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Massimo Burchi/SIME/40oners, Getty, Alamy

Bevitore, serving inventive dishes with carefully paired wines. Reservations are essential, as the local following is vast. Try the cocoa-bean tagliatelle with lamb ragout and artichoke chips (mains from £7; ilsantobevitore.com).

For a different kind of supper, where you don't just sit there, try **Desinare** at **Riccardo Barthel**. The kitchen designer has just launched a cookery school, with Arturo Dori at the helm. Prepare roast beef Italian-style, and pan-sautéed squab – then dine around the chef's table with your classmates (from £50; desinare.it).

The loveliest lunch venue in the neighbourhood is **Le Volpi e L'Uva**, a

Home is where the art is Top, Palazzo Pitti, where the Medicis and Napoleon Bonaparte once lived. Above, a terrace with a view at Gallery Hotel Art

laid-back little wine bar with a great terrace, on Piazza dei Rossi. The wine-maker Emilio Monechi is educating Oltrarno's palate with an unusual selection of boutique wines, paired with fine cheeses and cured meats (mains from £5; www.levolpieluva.com).

And, finally, for that all-important pre-dinner *aperitivo*? **Volume** is Santo Spirito's coolest bar, once the workshop for a maker of hat forms – his amazing sculptures still line the walls (volume.fi.it).

WHERE TO STAY

Palazzo Guicciardini is Oltrarno's latest bolt hole, and opened just six weeks ago. This 15th-century palace has eight rooms, with frescoed ceilings by Poccetti, the owners' family antiques and knowledgeable staff. The tech is state-of-the-art, though the human element needs to smooth out admin hiccups (doubles from £127, B&B; palazzoguicciardini.com).

On the north bank of the Arno – so strictly just outside Oltrarno, looking in – **Gallery Hotel Art** is the fashionistas' choice. This Ferragamo Group four-star is a bastion of understated chic, all cream



SUNDAY TIMES DIGITAL

Si chef! See the sort of dishes you'll whip up at **Desinare** at **Riccardo Barthel** with our video thesundaytimes.co.uk/travel

marble and dark wood. As the name suggests, it doubles as an art venue. The current photography show, *In Giro*, by Roberto Koch, exploits the nation's mania for cycling (doubles from £177, B&B; lunganocollection.com). The group's new venture, **Portrait Firenze**, opened last month and is set to be another stylish gem (doubles from £370).

For the best view over the city, try **Palazzo Guadagni**. It's great value, comes with the obligatory frescoes and has the grandest loggia in Oltrarno (doubles from £115, B&B; palazzo.guadagni.com).



WHAT TO SEE

When you've finished shopping and eating, you might want to think about a bit of culture. **Palazzo Pitti**, Florence's greatest palace and the largest museum in Oltrarno, was once the base of the ruling Medici

family, and later home to Napoleon Bonaparte and the Italian kings – though not all at the same time. Today, it's the only part of the south bank where you might be troubled by tourists.

Of the six mini-museums in here, the gobsmackingly splendid **Royal**

Apartments are a must, along with the **Galleria Palatini**: it has more Raphaels, Titians, Caravaggios, Canovas and Filippino Lippis than anyone can handle in one viewing. Then head for the **Giardino di Boboli** and its weird Grotta del Buontalenti, a Medici cave fantasy that is, frankly, a little bit disturbing (£7; www.polomuseale.firenze.it).

Oltrarno's loveliest frescoes are to be found in the Cappella Brancacci, part of the **Church of Santa Maria del Carmine**. Most of the interior was destroyed by fire, but the peaceful cloisters, and these paintings, remain, commissioned from Masaccio and Masolino in 1423, and completed by Lippi. You'll probably know The Temptation of Adam and Eve (£5).

Brunelleschi, architect of the great dome of the Duomo, has more work on show in Oltrarno: his **Cappella Capponi**, in Santa Felicità, is worth a visit for the startling Pontormo frescoes (put in €1 to light them up); then cross to the great bulk of **Santo Spirito**, with its Michelangelo crucifixion and Lippi's Nerli Altarpiece (free).

● **Mia Aimaro Ogden** was a guest of **Gallery Hotel Art**, **Palazzo Guicciardini** and **British Airways (ba.com)**, which has six flights a week to Florence from London City airport in the summer; from £77 one-way