



American Friends of Versailles on tour in Italy.

A SPECTACULAR TRIP FOR A SPECTACULAR CAUSE

by Sharon King Hoge

Marie Antoinette's ceiling is falling down and the American Friends of Versailles are raising funds to rescue it. Committed to helping preserve the grand palace that is an important symbol of Franco-American friendship, the AFV arranges elegant balls held in the palace and exclusive tours of European monuments linked to French history. In September, patrons and board members had the opportunity to visit Tuscany and Venice on a trip arranged and hosted by AFV board member **Her Royal Highness, Princesse Béatrice de Bourbon-Siciles**, Dame of Grand Cross of Justice of The Sacred Military Constantinian Order of Saint Georges.

Princess Béatrice, a descendant of the Bourbon Kings and Queens who reigned throughout Europe, literally opened palace doors for the group who were wined and dined in the private residences of some of Italy's most oldest and most prominent families.



View of the Queens Guard Room.

The underlying mission of the trip — raising funds for Versailles restoration — was never far from the minds of the participants. On private tours of notable museums led by curators and art historians as well as in rare opportunities to view private homes, gardens, and art collections not usually shared with the public, the group saw properties painstakingly restored to their original splendor which were constant reminders of the importance of supporting historic preservation.

Magnificent ceiling paintings by the likes of **Tiepolo** and **Tintoretto** renewed the group's dedication to restoring the picture of Jupiter on a silver chariot drawn by two eagles that crowns the Guard Room, the last chamber in **Marie Antoinette's** suite of private rooms at Versailles.



Tape sustains the ceiling of the Queens Guard Room.

Arriving from Los Angeles, New York, Colorado, Paris, Washington, D.C., Chicago, Sarasota, and Paris, the participants assembled in Florence at the five star Hotel Helvetia Bristol.



Anne-Marie de Ganay, Co-Chair, AFV French Board of Directors.



Margaret and Gregory Hedberg, AFV International Council, from New York.



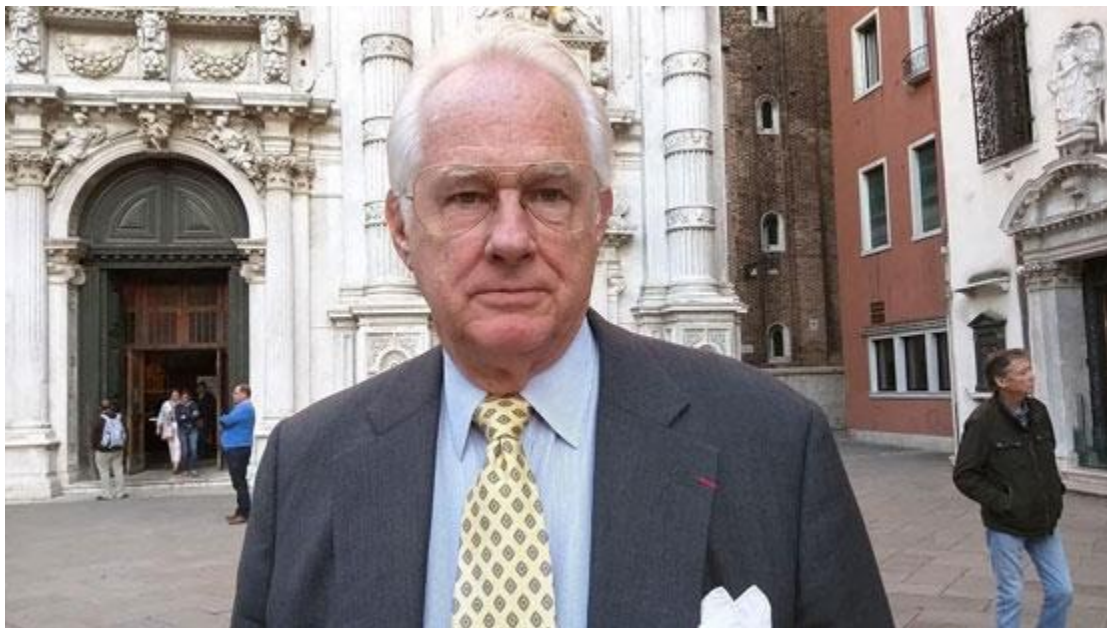
Betty and Sam de Forest Scott from New York.



Bonnie Deutsch, AFV International Council.



Catharine Hamilton, AFV President and Founder.



David Hamilton, AFV Board of Directors.



Dr. Susan Kendall, AFV International Council, Newport Beach CA and Chantilly, France.



Baron Roland de l'Espee, President Societe des Amis de Versailles and an AFV Honorary Chairman.



Aimee and William Maroney, AFV International Council Members, New York and Paris.



Gale Arnold from Washington DC and Nantucket.



Faith Coolidge, AFV International Council, from New York.



Juan Pablo Molyneux, AFV Vice President.



Susan and Harlow Higinbotham from Chicago.



Marjorie Vickers, Interior Designer, from Colorado.



Princesse Béatrice de Bourbon Siciles and Anne-Marie de Ganay.

Touring launched with a visit to Villa I Collazzi where the group was welcomed by **Marchesa Bona Frescobaldi**, member of a prominent Florentine noble family which has been involved in the political, sociological and economic history of Tuscany since the Middle Ages. The Marchesa served award-winning Tuscan wines from her family-owned winery, Marchesi de Frescobaldi, for which she has served as the wine ambassador. Frescobaldi family wines, dating back to 130 AD (!), have been served at the tables of the Papal court and the English court of **Henry VIII**.



The opening dinner was held at Villa I Collazzi.

The following day the group toured the garden of Villa Capponi, residence of **Signora Maria Teresa Benedetti**, before a private visit to Convento di San Matteo and its owner, **Marchesa Gondi**, a member of one of the most important families in Europe, once bankers to the **Medici**. A former cloister, the property was wonderfully restored by an ancestor of the Gondi family who was a well-known art dealer of the 19th century.



Villa Capponi.



Touring Villa Capponi.



AFV Honorary Co-Chairman Vicomte de Rohan with Villa Capponi owner Signora Maria Teresa Benedetti.



Arriving at Convento di San Matteo.



Marquesa Gondi welcomes Princess Béatrice and Catharine Hamilton to Convento di San Matteo.



Restored cloister Convento di San Matteo.



Gardens of Convento di San Matteo.

That afternoon the group toured the splendid garden of the 15th century Villa Medici in Fiesole, residence of **Anna Mazzini Marchi**, with a breathtaking view overlooking Florence from the property which was designed to resemble the Hanging Gardens of Babylon.



Approaching Villa Medici.



Detail of the Villa Medici garden.



Setting of Villa Medici in Fiesole.



Susan Higinbotham in the garden of Villa Medici.

The next stop was at Villa della Petraia with its magnificent garden laid out over three terraces that was designed during the 16th century.



Villa della Petraia interior.



Villa della Petraia decor detail.



Villa della Petraia landscape.

The AFV spent the third day in Lucca where they were received by **Principessa Vittoria Colonna di Stigliano** at Villa Torrigiani, located in the hamlet of Camigliano. One of the most interesting examples of 17th-century architecture in the Lucchesia, the villa can be considered one of the rare examples of Baroque architecture that was inspired by the architecture of Versailles. The house's interior is richly decorated in stucco, paintings, and trompe l'oeil. A portion of the park was modified during the romantic period, but still maintains 17th-century French bassin fountains reflecting the façades.



Entrance to Villa Torrigiani in Camigliano, Lucca.



Villa Torrigiani, inspired by the architecture of Versailles.



Entering Villa Torrigiani.



Principessa Vittoria welcomes le Vicomte de Rohan and Princess Béatrice to Villa Torrigiani.



The AVF group assembled at Villa Torrigiani.

The group attended a luncheon at the 15th century Villa Buonvisi Oliva which was hosted by **Signora Oliva** on her beautiful terrace. Originally built by **Matteo Civitali**, a famous Renaissance architect trained at the school of Lorenzo de Medici in Florence, the villa and its beautifully landscaped five hectares was the home of **Cardinal Francesco Buonvisi**, an ancestor of the Oliva family, who once boasted to **Louis XIV** that his stables were more beautiful than those of the newly constructed Versailles.



AFV Executive Director Kristin Smith.



Villa Buonvisi Oliva buffet.



Villa Buonvisi Oliva table setting.



Luncheon on the terrace at Villa Buonvisi Oliva.



After lunch, Catharine Hamilton inspects the better-than-Versailles stables.

The group next visited the Villa Reale di Marlia, a late Renaissance palazzo with renowned gardens. The 15th-century Italian Renaissance villa was in the Buonvisi family from 1517 to 1651, and has been left relatively unchanged.



In the gardens of Villa Reale di Marlia, American Friends of Versailles travelers gathered from around the US and France.



New Yorkers Betty and Stanley de Forest Scott enjoy the gardens of Villa Reale di Marlia.



Renowned gardens of Villa Reale di Marlia.



Villa Reale di Marlia garden cascade.

Dinner was hosted by **Pietro Ermanno Meschi**, longtime friend and supporter of the American Friends of Versailles, at his family's beautiful 16th-century Villa del Vescovo Meschi, built by the medieval **Antelminelli** family before being passed on to the **Franciotti** family who in the 17th century gave it its present aspect. In the beginning of the 19th century, the Villa became the summer seat of the archdiocese of Lucca assuming the name of Villa del Vescovo (Villa of the Bishop). The Meschi family has resided at the villa for more than a century.



Buffet table at Villa del Vescovo Meschi

The following day, the AFV group was invited as guests of **Marchesi Torrigiani** on a private visit to the largest privately owned garden located within city walls in all of Europe, Giardino Torrigiani, beautifully decorated with a series of statues, Roman sarcophagi, and marble urns which were collected and commissioned by the family. Renowned in the 16th-century as a botanical garden, it had a revival during the early 19th-century when the **Marquis Pietro Torrigiani** inherited the property and started acquiring the surrounding land. Adhering to the fashion of the time, he transformed the 25 acres into a 'romantic park' in the English style.



Giardino Torrigiani, the largest private garden in Europe.



Grotto in Giardino Torrigiani.



Stone monoliths in Giardino Torrigiani.



Villa Torrigiani gardens, influenced by Versailles.

A trip to Florence would not be complete without a visit to the Boboli Gardens 111 acres behind the Pitti Palace landscaped for the enjoyment of the Medici family. Here the group was greeted at the front gate by the head gardener, **Ivo Matteucci**, who led a very private tour of the famous gardens, unlocking areas not normally open to the public with a large set of ancient-looking skeleton keys.



Private tour of the Boboli Gardens.

Dinner that evening at Palazzo Ginori was hosted by the gracious and elegant **Marchese and Marchesa Ginori**. An old noble Florentine family, great allies of the Medicis, the Ginoris were well-known for being merchants and bankers in the political arena since the 15th century. The Ginoris explained their family's long history as leading manufacturers of fine porcelain since the company's founding in 1737 by their ancestor **Marchese Carlo Ginori**. The group dined in an enormous banquet hall on exquisite Ginori plates, and each course of the meal was paired with Castello Ginori wines from the family-owned winery.

The final day in Florence started with a private tour through the renowned Uffizi Gallery, then proceeded to the Palazzo Guicciardini where the group was received by the **Conte and Contessa Guicciardini** and their two young children. The 16th-century-era palace was the home of the famous historian and statesman of the Renaissance, **Francesco Guicciardini**, who is considered one of the major political writers of the Italian Renaissance. Counte Guicciardini gave the group a private tour of his family's archives and library, normally made available only to a select group of scholars. The group was also invited to tour the family's private garden, which once had a secret entrance into the Boboli Gardens next door.



Francesco Guicciardini.

Lunch was hosted by **Principe and Principessa Corsini** at Palazzo Corsini al Prato. The Corsini are among the most splendid of Florence's great families, combining the patrician heritage of ancient Florentine ancestry with the glory of the papacy, as **Pope Clement XII** was a member of the family. Palazzo Corsini al Prato remains a family palace featuring a rare example of a late urban Renaissance garden landscaped in 1624 by **Gherardo Silvani** who embellished the façade with an open gallery.



Principe Corsini greets Catharine Hamilton.



Principe Corsini greets Juan Pablo Molyneux and le Vicomte de Rohan.



Aimee Maroney and le Vicomte de Rohan on the terrace at Palazzo Corsini.



Dr. Susan Kendall, Catharine Hamilton, and Bonnie Deutsch on the terrace.



Corsini wine accompanied the lunch, which was hosted by Principe and Principessa Corsini at Palazzo Corsini al Prato.

Highlights of the final evening in Florence were cocktails and dinner at the impeccably restored Palazzo Gondi as guests of its owners, **Marchese and Marchesa Gondi**. Cocktails were enjoyed on the Palazzo's magnificent multi-tiered terrace that looks out over the city offering what are considered the best views of the city from a private residence. The Gondi family has long had ties to the French Crown and Versailles. Marchese Gondi explained that his ancestor, **Alberto Gondi**, used to own the underlying property at Versailles, which he sold to **King Louis XIII**. Accompanying the sumptuous meal were delicious wines from Marchesi Gondi's winery, including the Villa Bossi Chianti.



Palazzo Gondi dining room.



The table is set at Palazzo Gondi.



Marchese and Marchesa Gondi hosted dinner.



Spectacular views from Palazzo Gondi.



View of the Duomo from Palazzo Gondi.

Departing by high speed train, the participants arrived in Venice and checked into the elegant Bauer Il Palazzo, with rooms overlooking gondoliers and vaporetta taxi boats gliding by below. After a buffet luncheon on the hotel's waterside terrace, the group walked to iconic Palazzo San Marco, a few steps away where they were greeted by **Jerome Francois Zieseniss**, President of the French Committee for the Preservation of Venice who led them on a tour of the Museo Correr, the Royal Palace which, like Versailles, is in the process of constant rescue.

Pointing to examples, Zieseniss discussed the challenging decisions he faces in resolving differing views of restoration: should deteriorating rooms be preserved intact? or should the traces of antique decor be "recreated" in modern copies of the

original? In some rooms of the palace, he explained, the faded original wall covering is preserved but covered over with a modern woven-silk reproduction. Peering up at restorers on scaffolding above, AFV members were able to discern the dramatic difference as a later gray coating was delicately rubbed from ceiling panels overhead revealing the original bright white background.



Touring the Royal Palace with Monsieur Jerome Francois Zieseniss.



Behind the scenes restoring the royal Palace ceiling.



Monsieur Jerome Francois Zieseniss, President of the French Committee for the Preservation of Venice.

After a guided tour of Piazza San Marco which Napoleon called "the most elegant salon in Europe," the group had a brief rest in the hotel before traveling by water taxi to the Grand Canal home of "old friends" of AFV from Paris **Beatrice and Pierre Rosenberg**. One of the world's great art authorities, Rosenberg was Director of the Louvre before taking up residence in the Palazzo Brandolini, its spacious rooms outfitted with the couple's collection of colorful glass beads and ornaments. Moving on the group met up again with Jerome Zieseniss who welcomed them to an elaborate buffet dinner in his home Palazzo Balbi Mocenigo. Guests had the opportunity to meet some of his Venetian friends including, charming **Francesca Bartolotto Possati**, the young woman who oversees Il Palazzo Bauer and her family's other local hotels.



Reception hosted by M. and Mme. Rosenberg at Palazzo Brandolini.



Clockwise from left: Former Louvre Director Pierre Rosenberg; Studying the Rosenberg collections; Detail of the Rosenberg collections.

The next morning the group scooted across the lagoon to Torcello, to tour the Cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta an early church with an original 639 AD cornerstone that predates San Marco and therefore establishes it as the site of "Venice"

before Venice." After admiring its amazing gold mosaics with iconography depicting salvation and the seven deadly sins, some of the group climbed its tower for a look back toward San Marco. Boarding the hundred-year-old sailboat Eolo the group cruised the lagoon before landing for a spectacular lunch created by chef and captain **Mauro Spotta** which was served at a long dockside table.



Boarding Eolo.



Eolo approaches the dock.



Luncheon en plein air.

Chef and Captain Mauro Stoppa.



Perspective view from Torcello tower.

On the docket that evening was a night at the opera. Steps from Il Palazzo Bauer the newly restored, gleaming Fenice Theater was the setting for a remarkable

contemporary production of Verdi's "La Traviata" with Violetta seducing suitors in a black lace peignoir before falling in love and facing her tragic end. Walking from there to Harry's Bar, the group sipped Bellini cocktails, and dined on plates of Cipriani carpaccio and scampi thermidor.



Catharine and David Hamilton at Opera Fenice.



Faith Coolidge, Bonnie Deutsch, and Princess Béatrice in their box at Opera Fenice.



"La Traviata" curtain call.

Wednesday morning the group crossed back over the canal for a visit to the Fondazione Cini with exhibits devoted to the local glass industry. The group admired **Hirushi Sugimoto's** extraordinary "Glass Tea House Mondrian" perched on a pool in the courtyard and toured a retrospective of the creations of Fulvio Bianconi showing how the master's female figure perfume bottles evolved to scalloped-edge Fazzoletti "handkerchief" vases.



Glass tea house by Hirushi Sugimoto.



Bianconi Exhibit.



Glass creations of Fulvio Bianconi.

At the nearby restored 10th century Benedictine Monastery of San Giorgio Maggiore the crowning glory is the expansive refectory designed by Palladio which was the original site of Veronese's masterpiece "Wedding Feast of Cana." While the actual work is now displayed at the Louvre in Paris, a digital reproduction illustrates how it enhances its original setting. From there Director **Alessandro Martoni** took the group upstairs to tour the Libreria di San Giorgio Maggiore, opening drawers to pull out extraordinary original manuscripts such as **Taddeo Crivelli's** illuminated page of a 13th century book of vespers. A private luncheon of Bellini's, octopus salad, tuna tartar, marinated salmon, fillet of sole "a la Carlina" catered by Harry Cipriani was served in the sunny open courtyard.



Alessandro Martoni shares and examines ancient manuscripts.



Libreria di San Giorgio Maggiore.



Libreria Director Alessandro Martoni.



Original setting of Veronese's *The Wedding at Cana*.

That afternoon water taxis took the group to the Palazzo Contarini Polignac on the Grand Canal where artist **Roger de Montebello**, a nephew of former Metropolitan Museum director **Philippe de Montebello**, showed them around the waterside studio where he paints and sculpts. A visit to view the masterpieces by **Tintoretto** at the Grande Scuola di San Rocco rounded out the afternoon.



Approaching Grande Scuola di San Rocco.



Arrival at Palazzo Contarini Polignac.



In Roger de Montebello's studio.



Roger de Montebello.



Tintoretto masterpiece at Grande Scuola di San Rocco.

Princess Caroline Murat greeted the group for dinner at Palazzo Morosini on the Grand Canal. An accomplished pianist she performed pieces by Chopin before dinner in the candlelit dining room which concluded with a goblet of frothy lime sherbet and champagne.



David and Catharine Hamilton with Princess Caroline Murat.



David Hamilton and Kristin Smith admire eclectic art at Palazzo Morosini.



Modern art and momentos at Palazzo Morosini

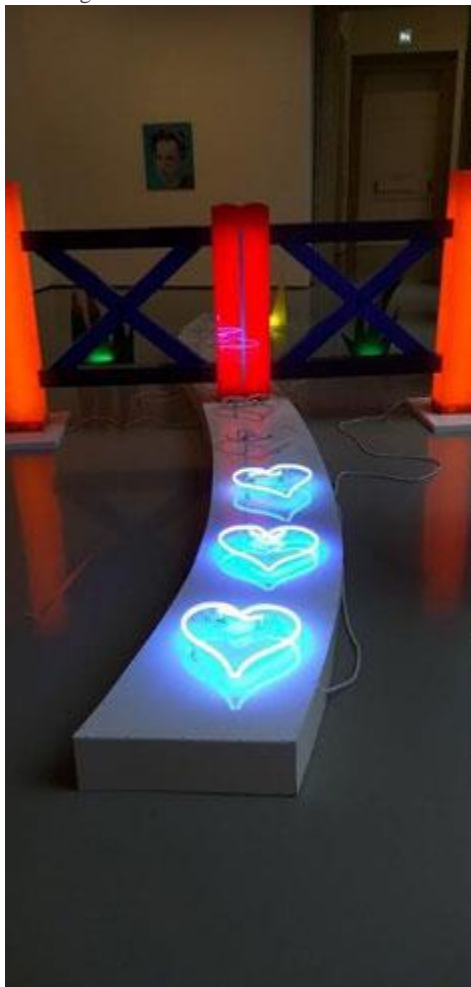
Thursday morning the tour closed with guided visits to the elaborately restored baroque Ca Rezzonico, and a stop to see the Tiepolo ceiling canvases in La Suola dei Grandi Carmini, and then a visit to Palazzo Grassi which exhibits works from the Pinault collection. After a brunch of sandwiches and champagne, **Paul Loyrette** guided the group through a retrospective of works by **Martial Raysse**.



Admiring Ca Rezzonico Museum.



Entering Palazzo Grassi.



Clockwise from left: Modern art at Palazzo Grassi; Paul Loyrette introduces the Palazzo Grassi exhibits; Reception at Palazzo Grassi.


A convivial buffet luncheon hosted by **Countess Caterina Fresco Alvera** in her spacious apartment in Ca Corner Gheltoff Alvera on the Grand Canal concluded an informative and inspirational journey.



Marjorie Vickers, Gale Arnold, Bonnie Deutsch, and Amie Maroney at Ca Corner Gheltoff Alvera.



Clockwise from top left: Faith Coolidge at Ca Corner Gheltoff Alvera; Princess Béatrice with hostess Countess Caterina Fresco Alvera; Luncheon at Ca Corner Gheltoff Alvera.



In addition to future fundraising tours, the America Friends of Versailles are planning a Grand Ball to be held in New York City in May 2016.