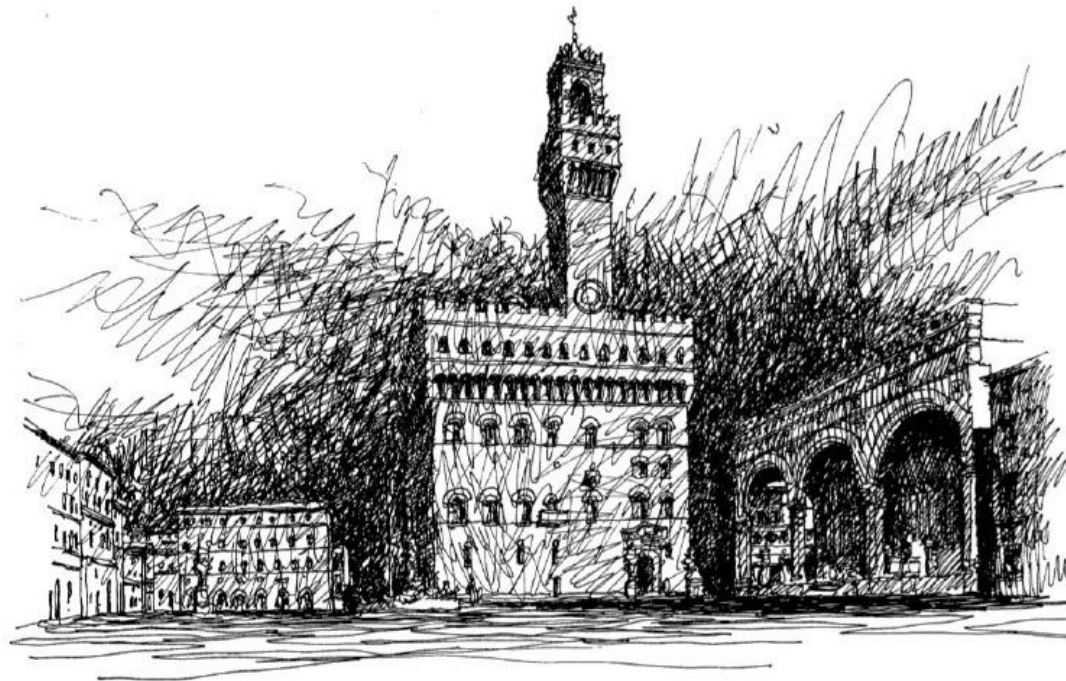


THE PIAZZAS OF FLORENCE

Place-Making Lessons for Urban Environments



EDWARD T. WHITE





THE PIAZZAS OF FLORENCE

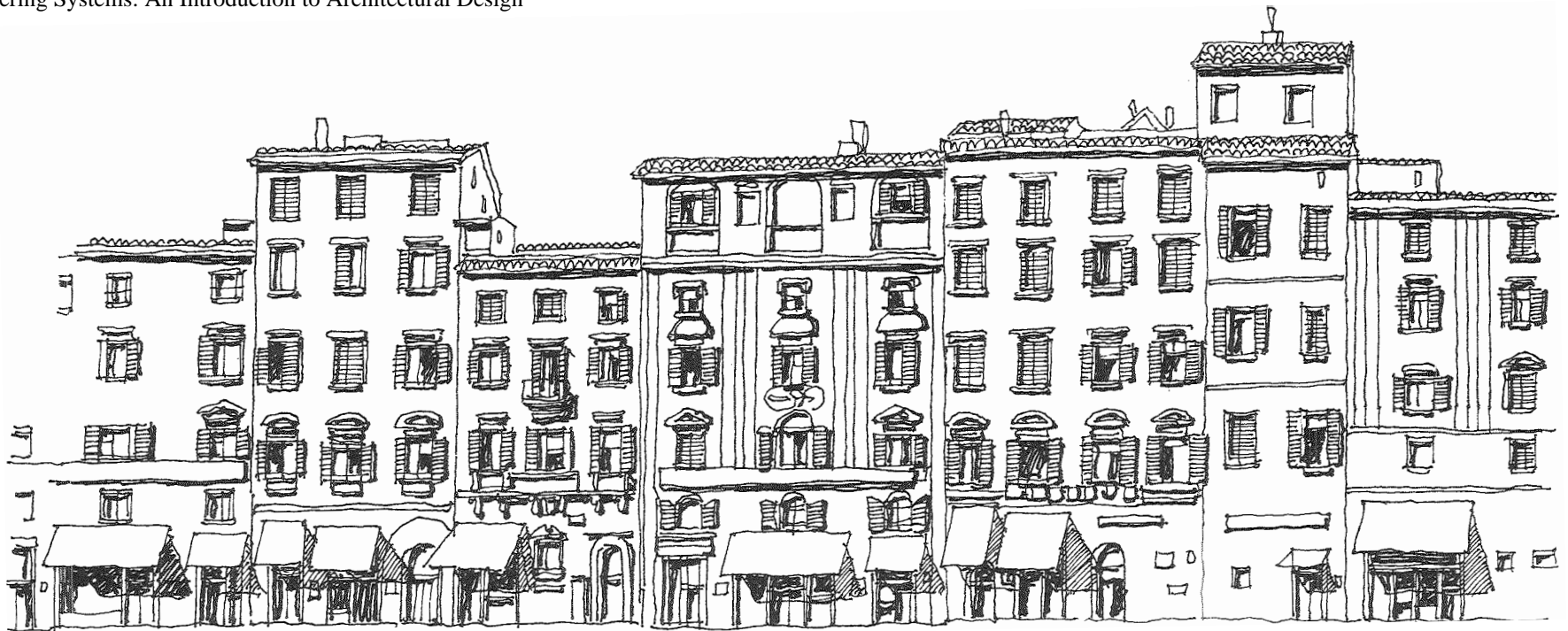
Place-Making Lessons for Urban Environments

EDWARD T. WHITE



The Edward T. White Library, available from ArchiBasics Press, includes these publications:

- Building Meaning Analysis: Diagramming Information for Architectural Design
- Concept Sourcebook: A Vocabulary of Architectural Forms
- Design Analytics: Notes on Facility Programming and Building Evaluation
- Design Briefing in England: Interviews with Architects
- Facility Programming in the United States: Interviews with Architects
- Images of Italy
- Ordering Systems: An Introduction to Architectural Design
- The Piazzas of Florence: Place-Making Lessons for Urban Environments
- Path • Portal • Place: Appreciating Public Space in Urban Environments
- Presentation Strategies in Architecture
- Site Analysis: Diagramming Information for Architectural Design
- Space Adjacency Analysis: Diagramming Information for Architectural Design
- Travel Drawing: Engaging the Spirit of Place



The Piazzas of Florence

Copyright © 2006 by Edward T. White. All rights reserved.

Reformatted and updated edition published by ArchiBasics Press 2024. <https://ArchiBasics.com>

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, except as permitted by the United States Copyright Act, without the prior written permission of the publisher. Since 2013, ArchiBasics Press has been the only authorized source for the work of Edward T. White and Architectural Media, Ltd.

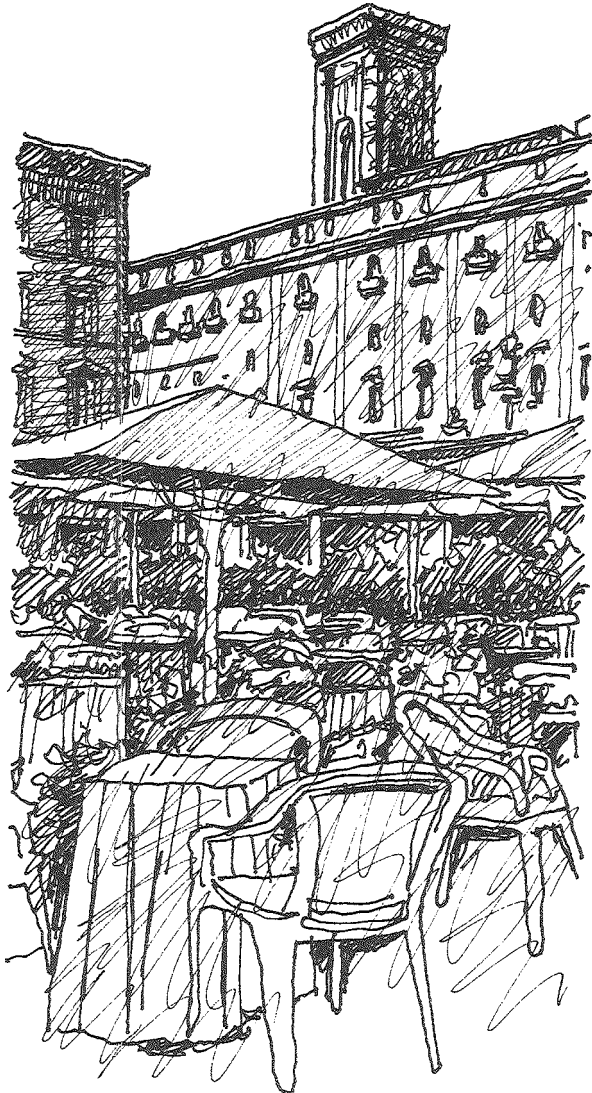
This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information regarding the subject matter covered. Neither the author nor the publisher makes any representations or warranties regarding the information provided and specifically disclaim any implied warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose. No warranty may be created or extended by sales representatives or written sales materials. Readers should seek professional advice before taking any actions related to information in this book.

CONTENTS

Author's Preface: Reminiscence And Reflection v

Publisher's Preface xi

INTRODUCTION xv



FABRIC AND STRUCTURE 1

PIAZZA DELLA SIGNORIA 9

LOCATION 10

CONNECTIONS 10

CONTAINER 11

Space 11

Architecture 15

Palazzo Vecchio 15

Loggia dei Lanzi 18

Fabric buildings 20

Portals 22

Ground plane 23

Scenery 24

Sculpture 24

Restaurants 25

People 25

Secondary scenery 25

ACTIVITY 25

Animation 25

Ownership 26

Demographics 26

Habitability 26

Activity zones 27

Entry experience 29

Via dei Calzaiuoli 29

Via Vacchereccia 32

Piazzale degli Uffizi 35

Via dei Gondi 43

Via dei Magazzini 49

Via dei Cerchi 52

Via Calimaruza 56

Chiasso dei Baroncelli 58

Via della Ninna 61

AMBIENCE 64

Atmosphere 64

Mood setters 64

Sensation 65

Emotion 67

Interior context 68

Exterior context 68

PIAZZA DELLA SANTISSIMA

ANNUNZIATA 71

LOCATION 72

CONNECTIONS 72

CONTAINER 73

Space 73

Architecture 76

Santissima Annunziata 77

Ospedale degli Innocenti 80

Confraternita dei Serviti 84

Palazzi 85

Portals 88

Ground plane 89

Scenery 100

Sculpture 90

People 92

Vehicles 92

ACTIVITY 93

Animation 93

Ownership 94

Demographics 94

Habitability 94

Activity zones 95

Entry experience 96

Via dei Servi 96

Via Cesare Battisti 99

Via Gino Capponi 102

Via della Colonna 104

Via dei Fibbiai 106

AMBIENCE 109

Atmosphere 109

Mood setters 110

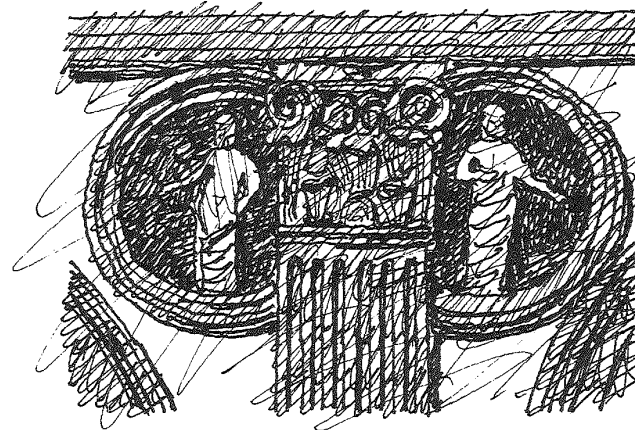
Sensation 111

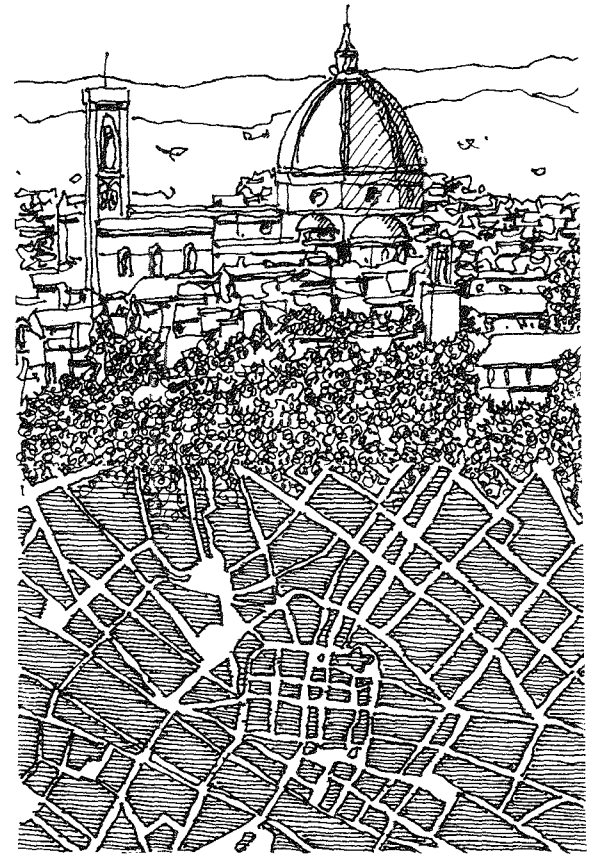
Emotion 111

Interior context 113

Exterior context 114

PIAZZA SANTO SPIRITO	115	PIAZZA DEL DUOMO	155	RECOMMENDED READING	270
LOCATION	116	LOCATION	156		
CONNECTIONS	117	CONNECTIONS	157		
CONTAINER	117	CONTAINER	158		
Space	117	ACTIVITY	166		
Architecture	121	AMBIENCE	170		
Santo Spirito	121	PIAZZA SAN LORENZO	173		
Fabric buildings	126	LOCATION	174		
Portals	127	CONNECTIONS	174		
Ground plane	130	CONTAINER	175		
Scenery	131	ACTIVITY	183		
Garden	131	AMBIENCE	192		
Restaurants	131				
People	131	PIAZZA SANTA CROCE	195		
Cars	132	LOCATION	196		
ACTIVITY	132	CONNECTIONS	196		
Animation	132	CONTAINER	197		
Ownership	132	ACTIVITY	205		
Demographics	132	AMBIENCE	211		
Habitability	132				
Activity zones	134	PIAZZA SANTA MARIA			
Entry experience	135	NOVELLA	215		
Via dei Michelozzi	135				
Via Mazzetta	139	PIAZZA DELLA REPUBBLICA	231		
Via del Presto di San					
Martino	144	PONTE VECCHIO	245		
Via delle Caldaie	147				
AMBIENCE	148				
Atmosphere	148				
Mood setters	149				
Sensation	150				
Emotion	151				
Interior context	152				
Exterior Context	162				





Author's Preface: Reminiscence And Reflection

I'm in love with Florence. My wife Barbara and I lived in this extraordinary place for a year on a teaching assignment with Florida State University's Study Abroad Program.

One of my courses, *Urban Fabric of Florence*, had never been taught before and required extensive preparation. My class covered Florence's history and the evolution of its urban form. Its architecture and its art. Its life, heroes, practices, and rituals. And its public spaces.

It's not surprising to fall in love with a place when we read numerous books about it. Teach courses about it. Tour students on foot every day around a marvelous city and its places to explain and extol its remarkable buildings and piazzas. Where we arrive already infused with an intense admiration for the place. And when we find it even more powerful in its presence and presentation than we were ready for. Our respect moves to reverence and to affection when we live there long enough to transform from tourist to traveler to pilgrim to citizen. Engage the city and its people each day without ever driving a car. Feel the scale and texture of its streets on foot. Become thoroughly, intimately immersed in the place's seasonal, weekly, daily rhythms. When the city's geographic setting, genealogy, urban form, and landmark buildings cohere as an elegant, honest printout of its natural and human processes.

Our apartment was in the city's historic core area at Piazza Santa Croce. We walked everywhere. Groceries, housewares, hardware. Cafes, restaurants, gelato. Museums, galleries, bookstores, theaters, churches, clothing stores. River, piazzas, historic sites. When we walk to places we feel the distances in our bodies. In our muscles and bones and lungs. Exertion, investment. Surfaces, sensations. Engage the city between here and there walking open and unencumbered by insulating, isolating vehicular enclosure. We learn orienting, wayfinding clues that enable life to get done. Quirky little cues, hints, signs that tell us where we are. When to turn. Assure us we're on course and not lost. Mark progress and inform us how much of our journey is behind and before us. Our own personal, secret landmarks that form our own personal, secret cognitive map for getting around.

In and around Florence's historic center area, the town is comfortably walkable. Compact, dense. Pathways are often narrow, twisting, medieval. At odd angles with odd intersections. Sized for foot traffic, horses, carts. Not cars, buses, trucks. In Florence, pedestrians rule and automobiles are inconvenienced interlopers. Many streets and precincts are foot traffic only. Blocks are short. Dense along sidewalk facades with varied, small retail changing wares and owners every 20 feet.

Storefront facade scale, frequency, and variegation enhance passage experience along pathways. Offering ever-changing, entertaining options, and enticing prospects. Shortening perceived walking time and distance. Filling up attention with happy distraction. Shops and cafes are integral to vibrant street life. Interior ornaments with enticing window invitations strung along busy, bustling, exterior path space.

Moving on foot in the city's veins with other pedestrians engenders strong feelings of belonging. Of membership in this society of lucky souls in Florence, in this street, at this moment. Kinship with Florentines. Elevated by our immersion in their town's lusty urban life and lofty history. Walking to and shopping at tiny, owner-operated stores fosters relationships with shop owners that grow from acquaintance to friendship to family. Each small store sells one thing. Bread, milk, meat. Vegetables, fruit, cheese. Wine, flowers, books. Medicine, film, shoes. Many shops are no larger than a generous closet. When we enter one of these intimate domains, we have penetrated its owner's personal space. Engagement, encounter are inevitable. No hiding here in the anonymity of a large department store. Repeated engagements mature cool business relationships to warm heart connections. Only a few repeat visits to the same small ristorante, trattoria, cafe brings smiles of recognition from the owner-chef and his wife-hostess.

An extra-hearty *buon giorno*. Handshake. Cheek kisses. Special table. Special meal. Invitation to visit their home. When we're here often, we become family to these dear, warm people. When it was time for us to leave Florence and return home to Florida, we went to each of these cherished friends to say goodbye. Tears were shed. Hugs held long and tight. Today, many years later, we still exchange letters and Christmas cards with many of these special spirits.

To leisurely stroll or purposefully stride along Florence's streets is to move in, through, past legend and myth. Almost every street inside the Viale is the site of a story, hero, villain. An important happening, process. A famous palazzo, alleyway. The town is not a neutral container for urban life. It is charged, saturated with the significance of fabulous memories, heroic memoirs kept shiny and vivid by a proud city population. This magnetic field of historical meaning radically realigns the iron filings of our body, our character, our attitude, our sense of self. We feel reconfigured. Made new, more alive by our dwelling in these antique places infused with great ancestry.

Narrow pathways through five-story, stone and stucco city solidity contrast dramatically with the piazzas' open areas. Wonderfully startling surprise of tight, shady canyons with narrow sky slivers above arriving at sunny urban rooms with expansive spaces and sweeping sky ceilings. Relief of our release from closely managed path movement options to wide open piazza possibilities.

In many Florence secondary streets there is a distinctly Italian blend of traffic types. Pedestrians, dogs, strollers mingle with bicycles, cars, taxis, scooters in an uneasy but workable, charming marriage. A truce between normally hard, fast, mechanical metal on wheels and slow, soft people on foot. Narrow sidewalks on many of these streets can't comfortably carry the pedestrian population so people stroll out in the narrow street space. Homogenizing an anarchy of movement into a single, strange stream and street etiquette. Each circulating entity tries its best to accommodate the others in a linear dance of unlikely, temporary neighbors. People pile out of the street onto sidewalks, then stop and turn to face cars heard approaching from behind. Rhythmic slap and patter of rubber wheels rolling on stone pavement or engine rumble reverberating down the street's tall, tight stucco canyon signal street crowds of car's approach. Quieter cars slowly ease up behind unwary pedestrians until someone in the crowd notices the vehicle creeping behind and signals a slide to the left or right to let the car through. Vespas have their own exuberant, obnoxious protocols. Noisy scooters, aptly named "wasps," rev their loud, buzzing motors as soon as they turn onto a street. Warning all on foot before them to part, move aside so they can gleefully, zippingly lean and swerve through street crowds at impatient, maiming speeds.

This is in rude contrast to the slow, gentle bicycles that chime their shy little handlebar bells to patiently, politely alert us that they are approaching from behind, remind us to pay attention, and to kindly ask permission to pass.

This awkward, abnormal mix of movement forms is normally considered dangerous, inelegant in planning parlance. Something to be avoided. Unmistakable evidence of design error or inattention. Grounds for embarrassment, apology, lawsuit. Perhaps this is true for ordinary towns. But in this extraordinary place, intertwined street life is an aspect of Florence's delightful, surprising, messy, memory-creating, citizen-shaping experience of moving through, living in, being with. Circulation modes typically regarded as toxic oppositions are thrown together by inevitable contingencies of medieval environmental configurations. Compelled to intimately, mindfully engage and negotiate and accommodate one another. Pulled into and made part of each other's urban existence.

Dogs on leashes join and participate in Florence street life as odd, sad, reassuring ornaments. Encountering animals, domesticated or otherwise, in a paved-over city is always a surprise. Their presence is unnatural, unfair and yet in some zoo-like way

positive, affirming to pedestrians. These poor little creatures, usually small-breed, loaf-sized terriers that fit in small apartments, seldom feel grass or ground under their paws; or run full speed; or fight, frolic, flirt with their kind; or potty in private. Surely they have bad dreams, suffer canine-type neuroses, develop fuzzy facial twitches. Unlike sparrows and pigeons and stray cats, dogs are less adaptable, less opportunistic in assimilating, appropriating, adapting to urban environments. From a people perspective, pets on urban pavement are a pleasant distraction. An instant of respite from the mild chronic tension of street guardedness, alertness, readiness. Our street face softens for a moment to a relaxed smile. We feel a vague validation of our value as a living being. A confirmation of correctness of being here, now. Like a canary in a coal mine, reassurance of the city's habitability. Dogs also add instructional interest to the streetscape. At the leash's other end we glimpse a bona fide Florentine. An authentic citizen in a city packed with pretenders.

Like all of Italy's countryside, coasts, mountains, lakes, towns, cities, Florence is an intensely sensual place. All the ways we take our world into ourselves are delightfully busy fielding, tasting, ingesting, metabolizing, making sense of this delectable, complex, dense medieval setting.

A centuries-old Florence predilection for things elegant, understated, well-made, confidently simple shapes Tuscan cuisine. Delicious, top-quality ingredients artfully assembled into tastefully presented, uncomplicated dishes. Florence's simple, coarse-textured, unsalted bread is indicative of the town's preference for things quiet, deferring, subtle. Firenze means Tuscany and Tuscany means Chianti and a blessed wine culture. Every tiny cafe and street counter serves coffee with character. Luxuriously long, daunting lists of gelato types tempt us toward gluttony in surprising, intense, heavenly flavors. Served in small cups in any odd, idiosyncratic combination of flavors we choose. Lipped off minuscule plastic spoons that focus our attention on each exquisite scoop and sip. Soft, cool, creamy, sensory concentration on the tongue.

Vision, hearing, touch, and smell join taste in feasting on Florence cuisines. To our eye, the town is a marvelous menagerie of shades and shadows. Sweeping Arno vistas and channeled, chiseled views down narrow, curving streets. Building and greenery and water and sky. Tans, umbers, creams, golds. Subtle shades of white and gray. Stucco, stone, red tile, green and gray and brown window shutters. Elegant store window displays. Sidewalk artists. People and pets. And for dessert, the delicious work of Michelangelo, Leonardo, Donatello, Botticelli, Brunelleschi, Ghiberti, Alberti, Arnolfo.

To the ear, Florence is traffic noise and church bells. Loud noontime tour group chatter and quiet conversations on slow, cool, evening strolls. Hum of large open piazzas and grinding reverberation of Vespas in tight, hard street space. Musical voices of vendors and waiters and shy solicitations of sidewalk portrait artists. Clank of cafe plates and silverware. Clip clop of dashing, caped police on horseback. Cold fronts whistling through Piazza del Duomo. Sad, sobering, staccato alarms of police cars and ambulances. Cloisters' contemplative silence. The loudest noise is at stop lights on major arterials. A motley mixture of vehicles rev-up and roar away at peak decibels when the light turns green. This assault on our embattled senses is amplified, prolonged by the sounds' reflection off hard streets and buildings.

Tactile sense is treated to a full menu of texture and temperature gradations. Temperate river breeze and biting winter wind. Hot coffee and cool gelato. Porcellino's smooth brass nose at Mercato Nuovo. Rough stone handrails. Doorknobs, leather crafts, tiny textures of fine gold jewelry. Wavy stone pavement and worn church steps underfoot. Luxurious relief of cafe chair or church pew after exhausting hours on tired feet.

Unlike our other senses, olfactory sensation is mostly inadvertent, accidental, non-intentional. Scents simply come to us and present themselves unbidden. We take them in unreflectively, full strength, as part of our breathing. Olfactory experience in unedited, pot luck, point blank. Pleasant and not so pleasant. Fresh-baked bread, coffee, cafe food. Thick musty scent of old stone, old space, old stories. First splatter of rain on dusty pavement. Green freshness in Boboli Gardens. Polished leather, antique wood stain, candle wax, pungent soaps, subtle perfumes, new clothes, fresh ripe fruit. Oil paint and turpentine in artists' shops. Smog, street fumes, cigarette smoke, horse manure waft and weave in sense memory with roasting Christmas chestnuts, church incense, and burning wood in February fireplaces.

Florence is a living being. An organism with health markers, vital signs. Temperature, blood pressure, pulse rate. Intelligence, inclinations. Ingestion, digestion, metabolism. Thoughts, fears, desires, dreams. Moods and facial expressions and body language. The town moves, makes things, gets things done, talks, asks questions. Feels pain, joy. Rejoices in wins, health, prosperity. Endures loss, illness, misfortune. It forgives, forgets, heals, remembers. The city's biorhythms are indicative of aliveness. Pace, population, character range radically over yearly, weekly, daily intervals. June and July are frenetic, frustrating, crowded. Overrun with swarms of travelers.

Irreverent with mindless visitations, over-ambitious agendas, opportunistic entrepreneurship, ravenous consumerism. August is hot, humid, buggy, lethargic, less energized due to heat, and stores closed for vacation. November, the city's rainy month, is gray, somber, moody, muted, merged. Wrapped in intimacy, density of wetness, umbrellas, heavy coats, hats, low sky ceiling, less light. December is serene, quiet, contemplative. Especially at night with elegant lights strung over shiny, raincoated streets. Reflected, doubled, dancing deformed on cold, wet, uneven, stone pavement. Weekdays are buzzing, busy with the business of business. Sundays slow, leisurely. Car traffic less dense, less urgent, a little more polite. Holy, happy sounds of church bells ricochet sacred solicitations down every street. Sunday is strolling day for Florentines. Old men, dressed up for church, walk slowly with their hands folded behind them. Daughters amble arm in arm with their mothers. Sharing a secret. Laughing shyly together. Sons saunter arm in arm with their fathers, lost in conversation, unabashed by their public display of intimacy and affection. Walking is relaxed, easy. Not pressed or purposeful. A pleasurable mosey for its own joy-filled sake. Early morning is full of hope, prospect, expectation. Energized with enthusiasm for the day ahead. Street sweepers cleaning piazzas. Vendors setting up souvenir stands. Sidewalk artists putting out their work.

Brisk striding to jobs. Delivery trucks making stops before traffic congestion complicates their rounds. A quick coffee and pastry and gossip and off to work. Streets beginning to fill with pressured, purposeful, vehicular life. City's old surfaces are magically made new, aglow, reborn in the early, gentle, golden light. In less touristy parts of town, mid-afternoon is siesta. A wonderful, civilized Mediterranean custom of daytime rest and renewal. Stores are closed from two to four. Errand lists laid down. Life pace slowed, pulled back, drawn in. Preparing, recharging for Latin evening's carefree happenings after a day filled with meeting obligations. Evening finds Florence more easy-going. Less striving, less crowded, less defined and defiled by tourism. Vehicles are less prevalent, less speedy, less menacing. Streets and piazzas are quieter, slower-paced. Cars' shiny, reflecting forms flash and dance as they cruise through nighttime storefront window light. Their headlights and tail lights are kinetic ornaments in dimly lit streets. Cafes, restaurants, trattorias fill up early with tourists. Then later from ten to one with natives. At night, Florence's facades don't work as hard. Don't look as worn and old. Their flaws, bruises, blemishes are dissolved into the forgiving, healing, homogenizing dimness of moonlight, window glow, and street lamps.



Otrarno Park 10/13/96

Publisher's Preface

The Edward T. White Library

What? Prof. White is arguably the most methodical, eloquent, and graphically inventive explainer of design in general, of effective design technique, and of designing for behavioral-contextual functionality. His books explore what makes a particular design meaningful, how the best designs manage to achieve both order and innovation, how the subconscious can process and then retrieve knowledge through such manual techniques as observation and sketching, how project goals can be established before designing, how built designs can be evaluated once occupied, and how that's all done in practice.

Why? There's an old joke that engineers learn more and more about less and less until they know everything about nothing and that architects learn less and less about more and more until they know nothing about everything. Design is an art but also a science. The best designers are specialists who gather information on all the issues that inform a good project but are also generalists who can step back and connect the dots. This is exceedingly difficult to do well. Effective designs are said to be durable, beautiful, and functional. Information is readily available on designing for durability and beauty but there's very little on how to achieve functionality. Prof. White's books help fill that void.

Why Now? As these books were first written years ago, readers may wonder if they are still relevant. The truth is that there's still nothing better or even close. Fact-based decisions are increasingly necessary – even in the design professions, which skew so heavily toward art. Of course, sometimes without grounding decisions in investigation, exploration, and collaboration, projects can still succeed. But the contemporary world of slim margins and extreme consequences is far better suited to projects based on the rigor Prof. White advances. The original texts have been minimally edited to eliminate obsolete references. Any remaining won't reduce the power of the message.

The Piazzas of Florence

Place-Making Lessons for Urban Environments

With the preceding explanation of what interests me so much about the books in this “library” in general, note that this book is a bit of an exception to the rule. In contemporary parlance, one might say it is a prequel, even though it was not written first or even fifth.

The Piazzas of Florence explains *why*. Why do years of effort, rooted in the conscious and subconscious understandings of really good architectural and urban designers and their clients/patrons and all of the people who add to the culture of a place, eventually produce almost impossibly special cities, towns, neighborhoods, and parks, that make residents feel endlessly grateful and make visitors want to go back again and again, at least in their memories if not physically?

As Tim White admits in the first sentence, this is a love story to a city – its architecture, urban design, ambiance, history, personality, energy, and more. Read it and you will understand what it feels like to be inspired by such a place. You may need to go there yourself someday to understand that such inspiration is not only possible but almost inevitable.

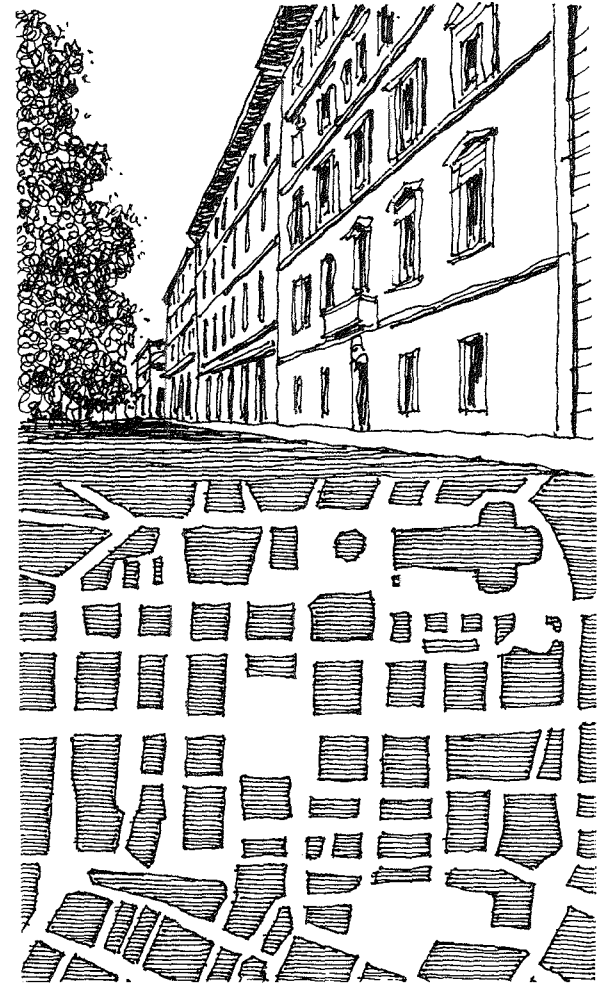
With Prof. White's tales of Florence in your head, you will likely understand what drove him to write all the other books in this collection. He so clearly wants the design of more places to make the people using them feel like he does in Florence. And they can be designed that way, if based on the design elements that make places great, as one finds in Florence.

Understanding these elements is what his other books offer – detailed explanations of how to let site and program and context in its broadest sense inform decisions related to design and community. This book is a great place to either start exploring or to tie it all together. Enjoy.

Barry D. Yatt, FAIA Emeritus

Founder, ArchiBasics Press

Professor Emeritus, School of Architecture and Planning, The Catholic University of America



INTRODUCTION

The Piazzas of Florence completes a trilogy of publications inspired by our year in Italy.

First was **Images of Italy**, a book of travel sketches and poems. Next was **Path-Portal-Place**, a work about understanding and appreciating public space in urban environments. **The Piazzas of Florence** describes particular places in this particular city.

Nine piazzas are selected here for analysis. Chosen from Florence's many wonderful public urban spaces. These nine are chosen for their variety of configurations, contained activities, and moods. For their instructive value and explanatory power. For their mix of successes and shortcomings. Selected because they are some of the town's largest, most important, most intensely used exterior public places. And because they are all especially dear to Barbara and me.

Each piazza is described in terms of the taxonomy developed in **Path-Portal-Place**. Types of design lessons are implied for each taxonomy term. The taxonomy's three major descriptive categories are *container*, *activity*, and *ambience*.

Container is the piazzas' spatial/physical fabric. Vessel. Setting for activity. Basis, together with activity and contextual conditions, for ambience.

Activity is what's happening. Where, when, and by whom. Action, occasion, event. Human processes that use, dwell, inhabit. Animate, energize. Set tone, pulse, temperature.

Ambience is place feel, theme, chemistry. Ambience is not engaged cerebrally, analytically but apprehended, ingested, metabolized viscerally, sensually, intuitively, instinctually. Not processed, ordered, tidied up but lived point blank, in the messy swirl of here and now.

Book accounts and language always fall short of faithfully portraying life's layering, depth, richness, complexity, interaction, juxtaposition, simultaneity. Taxonomies, words, and language are artificial constructs imposed on life's whole, homogeneous, seamless fabric in order to focus on particular aspects. To make sense of them for ourselves and communicate them to others. The taxonomy employed to describe Florence's piazzas will necessarily concentrate on certain place attributes and leave others unaddressed.

Container is composed of space, architecture, and scenery. Space is spatial volume, shape, definition, containment, scale, boundary, geometric regulating patterns. Architecture is surface and materiality, particular buildings, fabric facades, portals, ground plane. Scenery is any non-architectural element such as outdoor cafe tables, chairs, and umbrellas; fountains; sculpture; landscaping; flags and banners; benches; lamp posts; bollards; outdoor merchandise display. Scenery also includes people, parked cars, horse carriages, sidewalk portrait artists, vendor carts, vehicular traffic, and taxi stands.

Activity consists of animation, ownership, demographics, habitability, activity zones, and entry experience. Animation is level of liveliness, popularity, energy level, use intensity. Ownership addresses relative predominance of pedestrian or vehicular activity. Demographics describes general attributes of the people there. Habitability is level of accommodation, comfort, choice. Activity zones observe what happens and where it occurs. Entry experience relates what its like to approach and enter from connecting streets.

Ambience consists of atmosphere, mood setters, sensation, emotion, interior context, exterior context. Atmosphere is feeling tone, mood, significance. Mood setters identify piazza elements that primarily establish place ambience. Sensation describes ways our senses are engaged. Emotion speaks of feelings engendered. Interior context reminds us that what we bring to the piazza affects the nature and quality of our encounter with it. Exterior context mentions the impacts on ambience of timing, weather, politics, economics, holidays, and special events.

Location and *connections* join container, activity, and ambience as design-lesson categories. Location is where a piazza is situated in Florence. Connections describe linkages between the piazza and other significant sites.

Nine piazzas are presented in three sets of three. The first three employ the full analytical taxonomy with headings and sub-headings punctuating the text. The next three are presented with major taxonomy headings but no sub-headings. The last three drop all headings and treat the piazzas with continuous, untitled, unpunctuated narrative. This gradation of heading treatments explores the relative explanatory power of fine-grained, multi-category analysis versus compressed, unarticulated textual continuity. Elaboration to abbreviation. Segmentation to homogenization. Expansion to condensation. Prosaic to poetic.

Application of the same analytical taxonomy to all nine piazzas strives toward consistency of treatments, comparability of descriptions, and congruity of design lesson types across piazzas.

Piazza descriptions are one person's experience in Florence during a year's residence there in the late 1990s. The book is intensely personal. Idiosyncratic. More diary than dissertation. More self-disclosing poetry than professional, technical pose. No claims are made regarding research rigor, consensus of opinion, corroboration of findings, comparison with earlier works, or universal applicability of inferred design lessons.

The piazzas are not treated historically but described as they are today. As contemporary, living, architectural configurations. As public spaces in a present day urban environment that may offer us design wisdom that might be applicable to today's project challenges. It is assumed that these places will be preserved in the future largely as they are today, given the power of their significance and Florence's fierce, protective reverence for its history, city fabric, and landmarks.

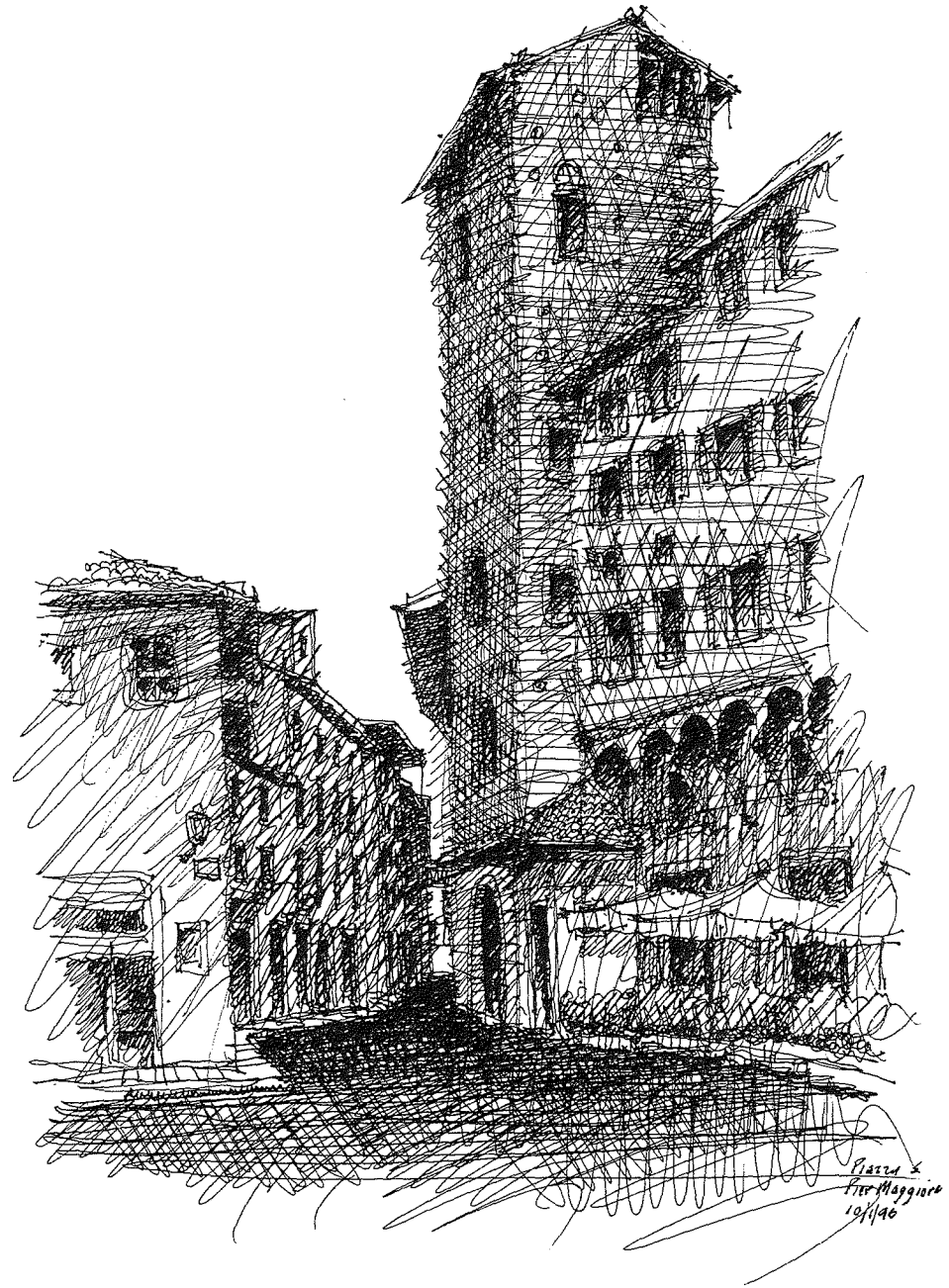
The book's thesis and hope is that place-making lessons useful today for our planning and building projects can be harvested from environments built in different times and formed in response to shaping forces different from our own. Distillation of contemporary design principles from a medieval town requires effort, investment. Exertion, imagination, vision. Lessons must be sought, teased out, inferred, implied, induced. Interpolated, extrapolated. Fleshed out. Rendered relevant by intention to make them so. The book's content and presentation are more experiential than scholarly, but its pages are nested in traditions of history and the value of the past as a well of wisdom.

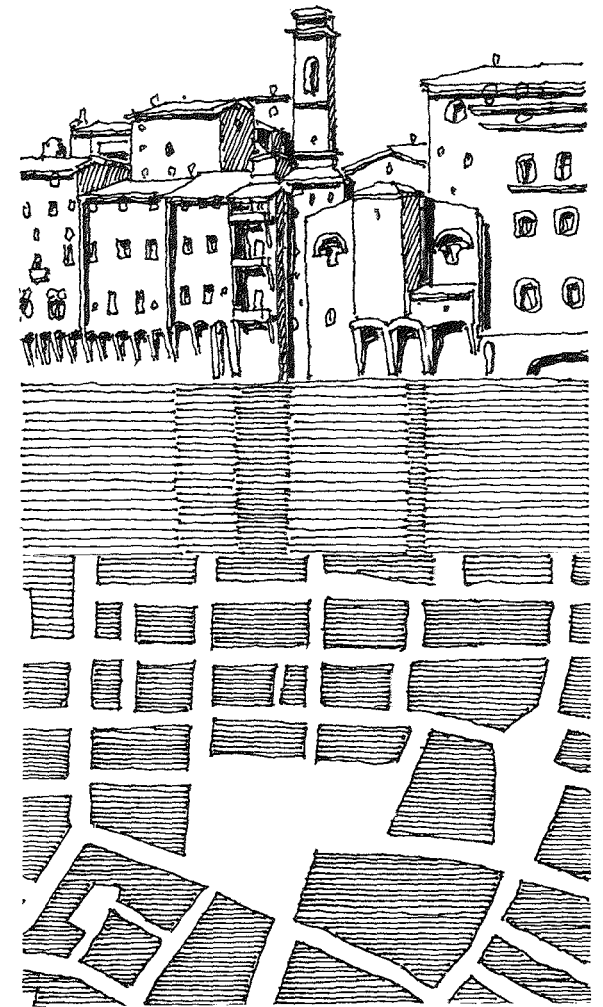
This book may be used in several ways. As source for planning principles. Preparatory reading for a trip to Florence. Guide while exploring and experiencing this extraordinary city. Remembrance of time spent in Italy. Perhaps an anecdotal historical description for archeologists in a distant future. For me, this book is the fulfillment of a private promise.

Completion and closure and celebration. Marking, with gratitude and joyful reverie, a profound personal passage. A touching of town and time and dear memories in a final farewell with fine-grained intimacy and close-fitting engagement of recollection, imagination, writing, sketching. Looking again at slides, re-reading on-site notes, revisiting books and references. Recounting experiences in Florence with Barbara.

Basing this book on recollections of piazza experiences years after our stay in Florence may seem ill-advised. Dangerous. Irresponsible. Too much forgotten. Memories tangled, merged, warped, stretched. Distorted from fact to fiction by time and distance.

Accuracies of immediate, current, direct, present, on-site observations lost to inaccuracies of second best, after-the-fact remembrances and reconstructions. For this author, the opposite is true. Time and distance have produced perspective. A steady, studious, perspective view from above. Remove and reminiscence has purified, clarified, congealed, crystallized, focused reflection. Distilled and densified piazza images and the principles they proffer. Distractions, confusions, interruptions, irrelevancies of direct, present experience have dissolved with the years, leaving unadulterated, pristine residues of what is memorable, vivid, remarkable, and instructive about these dear places. Summaries and subtleties. Patterns and pieces. Aggregates and anomalies. This book could not have been written during our stay in Florence. Time was needed for insignificance to evaporate, significance to surface, insight to ripen. For fact to evolve to interpretation, to transform to useful fiction. For life-affirming myth and story to emerge from raw experience and sense data.





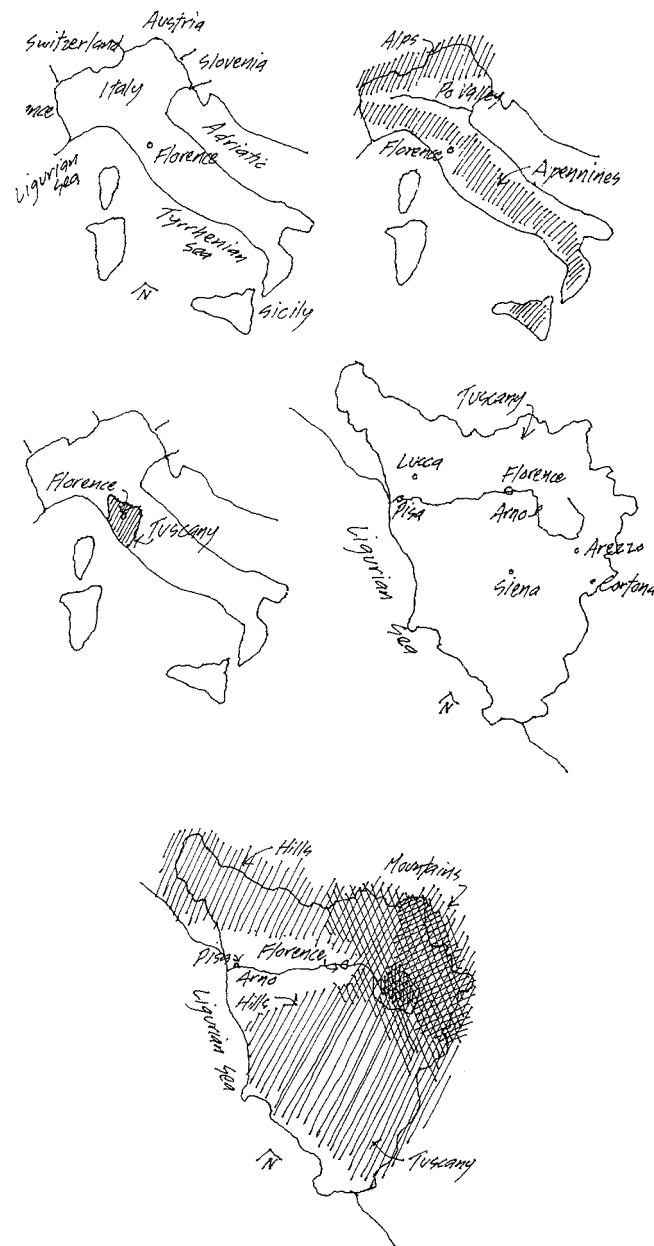
FABRIC AND STRUCTURE

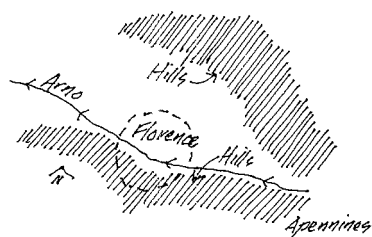
The bulk of this book is devoted to describing specific Florence piazzas. Before delving into particular places, however, let us first address the city as a whole configuration, an overall proposition. Its geographic setting, regulating geometries, urban form, general character, remarkable features. Establish a context for the piazzas. A sense of the plural, a feel for the aggregate before turning to the singular.

Florence's archeology shades into anthropology, into political, social, economic, and military history through multiple layers of deep, dense genealogy. Etruscan, Roman, Early Christian, Medieval, Renaissance. Baroque, Enlightenment, Romantic, Industrial, Contemporary. Much of the city's present fabric and configuration inside the Viale was built in Medieval and Renaissance times. Most major modifications to the Medieval city, the Viale, Piazzale Michelangelo, Ponte alle Grazie, Piazza della Repubblica, Duomo's face, and Santa Croce's face were completed in the late 1800s. Florence today is a contemporary culture housed in a medieval container. A marvelous misfit between thirteenth- and fourteenth-century tangled, angled mass and path and today's speedy, straight line, efficiency-oriented society. Much of the town's current character, feel, mood, and energy results from this strained marriage. From a hurry-up, mechanical, living organism inhabiting and grinding against an environment scaled and configured for foot traffic.

Florence is at the northern third point of Italy's long, northwest to southeast peninsula. In the heart of the country's narrow, mountainous land mass between the Adriatic Sea and Ligurian Sea. At the meeting of northern, western, eastern, and central Tuscany.

Like the city itself, Florence's geographical and geological contexts have pronounced personalities. They are rich with event and character. Surrounding landforms, groundscapes, foliage, drainage patterns are integral with the town's essence, its way of being. Florence sits in a bowl with an opening facing west. East are the Apennines and their foothills. Hills reach around the town's north and south sides, cradling Florence in a protective crotch. Land forms flatten as they move west toward Pisa and the coast. Geology creates the town's front and rear. Florence's back is east, toward the mountains. Front is west, toward flat terrain. This front-back disposition explains some of the city's early functional zoning and settlement patterns. Prison, prostitution, executions, and working-class housing were located on its east or back side. The town's front door and ceremonial entrance was on its west side, now embodied vestigially by the Vittorio Emanuele arch in Piazza della Repubblica.



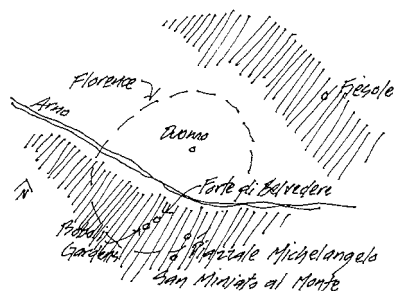
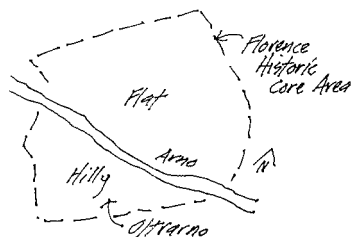


Foothills roll right up to the town's outer edges. Hem the city in. Provide wonderful perches for privileged Florence perspectives.

Elevated views of town tapestry, Duomo, and other prominent landmarks from Fiesole, Piazzale Michelangelo, San Miniato al Monte, Forte di Belvedere, and Boboli Gardens are all dramatic and memorable.

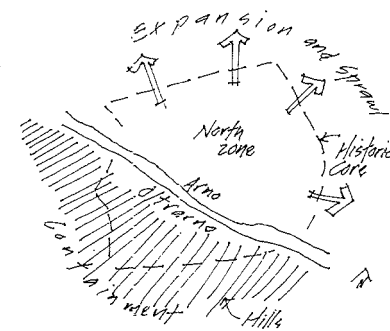


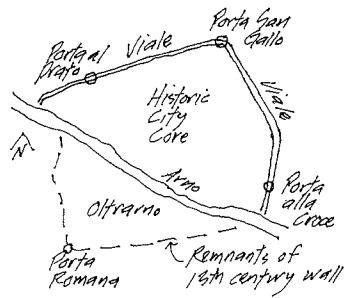
Mountains and foothills create river basins. The land conformation east of Florence forms the river Arno. After a long southerly-westerly loop through the Apennines, the Arno emerges from hilly topography and runs west through Florence toward Pisa. The river is fed, fattened as it goes by numerous small rivers and rivulets. The Arno divides and defines Florence. It is central to the city's history, identity, character. It separates the town into its larger, flatter, paved, northern component, and its smaller, hillier, greener, southern, Oltrarno component. The Arno creates a wide water piazza, a linear pause in Florence's dense, relentless, urban texture. And offers the luxury of long-view perspectives and spatial relief and release from the tight street containment in this short-vista town.



The river is deeply embedded in the city's biography. Employed for strange and unlikely use combinations over Florence's centuries of transformations, travails, triumphs. Source of power via water wheels for manufacturing along its banks. Trash dump and sewer. Irrigation and drinking water. Clothes washing. Waste disposal for butchers on Ponte Vecchio. Fishing. Mode of transportation. Setting for city celebrations. Key component in the town's defensive strategies. Cemetery to famous and infamous Florentines. Although Florence has not responded to Arno amenity through the siting and orientation of its major landmarks, the river has had a significant impact on the city's built form. Lungarni (riverbank roads), riverfront fabric facades and bridges, especially Ponte Vecchio, are major features of Florence's complexion and temperament. Some say the Arno's devastating floods are the river's protest, revenge for the town form's indifference and inattention to this unconsummated marriage of natural and urban.

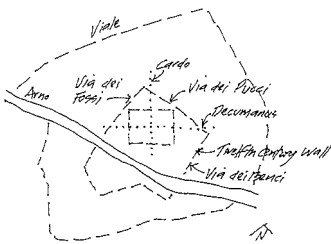
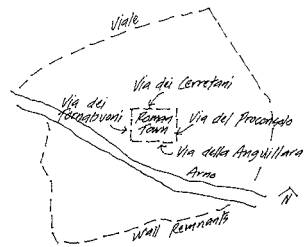
Florence's bulk of built form and center of historic gravity are north of the Arno. The town sprawls and spreads on this side of the river because there are no immediate natural barriers north, east, or west. The Oltrarno area south of the river is smaller, more sharply shaped due to encroachment of and containment by the south bank's hilly terrain.





The city's central section is within the Viale, a wide ring road wrapping around the town's historic core. The Viale marks the route of Florence's thirteenth century perimeter wall that was demolished in late 1800s to modernize Italy's new capital. The old wall's gates still stand, now isolated ornaments within this broad, busy, vehicular circuit.

The Viale's path outlines the position of Florence's last and longest perimeter wall. Subtle street patterns within the city core trace the routes of two other earlier city walls, creating an urban geometry of oddly concentric rings and forming three layers of roughly concentric urban fabric. The inner wall outline is almost rectangular and aligned with the cardinal points. An echo of Florence's founding Roman town perimeter. Via dei Cerretani, Via del Proconsole, Via dei Tornabuoni, and Via della Anguillara approximate the Roman wall's original position. The second wall out, built in the twelfth century, was rotated 45 degrees to enclose the town's development that stretched out along the extensions of the Roman cardo and decumanus. This wall hopped across the Arno to protect a river-hugging strip of city on the river's south bank. Via dei Fossi, Via dei Pucci, and Via dei Benci indicate this wall's former location. The last wall, traced by the Viale, continued the forty-five degree rotation to envelop the expanded town growth along the extensions of the original Roman cardo and decumanus.



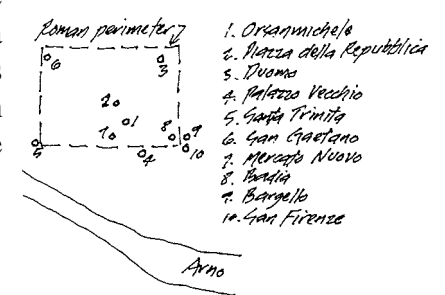
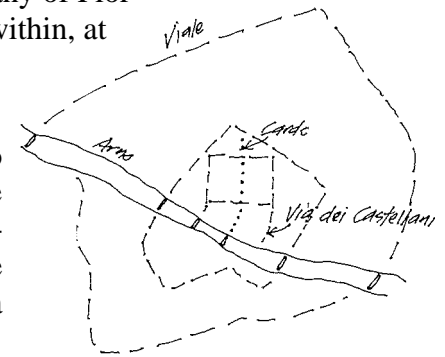
Remnants of this last wall together with Porta Romana still stand south of the river. Porta al Prato, Porta San Gallo, and Porta alla Croce are the remaining wall elements north of the Arno.

Traces of these three walls are useful bases for understanding, in simplified conceptual terms, Florence's evolutionary layers (Roman core with surrounding medieval rings), urban structure (nested, rotated, concentric regulating lines), landmark locations (along cardo/decumanus, at wall corners, and at extensions of walls), and street orientations (north-south inside Roman rectangle, and rotated 45 degrees in outer medieval rings).

History quickens as we move from the perimeter toward the town's center. Many of Florence's most significant sites are within, at edges of, or just outside the Roman wall's former path.

Southerly extensions of the cardo and of all three wall routes arrive at and cross the Arno with bridges. Via dei Castellani is the lone notable exception without a bridge.

Inside the Roman perimeter we find Orsanmichele, Piazza della Repubblica, and a host of palaces and churches. Along the Roman wall's path are positioned the Duomo/Baptistery/Campanile, Palazzo



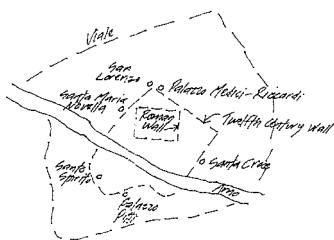
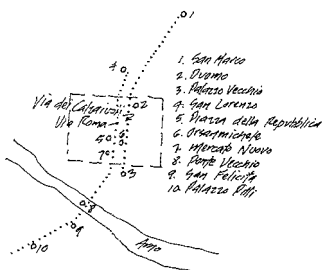
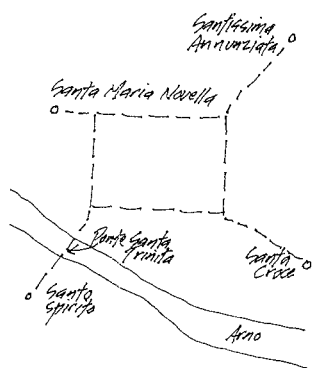
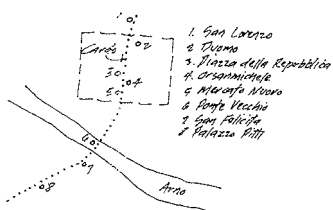
Vecchio/Uffizi/Loggia dei Lanzi/Piazza della Signoria, Santa Trinita, San Gaetano, Mercato Nuovo, Badia, Bargello, San Firenze, and more palaces and churches.

The north and south continuation of the cardo connects San Lorenzo, Duomo, Piazza della Repubblica, Orsanmichele, Mercato Nuovo, Ponte Vecchio, San Felicità, and Palazzo Pitti/Boboli Gardens.

Outward projections of the Roman wall's edges form a pinwheel with arms reaching out to other notable Florence sites. The northerly extension of the east wall leads to Santissima Annunziata. Easterly run of the south wall takes us to Santa Croce. Southerly stretch of the west wall moves across the Arno at Ponte Santa Trinita to Santo Spirito. And westerly procession of the north wall ends at Santa Maria Novella.

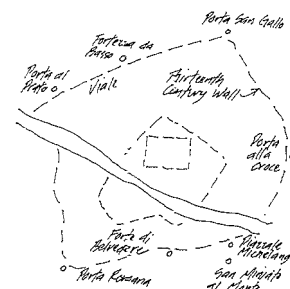
Many of Florence's heavyweight historic sites are strung along two north-south streets. Via dei Calzaiuoli and its extensions and Via Roma and its extensions (cardo) collect and connect an impressive group of famous Florence buildings and piazzas.

The twelfth-century wall's position is a referent for city sense-making and significant site positioning. Historic sites along the wall's route are less frequent and less weighty than places found at/in the Roman town grid. Important locations along the twelfth-century wall path are San Lorenzo, Palazzo Medici-Riccardi, Santa Croce, Santa Maria Novella, Santo Spirito, and Pitti Palace/Boboli Gardens.



The thirteenth-century wall, now the Viale (ring road), serve to locate Fortezza da Basso, Porta San Gallo, Porta alla Croce, Porta al Prato, Porta Romana, Forte di Belvedere, Piazzale Michelangelo, and San Miniato al Monte.

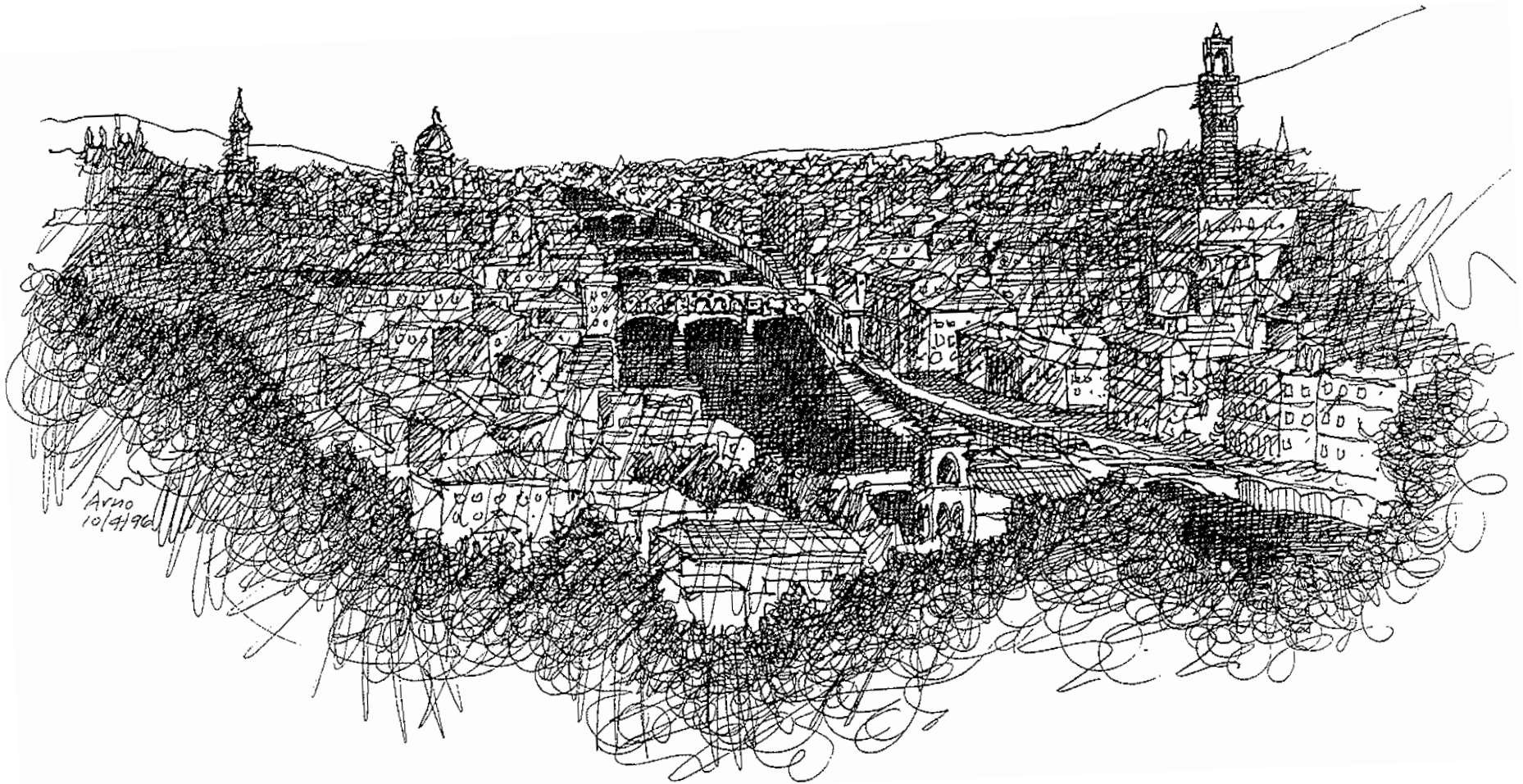
Cities have genders. Venice is a she. Florence is a he. Venice is feminine. Lacy, ornate, linear, delicate. Subtle, curvaceous, sensual. Elegant, colorful, complex, romantic, expressive. Water-based, soft, open, receptive. Affectionate, nurturing. Florence is masculine. Heavy, thick, opaque, muscular. Strong, spartan, spare. Brown, plain, undecorated. Understated, conservative, aloof, grounded.



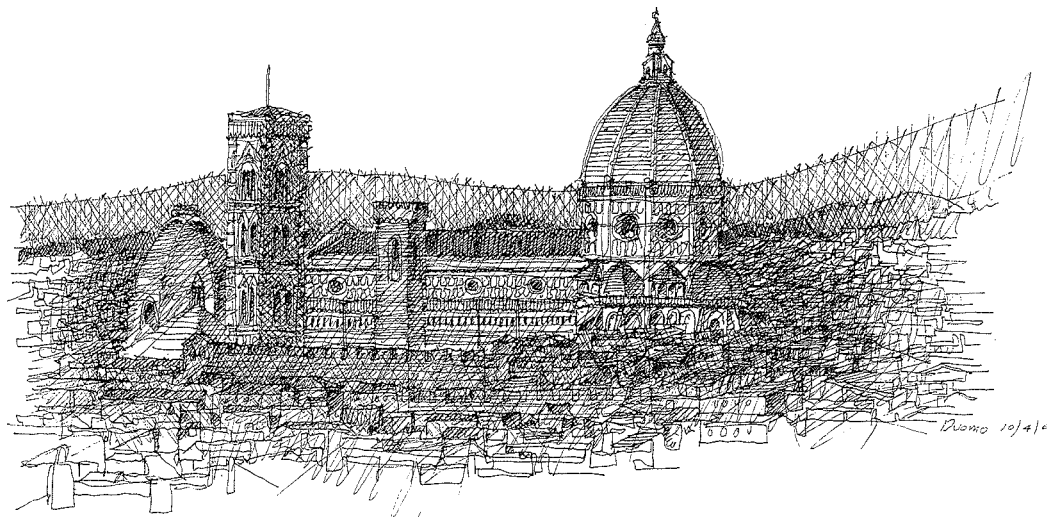
Except for its tall landmarks, Florence is five stories of dense urban texture formed into small, oddly shaped, solid city blocks by webworks of oddly-angled short streets. City block faces are mostly plain fabric facades toeing up to narrow sidewalks, creating tall, narrow, shady street sections. Fabric facades form city fabric. A background tapestry and texture for foreground landmark structures.

They are working-class walls for containing handsome piazzas and engaging pathways. Facades are typically 10 to 30 feet wide. Each is independent in its elevational composition, roof height, eave projection, coloration, and fenestration pattern. Four to six stories tall. Unadorned. Tan, gold, or cream colored stucco. Perforated by rows and stacks of vertically proportioned windows without screens protected by brown or green wood shutters. Shutters can be deployed in

several ways, creating a happy, hopping random texture on facade formations. Wall-window figure-ground is always more wall than window, expressing heft, solidity, weight. Fabric facades are topped by modest wood eave projections and a hint of red barrel roof tile at eave edges. Eaves overhead angle, jab and jog down streets following their changing facade angles, forming jagged, ragged, bright linear sky shapes above tight, tall, shady street spaces.



Landmark buildings are special architectural events in Florence's snug nesting of solid city blocks. Exceptions, culminations, ornamentations. Delightful, anomalous discontinuities embedded in plain, compact, urban fabric continuity. Landmarks are best understood and appreciated as a grouping, as an ensemble from elevated vantage points such as Piazzale Michelangelo, Fiesole, and the tops of Duomo's dome and Campanile. Landmarks are tall. Large in footprint. Special in massing, material, and elevation. Historically, architecturally important. High-profile focal points in the town's social, cultural, political life. The Duomo is by far Florence's most important and imposing landmark. The church's mass and dome dominate the town's skyline in a scalar shift that renders the town around it toy like. Duomo is Florence. Florence is Duomo. Like the Eiffel Tower to Paris, Big Ben to London, St. Peter's to Rome, Golden Gate Bridge to San Francisco. Other less commanding forms also pop up as orienting foci above the city's sea of angled red tile roofs. They are comforting compass points. Bases for gauging distance and scale. Palazzo Vecchio, Santa Croce, San Lorenzo, Santa Maria Novella, Pitti Palace, Santo Spirito, Bargello, and Badia are Florence's second-tier landmarks behind the Duomo ensemble of Santa Maria del Fiore, Baptistery, and Giotto's Tower.



Landmarks are honored with their own piazzas. Dedicated, open, public space in front of them or wrapped around them giving them room to breathe. To be appreciated from a decent viewing distance. Host crowds at outdoor events. Attract and accommodate rich daily urban life.

Churches in Florence are pervasive. Prevalent landmarks and the preeminent reasons for the city's piazzas. Piazzas, secular and sacred, are the town's outdoor living rooms. Places where people come, congregate, commune. Housing quarters inside the Viale lean toward the small and modest, so citizens tend to spill out and spend their leisure time in the city's generous open public spaces. Piazzas offer variety, amenity. Invitation to sit and visit. Stroll. Walk dogs. Allow children to burn off energy running and chasing soccer balls.

Piazzas at landmarks attract tourists too. And draw functions that track and feed on tourist trade. Art and antiques. Souvenirs. Jewelry and leather craft. Clothing, shoes, hats. Cafes and bakeries and gelato shops. These activities ring and enclose piazzas in these places' perimeter buildings. Create reasons to come, stay, populate, activate. Where possible, dining and merchandise displays extend out to sidewalks and into the piazza proper to variegate, support, enliven urban action. Piazza life is often ornamented with outdoor entrepreneurs such as horse buggy rides, sidewalk portrait artists, souvenir stands, snack carts, and roving performers.

Commerce supporting ordinary, uncelebrated daily routine runs along back streets and in small, out-of-the-way piazzas. These delightful little establishments are tiny, specialized, owner-operated, intimate, personal.

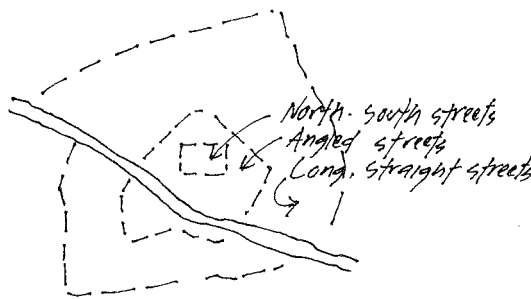
Run by dear, warm, chatty, helpful characters with sleeping dogs or cats on counters. Barbers, butchers, bookstores. Stationary, school supplies, shoe repair, seamstress. Vegetable stands, dairy shops, cheese stores. Hardware, locksmith, laundry, video rental, photocopying.

Florence streets have hierarchy. Typology. Clear character. Viale and Via. Lungarno. Borgo and Canto. Wide arterials fill up with frightening, frenetic, noisy, vehicular life. Generous pedestrian-only pathways protectively connect to major landmarks. Secondary streets with narrow sidewalks accommodate an uneasy mix of moving vehicles and heavy foot traffic. Skinny roads carrying persistent pedestrian flow. Empty service streets are lined only with garage doors. Dead-end alleyways are cluttered with trash cans, empty boxes and stray cats.

Except for the north-south-east-west street grid in the Roman core area, paths in Florence are bent, curved, angled, twisted. The street network is especially tangled between the Roman wall boundary and the twelfth-century wall boundary. Beyond the twelfth-century wall boundary, the city is more engineered, ordered, characterless. Roads become wider, blocks longer, and streets straighter for longer distances. Fewer paths reserved for foot traffic as we move

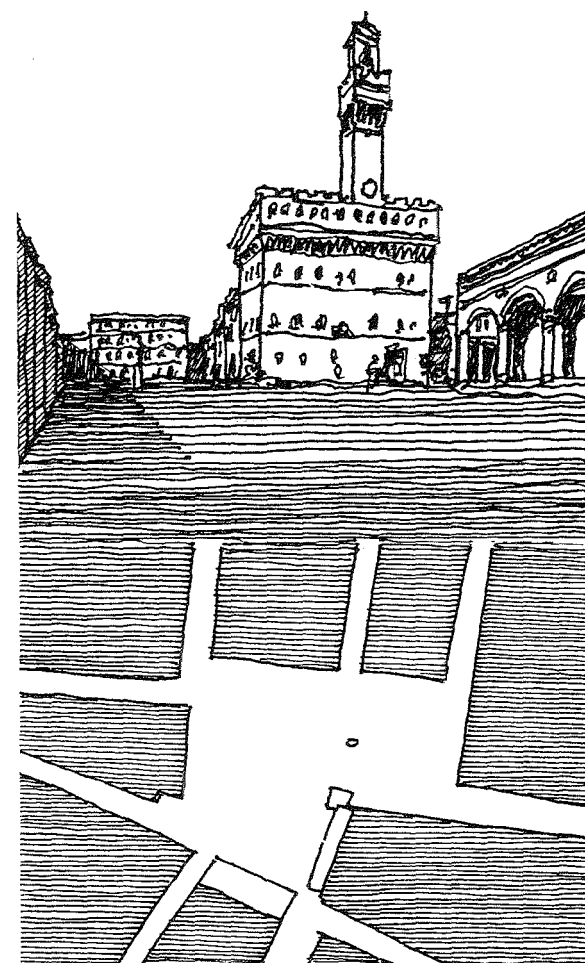
out toward and beyond the Viale. Even on straight streets, axial vistas are engaging, interesting. Rendered subtly or dramatically complex by roof eaves at different heights, facades turned at slightly different angles, and elevations of different hues and tones perforated with different window cadences. Ground-floor facade treatments are different from building to building due to street level commerce of different types presenting themselves differently with distinct display windows, signage, entries, and canopies.

Urban blocks are smaller in the town's center, its core historic zone. Streets are narrower, shorter. Tight streets feel taller, more intimate, more enveloping. Short path perspectives terminate with handsomely posed fabric facades or with carefully composed palazzi. Or with fortunate glimpses of landmark domes, towers, campaniles, and facade fragments. Seductive streets tease, entice, invite with their curves and bends. Breathtaking surprise side glances are often offered up interesting shady streets to stunning views of the Duomo's sun-washed red dome and bright white lantern posed against a blue sky.



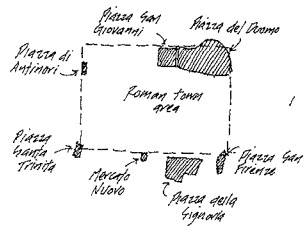
Tourists aside, Florence is a vibrant, exciting city scene. Bustling with bristling, healthy, robust pedestrian life. A strong, coherent community sense. Intense awareness, affection, pride, reverence for its story and its present-day fabric of architecture and public space. The town is a living, thriving entity because it is infused with dense, four-story housing above street-level commerce inside the Viale. Populated with 24-hour citizens, not eight-to-five commuters. Citizens are served by and support the town's densely deployed small-scale retail. Shopping is done daily. On foot. Flooding streets with life, relationships, communion.

Florence has a rich roof life too. It can be partially appreciated atop the Duomo's lantern and upon Giotto's Tower. It is hinted at from street-level perspectives where we see it peeking out over parapets. Nestled into the texture of bouncing, sloped, angular, term cotta roof planes are small roof-top gardens, terraces, patios, porches. Dun tile floors. Colorful canvas canopies. Vine-covered lattice. Tables, chairs, chaise lounges. Flower pots, herbs, small trees. Laundry on lines. Private, sheltered retreats. Luxurious personal access to sun and sky. Solitary, intimate places to complement public, exposed, intense aspects of life in the streets and piazzas below.

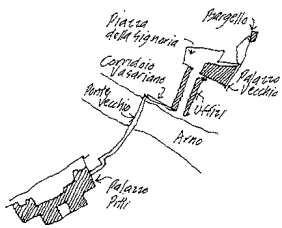


PIAZZA DELLA SIGNORIA

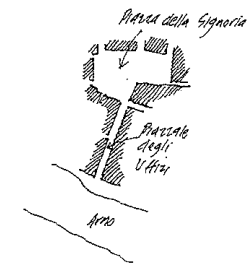
Piazza della Signoria is Florence’s center point of politics and civic life. Together with the Duomo, it is the parent of public places in this city.



LOCATION. Piazza della Signoria is positioned near the Roman city plan’s southeast corner and joins with Piazza San Firenze, Piazza del Duomo, Piazza San Giovanni, Piazza di Antinori, Piazza Santa Trinita, and Mercato Nuovo to mark the perimeter of the original Roman town grid.



Piazza della Signoria is a link in the string of government-related places in Florence that begin with the Bargello at Piazza San Firenze and then run south through Piazza della Signoria, Piazzale degli Uffizi, Corridoio Vasariano/Ponte Vecchio, and terminate at Piazza dei Pitti on the Arno’s south side.



Piazza della Signoria is Florence’s only major piazza that enjoys a significant relationship with the river Arno, achieved by the piazza’s connection to the river through Piazzale degli Uffizi.

CONNECTIONS. There are numerous path connections from Piazza della Signoria to other important city places, making this piazza a major hub space in Florence’s historic core. The other major hub space is Piazza del Duomo.

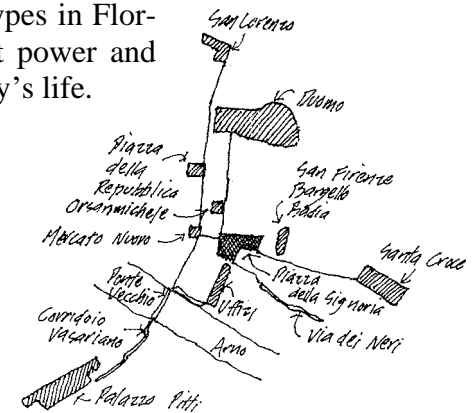
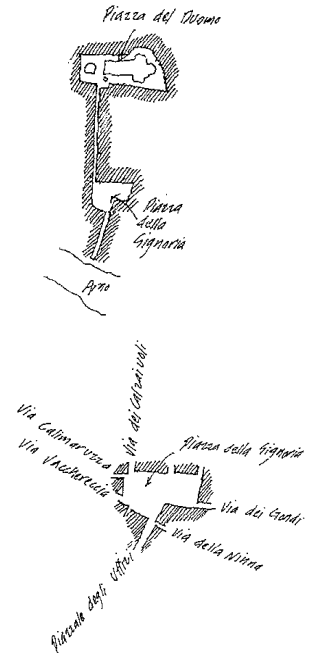
These two polestar piazzas orient and organize most of the other public spaces in Florence.

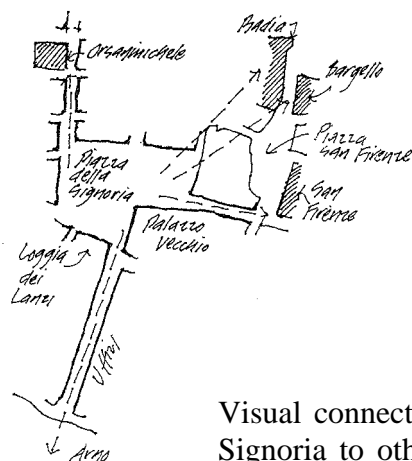
Piazza della Signoria connects to public places and major buildings near the river as well as to Piazza San Giovanni and Piazza del Duomo to the north.

Via dei Calzaiuoli leads north to Orsanmichele and Duomo/Battistero. *Via dei Gondi/Borgo dei Greci* connects with Piazza San Firenze, Bargello, Badia, and Santa Croce. *Piazzale degli Uffizi* leads to the Arno, Corridoio Vasariano, and Ponte Vecchio.

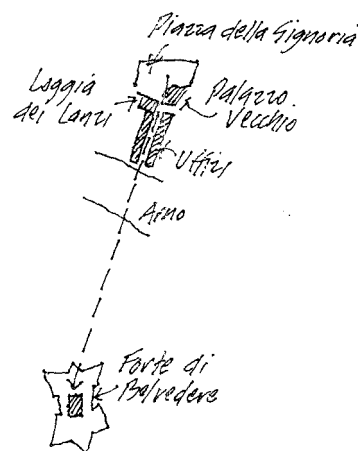
Via Calimaruza links to Mercato Nuovo. *Via della Ninna* extends to Via dei Neri, one of Florence’s most interesting commercial streets. *Via Vacchereccia* relates the piazza to Via Por Santa Maria, a north-south path that bisects the Roman city’s grid and links San Lorenzo, Duomo, Piazza della Repubblica, Mercato Nuovo, Ponte Vecchio, and Palazzo Pitti.

Piazza della Signoria’s connection to places of religion, commerce, art, and government reminds us of the successful integration of diverse activities and mixed place types in Florence and the pivotal position that power and politics have always had in this city’s life.





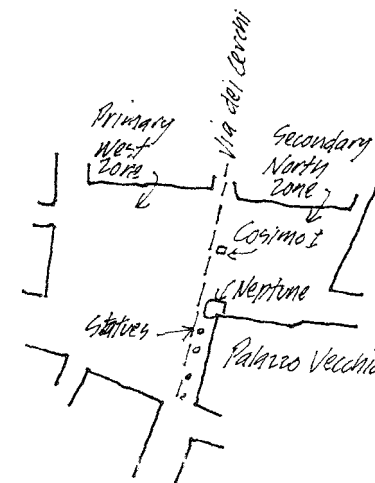
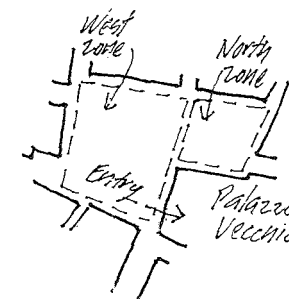
Visual connections from Piazza della Signoria to other sites are subtle and significant. Orsanmichele's foreshortened facade can be seen up Via dei Calzaiuoli. A fragment of San Firenze is visible down Via dei Gondi. In addition to strong visual invitations into Piazzale degli Uffizi and into connecting pedestrian streets, the tower tops of the Badia and Bargello can be seen over rooftops to the northeast. Fragments of buildings across the Arno are visible down the Uffizi's piazzale axis. A particularly poetic view that sums up Florence's political history is toward the south across and beyond Palazzo Vecchio's front entry facade. This vista juxtaposes Palazzo Vecchio, Loggia dei Lanzi, and Uffizi in the foreground, and Forte di Belvedere across the river. It is significant that the Duomo cannot be seen from this political piazza, perhaps emblematic of Florentine desire to control the relationship between church affairs and state affairs.

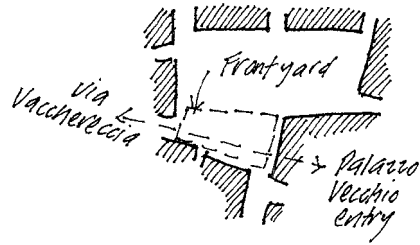


CONTAINER

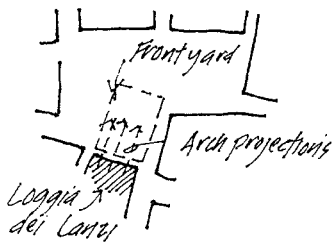
Space. Piazza della Signoria is an L-shaped space with its anchoring building, Palazzo Vecchio, positioned at the L's elbow. The L configuration creates two distinct spatial zones. The largest and main piazza space is to the west in front of Palazzo Vecchio's main entry elevation. The smaller, secondary space is north of the Palazzo. This area is secondary because it is smaller, less activated, and faced by the Palazzo's relatively uneventful side facade. Geometric projection of the Palazzo's front facade toward the north, the string of statues that run north-south, position of Neptune Fountain at the Palazzo's corner, and placement of the equestrian statue of Cosimo I all contribute to the articulation of the secondary piazza space from the primary piazza area. This division between the primary space and secondary space is further reinforced by the street opening in the piazza's north wall at Via dei Cerchi.

Piazza della Signoria's geometric life is elaborated and embroidered by compositional projections of facade dimensions and facade elements into the space, by placement of sculpture pieces, by the outside dining areas of piazza perimeter restaurants, and by the positions of wall openings to the streets that connect the piazza to its surrounding neighborhoods.

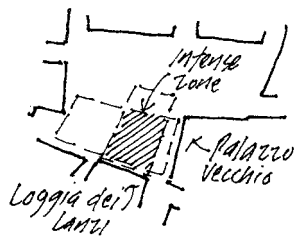




Geometric projection of Palazzo Vecchio's front facade to the west creates a piazza zone that is claimed and owned by this dominating structure. This front yard of the piazza's main anchoring building is special because it is defined and presided over by Palazzo Vecchio's front facade, the most important face of the piazza's most important architectural structure. Projection of the Palazzo's main entry to the west produces an axis that connects with Via Vacchereccia to produce a powerful east-west linear energy.



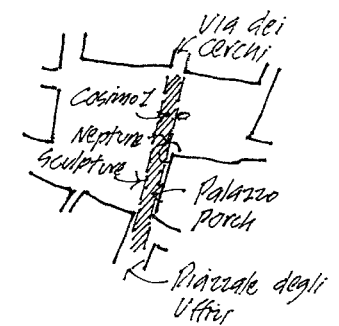
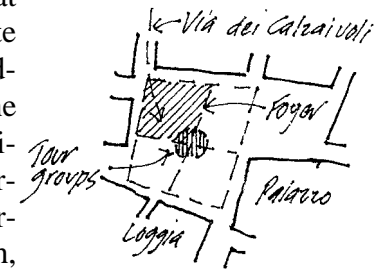
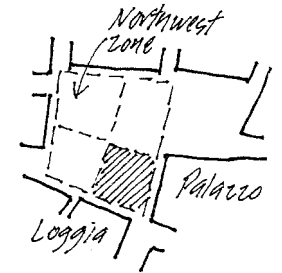
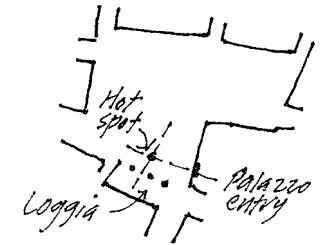
Extension of Loggia dei Lanzi's facade toward the north creates a second claimed front-yard piazza zone. Extensions of the centers of the three Loggia arches generate three additional axial forces running north-south through the piazza.

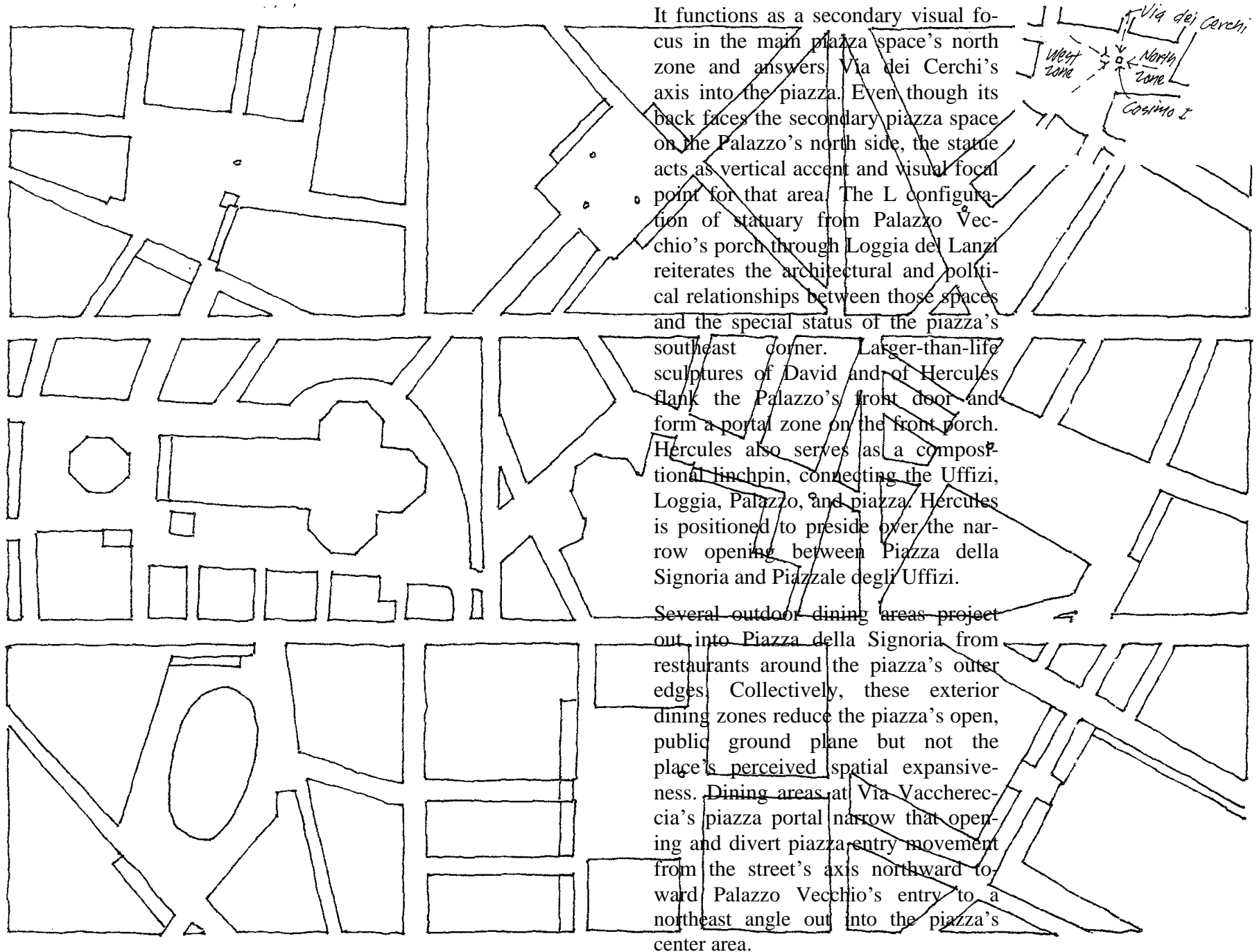


The piazza area where the Palazzo's front yard crosses the Loggia's front yard is the place's most intense zone in terms of population density, building ownership of piazza space, building presence, and sense of being on hallowed ground.

Where the Palazzo's entry axis crosses the axis of the Loggia's center arch is perhaps Piazza della Signoria's single most portentous geometric point.

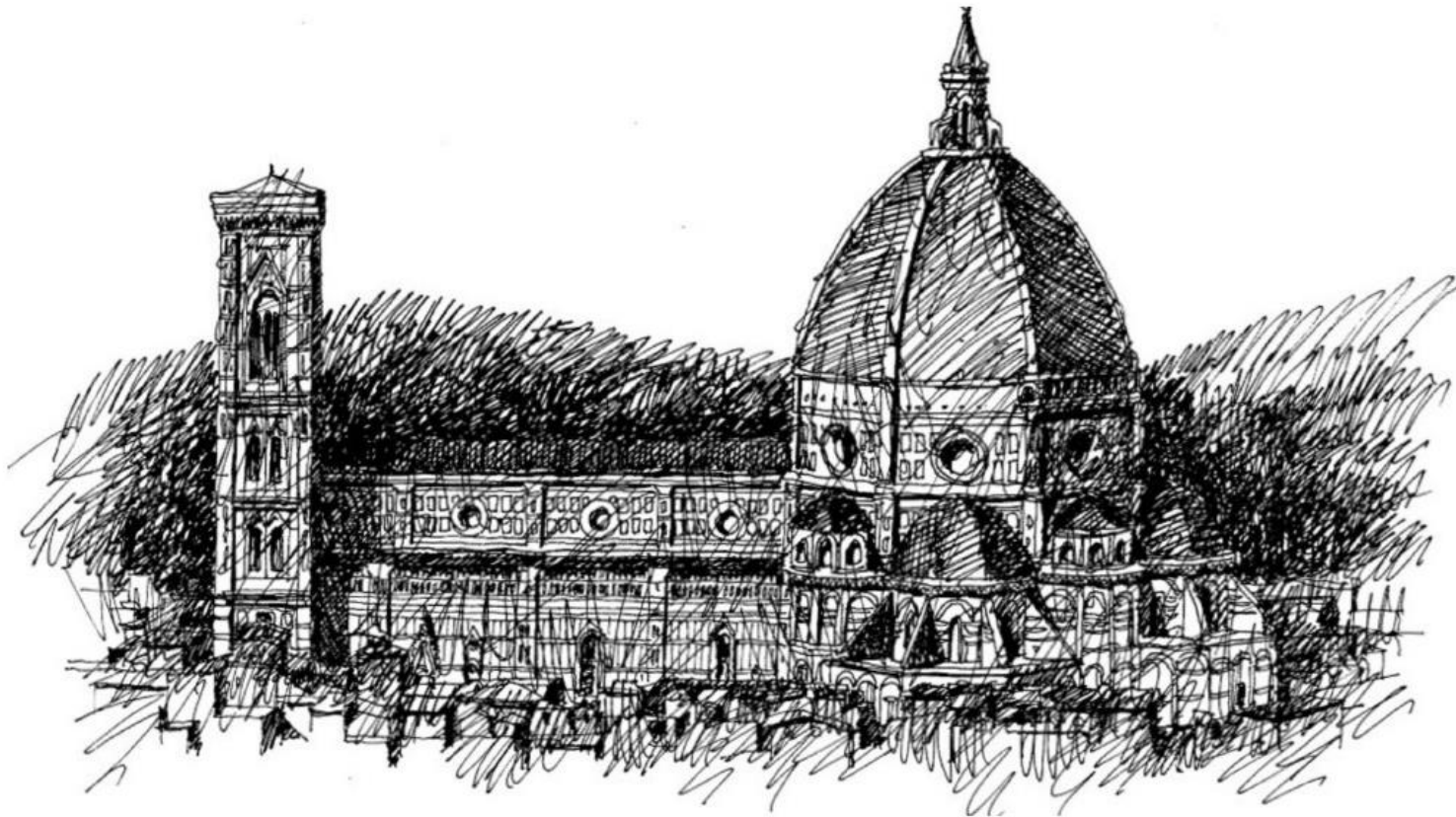
Palazzo and Loggia front yards occupy a quarter of the piazza's primary western zone. The other three quarters, located toward the piazza's northwest corner, are less proximate and less insistent in their participation in the geometric lives of the piazza's two primary buildings. The northwest quadrant functions as a kind of piazza foyer, receiving large crowds of tourists arriving from the Duomo down Via dei Calzaiuoli. It is interesting that many tour groups stop at the approximate center point of the four west piazza quadrants to talk about the buildings and the space. Projection of Piazzale degli Uffizi's spatial axis to the north creates a narrow strip of north-south space that incorporates Palazzo Vecchio's front porch, the line of sculpture including Neptune and Cosimo I, and connects through its northerly extension with the piazza's street portal at Via dei Cerchi. This strong north-south axial energy created by the Uffizi and supported by the Palazzo's front facade and porch results in partial Uffizi ownership of the sculpture positioned within this long, narrow spatial zone. This thin spatial zone also functions as an implied boundary, reinforcing the articulation of the main piazza space to the west from the secondary piazza space situated north of the Palazzo.





It functions as a secondary visual focus in the main piazza space's north zone and answers Via dei Cerchi's axis into the piazza. Even though its back faces the secondary piazza space on the Palazzo's north side, the statue acts as vertical accent and visual focal point for that area. The L configuration of statuary from Palazzo Vecchio's porch through Loggia del Lanzi reiterates the architectural and political relationships between those spaces and the special status of the piazza's southeast corner. Larger-than-life sculptures of David and of Hercules flank the Palazzo's front door and form a portal zone on the front porch. Hercules also serves as a compositional linchpin, connecting the Uffizi, Loggia, Palazzo, and piazza. Hercules is positioned to preside over the narrow opening between Piazza della Signoria and Piazzale degli Uffizi.

Several outdoor dining areas project out into Piazza della Signoria from restaurants around the piazza's outer edges. Collectively, these exterior dining zones reduce the piazza's open, public ground plane but not the place's perceived spatial expansiveness. Dining areas at Via Vacchereccia's piazza portal narrow that opening and divert piazza entry movement from the street's axis northward toward Palazzo Vecchio's entry to a northeast angle out into the piazza's center area.



THE PIAZZAS OF FLORENCE

Place-Making Lessons for Urban Environments

EDWARD T. WHITE



The Edward T. White Library
ArchiBasics Press