestries, see C.J. Adelson, *Fevere Pietro*, in *The Dictionary of Art*, vol. 11, London, 1996, pp. 47-48; A Frezza, *Scritti di storia dell'arazzeria medicea*, Isola del Liri-Roma, 1992, pp. 113-137.



35. A Florentine 17th century tapestry in the staircase.



36. St. John the Baptist, Florentine 17th century tapestry, first floor landing.



37. The second floor landing.



38. Pierre Lefèvre, *The Chariot of the Sun*, staircase.



39. The Adam Room.



40. An Emilian giltwood table, Adam Room.

On the landing of the first floor, one can walk past a very nice Roman giltwood console of the eighteenth century and enter the Adam room, so called because the plasterwork of the ceiling imitates the style of the two famous architects. (fig. 39)

Here tapestries again decorate the walls, and apart from them, two impressive Emilian giltwood tables with crossing legs should be singled out for their fine carving. They have wood tops painted to look like marble and some nice Chinese porcelains are displayed over them. (fig. 40)

The tapestries are French Gobelins and they belong to a well-known series called *Les Enfants Jardiniers*, woven after cartoons by the painter Sève le Jeune who took his inspiration from models sketched by Charles Le Brun in 1664. (figg. 41-44)

Many sets of these fortunate tapestries were made. The first two were destined to Colbert but were acquired in 1685 by Louis XIV. Other sets were woven by order of the King as diplomatic gifts, as is the case of this, the fourth, which was made between 1703 and 1705 in the atelier of De La Croix and quite probably presented to the Grand Dukes of Tuscany¹⁴.

Through the illustration of various activities of the gardeners, the tapestries are allegories of the Seasons. Two tapestries, the largest of all, and the one next to it, refer to Spring, the one to the right of the fireplace symbolises Winter, and the one by the window Autumn.

¹⁴ H. Goebel, *Wandteppiche. II: Die Romanischen Länder*, Leipzig, 1928, vol. I, pp. 126-7; P. Mironneau, *Jeux d'enfants et enfants jardiniers au château de Pau: une illusion de fraîcheur*, in *Le Festin*, 1998, pp. 96-101; N. Birioukova, *Les tapisseries françaises au musée de l'Ermitage*, in *La tapisserie au XVIIIe siècle et les collections européennes*. Actes du colloque international, Chambord, 18-19 octobre 1996, Paris, 1999, pp. 191-199



41. A tapestry of the series *Les Enfants Jardiniers* in the Adam Room.



42. Detail of fig. no 41.



43. Detail of one of the series *Les Enfants Jardiniers* in the Adam Room.



44. *Autumn*, one of the tapestries *Les Enfants Jardiniers* in the Adam Room.



45. The Blue Room.

The Blue Room houses some of the most precious paintings in the Embassy. (*fig. 45*) To the left of the door there are two portraits. One is of *Duke Carlo Emanuele I of Savoy* (1562-1630) as a young man. It is a copy of a painting by Giacomo Vighi called *L'Argenta* (c. 1510-1573), which is preserved in the Pinacoteca Sabauda in Turin¹⁵. The other represents perhaps the young Isabella of Savoy, sister of Carlo Emanuele I. The style of this picture and the baroque console by the side of the sitter, though, suggest that it could date to the mid-17th century. (*figg. 46-47*)

The two most important paintings in the room hang by the fireplace. To the left a Bartolomeo Passarotti, to the right a Federico Barocci. (*figg. 48-49*)

The Passarotti is the portrait of an unknown art collector in his studio. The identity of this proud man showing his treasures and his erudition remains mysterious. A fascinating suggestion has been recently made, that it could be the effigy of the sculptor and medallist Domenico Poggini (1520-1590) because the medal on his chest was cast by him¹⁶.

This painting is a wonderful work by Passarotti, probably one of his best portraits, where the introspection in the psychology of the sitter and the skill of the artist are at their pinnacle.

The man portrayed by Federico Barocci (1528 *circa*-1612) was for long time considered to be a member of the Della Rovere family, the rulers of Urbino, where Barocci was born and spent nearly all his life. It seems instead that he could be Count Federico Bonaventura (1555-1602), a man highly trusted by the Duke Francesco Maria II Della Rovere, and a friend of Barocci and of the poet Torquato Tasso¹⁷.

The evidence for this new identification seems convincing, and it is interesting to notice that the portrait must have been made shortly before the death of Count Bonaventura, as the canvas is signed and dated "FED. BAR. URB. MDCII".

¹⁵ A. Griseri, in *Catalogo della Mostra del Barocco Piemontese. Pittura*, Turin, 1963, vol. II, p. 45, no.1, pl. 1.

¹⁶ C. Höper, *Bartolomeo Passarotti (1529-1592)*, Worms, 1987, vol. II, p. 57, cat. G 44.

¹⁷ F. Sangiorgi, *Precisazioni su due ritratti di Federico Barocci*, in *Notizie da Palazzo Albani*, XX, 1991, nos. 1-2, pp. 165-170.



46. Giacomo Vighi, called L'Argenta, *Duke Carlo Emanuele of Savoy*, Blue Room.



47. 17th century Piedmontese painter, *Isabella of Savoy* (?), Blue Room.



48. Bartolomeo Passarotti, *Portrait of a Collector (the sculptor Domenico Poggini?)*, Blue Room.



49. Federico Barocci, *Portrait of Count Federico Bonaventura*, Blue Room.

Two preparatory drawings are known, one, an earlier and different idea of the general composition, is now in the collection of the Martin von Wagner Museum in Würzburg (no. 7185); the other, with a detail of the hands, is in the Uffizi (no. 11440).

This beautiful picture by one of the most celebrated painters of the Seicento was bought in London in 1952 by the Italian State and it had been in England since 1884 at least, when Lady Castletown of Upper Ossory lent it to the Royal Academy for a Winter Exhibition of Old Masters. At one stage during its long permanence in Britain, the painting was believed to be the portrait of the Earl of Pembroke¹⁸.

Truly English by birth and by subject are the other three portraits displayed in the Blue Room. (*figg. 50-52*)

At first, it might seem curious to find in the Italian Embassy three English Ladies (and a fourth is in the Venetian Drawing Room) (*fig. 53*) by the Court painter to Charles II, Sir Peter Lely. These pictures, though, have been for centuries in Florence, as they were commissioned together with others by Grand Duke Cosimo III.

The paintings have been involved in some adventurous circumstances as in 1672 the ship that was carrying them to Tuscany was attacked by Dutch pirates who stole the cargo. The paintings were traced in The Hague in 1673, and Cosimo III could finally have them back after the intervention of the Prince of Orange¹⁹.

The three ladies in the Blue Room are identified as Barbara Villiers, Countess of Castlemaine (later Duchess of Cleveland), who in 1660 became Charles II's mistress; Mary Butler, Lady Cavendish; and Mrs. Cheke (this is the name given to her in the documents about the commission and the troubled shipping to Florence). The fourth painting shows *Elizabeth Wriothesley*, Countess of Northumberland.

Cosimo III ordered other paintings from Lely, all portraits of English gentlemen and ladies, and a self-portrait to be added to the famous Medici collection of paintings of this type²⁰.

Among the furniture of the Blue Room, it is worth pointing out a fine lacquered bureau-trumeau made in Venice in the first half of the eighteenth century, with some later integrations, which contains a small but attractive collection of biscuit and porcelain statuettes from Capodimonte. (*figg. 54-55*)

¹⁸ For more information about this portrait, see H. Olsen, *Federico Barocci*, Copenhagen, 1962, pp. 205 et ss.; A. Emiliani, *Federico Barocci*, Bologna, 1985, vol. II, pp. 342-343.

¹⁹ A.M. Crinò-O. Millar, *Sir Peter Lely and the Grand Duke of Tuscany*, in *The Burlington Magazine*, C, 1958, pp. 124 et seqq.

²⁰ A.M. Crinò, *Documents relating to some portraits in the Uffizi and to a portrait at Knole*, in *The Burlington Magazine*, CII, 1960, pp. 257 et seqq.; see also M. Chiarini, *Firenze e l'Inghilterra*, catalogue of the exhibition, Florence, 1971, under nos. 21,34, and 47. In the Florentine collections there is also a self-portrait by Kneller.



50. Sir Peter Lely, *Barbara Villiers, Countess of Castlemaine*, Blue Room.



51. Sir Peter Lely, *Lady Cavendish*, Blue Room.



52. Sir Peter Lely, *Mrs. Cheke*, Blue Room.



53. Sir Peter Lely, *Portrait of an unknown Lady*, Venetian Drawing Room.



54. Porcelain and biscuit statuettes in the Venetian bureau-trumeau in the Blue Room.



55. Detail of a commode in the Blue Room.



56. The Ballroom.



57. Detail of one of the Venetian mirrors in the Ballroom.

From the Blue Room one enters the Ballroom, a large and magnificent space where beautiful tapestries and furniture can be seen. (*fig. 56*)

The floor is covered by an impressive Savonnerie carpet, whereas the walls are decorated with mirrors and with four tapestries. These show the personification of the river Arno with a lion and the Medici coat-of-arms supported by two “genii”, and they belong to a larger series parts of which are in the Palazzo Pitti in Florence. They were all produced in the workshop of Giovanni Battista Termini between 1710 and 1717 after a cartoon by Giovanni Camillo Sagrestani (1660-1731). (*fig. 58*)

One of the tapestries of the Embassy bears the “F a F” mark, and another is signed with a monogram by the weaver Leonardo Bernini. The coat-of-arms and the shape of the crown on top recall similar details in the heraldic fresco of 1706-1707 by Sebastiano Ricci in the Palazzo Pitti²¹.

On the sides of the door leading to the Blue Room there are two important Florentine giltwood mirrors, similar to each other, but not a pair. On the wall of the fireplace two large Venetian mirrors with elaborate ornaments of garlands and sphynxes are a typical decoration for a grand room like this. (*fig. 57*)

On the opposite wall is a portrait probably coming from the Sardinian Legation. The sitter is Carlo Emanuele III (1701-1773), second King of Sardinia, in an autograph replica of a work in the Galleria Sabauda in Turin by Maria Giovanna Clementi, called “la Clementina” (Turin, 1690-1761)²². (*fig. 59*)

²¹ G. Conti, *Ricerche storiche sull'arte degli arazzi a Firenze*, Florence, 1875, p. 82; *The Twilight of the Medici. Late Baroque Art in Florence, 1670-1743*, exhibition catalogue, Detroit-Florence, 1974, cat. no. 241 a-b, pp. 412-413.

²² A. Griseri, *op. cit.*, p. 93, no. 228, pl. 119.



58. One of the four tapestries with the River Arno and the Medici coat-of-arms in the Ballroom.



59. Maria Giovanna Clementi, called la Clementina, *King Carlo Emanuele III*.



60. The Venetian Drawing Room.



The proportions and the atmosphere of the Venetian Drawing Room make it a beautiful place for conversation and for enjoying the quality of the two pictures that hang at the end of the room. (fig. 60)

The name of this drawing room comes from the furniture, which is mainly from the Veneto, like the polychrome commode near the passage to the stair, or the charming gondola chair.

A very good *Portrait of a Young Man*, quite probably by Leandro Bassano (Bassano, 1557-Venice, 1662), is an image of great intensity. (fig. 61) This painting has also an interesting provenance because it was part of the collection of Gerolamo Manfrin, a gentleman from Zara who towards the end of the eighteenth century made a fortune and bought the Palazzo Venier in Cannaregio. There he kept his collection of hundreds of Venetian paintings, which comprised *The Tempest* by Giorgione, and which attracted large numbers of visitors among the foreign travellers to Venice²³. The Manfrin collection was then sold by the heirs of Gerolamo around the middle of the nineteenth century. This picture by Bassano comes from the collection of Lady Somers at Eastnor Castle in Herefordshire.

The other remarkable painting in the Venetian Drawing Room is the *Head of a Popolana* by Gaetano Gandolfi, the eighteenth century painter from Cento, who displays here all his taste for lively images and the richness of his palette²⁴. (fig. 62) There is a nice sense of immediacy and freshness in this painting. It is of a very high quality, with quick strokes of the brush that light up the colour and give a vibrant aspect so typical of the eighteenth century.

²³ On Manfrin, see F. Haskell, *Patrons and Painters*, London, 1963, pp. 379-381; W. Hauptman, *Some nineteenth century references to Giorgione's Tempesta*, in *The Burlington Magazine*, 1994, vol. 136, no. 1091, pp. 78-92.

²⁴ D. Biagi Maino, *Gaetano Gandolfi*, Turin, 1995, p. 352, cat. no. 32, tav. LIX.



61. Leandro Bassano, *Portrait of a Young Man*, Venetian Drawing Room.



62. Gaetano Gandolfi, *Head of a Popolana*, Venetian Drawing Room.



63. A commode from the Veneto in the Venetian Drawing Room.



64. Detail of a Meissen group in the Venetian Drawing Room.



65. Detail of fig. no. 66.



66. A Venetian 18th century commode, Venetian Drawing Room.



67. One of the private apartments.



In the small room at the end of the Venetian Drawing Room there are some nice Capodimonte small figures and two large 19th century marble busts of moors.

The private apartments at the second floor are decorated with interesting furniture and some good paintings. (fig. 67)

Among them, two should be mentioned, a *Madonna and Child*, attributed to the sixteenth-century painter from Vercelli, Benedetto Lanino, and a beautiful oil on canvas of *St. Cecilia*. This painting is undoubtedly a Lombard work of the first half of the Seicento, and most probably by Francesco Cairo (Milan, 1607-1665)²⁵. (fig. 68)

Carlo Milano

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²⁵ See especially the *Judith with the Head of Holophernes* of the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art of Sarasota, for which: F. Frangi, *Francesco Cairo*, Turin, 1998, cat. no. 28, fig. 32, p. 245).



68. Francesco
Cairo, *St.
Cecilia*, private
apartments.

