

MERCHANTS, POPES & ENGLISH PEERS SIENA & TUSCAN GARDENS

WEDNESDAY 11 – MONDAY 16 MAY 2022 (6 DAYS)

LECTURER: JAMES HILL

£2190

- **Private visits to many of southern Tuscany's best villas & gardens including world famous La Foce**
- **Introduction to Siena & its artistic treasures**
- **Generous hospitality from several of the owning families**
- **Charming villa-style hotel on the outskirts of Siena**
- **Excellent Tuscan food & wine throughout**



La Foce, Chianciano, Tuscany

OVERVIEW

Tuscany is dominated by cities and towns which contributed enormously to the history of architecture, sculpture, painting and landscape design. While Florence came to prominence in the fifteenth century, the preceding decades were dominated by its great southern rival, Siena. Encircled by a magnificent set of medieval walls, Siena contains a remarkable array of buildings and art collections to which you will be introduced.

Outside those walls, we shall also discover some beautiful gardens scattered throughout southern Tuscany. These range from the renaissance and baroque periods to some of the most interesting gardens created in Italy in more recent times. Indeed, we shall enjoy remarkable levels of private access and hospitality, guided by some of the owners, as our days unfold in this most heavenly of landscapes.

Duccio di Buoninsegna, Simone Martini, the Lorenzetti brothers – these are the names that mark the high point of Sienese painting. Working in both fresco and on panel, these artists stand in direct contrast to those of Florence. Sienese masters developed a style rooted in deep spirituality, while their Florentine contemporaries concentrated on a more worldly approach, leading in time to the innovations of the early Renaissance. However, unlike the dispersal of so much Florentine art, the majority of Siena's most important works of art are still in situ in the buildings and churches for which they were produced – a unique survival amongst Italian cities. Whilst all this patronage developed, it had to be paid for, and what generated the huge amounts of money involved? Siena was a very important commercial centre in late medieval times. Banking was one of its most profitable activities, together with the sale of many different luxury goods and products. From this mercantile elite, two families rose to spectacular prominence, as members of both were elected to serve as Pope.

First of these papal dynasties, the Piccolomini family produced two popes, the scholarly Pius II (1458 – 1464) and Pius III (ruling for a few months during 1503). The family left their mark on both Siena and the surrounding countryside. Of far greater significance was the Chigi family, a dynasty of merchant princes and papal advisors, eventually producing one of the greatest of the seventeenth century popes, Alexander VII (1655 – 1667). More than any other Sienese family, the Chigi have left an indelible impression on this area, particularly the tradition of building fine country villas surrounded by wonderful gardens, a heritage we shall discover repeatedly.

We stay just outside the city walls at the 4* **Villa Scacciapensieri**, a handsome nineteenth century villa, set in its own park and gardens. It has a good restaurant, a swimming pool and sits about two-and-a-half kilometres north-east of Siena. There are excellent local transport connections into the city centre via taxi and public bus.

ITINERARY OUTLINE

Day 1: Wednesday 11 May – We fly from Heathrow to **Pisa**, arriving midday. We travel the short distance to the lower hills of Pisa and **Villa di Corliano**, the first of our private visits and the home of the Counts Agostini Veronesi della Seta. Our group lunch will be followed by an introduction to the villa and its garden. We travel through

Tuscany to **Siena** and our hotel, the **4* Villa Scacciapensieri**. Our first group dinner will be in the hotel's restaurant. Wine, water and coffee are included with all group lunches and dinners.

Day 2: Thursday 12 May – Today we drive into Siena's countryside. Our first private visit will be to one of the most famous gardens in Tuscany, **Villa Cetinale**. Built between 1676 and 1716 by Cardinal Flavio Chigi, nephew of Pope Alexander VII, it remained in Chigi family ownership until purchased by the late Lord Lambton in 1977. Since then, Lord Lambton, and now his son, the present Earl of Durham, have created one of Tuscany's most magnificent gardens. We have our group lunch today when we visit privately **Castello di Celsa**. Built in the thirteenth century by the Celsi family, the villa is an amazing amalgamation of renaissance and later 'Gothic Revival' elements. The gardens, which look out over a landscape that could have been painted by the Lorenzetti workshop, are a mix of renaissance and baroque features. Later that afternoon we return to our hotel. Dinner is not included and there will be an evening bus transfer into and back from Siena, if required.

Day 3: Friday 13 May – We drive into **Siena** and guided by a local specialist, we begin at the **Duomo and Baptistry**, one of the best medieval church complexes in Italy. Begun in 1150 the Duomo has remarkable inlaid floors, the famous pulpit by Pisano and his workshop, sculptures by Michelangelo and Bernini and the remarkable Piccolomini Library, named for Pope Pius II and adorned with the last frescoes painted by Pinturicchio. Nearby is the **Museo del Opera del Duomo Metropolitana** which has many of the Cathedral's treasures, of which the most important is Duccio's masterpiece, the famous **Maestà** of 1308 – 11, formerly placed on the High Altar but now much more easily seen in this museum. We pause for lunch (not included) and in the afternoon, we visit the **Palazzo Pubblico** with its remarkable frescoed halls and galleries, including the famous scene of **Good and Bad Government** by the Lorenzetti workshop. Within the building is also housed the **Museo Civico**, of which the principal glories are the **Sala del Mappamondo** decorated by Ambrogio Lorenzetti about 1320 – 30 and a fresco of the **Maestà** painted by Simone Martini in 1315. We return to the hotel and the evening will be free.

Day 4: Saturday 14 May – Today we travel down the **Via Cassia** through the **Val D'Orcia**, a wonderful stretch of countryside, to **La Foce**, the fine garden designed by Cecil Pinsent for Marchesa Iris Origo from the 1920s onwards. It is probably the best inter-war garden in Italy and we shall have a private visit. After a group lunch at the estate's excellent restaurant, we then continue to nearby **Pienza**, the town remodelled by Pope Pius II according to the theories of Alberti, the great renaissance authority on classical architecture. After a guided walk about the town and some free time, we return to our hotel where the evening will be free.

Day 5: Sunday 15 May – We begin with a visit to nearby **Villa Vicobello**, the home of a member of the Chigi family, who will host us as we visit this charming garden, with refreshments. We then travel into Siena where there will be some free time for lunch (not included) and an opportunity to explore the city at leisure. In the afternoon we return to our hotel. In the early evening, we drive the short distance to **Villa di Geggiano** where we shall be the guests of Count Andrea Boscu Bianchi Bandinelli, a descendant of Pope Alexander III (1159 – 1181). This is a charming '**delizia Senese**', a party villa - a remarkable setting for our guided visit and final group dinner.

Day 6: Monday 16 May – We leave for the final time and drive through the spellbinding countryside of **Chianti** to the hills around **San Casciano Val di Pesa** to the south of Florence. **Villa Le Corti** is the winery and historic home of the Corsini family where we shall enjoy a group lunch accompanied by the estate's wines, with a visit to the estate's villa. We continue to Pisa airport for our afternoon flight to Heathrow.

PRACTICALITIES

Price £2190 **Without Flights** £2045 **Deposit** £300

Single Supplement £225 (Double Room for Sole Use)

Hotel 5 nights with breakfast at 4* Villa Scacciapensieri, Siena

Flights British Airways

Outward: **BA604** Depart London Heathrow (Terminal 5) **0830**, arrive Pisa **1145**

Return: **BA613** Depart Pisa **1705**, arrive London Heathrow (Terminal 5) **1825**

Price includes 2 dinners & 4 lunches with wine, water & coffee, all local transfers, entry fees & gratuities, City Tax, services of local lecturer and local tour director, James Hill and on-site guides

Not included Travel to/from Heathrow, 3 dinners & 2 lunches



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