

THE ANTIQUARIAN AND HIS PALAZZO

A case study of the interior of the Palazzo Davanzati in Florence

R.E. van den Bosch



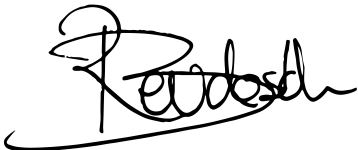
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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R.E. van den Bosch', with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

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This thesis is the result of a long and intense process and it would not have been possible without the help and encouragement of a number of people.

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INTRODUCTION

“A notable addition has just been made to the historical attractions of Florence by the opening of the restored Davanzati Palace in the Via Porta Rossa”.¹ With these words an anonymous correspondent of *The Times* began his article on the Palazzo Davanzati, which opened in Florence in 1910. In November 1904 Elia Volpi (1858–1936) bought the palazzo. Volpi was originally educated as a painter and restorer but worked at the beginning of the twentieth century as an art dealer and antiquarian. The Palazzo Davanzati was built for the Davizzi family, but it is known by the name of the third family that lived there; the Davanzati [fig. 1]. In the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, interest in the Italian Renaissance grew immensely. Collectors, scholars, writers and art lovers came from all over Europe and North America to Italy – particularly Florence – to immerse themselves in the culture and history of the city. Some of these visitors purchased artwork and furniture to decorate their houses back in Europe or America; others settled in Florence and built their collections there. As a consequence, this was a fortunate time for art dealers in Florence; the two most successful art dealers were Volpi and his teacher and colleague Stefano Bardini (1836–1922). Both acted upon this increased interest in Italian artworks and ensured that they had a great number of works available for potential buyers.

In 1904 Volpi expanded his business with the purchase of the Palazzo Davanzati [fig. 2]. According to general opinion, his intention was to restore the original medieval interior of the palazzo and to reinstate the medieval appearance of the domestic interior where three families, the Davizzi, Bartolini and Davanzati, had lived for over five decades.² The personal intentions of Volpi and the way in

¹ Anonymous correspondent, 4 May 1916, p. 6.

² Among others, Roberta Ferrazza, *Il Palazzo Davanzati* (1994), Adriana Turpin, ‘Objectifying the Domestic Interior: Domestic Furnishings and the Historical Interpretation of the Italian Interior’ (2013), Maria Fossi Todorow, *Palazzo Davanzati – Museum of the Florentine House* (1979).

which he intended to use the palazzo will be discussed later in this thesis. The restoration took six years. This was longer than Volpi initially intended because the entire structure of the building had to be rearranged, the interior had to be decorated and the building had to be filled with furniture. To reach his goal it is plausible that Volpi made use of examples or other sources representing the medieval Renaissance interior. Therefore, the central question of this thesis is whether Volpi used sources to renovate the fourteenth-century Davanzati palace to its original state, and if so, which sources he used. Unfortunately, this question and research field are plagued by problems which complicate study and make it difficult to provide a succinct answer. Furthermore, the question is related to various fields of research, namely interior design, the historical house museum, renovation, authenticity and representations of the domestic interior.

Problem 1 – The lack of previous research and discourse on the interior

One of the biggest problems is the minor amount of research that has been carried out on the interior of Italian Renaissance palazzi. As Marta Ajmar-Wollheim and Flora Dennis discussed in the introduction to the exhibition catalogue of *At Home in Renaissance Italy*, held from 5 October 2006 to 7 January 2007 in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, many scholars researching the Italian Renaissance domestic interior question “why hasn’t such a pivotal subject made it into the mainstream of Renaissance studies?”³ Interiors research has been of interest to only a small group of scholars, and specification of the Italian Renaissance has been even more limited. However, interest increased in 2001 when three London institutions (the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Royal College of Art and the Bedford Centre for the History of Women and Gender, located at Royal Holloway University of London) collaborated to develop the Centre for the Study of the Domestic Interior. Its purpose was to “develop what had been up to then a discrete set of academic

³ Ajmar-Wollheim, Dennis, 2006, p. 10.

interests into a more defined field of research".⁴ Furthermore, the Centre was established "to develop new histories of the home, its contents and its representation".⁵ Various publications support the work of the Centre or have been realised with its support, such as *Imagined Interiors: Representations of the Domestic Interior since the Renaissance* (2006) by Jeremy Aynsley and Charlotte Grant, or *Publishing the Modern Home, 1880-1950*, a special edition of the *Journal of Design History* by Jeremy Aynsley and Francesca Berry. These publications are some of the first broader research projects into the Italian domestic interior. Although research about the Italian Renaissance interior had been developed in the past, it was previously focused on the different types of furniture found within houses. Research on this subject increased at the beginning of the twentieth century as interest in the Italian Renaissance flourished. Scholars who have researched Italian Renaissance furniture include Wilhelm von Bode (1902), Attilio Schiaparelli (1908), Mario Praz (1964) and William M. Odom (1966).⁶ In 1991 Peter Thornton presented studies of the various types of furniture and interior aspects of the Renaissance, combined in *The Italian Renaissance Interior*.

All of the above-mentioned publications focus on the furniture and functions of the rooms in the medieval and Renaissance home. More recently, curiosity about the families that lived in the palazzi, their habits and the domestic household has grown. In order to better understand the people of the fifteenth century, a clearer understanding of their habits, culture and social standards has to be formed, including how a family lived together in a palazzo and how the house functioned in different rooms. This research field expanded with the creation of the Centre for the Study of the Domestic Interior and its publications. More recently, further books

⁴ Aynsley, Grant, 2006, p. 10.

⁵ Website of The Centre for the Study of the Domestic Interior, (n.d.), <http://csdi.rca.ac.uk/>.

⁶ Wilhelm von Bode, *Die italienischen Hausmöbel der Renaissance* (1902), Attilio Schiaparelli, *La casa Fiorentina e I suoi arredi nei secoli XIV e XV* (1908), Mario Praz, *An Illustrated history of interior decoration: from Pompeii to Art Nouveau* (1964) and William M. Odom, *A history of Italian furniture from the fourteenth to the early nineteenth centuries* (1966).

have been added to this list. In 2013 Erin J. Campbell, Stephanie R. Miller and Elizabeth Carrol Consavari wrote *The Early Modern Italian Domestic Interior, 1400–1700: Objects, Spaces, Domesticities*, in which various aspects of the Renaissance home are discussed. These include eating habits, variations between houses of different cities and the role of children in the Italian Renaissance home. Ajmar-Wollheim and Dennis also wrote various articles on the Renaissance interior, which are gathered in *Approaching the Italian Renaissance Interior* (2007) along with the work of other scholars.

Another research field in which interest has increased in recent years, and which is particularly applicable to the subject of this thesis, is the representation of the interior. For instance, in her publication *Medieval and Renaissance Interiors in Illuminated Manuscripts* (2016) Eva Oledzka examines the representation of interiors specifically found in manuscripts. As mentioned above, *Imagined Interiors: Representations of the Domestic Interior since the Renaissance* also offered a breakthrough regarding various representations of the interior in diverse areas and periods of art.

Problem 2 – The lack of (reliable) sources

In addition to the lack of existing research, the unreliability of primary sources (which in turn affects the trustworthiness of secondary sources) is a further difficulty faced when researching Italian medieval and Renaissance interiors, because the authenticity of sources cannot be fully proven. Examples of such sources are paintings, woodcuts, illustrated manuscripts and other visual sources which represent the interior dating from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century. This problem has been identified by many scholars, including the Dutch researcher Willemijn Fock. In her article 'Semblance or Reality? The Domestic Interior in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Genre Painting' (1998) she revealed the unreliability of paintings and woodcuts in their representation of the Dutch interior. Until now,

these artworks had been used as a standard source for research about the seventeenth-century Dutch interior. Elsewhere, Patricia Allerson notes the problematic authenticity of sources in her essay 'Contrary to the truth and also the semblance of reality?' Entering a Venetian 'lying-in' chamber (1605)' (2007). In her consideration of the available evidence for the placement of furniture in Renaissance homes, she found that assessing the reliability of sources is problematic. There are so few sources available that the validity of these sources as a general approach to understanding the Renaissance interior is questionable. Since it is difficult to determine which images are trustworthy, scholars have turned to inventories as a more reliable source.⁷ Furthermore, reliability is particularly problematic because only a limited number of sources is available. Answers could be found in the archives in Florence; the latest publication of the Museo di Palazzo Davanzati, *1916–1956–2016, Dall'asta al museo, Elia Volpi e Palazzo Davanzati nel collezionismo pubblico e privato del Novecento* (2017) provided a significant amount of new information about Elia Volpi, as well as the palazzo, the situation in Florence around the turn of the century and the international changes that followed Volpi's purchase. Unfortunately, little insight is offered into Volpi's restoration of the palazzo. Earlier publications on the Palazzo Davanzati, such as the 1994 publication *Palazzo Davanzati e le collezioni di Elia Volpi* by Roberta Ferrazza, which provide an overview of the history of the palazzo, have also had to deal with the issue of limited sources. For example, no inventories are available from any of the residential families that lived in the palazzo over the years, further complicating research in this area.

Apart from the books mentioned above, the optimal source for this research would be a Volpi archive with letters and personal notes, written during or before the time of the renovation. Searching for these sources would be like looking for a needle in a haystack. There is a photographic collection commissioned by Volpi,

⁷ Allerson, 2007, p. 7.

which was donated to the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence in 1983 by the family of Mario Vannini Parenti, Volpi's son-in-law.⁸ Regrettably, this collection is not very creative. Volpi ordered major photographic campaigns by the photographers Fratelli Alinari and Giacomo Brogi, which were focussed on items that Volpi wanted to sell or on promoting the Palazzo Davanzati.⁹ The collection is focussed on the time after the renovation and opening of the palazzo, while the period before the opening is the most interesting for this thesis. Further research into the archives of Florence would be required to form a concrete view on the intentions and ideals of Volpi for the palazzo, with no certainty of finding anything. This thesis will be a start to research into the period before the Palazzo Davanzati was opened, a period which until now has been under-represented in existing research on the palazzo.

The central question – whether Volpi used sources to model his palazzo after one of the Middle Ages and Renaissance – is accompanied by many further questions. First, many scholars, writers and travel books have stated that the goal of Volpi was to create the impression of an old Florentine medieval house. On the basis of later discoveries, which will be specified in this thesis, the accuracy of this goal can be questioned. Also unclear is Volpi's true intention upon opening the palazzo to the public, the kind of experience he wanted to create and whether he wished to use it as a showroom to sell objects from his collection. These questions relate to the aspect of authenticity, according to which the creator of an historic house museum would consider whether to create a fully authentic experience for the visitor. What was more important: creating an interior that was truly authentic, or the experience of a medieval interior? And in recreating the medieval interior, did Volpi intend to create a palace with an educational function, or was it a covert means to boost his sales as an art dealer? Was Volpi inspired or influenced by other

⁸ Cappellini, 2017, p. 182.

⁹ Cappellini, 2017, p. 182.

art dealers? How did the world that Volpi live in affect his goals for the Palazzo Davanzati?

Despite these questions and the various problems that they raise, this research field is interested in more than simply the items of furniture contained in the Italian medieval and Renaissance interior; it also investigates the families of the palazzi and how they lived. Indeed, the interior can inform scholars about the habits of fifteenth-century palazzi residents. While this thesis cannot fully answer the question regarding the habits and interior preferences of fifteenth-century families, it does contribute to research into the interior of Italian medieval and Renaissance palazzi and creates opportunities for further research. By examining the possible sources that were consulted to create the Palazzo Davanzati, the design and development of historical house museums can be more fully elaborated.

Prior research into the Davanzati palace has focused on the families that lived there, Volpi as an art dealer and the effect of his business on the American and European art dealing worlds. In recent years, interiors research has focused more on the habits of the families and how the interior was depicted in visual representations. More research is needed into Florentine families and how they refurbished their palazzi. This thesis combines the existing research on the Palazzo Davanzati with prior interiors research of the Italian Middle Ages and Renaissance, in order to determine where the disparities of these fields converge.

This thesis examines the central question of whether Volpi used any type of source while recreating the Palazzo Davanzati, and begins with the intentions of Volpi when he bought the Palazzo Davanzati: whether he made statements about it, what kind of style he wanted to pursue and what his precise goal was while creating the palazzo. The antique and art dealing world of the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries will be examined in chapter 2, including how other contemporary art dealers could have influenced Volpi. Following a description of the various art dealers working at the time, the authenticity of the objects that

they purchased is questioned. Contemporary visitors of the palazzo may not always note its authenticity, but their opinions about the Palazzo Davanzati are important to understand the contemporary reception of the palazzo; this is discussed in chapter 2. Chapter 3 compares the interior created by Volpi and the interior aspects found by researchers, and considers whether Volpi arranged the palazzo according to the original design and the various functions that occurred in a palazzo such as the Palazzo Davanzati. Finally, the possible sources – including written and visual material – that Volpi could have used to complete and arrange the interior of his palazzo are examined.

This thesis begins by examining the intentions of Volpi upon purchasing the palazzo. He purchased the building in 1904 and, according to the general opinion, recreated an old Florentine house which could be visited and studied. Whether this was the true and single intention of Volpi will be discussed in the first chapter of this thesis.

CHAPTER I

THE INTENTIONS OF VOLPI IN THE RENOVATION OF THE PALAZZO DAVANZATI

Almost all of the books and articles written about the Palazzo Davanzati and Elia Volpi share one opinion: that in buying the palazzo on the via Porta Rossa, Volpi intended to create a private museum by reconstructing the palazzo as an old Florentine house and regaining the sense of the former home of the Davizzi, Bartolini and Davanzati families. However, scholars differ in their opinion about the actual intentions of Volpi, which makes this area of research important, as subsequent research has been based upon the opinion described above. Adriana Turpin stated that Volpi furnished the palazzo “to create a museum of the Renaissance domestic interior”.¹⁰ According to Maria Fossi Todorow, Volpi created “an overall harmony between architecture and interior decoration which represented a major reconstruction of the style and life of an original Florentine *palazzo*”. Moreover, Roberta Ferrazza stated that “Volpi comprò Palazzo Davanzati con l’intento di restaurarlo come ricostruzione-esempio di una casa fiorentina antica, sia nell’architettura che nell’arredo”.¹¹ Even though scholars have formulated a generally accepted opinion, no agreement has been reached on Volpi’s personal intentions regarding the palazzo. This opens the debate and the search for the true intention of Volpi. This is a difficult aspect of the research, since the primary sources were commissioned or written by Volpi himself. Caution is needed when referencing these sources, as the actual intention of Volpi and the intention that he wanted his visitors and scholars to believe could differ. Accordingly, he could have influenced the primary sources.

¹⁰ Turpin, 2013, p. 216.

¹¹ Ferrazza, 1994, p. 32.

Volpi was working as an art dealer when he bought the palazzo, so he likely planned to use it as a showroom for his pieces. In this case, the interior would not be the most important aspect of the palazzo. Rather, the individual items themselves and the sale thereof would be more significant than the arranged interior. Volpi influenced his visitors to believe the idea that he aimed to recreate the Italian medieval Renaissance interior of a merchant family. The installation of the memorial stone in front of the Palazzo Davanzati is one example of this influence. The memorial stone is engraved with the following statement:

“Questo palagio – che I Davizzi nel 1300 si fecero edificare – e nel 1500 ebbero I Davanzati – acquistò Elia Volpi nel 1904 – e per amore della bellezza antica – restituiti nel suo primo stato – di fabbrica e di arredamento – esempio per la sua interezza unico – di quello che fosse – nell’età della gloriosa repubblica – una casa di mercatanti fiorentini”.¹²

In Ferrazza’s *Palazzo Davanzati e le collezioni di Elia Volpi* (1994), which provides a detailed description of the palazzo, Ferrazza states that the inscription was commissioned by Volpi himself and that it welcomed guests to the opening of the Palazzo Davanzati on 24 April 1910 [fig. 3].¹³ The statement on the memorial stone describes Volpi’s love for ancient Florentine times as the motivation for his renovation of the palazzo to its original state, *restituiti nel suo primo stato*. This primary source is one that researchers must be extremely careful with when they study this subject. Ferrazza states that the inscription was commissioned by Volpi himself, whereby Volpi could have influenced his visitors and affected their opinions about the palazzo. Other scholars view this memorial stone as proof of the intentions of Volpi, but it is more an indication of what the Palazzo Davanzati

¹² Ferrazza, 1994, p. 44.

¹³ Ferrazza, 1994, p. 44.

represented and what kind of experience the viewer could expect. The true intentions, in the sense of how Volpi used the palazzo and what was his personal aim with the palazzo, are not explained by this memorial stone.

Another source that favours the above-mentioned generally accepted opinion is an interview in the magazine *Il Resto del Carlino* conducted with Volpi in 1909:

“Da un resto di pitture che esistevano nel palazzo al secondo piano, rimaste sempre scoperte, capii che dovevano esserci altre stanze dello stesso genere... In quel palazzo v’era di tutto un pò... Dalle cantine alle soffitte... a ripristinarlo... Ho dovuto faticare non poco... In quattro camere abbiamo trovato degli affreschi con grandi stemmi di famiglie fiorentine; in altre come nel cortile, delle iscrizioni di dati e fatti storici riflettenti la storia fiorentina, e disegni a carbone di teste e di figure... io mi sono limitato a conservare i resti antichi; né abbellimenti, né invenzioni ho portato in questo restauro”.¹⁴

According to the interview, Volpi aimed to recreate the palazzo as an ancient Florentine house without any adjustments or improvements. Both the memorial stone and the interview were initiated by Volpi and provided the opportunity to present his palazzo to the public. Both sources provide a coloured intention of Volpi regarding how he influenced his visitors. The way that visitors saw the palazzo, which is based on these influenced sources, is therefore debatable. Later research and discoveries, which will be examined in this chapter, make this vision increasingly questionable.

Up to now, Volpi has been presented by authors and scholars as a businessman who temporarily stepped aside from his profession as an art dealer and created his personal museum, the Palazzo Davanzati. In fact, later discoveries

¹⁴ Degli Alberti, 1909, p. 3.

imply that the profession of art dealer was more present than ever in Volpi when he created the palazzo. It is thus important to separate the intention of which Volpi convinced his viewers from his intentions in terms of how he intended to use his palazzo. This implies that Volpi used the palazzo as a showroom for his business, as a place to sell and to attract new customers. The completely restored palazzo was the perfect décor for his art dealership. This chapter examines reasons to doubt the opinion created by scholars.

The number and nature of the original furniture pieces and artwork of the Davanzati family remaining in the palazzo when Volpi purchased the building in 1904 is uncertain. Because no inventory was produced by the Davanzati family or by Volpi upon purchasing the palazzo, it is difficult to establish whether Volpi's collection contained any items that were originally the property of the former residents. After the last heir of the Davanzati family died in 1838, the building was sold to sir Antonio Orfei in 1859. He divided the palazzo into separate apartments for various Florentine families.¹⁵ As a result of these alterations, it is possible that only a few or even none of the original pieces remained in the building. With the exception of the walls added by Orfei within the original structure, the colourful wall frescoes were covered with a thick layer of white plaster. After Volpi purchased the palazzo he began to renovate the building with the help of his assistants, Federigo Angeli and Silvio Zanchi.¹⁶ Together they removed the extra walls that were added by Orfei, renovated the ceilings and removed the plaster in order to reveal and restore the wall paintings. Together with Angeli and Zanchi, Attilio Schiaparelli, the author of *La Casa Fiorentina ei suoi arredi nei secoli XIV e XV* (1908), also worked with Volpi on the reconstruction of the palazzo. His research on various Florentine palazzi would have helped Volpi in his plans to recreate the palazzo. Schiaparelli will

¹⁵ Ferrazza, 1994, p. 21.

¹⁶ Fossi Todorow, 1979, p. 5.

be further discussed in chapter four, 'Inspiration for Volpi - Representing the Italian domestic interior'.

The renovation of the palazzo took longer than expected. The building activities were extended twice due to difficulties faced during the renovation: "Il Palazzo Davanzati è purtroppo indietro nei restauri perché fatti con tanta coscienza che per le difficoltà incontrate per bene riuscire sarà inaugurato nella primavera del 1910".¹⁷ On 24 April 1910 the palazzo was finally opened to the public. The opening was celebrated with a large social event attended by guests including various Florentine aristocrats and cultural figures.¹⁸

To succeed in his recreation of an old Florentine home, Volpi must have consulted references to create his ideal private museum. Unfortunately, few sources remain from the time when the palazzo was renovated. Ferrazza states that Volpi was the cause of this limited number of sources, as he renovated the palazzo in absolute secrecy.¹⁹ For this sharp statement of secrecy Ferrazza provides no sources. The conclusion that there were limited sources due to this alleged secrecy underestimates the importance of the missing sources. A statement like Ferrazza's without any proof cannot be assumed to be true. Undoubtedly, Volpi must have studied both the subject and time period to be able to create the most authentic experience possible. The types of sources that Volpi might have used to create the Palazzo Davanzati (visual, written and other palazzi in Florence) are discussed in chapter four, 'Inspiration for Volpi – representing the Italian domestic interior'.

The proposed secrecy entails another, more important, question; what was this secrecy intended to conceal? Recent discoveries by Lynn Catterson, who researched Stefano Bardini and his atelier, brought to light forgeries that were sold by Bardini, the former teacher of Volpi. Catterson's research reveals that not all of the pieces sold by Bardini to his clients were authentic. In her article 'Stefano Bardini

¹⁷ Ferrazza, 2017, p. 20. Letter of Volpi to Bode: Florence, 10 March 1909.

¹⁸ Ferrazza, 1994, p. 44.

¹⁹ Ferrazza, 2017, p. 16.

and the Taxonomic Branding of Market Style: From the Gallery of a Dealer to the Institutional Canon' (2017) Catterson examines Bardini's trades, and found that he sold the same item to numerous clients.²⁰ Catterson concludes that the production of duplicates was being undertaken in Bardini's atelier.²¹ In this way "the practice of fabrication was a substantial aspect of Bardini's business practice".²² As Volpi worked in the atelier of Bardini prior to purchasing the Palazzo Davanzati, it is likely that he worked with Bardini to create some of these forgeries and even continued to do so within his own business.

In 1916 the collection of the Davanzati palace was sold at an auction in New York. Volpi sold all 1,215 of his pieces and returned to Italy with a million dollars. With this financially successful auction in mind, Volpi returned to the United States in 1917, with 521 more pieces to sell. This time the yield of the auction was relatively low; he earned 178,200 dollars. This was due to the forgery scandal that Volpi was involved with at the time. Around the same time of the auction Volpi was sued by the court of New York for selling falsified paintings of Van Dyck and Rubens.²³ The art collector Jackson Johnson discovered that paintings which were sold for \$8,400 were actually forgeries and were only worth \$200. Volpi continuously claimed to be innocent and to have been unaware that the paintings were not originals, while admitting that he did not have the paintings checked by a specialist before selling them.²⁴ A few years later, Volpi was implicated in another forgery scandal concerning his ties to the business of sculptor Alceo Dossena (1878–1937) because he sold a number of sculptures made by Dossena. In the early twentieth century fake artwork circulated throughout the Italian art market. Dossena was a skilled sculptor who mastered the art of making forgeries of sculptures in the

²⁰ In the article 'Stefano Bardini and the Taxonomic Branding of Market Style: From the Gallery of a Dealer to the Institutional Canon', the sculpture Madonna di Verona was taken as an example to show the duplicates that were found in the business of Stefano Bardini.

²¹ Catterson, 2017, p. 62.

²² Catterson, 2017, p. 62.

²³ Ferrazza, 1994, p. 120.

²⁴ Anonymous correspondent, 8 June 1919, p. 23.

Renaissance style, as well as sculptures of the Roman, Greek and Gothic periods. Dossena was so skilled that even experts like the famous art historian and curator Wilhelm von Bode (1845–1929) could not detect the forgery.²⁵ In the photographic collection of Volpi, 74 photographs were found to depict sculptures which are now known to be made by Dossena.²⁶ Volpi's sale of Dossena's forgeries resulted in scandal when his clients discovered that the items they had purchased were fake. While Volpi was never convicted for selling forgeries, his trustworthiness has been shattered by these discoveries.²⁷ The secrecy posited by Ferrazza might have been a concealment of such forgeries. With the discoveries of Bardini, Dossena and the two paintings, Volpi can no longer be considered an honest art dealer.

Researchers' interest in the Palazzo Davanzati may appear odd, considering the revival of the Italian Renaissance in the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries and the origination of the building from the Middle Ages. However, the researchers' interest is not peculiar; interest in the medieval parts of the city grew when the city centre of Florence was drastically modernised during the second half of the nineteenth century, after Florence became the capital of the Kingdom of Italy in 1865. At this point almost all of the medieval palazzi and tower houses were destroyed or incorporated into other buildings. Various scholars, art lovers and, more importantly, the Associazione per la Difesa di Firenze Antica fought for the preservation of medieval Florence, resulting in a number of medieval palazzi being saved in addition to the Palazzo Davanzati. For example, the Palazzo dell'Arte della Lana, the Palagio di Parte Guelfa and the Casa di Dante were renovated and saved from demolition.²⁸ The latter two palazzi were subsequently renovated by Giuseppe Castellucci (1863–1939), an architect born in Arezzo. The choice of Castellucci was an explicit social statement: "Such patronage

²⁵ Goldhahn, (n.d.)

²⁶ Catterson, 2017, p. 193.

²⁷ Goldhahn, (n.d.).

²⁸ Ferrazza, 2017, p. 30.

acknowledged full participation in a conservative and traditional cultural milieu that was decidedly antimodern”.²⁹ The palazzi were saved because “si riscoprì nelle sopravvissute architetture medievali non solo una valenza documentaria, ma una vera e propria fonte di valori spirituali”.³⁰ This interest in the surviving medieval buildings challenges the style that is attributed to the Palazzo Davanzati. Scholars differ in their opinions on this style difference. For example, the current directors of the museum, Maria Grazia Vaccari and Rosanna Catarina Proto Pisani, have referred to a medieval house. Others, such as Adriana Turpin, have defined the building as Renaissance, while Ferrazza considered the palazzo to have both medieval and Renaissance characteristics.³¹ It is difficult to precisely determine to which period the palazzo belongs because the palazzo itself was built in the Middle Ages and thus exhibits various features from this time. The windows, the façade of the building and the defence holes in the *Sala Madornale* are all characteristic of a medieval building.

In contrast with the medieval exterior, most of the furniture dates from the Renaissance era. Volpi himself describes the building in the auction catalogue of 1916 as “the most interesting museum in Italy of Renaissance life and art”.³² The 1916 auction catalogue presents items from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries, which suggests that Volpi wanted to showcase the different styles of furniture and artwork present in the palazzo as it functioned and changed during the time the Davizzi, Bartolini and Davanzati families lived there. In almost every one of the few interviews with and statements made by Volpi he spoke about the recreation of an old Florentine house, without specifying whether he intended to create a house according to a particular art period. The introduction of the 1916 auction catalogue is one of the first mentions of a Renaissance house. Volpi may

²⁹ Medina Lasansky, 2004, p. 42.

³⁰ Ferrazza, 2017, p. 30.

³¹ Maria Grazia Vaccari, Rosanna Catarina Proto Pisani, *Palazzo Davanzati. A house of medieval Florence*. (2011). Adriana Turpin. ‘Objectifying the Domestic Interior: Domestic Furnishings and the Historical Interpretation of the Italian Renaissance Interior’ (2013). Roberta Ferrazza. *Palazzo Davanzati e il collezioni di Elia Volpi*. (1994).

³² Volpi, 1916, p. 3.

have been cautious to specify a particular period for the house because three different families lived in the palazzo over a period of 500 years. Over this period the styles changed and the interior was adapted. Furthermore, because interest in the Renaissance was flourishing when Volpi opened his palazzo, filling it with Renaissance artwork and furniture would have been an optimal marketing choice. This would have attracted more visitors to the palazzo, thus leading to more publicity for Volpi. The palazzo represented the different styles of its time and changed through the centuries. Volpi may have wished to illustrate this evolution through the various objects he exhibited. For this reason and due to the combination of medieval and Renaissance furniture and architectural details present in the palazzo, it seems more appropriate to consider the Palazzo Davanzati a medieval Renaissance palazzo than to draw a clear distinction between the two styles.

The items exhibited by Volpi in the palazzo were mostly derived from his own collection. As mentioned above, no inventory is available to determine whether objects were left in the palazzo when it was sold to Volpi. Consequently, it is impossible to establish whether items were present in the building when Volpi purchased the palazzo. Although no records of present items remain, it is striking that the day after the opening of the Palazzo Davanzati to the public in 1910, an auction was hosted in Rome by auction house Jandolo and Tavazzi selling various objects from Volpi's collection.³³ The auction was criticised. People believed that Volpi wanted to burn the last remaining pieces of the Palazzo Davanzati or to dispose of items with little worth.³⁴ The auction catalogue does not mention whether the items were intended for the Palazzo Davanzati, only that they came from Volpi's own collection. Volpi could have taken the possible remaining items that were left in the building when he purchased it, combined them with items from

³³ Jandolo & Tavazzi. *Catalogue de la vente des objets d'art ancien composant les collections Elie Volpi*. (1910).

³⁴ Ferrazza, 1994, p. 46.

his own collection and eventually selected which items to include in the palazzo. The magazine *L'Antiquario* argued against the critiques, and attempted to remind critical readers of the purpose of the Palazzo Davanzati – that it was not built as a venue for sales:

“Il Palazzo Davanzati non fu ripristinato per scopo venale, per accrescere pietre alla corona già splendida di chi lo acquistò con intento nobilmente grandioso; non fu comprato né restaurato per speculazione, ma per sentimento assai elevato ove le punte velenose di critici gretti arrivar non potrebbero. L'addobbo del palazzo Davanzati racava uno strappo alla collezione raccolta con tanto amore. Aperta la ferita, meglio disperder tutto e ricominciar magari da capo. Questo il concetto informatore che indubbiamente spinse il professore alla vendita, per questo volle che vendita ed inaugurazione fossero contemporanee, perché coloro che lo conobbero nei primordi, ne apprezzarono e ne incoraggiarono l'opera, godessero del preveduto trionfo”.³⁵

The comments made on the sale were positioned against Volpi as an art dealer and his possible secret agenda. According to Ferrazza, Volpi stated several times that he had no intention of selling the items from his palazzo: “Volpi aveva dichiarato pubblicamente più volte che nulla di quello che arredava il suo museo era in vendita”.³⁶ Despite this statement by Ferrazza and the interview published in *L'Antiquario*, the precise date of the auction is highly prescient and Volpi's profession as art dealer is substantially coincidental. His commitment to his profession as an art dealer and his goal to use the palazzo as a showroom for sales is proven by this auction. His commitment can also be observed several years later,

³⁵ Tolosani, 1910, p. 57.

³⁶ Ferrazza, 2017, p. 25.

at the onset of World War I. A financial crisis hit Europe and caused collectors from, for example, Germany and England to suspend their purchases from Volpi.³⁷ Consequently, Volpi took his career elsewhere: “Elia Volpi cominciò a pensare seriamente alla necessità di mettere a frutto la diffusa fama del suo museo private della casa fiorentina antica e decise di vendere gli oggetti che dal 1910 erano l’arredo di Palazzo Davanzati”.³⁸ Since America did not enter the war until 1917, American buyers did not encounter financial trouble to the same degree as European buyers. The rise of the art market in America, a land in which Volpi had always been interested, brought Volpi to New York.³⁹ He stated in the introduction to the 1916 New York auction catalogue that the “unhappy state of Europe . . . has forced me to disperse the gatherings of years,” but also that he had intentionally chosen to organize a public auction in America.⁴⁰ At first his arrival in America was not entirely appreciated: “Upon his arrival in New York harbour, the elderly and eminent Professor, who spoke no English, was thrust into captivity on Ellis Island on a moral charge stemming from his relation with his secretary and traveling companion, Signora Morosini. After the press had fully exploited the professor’s alleged unchastity, the Italian Ambassador obtained his release, and Volpi, presumably wearing the badge of infamy, attempted to sell his collection to New York dealers”.⁴¹ Those New York dealers were not happy to see Volpi interfering with their market and eventually offered \$500,000 for his 1,215 pieces.⁴² However, auctioneer Thomas Kirby advised Volpi to host an auction, and as a result Volpi made almost double the amount of money offered.⁴³ The sale demonstrates that Volpi was above all an art dealer. In his own publication Volpi skirts around the

³⁷ Ferrazza, 1994, p. 114.

³⁸ Ferrazza, 1994, p. 114.

³⁹ Craven, 2005, p. 59.

⁴⁰ Volpi, 1916, p. 3.

⁴¹ Towner, 1971, p. 320.

⁴² Ferrazza, 1994, p. 117.

⁴³ Ferrazza, 2017, p. 25.

reason for his sales, stating that he was forced to go to America. Forced seems too strong a word in this situation, since Volpi knew and likely experienced the continual rise of financial troubles in Europe, and knew that he would profit more from an auction in America. Hosting such an auction would be a financial bonus, open up a new client base and introduce him as an art dealer to various American collectors.

While Volpi used his palazzo for business purposes, it also inspired other collectors, painters, renovators and artisans. Among others, the architects Erik Friberger and Ottavio Papini, Charles Holroyd of the National Gallery in London, art historian Wilhelm Reinhold Valentiner, painter Julius Rolshoven, art dealer Arturo Laschi and the renovator Mauro Pelliccioli all visited the palazzo. Volpi also studied other palazzi that were renovated by collectors or academics in order to preserve and exhibit the history of the city and educate visitors, such as Bardini's Palazzo Mozzi, the Villa La Pietra of Arthur Acton (1873–1953) and the Villa i Tatti of Bernard Berenson (1865–1959). Volpi's close involvement with the Palazzo Davanzati can be seen in the serious way that he remained connected to it, even after selling it to the Egyptian antiquarian Leopold Bengujat in 1926. He kept himself informed about the new owners of the palazzo and their adjustments, and ensured that his vision of the palazzo and its educational value would not be neglected. In 1934 Volpi penned a protest to the mayor of Florence: "la deturpazione fatta al Palazzo Davanzati... dall'attuale proprietario, così ignorante in cose d'arte antica, fino al punto di svisare completamente la linea del Palazzo Fiorentino del '300 e la sua originalità".⁴⁴ Changes had been made to the interior that Volpi had arranged. However, these changes had not been discussed when Volpi sold the palazzo to the new buyers, who were required to promise that nothing of his arranged interiors would be altered:

⁴⁴ Ferrazza, 1994, p. 57.

“Non mi sarei dato alcun pensiero se il restauro di quel palazzo non mi fosse costato ben cinque anni di fatiche e di sacrificio artistico . . . disgraziatamente vendei quell'edificio per una eventualità di cose . . . ma dal prof. Giuseppe Volterra che fu in parte mediatore della vendita, ebbi formale assicurazione che nessuna modificazione sarebbe stata apportata al lavoro da me compiuto. Contrariamente a ciò, per quanto riguarda l'interno del fabbricato, fu pensato di sfondare il cortile ed un'altra stanza con immisione di scala a chiocciola in fero, per andare poi a spegnere i moccoli nella cappella che doveva sorgere nelle cantine. Inoltre alle porte che danno nel cortile sono state applicate delle gabbie in ferro battuto così materiali e di cattivo gusto come se dovessero contenere delle bestie feroci”.⁴⁵

This quote illustrates the love that Volpi put into the renovation of the palazzo and his intention to arrange its interior and exterior in the form of a medieval and Renaissance house.

With so many unavailable sources it is difficult to form a concrete view of Volpi's intentions with the Palazzo Davanzati. Even more importantly, when researching the intentions of a historical person, it is important to consider that intentions are personal and can change due to many types of circumstances. In the case of Volpi, it is possible that his intentions changed as a result of the time. He may have intended to create an old Florentine house and not to sell any of its items, but due to World War I could have later changed his mind and been forced to sell his collection overseas. Even so, the early auction in 1910 that followed the opening of the Palazzo Davanzati shows that Volpi was likely to use the palazzo as a showroom for his dealership rather than as a museum. Both the museum function and the business aspect strengthen each other, and would have made the concept of the palazzo stronger and Volpi a more successful and a well-known dealer. At the

⁴⁵ Ferrazza, 1994, p. 58.

end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, the art dealing business in Florence was prosperous. This business climate in which Volpi worked and the opening of many renovated palazzi will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER II

ART DEALING IN FLORENCE AROUND 1900

AND THE (UN)IMPORTANCE OF AUTHENTICITY

Art dealing in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries

When Volpi changed his profession from restorer to art dealer, the antique market already had a favoured period – the Italian Renaissance. Florence was the centre of the Italian antique market, and many collectors, museum directors and other interested people from all over Europe and America travelled there and immersed themselves in the world of the Renaissance. Art dealers situated in Florence took advantage of the fact that due to economic changes, many wealthy Italian families had to sell several items from their collections and hence provided dealers with new items.⁴⁶ Collectors, meanwhile, were eager to purchase items and fill their collections. In addition to Italian collectors, a large number of British and American collectors and members of the rich elite were also interested in the Italian Renaissance. When Volpi was still a student of Bardini (and later when he had his own business) they both took advantage of this interest by offering material to foreign collectors. Volpi and Bardini worked with photographs and thus provided collectors with the opportunity to survey the available offerings without the inconvenience of travel. On the backs of these photographs Volpi wrote information about the artist, the name of the artwork and whether the object was for sale.⁴⁷

Collectors, academics and the rich elite began to collect works from the Renaissance to furnish their homes and museums in Europe and the United States. Some of these collectors even went a step further and bought a palazzo of their own in Florence or the surrounding area. These buildings were restored in an attempt to

⁴⁶ Goldhahn, (n.d.).

⁴⁷ Goldhahn, (n.d.).

regain their 'original' state and were used to exhibit the artwork of collectors. John Temple Leader (1810–1903) was one of the first to do so. He purchased a castle at Vincigliata in 1855, which he restored with authentic furniture to imitate its appearance in Renaissance days. The Vincigliata castle was an inspiration for many others, and numerous new Anglo-American inhabitants of Florence were inspired to do the same.⁴⁸ Leader's idea and implementation were similar to the designs of Volpi with the Palazzo Davanzati. Both collectors attempted to restore the original state of the property and to come as close as possible to its original condition. The difference between the two is that Volpi was an art dealer and also held the business aspect of the palazzo in mind, while Leader was an English politician and connoisseur. Their personal intentions regarding their palazzi thus differed. However, in both the cases of Volpi and Leader, a former Renaissance palazzo was restored and filled with Renaissance artwork and furniture. In other cases, collectors chose to build a new house in the Renaissance style rather than use an original building. For instance, the Bagatti Valsecchi brothers furnished their family home in Milan, the Palazzo Bagatti Valsecchi. Meanwhile, Frederick Stibbert (1838–1906) collected a large number of armour pieces and other artworks in his house, the Villa of Montughi. Unlike these buildings with their modern features, Volpi made it clear that he did not add nor change anything concerning the structure of the Palazzo Davanzati: "io mi sono limitato a conservare i resti antichi; né abbellimenti, né invenzioni ho portato in questo restauro".⁴⁹ The various palazzi that were being renovated and opened to the public could have inspired Volpi to open up a palazzo himself. The favoured period of the art market at the time, the Renaissance, likely persuaded Volpi to focus on Renaissance art instead of art from another period; thus, he filled his palazzo with mostly Renaissance art. Furthermore, Volpi had a personal interest in the Renaissance. While studying at the Accademia di Belle Arti

⁴⁸ Turpin, 2013, p. 214.

⁴⁹ Ferrazza, 1994, p. 40.

in Florence he began as a student of Annibale Gatti (1828–1909), a painter under whom he studied the great works of the Italian Renaissance. Volpi was especially fond of the works of Ghirlandaio, Raphael and Andrea del Sarto.⁵⁰ As mentioned earlier, Volpi repeatedly stated that he had no intentions to sell the items from his palazzo; but in 1916 he sold his entire collection from the palazzo. His choice to fill the palazzo with mostly Renaissance art would have contributed to the idea of this sale, as Volpi must have considered what type of art would attract the most attention and visitors to his palazzo. Around the same time that Volpi purchased and opened his fully refurbished palazzo, two other collectors with almost the same interests as Volpi opened a palazzo along with their collection: Stefano Bardini and Herbert Horne (1864–1916).

Stefano Bardini

Stefano Bardini, the “prince of antique dealers”, was born on 13 May 1836 in Pieve Santo Stefano.⁵¹ He studied at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Florence to become a painter and worked as a copyist and restorer before starting his art trading business in the 1870s.⁵² As an art dealer, Bardini primarily collected medieval and Renaissance paintings, sculptures and other artwork.⁵³ Bardini first focussed on the Italian market, but in 1870 he was introduced to Wilhelm von Bode (1845–1929), the creator of the Kaiser Friedrich Museum, who at that time was the assistant curator at the Antiquities Department and the Gemäldegalerie of the Royal Museums in Berlin.⁵⁴ Von Bode introduced Bardini to the international antique world, which expanded Bardini’s business range.⁵⁵ In 1880 Bardini designed his own

⁵⁰ Ferrazza, 1994, p. 79.

⁵¹ Niemeyer Chini, 2009, p. 37.

⁵² Nesi, 2011, p. 184.

⁵³ Website Victoria and Albert Museum, (n.d.).

⁵⁴ Website RKD&artists, (n.d.).

⁵⁵ Nesi, 2011, p. 184.

gallery in Florence with architect Corinto Corinti (1841–1930), where his artwork was displayed and where students could work: the Galleria di Piazza de' Mozzi [fig. 4].

The palazzo was divided into rooms with large windows and was filled with fireplaces, wall panelling and ceilings.⁵⁶ With these varied architectural features Bardini created small interiors within his gallery, where he exhibited his collection and offered his visitors the chance to wander around the showrooms.⁵⁷

Three years after Bardini purchased the Palazzo Mozzi, Volpi started as a student in his atelier. Bardini influenced Volpi's career and introduced him to the use of photography for art dealing, which was extremely useful for dealing overseas. While Volpi was less inclined to "photographic experimentation" than Bardini, he did work with photography for his dealing business and commissioned large campaigns with Alinari and Brogi to promote his palazzo.⁵⁸

The importance of Bardini in the art world must not be underrated. He was one of the most important art dealers of Florence in the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. Adriana Turpin argues that the influence of Bardini on the art market remains visible today: "Bardini's influence in creating the nineteenth-century Renaissance collection cannot be underestimated and his ideas of display influenced the representation of the collections of both Isabella Stewart Gardner and Nolie Jacquemart-André".⁵⁹ This particular way of exhibiting items is indicated in figures 5 and 6. Lynn Catterson agrees with Turpin's statement in her article 'Stefano Bardini and the Taxonomic Branding of Marketplace Style: From the Gallery of a Dealer to the Institutional Canon' (2013). With the items that Bardini sold he developed a recognisable personal taste, thus creating "a particular brand".⁶⁰ Bardini worked with collectors and museums across Europe and America, and filled their collections with his view of the Italian Renaissance. In addition to

⁵⁶ Craven, 2005, p. 59.

⁵⁷ Craven, 2005, p. 59.

⁵⁸ Cappellini, 2017, p. 182.

⁵⁹ Turpin, 2013, p. 216.

⁶⁰ Catterson, 2017, p. 42.

Wilhelm von Bode another of his most important clients was the director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Henry Gurdon Marquand (1819–1902), who worked at the museum in the 1890s and bought many works from Bardini.⁶¹ Aside from museums, interest in the Italian Renaissance was also growing among private collectors in America. Several important collectors, such as Bernard Berenson, John and Isabella Stewart Gardner, Charles Foulke, Charles Yerkes and Quincy Adams Shaw, and architects such as Charles McKim and Stanford White, bought pieces from Bardini.⁶²

About 10 years after Volpi began as a student in Bardini's atelier, where he learned the specifics of art dealing, he began to make business deals by himself, for example with Stanford White and Wilhelm von Bode. Volpi subsequently started his own art dealing business. He no longer wanted to be considered as the student of Bardini, but as an independent and respected art dealer. With his purchase of the Palazzo Davanzati, Volpi aimed to be viewed apart from Bardini as an individual art dealer. As he wrote to Von Bode: "Posso ora presentare alla S.V. qualunque oggetto antico, senza timore, e ciò per essermi assolutamente sciolto da ogni impegno con il Signor Bardini".⁶³ After years of training with Bardini, Volpi used his Palazzo Davanzati as a means to create his own brand, which resulted in the "stile Davanzati", just as Bardini had created his own style. Apart from this trademark, as an independent art dealer Volpi could earn more than as a student of Bardini and he would also be able to create his own client base. While Bardini first tried to ignore the success of Volpi, eventually he could no longer deny it. The bond between the two dealers was reignited at a large auction in New York in 1918, where Volpi helped Bardini to sell his collection to the American public after his own successful auctions of 1916 and 1917.

⁶¹ Catterson, 2017, p. 42.

Turpin, 2013, p. 216.

⁶² Catterson, 2017, p. 42.

⁶³ Ferrazza, 2017, p. 17.

In the publication *Museo Bardini* (2011) Antonella Nesi argues that, despite working in the same profession and with the same clients and period of art, Bardini and Volpi had very different personalities: “Stefano Bardini ed Elia Volpi, il maestro e l’allievo, rappresentano in maniera significativa due felici modi d’interpretare il commercio antiquario, con stili completamente diversi e affini solo per l’alta professionalità nel campo del restauro e nell’approccio internazionale delle vendite”.⁶⁴ The difference that Nesi addresses is debateable, since the personalities of the two art dealers are not hugely contrasting. Both did anything in their power to achieve the best deals and to attract new customers with their palazzi. However, the two palazzi are not reconstructed in exactly the same way; the approach of Bardini differed slightly from that of Volpi.⁶⁵ In the Davanzati palace Volpi renovated the entire building and arranged the rooms according to their functions; in this way he created an actual house, replicating how it would (or could) have functioned during the time of the Davizzi, Bartolini and Davanzati. In contrast, Bardini arranged several areas of his palazzo as showrooms, although these rooms were not connected in the manner of a functioning household. With this arrangement, the sales aspect of Bardini’s palazzo was more apparent to his clients.⁶⁶ The rooms of the Palazzo Mozzi were clearly designed as showrooms where rich American and European collectors could acquire objects of their taste and send them home where they would display their purchases.⁶⁷ The various chambers in the Palazzo Davanzati can also be seen as showrooms, considering that potential buyers could imagine how an object would appear in a fully decorated room.

With the Palazzo Davanzati Volpi developed his own clientele, some of whom had already worked with him when he was an employee of Bardini. Customers such as Isabella Steward Garner, Bernard Berenson, Stanford White and J. Pierpont

⁶⁴ Nesi, 2017, p. 249.

⁶⁵ Catterson, 2017, p. 42.

⁶⁶ Catterson, 2017, p. 42.

⁶⁷ Catterson, 2017, p. 42.

Morgan also became clients of Volpi.⁶⁸ One year after the opening of the Palazzo Davanzati, Herbert Horne, an English collector, bought the Palazzo Corsi as a home for his broad collection.

Herbert Horne

Herbert Percy Horne was born in London on 18 February 1864 [fig. 7]. Apart from being a well-educated academic, he was an art critic, architect, poet, art historian, typographer and music aficionado. His interest in the Florentine Renaissance began while he was living in London. He often travelled to Florence and eventually decided to move there in 1905, where he remained until his death on 14 April 1916.⁶⁹ With his move to Florence, Horne came into contact with other important figures from Europe who lived there, such as Aby Warburg, Bernard Berenson and the German journalist and historian Robert Davidsohn.⁷⁰ In Florence he wrote the monograph *Botticelli – Painter of Florence* in 1908. Horne was also a remarkable collector. Although he had little available money, he managed to build a collection of high-quality objects. His knowledge about art gave him an advantage over other collectors. After many years of patiently saving money, Horne was finally able to buy his Palazzo Corsi at the via dei Benci in 1911. Thereafter he aimed to recreate the original state of the palazzo as far as possible.⁷¹ While he initially collected mostly paintings and other artwork, his focus shifted to furniture and domestic objects after purchasing the palazzo.⁷² Horne aimed to “reconstruct a Renaissance gentleman’s refined residence” for himself and his visitors to experience.⁷³

The differences and similarities between Volpi and Horne are evident. In the case of Horne, it was always clear that he wanted to represent the Renaissance

⁶⁸ Craven, 2005, p. 59.

⁶⁹ Rossi, 1967, p. 8.

⁷⁰ Nardinocchi, 2011, p. 160.

⁷¹ Rossi, 1967, p. 10.

⁷² Rossi, 1967, p. 10.

⁷³ Nardinocchi, 2011, p. 161.

house, to inform his visitors and to open up a place for the purpose of education. As discussed in chapter 1, Volpi's intentions with the Palazzo Davanzati are far more obscure and difficult to define. He used the palazzo as a showroom for his business. The personalities of the two men also differed. While Horne was a modest, even shy, man, Volpi was far more outgoing. This was exemplified by the opening of the Palazzo Davanzati in 1910, set up by Volpi as a large event. Volpi also invested in advertisements to generate attention for his palazzo. This was not the case for Horne's Palazzo Corsi. In this light, Bardini and Volpi are more alike than Horne and Volpi, and the former were more focused on their commercial activities. A significant difference is then that Horne, unlike Volpi and Bardini, was not a dealer. While all three were fascinated by the Italian Middle Ages and Renaissance and collected various items, Horne was focussed on the experience and the educational aspect of the house, while Bardini and Volpi were primarily focused on the business aspect.

Nevertheless, Horne and Volpi are similar in the way that they decorated and renovated their palazzi. Where Bardini categorized his items, both Horne and Volpi exhibited their collections by the recreation of an actual household. Volpi intended to create the home of a rich merchant family, while Horne aimed to reconstruct the residence of a Renaissance gentleman.⁷⁴ Horne selected the pieces of his collection carefully, with the idea of creating a house museum in mind. In contrast to Volpi, he had no intention of selling the property or his collection, and before he died he left his whole collection to the Italian state, which opened the Museo Horne in 1921.⁷⁵

The (un)importance of authenticity in a historic house museum

When Volpi opened the Palazzo Davanzati it was claimed that it contained only original items from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance era. However, the term

⁷⁴ Nardinocchi, 2011, p. 161.

⁷⁵ Nardinocchi, 2011, p. 162.

“original” should be viewed cautiously, because not all of the items were ultimately found to be authentic. Following the 1916 auction in New York, buyers discovered that some pieces of artwork were not original fifteenth-century productions, but nineteenth-century reproductions. This raises the idea that the authenticity of every object in the house was less important than the creation of a Renaissance experience, which was produced with the assistance of some reproductions.

Scholars have differing opinions regarding what Volpi considered to be more important – authenticity, or the feeling of authenticity. The previously mentioned research by Lynn Catterson revealed that authenticity was already an issue when Bardini and Volpi were art dealers. In the case of Bardini, discoveries have shown that not all of the pieces sold to his clients were authentic. In fact, Catterson discovered that “the practice of fabrication was a substantial aspect of Bardini’s business practice”.⁷⁶ As Volpi worked in Bardini’s atelier for some time, it is possible that Volpi worked with Bardini to create some of these forgeries. It is even possible that Volpi continued to do so in his own business and consequently sold forgeries to his clients. Indeed, forgeries sold by Volpi were discovered after his 1916 auction. Volpi was also included in a larger forgery scandal concerning his ties to the business of sculptor Alceo Dossena, as discussed in chapter 1. Various forgery scandals initiated concern towards art dealers, which led to a diminished taste for Italian medieval and Renaissance art and furniture. The breaking point for Volpi came with his failed final auction in America in 1927.⁷⁷

Authenticity is an ongoing issue for many historical house museums. One example of a museum that has struggled with this aspect is the Loo Palace museum in Apeldoorn, the Netherlands. The former royal palace, built in the seventeenth century, was renovated between 1977 and 1984. Hanneke Ronnes researched the renovation by discussing the authenticity, presentation and reception of the

⁷⁶ Catterson, 2017, p. 62.

⁷⁷ Ferrazza, 2017, p. 30.

museum in her article 'Authenticity and the experience of authenticity: the representation and reception of museum Paleis Het Loo' (2010). Similarly to the Palazzo Davanzati, the restoration of the Loo Palace involved the removal of walls to recreate its original structure.⁷⁸ Ronnes makes an important point in her article that also pertains to the Florentine palazzo – namely, that it is a contradiction in terms to restore the palace exactly to its original appearance.⁷⁹ A restoration cannot pay full respect to a building because style constantly evolves and because no one particular style represents all of these changes. Instead, the curators asked themselves during the restoration what kind of experience they wished to give their future visitors. The Loo Palace could represent a palace and be an experience for visitors, as well as a museum in the classical sense of the word with the primary role to educate its visitors.⁸⁰ This is a question that must also be examined for the Palazzo Davanzati. Apart from a Florentine palazzo and a showroom for Volpi's merchandise, the Davanzati palace also functioned as a place for education. The creation of an experience therefore requires fewer authentic pieces than an educational or museum setting which claims to contain only original items. Ronnes and the curators of the Loo Palace considered whether authenticity was an important aspect for its visitors. If it is clear that the palace is a reproduction, then it is clear that it is not fully authentic, but rather formed through the eye of the restorer. This question can also be put forward in the case of the Palazzo Davanzati. Adriana Turpin states in her article 'Objectifying the Domestic Interior: Domestic Furnishings and the Historical Interpretation of the Italian Renaissance Interior' (2013) that the process of acquiring items for the house could go one of two ways. Either the authenticity of the objects could be the most important aspect, and visitors can then be completely sure that the items are authentic; or the "historical recreation of the Renaissance" could be preferred, even if the objects lack

⁷⁸ Ronnes, 2010, p. 191.

⁷⁹ Ronnes, 2010, p. 194.

⁸⁰ Ronnes, 2010, p. 192.

authenticity.⁸¹ While Volpi possibly intended to give his visitors the experience of looking into the house of a medieval and Renaissance family, he followed the second approach and added items that were not authentic. However, since he did not mention this, his credibility as an art dealer was later at stake. When the items from the palazzo were sold at the 1916 auction in New York, they were claimed to be authentic objects from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century. After the auction, several items were discovered to be forgeries.⁸² It is then no surprise that collectors lost their trust in the Florentine dealer. What is uncertain is whether Volpi used these forgeries to create an overall experience or simply to sell more items. Considering the auctions of 1910 and 1916 and Volpi's focus on dealing, it is more likely that Volpi used the forgeries as a means to boost his business.

Contemporary reception of the Palazzo Davanzati

Once Volpi had completed the restoration of the Palazzo Davanzati, it became a preferred venue to visit for travellers from Europe and America, collectors and prominent people alike, due to the amount of attention it received in Italian and foreign magazine articles, for example the long article 'Le palais Davanzati' published in *Les Arts* in August 1911. Foreign collectors saw the palazzo as a model for their own collection or museum.⁸³ The house was used as a place to study the domestic interior of the Italian Renaissance, and people like Louis Couperus and admirers of medieval Florence praised Volpi for his renovation and how he had preserved a piece of medieval and Renaissance Florence, which had been significantly limited due to the modernisation of the city.

After Florence became the capital of the country in 1865, the city changed profoundly. The altered organisation of Florence created a multitude of structural

⁸¹ Turpin, 2013, p. 208.

⁸² Ajmar-Wollheim, Dennis, 2006, p. 20.

⁸³ As earlier mentioned, the Palazzo Davanzati inspired the way (among others) Isabella Stewart Gardner and Nelie Jacquemart-André exhibited their collection.

and organisational problems.⁸⁴ The city's need to modernise resulted in the demolition of the old medieval city walls, which were replaced with broad boulevards and modern buildings. After five years the capital of the kingdom shifted to Rome, and Florence was left with an enormous debt of 90 million lire.⁸⁵ When the township decided to change the city structure once more, the via Porta Rossa was affected. Almost all of the street's medieval houses and towers were transformed, and only a few of the original shapes were preserved. Antonio Orfei, the owner of the palazzo after the Davanzati family, tried to save his property by renovating small parts of the palazzo and dividing it into separate apartments for multiple families to rent.⁸⁶ Several academics, art lovers and most importantly the Associazione per la Difesa di Firenze Antica, founded in 1898, actively opposed the modernisation of the city and focused on the value of the Palazzo Davanzati for the art world as one of the last medieval palazzi left in Florence. They fought against the government to save the building, even though it was derelict and quite unsafe, and finally won in December 1898.⁸⁷ The modernisation of the city was an important subject for Florentine magazines, scholars and visiting academics at the time. To form a contemporary view on the modernisation of the city and the creation of the Palazzo Davanzati, a summary of the various opinions is now provided. One magazine, 'Il Marzocco', an artistic and literary review, fought against modernisation in favour of the preservation of the Palazzo Davanzati:

"Per avere una via perfettamente diritta e risparmiare un paio di minuti di cammino, il Comune di Firenze stava per inventare il palazzo Davanzati, il palazzo di Parte Guelfa, per abbattere due mirabili edifici del Tre e del Quattrocento e per demolire tre torri. Quando si fosse compiuta una tale

⁸⁴ Ferrazza, 1994, p. 21.

⁸⁵ Ferrazza, 1994, p. 23.

⁸⁶ Ferrazza, 1994, p. 21.

⁸⁷ Ferrazza, 2017, p. 17.

rovina, si sarebbe raggiunto unicamente lo scopo stupido e inutile d'una via retta fiancheggiata dalle solite case a cinque piani. Per fortuna, giunsero proteste da tutte le parti del mondo civile, e i lavori furono rimandati... Quella tregua dura da circa tre mesi. Durante questo tempo i rappresentanti della nostra città saranno veramente riusciti a liberarsi dall'incubo del rettifilo?"⁸⁸

Luckily, the Palazzo Davanzati was saved by Elia Volpi. The urge to preserve houses and collections had become important, and Volpi was not the only one to do so. Several palazzi, such as Horne's Palazzo Corsi and Berendson's Villa i Tatti, were established with the intent to open up the 'archive of the city', to tell its stories and to show the public how medieval Florence looked. Visitors could educate themselves about the historical meaning of the house and visit small parts of Middle Age Florence that were still visible.

The Dutch writer Louis Couperus lived in Florence when the palazzo was opened, and was an admirer of the remaining medieval parts of Florence. When he first wrote about Florence in 1911 he was pleased that something remained of the medieval feel of the city, despite the modernisation that had affected its architecture.⁸⁹ However, only four years later he sadly reported that modernisation had proceeded and changed almost all of the medieval parts of Florence. Couperus paid a visit to the palazzo and praised the love that Volpi had for his palace and the fact that he had spared neither money nor effort in restoring the domestic household of the Davizzi, Bartolini and Davanzati families. In his book *Uit blanke steden onder blauwe lucht* (1912) Couperus considered the furnishings inside the palazzo: "alle deze meubelstukken zijn met zorg verzamelde, waardevolle antiquiteiten".⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Ferrazza, 1994, p. 25.

⁸⁹ Kralt, 2001, p. 49.

⁹⁰ Couperus, 1994, p. 112.

Before the second auction in 1917, Richard Franz Bach (1888–1968), curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, wrote an article in which he made public his concerns about the Palazzo Davanzati. While he first described Volpi’s renovation of the Palazzo Davanzati and the “distinct success” of the palazzo, he later asked himself what would happen to the palazzo when its furnishings were sold.⁹¹ Even if they would find a new destination and would be handled well, nothing would be secure concerning the palazzo itself.⁹² Since Volpi had restored all of the ceilings, floors and walls, Bach thought it would be a shame if they were not maintained.

The love that Volpi put into the renovation of his palazzo was noted by his visitors. In addition to the admiration of Couperus, art historian Selwyn Brinton, who wrote about his visit to Florence in 1924 in *The American Magazine of Art*, stated that Volpi had fully devoted six years to restoring the building. He praised Volpi for the fine furnishings he had collected in the palazzo, which were “carefully chosen” for it.⁹³ An anonymous correspondent of *The Times* wrote in 1910 about the renovation of the house, which was the “happy result” of the “skill and good fortune” of Elia Volpi.⁹⁴ Because the state of the palazzo when Volpi purchased it in 1904 was almost “unrecognisable” and the interior was “neglected”, the Times correspondent made a fair point – that apart from knowledge and money, the buyer needed to be an optimist to be able to see “that anything could be done with it”.⁹⁵ Volpi had been able to realise his vision. The correspondent concluded that with all the restorations and the furnishings added by Volpi from his own collection to the palazzo, “the visitor may almost imagine himself to be a guest of some Davizzi or Davanzati in the Florence of old”. This is a striking image, considering Volpi’s goal to create an old Florentine house.⁹⁶

⁹¹ Bach, 7 February 1917, p. 82.

⁹² Bach, 7 February 1917, p. 82.

⁹³ Brinton, 1924, p. 257.

⁹⁴ Anonymous correspondent, 4 May 1916, p. 6.

⁹⁵ Anonymous correspondent, 4 May 1916, p. 6.

⁹⁶ Anonymous correspondent, 4 May 1916, p. 6.

Richard Franz Bach's desire for the palazzo to be saved was fulfilled. In 1927 the antiquarians Leopoldo and Vitale Bengujat bought the palazzo from Volpi, and made some changes to the furnishings and to Volpi's design. In 1934 the Great Depression hit Florence, and the Bengujat brothers were affected by this economic crisis. As a result they were no longer able to maintain the costs of the palazzo and it was sold to the Spanish Art Gallery, a London auction house.⁹⁷ In around 1950 the palazzo was sold to the Italian state. After much debate about the function that the Palazzo Davanzati should fulfil, the decision was made to open it as a museum and to arrange the interior as a medieval Renaissance interior. In this way its visitors could continue to visit an old Florentine palazzo. Consequently, in 1956 the Museo della Casa Fiorentina Antica was opened. From 1995 to 2009 the palazzo was again restored to preserve the work of Volpi and to give its visitors from all over the world a supposedly ideal picture of an old Florentine house.⁹⁸

There are few contemporary reviews of the Palazzo Davanzati before the 1916 auction, as most articles are focussed on the auction and the introduction of Volpi to the American public. The reviews that have been discussed are positive about the work of Volpi. He made a highly fortunate decision when he decided to promote his showroom as a place where people could experience and walk around in an old Florentine house. This reception is mostly based on the love that Volpi gave to creating such a palazzo, along with the various items that were so carefully chosen. However, these contemporary writers did not possess the knowledge that is available today, which reveals Volpi's aim to create a showroom for his business: the auctions of 1910 and 1916 and the many examples of forgeries have since diminished the trustworthiness of Volpi. Contemporary writers of Volpi were positive towards his work, since they were unaware of the forgeries. The fact that the Palazzo Davanzati was one of the last standing and surviving pieces of medieval Florence in

⁹⁷ Vaccari, Proto Pisani, 2011, p. 10.

⁹⁸ Vaccari, Proto Pisani, 2011, p. 10.

the time of modernisation, and that it was saved by Volpi, was admired and appreciated by most people. With the additional knowledge available today, it is increasingly clear that Volpi created the palazzo as a place for business, to promote his items and to attract new customers to whom he could sell his artworks. Still, Volpi did ensure that the interior in which the items were exhibited was not constructed from imagination, but that it was based on actual medieval and Renaissance interiors. He exhibited his items in a historical reconstruction of the interior of an old Florentine house. In the next chapter the accuracy of the design and the arrangement of the rooms of Volpi's reconstruction are discussed in the context of the latest interior design research.

CHAPTER III

THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE PALAZZO DAVANZATI

In recent years research into domestic interiors has increased, with a special interest developing in the Italian Renaissance. Using inventories, surviving furniture, paintings, woodcuts and diaries, scholars can create a more accurate picture of what a typical medieval and Renaissance house would have looked like. In this chapter the interior of the Palazzo Davanzati as restored by Elia Volpi is discussed in comparison to the known features of the Italian Renaissance interior. These standards are based on the interiors research presented in Peter Thornton's *The Italian Renaissance Interior 1400–1600* (1991), the publication *Medieval and Renaissance Interiors in Illuminated Manuscripts* (2016) by Eva Oledzka, and the exhibition catalogue *At Home in Renaissance Italy* (2006) by Marta Ajmar-Wollheim and Flora Dennis. This secondary literature is used to form a standard of the Italian interiors research of the Middle Ages and Renaissance. The restored interior of the Palazzo Davanzati produced by Volpi will be compared to the later research of Thornton, Oledzka, Ajmar-Wollheim and Dennis, to determine how closely Volpi approached an authentic reconstruction of a Renaissance palazzo in Florence. Furthermore, this comparison will demonstrate how close Volpi came to achieving an original interior and will prove whether or not he researched Italian interiors before reconstructing the palazzo. The Palazzo Davanzati has been used since its opening as inspiration for the studies of various scholars and students, but this chapter questions whether Volpi included the original items that the particular rooms should contain, according to recent interiors research. In the Middle Ages and the Renaissance almost every room had particular functions, which were illustrated by certain pieces of furniture that they should typically contain. Researchers have identified these pieces by researching images and written

sources. Accordingly, this chapter compares Volpi's arrangement to this notion of the Renaissance interior. Through this comparison, Volpi's goals are examined: whether he actually wished to recreate the palazzo as authentically as possible – and thus if he examined the period before he started his renovation – or if he engaged in a half-hearted attempt at reconstruction.

This comparison of Volpi's arrangement and research on interiors can be made with the help of photographs from the Alinari archive. In 1854, Leopoldo Alinari started the Fratelli Alinari Fotografi Editori together with his brothers Romualdo and Giuseppe. With this archive they aimed to preserve the cultural treasures of Italy.⁹⁹ They photographed the Palazzo Davanzati after its opening in 1910, following the final auction of Volpi in New York around 1920, and in 1956, when the Italian government had purchased and renovated the building. With these photographs, Volpi's vision of the palazzo can be studied. This chapter refers to photographs from the Alinari archive to help form an image of the Palazzo Davanzati as reconstructed by Elia Volpi, in order to make his idea visible. The intentions of Volpi to use the palazzo as a showroom for his practice as an art dealer are shown through the way he exhibited the items in the room. Volpi created a historical reconstruction of an old Florentine house, including all of the different rooms therein. In this way, Volpi gave his clients a sense of what the items would look like in their own collections. This way of exhibiting, by using the historical reconstruction of an interior, can also be seen in the collections of his clients, Isabella Stewart Gardner, Nolie Jaquemart-André and Herbert Horne. Reconstructing the interior was a way of exhibiting items, as illustrated in figures 5 and 6.

The palazzo at the via Porta Rossa was built in the fourteenth century for the Davizzi family, who gave an unknown architect the assignment to construct the building. Due to the lack of interest of scholars in medieval palazzi and the number

⁹⁹ Website The J. Paul Getty Museum, (n.d.).

of palazzi that were demolished or incorporated into other buildings in the nineteenth century, many of the fourteenth century architects remain unknown.¹⁰⁰ The Davizzi family made their fortune as merchants in foreign cloths and were members of the Arte di Calimala (Guild of Calimala). Their palazzo was built in one of the wealthiest streets and was surrounded by many other rich Florentine families, including the Davanzati family, who would later purchase the palazzo.¹⁰¹ The property originally consisted of a detached block of houses, which if necessary could be transformed into a stronghold for defence.¹⁰² After living in the residence for approximately 160 years, due to various economic failures, the Davizzi family was forced to sell the property to the Bartolini family on 31 December 1516. The Bartolini family lived in the palazzo for 62 years until 1574, when the palazzo was sold to Bernardo d'Anton Francesco Davanzati (1529–1606). Following a line of successful merchants and high political positions in the Florentine government, the Davanzati family was an old and illustrious family – even one of the richest families in the city.¹⁰³ The purchase of the palazzo by the Davanzati family was the beginning of a new historical epoch. They improved various elements in the house, the most radical adjustment being the spacious loggia added to the top of the building at the end of the sixteenth century or the beginning of the seventeenth century.¹⁰⁴ They also added their coat of arms to the facade.¹⁰⁵ After about 260 years, the Davanzati era ended when the last male heir, Carlo Davanzati, threw himself out of one of the windows of the palazzo in March 1838. The palazzo was then sold to Sir Antonio Orfei, who later sold it to Elia Volpi, thus beginning a new chapter for the palazzo.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁰ Goldthwaite, 1972, p. 978.

¹⁰¹ Rosenberg, 1922, p. II.

¹⁰² Ferrazza, 1994, p. 17.

¹⁰³ Berti, 1976, p. 6.

¹⁰⁴ Rosenberg, 1922, p. II.

¹⁰⁵ Ferrazza, 1994, p. 20.

¹⁰⁶ A complete history of the Davizzi, Bartolini and the Davanzati family and their palazzo is written by Roberta Ferrazza, *Palazzo Davanzati e le collezioni di Elia Volpi* (1994).

When Volpi purchased the palazzo and planned to recreate an old Florentine house, it was important that in addition to having money and a carefully considered vision he possessed knowledge about the place and time in which the palazzo originated. As Laurence Vail Coleman, director of the American Association of Museums, stated: "The restoring of a historic house is work for a specialist, and no unqualified person should undertake it".¹⁰⁷ Because of his education and experience as a restorer and art dealer, Volpi had undoubtedly seen many visual representations of the medieval and Renaissance home. Nonetheless, he wisely chose not to decorate and renovate the palazzo alone but instead requested help from his friends, restorer Federigo Angeli and painter Silvio Zanchi.¹⁰⁸ Angeli learned the profession from his father Angiolo Angeli and the American painter Julius Rolshoven (1858–1930), while Zanchi attended the Accademia di Belle Arti in Florence alongside Volpi. Angeli and Zanchi both worked on the restoration of the wall paintings.

Exterior

The Palazzo Davanzati is a type of townhouse derived from the tower house. As mentioned above, the palazzo originated from several blocks of houses, two of which were towers. The townhouse was a new building type in the fourteenth century, which according to architectural historian Spiro Kostof was "turning into something more urbane, less dour".¹⁰⁹ Many families displayed their coat of arms on the facade; Volpi preserved the coat of arms of the Davanzati family. The lower part of the facade consisted of large rusticated stone, while the upper parts were made of smaller, rough brick. The plan of the palazzo was rather simple: a central courtyard was surrounded by staircases, rooms and balconies. The open courtyard extended upwards through the entire building and was not topped with a ceiling.

¹⁰⁷ Coleman, 1933, p. 54.

¹⁰⁸ Fossi Todorow, 1979, p. 5.

¹⁰⁹ Kostof, 2010, p. 378.

The building comprised four floors, including the loggia on top. Upon entering the palazzo from the side of the via Porta Rossa through the entrance doors, visitors were welcomed by a wide fourteenth-century entrance hall with octagonal columns. The simple stone construction and balanced proportions of the courtyard were surrounded by various rooms on the first floor.

Piano primo – First floor

The stairs could be entered from the left of the courtyard. The first large room in the piano primo was the *Sala Madornale*, a reception area that was mostly used for business [fig. 8].¹¹⁰ The medieval character of the building and defence features were visible in this room. The massive structure of the building and its somewhat “unfriendly” appearance derive from the time of battlements, when its residents needed to be protected by heavy doors and walls.¹¹¹ In the sala on the first floor, four holes in the floor are still visible. These were preserved by Volpi to represent the medieval aspect of the house. The American curator Richard Franz Bach explained in his article ‘The Palazzo Davanzati, Florence’ that these holes would have been used to pour hot oil upon intruders or to observe those who entered the building. In this way such a feature provides information about the place and time in which families formerly lived in the palazzo: “The very existence of such provision for self-defence in a city residence of this time invites vivid conjecture as to the exigencies of contemporary life”.¹¹² Peter Thornton mentions the importance of the chimney piece as a feature of the Sala Madornale in the Italian Middle Ages and Renaissance interior. Characteristic of fifteenth-century chimney pieces was a “huge pyramid-shaped hood” called a *padiglione*, which is also present in the Palazzo Davanzati of Volpi.¹¹³ According to Thornton, it was not uncommon for chimney

¹¹⁰ Proto Pisani, Vaccari, 2011, p. 39.

¹¹¹ Bach, 7 February 1917, p. 85.

¹¹² Bach, 7 February 1917, p. 85.

¹¹³ Thornton, 1991, p. 21.

pieces in the sala to bear the coat of arms of the family, painted upon or carved into the fireplace.¹¹⁴ In Volpi's reconstruction of the Palazzo Davanzati the coat of arms was not painted on the chimney piece in the Sala Madornale. However, the coat of arms is visible on the chimney piece in the Camera delle Impannate and the Sala dei Pappagalli, rooms that are discussed further below. In Volpi's renovated Palazzo Davanzati no wall paintings were present in the sala, and the wooden ceiling was decorated. Thornton describes two ceiling types found in Italy, a *palcho* or a *soffitto*.¹¹⁵ Volpi's reconstruction used *palcho* ceilings, a basic form that is "formed with baulks of timber that we call joists and which in Italy are called *cordoni* or *bordinali* because they bear the main burden of the ceiling".¹¹⁶ The ceilings in the palazzo were formed with great baulks of timber, horizontally supported by smaller beams placed vertically atop the baulks. The baulks of the ceiling were decorated with a variety of painted geometric patterns.

The dining room is situated next to the sala and is also called the Sala dei Pappagalli due to the wall paintings featuring a pattern of parrots. These wall paintings were carefully restored by Volpi, Zanchi and Angeli. Next to the Sala dei Pappagalli, a bathroom (an innovative feature for the time), a study and the Sala dei Pavoni (a bedroom) can be found [fig. 9]. As with the Sala dei Pappagalli, the Sala dei Pavoni derives its name from the wall paintings therein. Each peacock is accompanied by a weapon and a family coat of arms, representing the many families that were important to the families who lived in the palazzo.

Piano secondo – Second floor

Similar types of rooms are situated on the second floor. However, for historians the most important room on this floor is not the sala but the bedroom, the Camera della Castellana di Vergy. The walls of the bedroom are covered with frescoes that

¹¹⁴ Thornton, 1991, p. 20.

¹¹⁵ Thornton, 1991, p. 21.

¹¹⁶ Thornton, 1991, p. 53.

illustrate the medieval tale of *La Châtelaine de Vergi* or the Châtelaine de Vergy [fig. 10].¹¹⁷ This medieval tale about courtly love dates from early thirteenth-century France and is derived from the love story of Tristan and Iseult. The original author is unknown, but the story was popular among courtly circles in France and Italy. The fresco was supposedly created for a wedding, which is discussed below.

According to Oledzka, from the thirteenth century onwards it was common for wealthy families to decorate the walls of their private residences with various paintings. Such paintings could be very simple, using one colour, but could also include motifs, patterns or figurative depictions.¹¹⁸ The Palazzo Davanzati is a rare example where frescoes are still visible and in a rather good state. Maria Grazia Vaccari, director of the Museo della Casa Fiorentina Antica, added that in recent years a few other examples of well-preserved wall paintings have been found in Florence, at the Via dei Cerchi and the Via dei Boldrone.¹¹⁹ The ideas for these wall paintings likely originated in the north of Italy, where the first examples of these frescoes can be found.¹²⁰ The wall paintings were not a later addition by Volpi, who instead carried out their careful renovation together with painter Silvio Zanchi. White plaster was removed to reveal the authentic wall paintings; in some places small areas of the authentic, unrestored wall painting were left to show the difference between the unrenovated and renovated versions.

Peter Thornton described an interesting difference between the wall paintings of the Palazzo Davanzati and those in other contemporary palaces: the rooms that were chosen to be decorated with frescoes. Normally, the first room to

¹¹⁷ The story of the Châtelaine de Vergy is told in a poem of 8 rhymed couplets. It tells a tragic love story where the Châtelaine of Vergy, the niece of the duke of Burgundy is in love with a knight. They keep their relationship a secret, but when the Duchess of Burgundy falls in love with the knight, he tells her of their relationship. The duchess tells the Duke of the unfaithful knight, who tries to save his honor to tell his lord about his secret relationship and thus violating the promise to the Châtelaine. When the Châtelaine realizes that the knight violated his promise, she dies and the knight kills himself when he discovered her body.

¹¹⁸ Oledzka, 2016, p. 59.

¹¹⁹ Proto Pisani, Vaccari, 2011, p. 113.

¹²⁰ Proto Pisani, Vaccari, 2011, p. 113.

be painted was the sala because guests were welcomed there. After the sala the dining room, the *saletta*, would be painted, followed by the owner's bedchamber.¹²¹ Strangely enough, the salas of the Palazzo Davanzati were not painted during the renovation of Volpi. It is unknown whether these rooms were ever painted, if Volpi chose not to revive the wall paintings in the salas, or if they were too damaged to properly recreate. Considering the work and time put into the renovation by Volpi, it is unlikely that he would not exhibit such an important wall painting. Where the salas were not painted, the dining rooms and bedrooms of the palazzo do feature wall paintings.

The decoration of rooms with frescoes, as in the Palazzo Davanzati, was fashionable during the fifteenth century. The surface of the wall was split into two or more horizontal parts, which in turn were divided by vertical elements such as painted or real pilasters.¹²² Painters could use various designs. For example, Eva Oledzka lists "geometric designs, flora and fauna patterns, heraldry and figurative or historiated decoration" as fashionable choices.¹²³ A variety of designs can be found in the rooms of Volpi's reconstruction. In the Sala dei Pappagalli and the Sala dei Pavoni, both geometric patterns and flora and fauna designs are depicted. In almost all of the rooms paintings of imitated textile can be found. This was very common in the Middle Ages and developed over time. What started with imagined textiles eventually became painted imitation marble during the Renaissance.¹²⁴ A good example of imitated curtains can be seen in the Sala dei Pappagalli, where multiple simulations of textiles are painted onto the walls. Curtains appear to be hanging on the wall and to cover another layer, because only the top of the underlying layer can be seen. Parrots and trees are an example of the flora and fauna theme, and are painted into a geometric pattern.

¹²¹ Thornton, 1991, p. 41.

¹²² Oledzka, 2016, p. 59.

¹²³ Oledzka, 2016, p. 59.

¹²⁴ Thornton, 1991, p. 35.

Oledzka explains that when a room was decorated with frescoes, the most important aspect was the relationship between the images and the function of the room. For example, it was not appropriate for a bedroom to be decorated with heroic battle scenes, a theme that would be more suitable in a formal reception room. Instead, “aesthetically pleasing, alluring images or amorous narratives” were depicted in bedrooms.¹²⁵ A fresco in one of the bedrooms of the renovated Palazzo Davanzati depicts such an amorous narrative, the tale of the Chatelaine of Vergy, with a moral that was important to the viewer of the work. This bedroom was the maternal chamber and the important viewer was the new bride.

The cycle of the Chatelaine of Vergy is “a rare surviving example of secular fourteenth century palazzo decoration” according to Mary Kathryn Benefield, who dedicated her master’s thesis to the fresco cycle [fig. 11].¹²⁶ The paintings were created by an unknown artist, who completed the work around 1390. Scholars have engaged in continued discussion regarding the occasion for which the fresco cycle was intended. Walter Bombe stated in *Un Roman Francais dans un Palais Florentin* of 1911 that the cycle was intended for the marriage of Tommaso Davizzi to Catalena degli Alberti in 1395.¹²⁷ Rosanna Caterina, Proto Pisani and Maria Grazia Vaccari argue otherwise in the most recent museum catalogue, *Museo di Palazzo Davanzati*, stating that the fresco cycle could have been commissioned for the wedding of Paolo Davizzi and Lisa degli Alberti in 1350, resulting in a date range of 1350 to 1359. Recent research has revealed that, based on the clothes and the painting style, it is more likely that the cycle was painted around 1350, at least before 1359, the year that Paolo Davizzi died.¹²⁸

According to Benefield, the fresco cycle was supposed to set an example for the new bride. The groom or his family were responsible for decisions made around

¹²⁵ Oledzka, 2016, p. 59.

¹²⁶ Benefield, 2013, p. 1.

¹²⁷ Benefield, 2013, p. 5.

¹²⁸ Proto Pisani, Vaccari, 2011, p. 115.

the house, including decorations before the wedding.¹²⁹ The scenes of the tale were intended to function as a warning for the bride. In addition to the frescoes, similar messages were depicted upon the furniture in the bridal chamber. *Cassoni* and *spalliere* were popular items used in the Middle Ages and Renaissance to tell historical, mythological and allegorical stories, and were painted onto furniture pieces.¹³⁰ The figures were dressed in a fashionable clothing style to ensure that the new bride could rely on the stories.¹³¹ The *cassoni* and *spalliere* were often given by the bride's family as a part of her dowry and placed in the bedroom after the wedding, to remind the bride of the behaviour that society and her new family expected from her as a good and chaste wife.¹³²

Terzo piano – Third floor

On the third floor of the Palazzo Davanzati, another bedroom, the Camera della Impannate, and the kitchen were situated [fig. 12, 13]. While many kitchens in the Middle Ages were located on the ground floor, researchers have found from architectural plans and inventories that some kitchens in medieval Italy were placed on the top floor, to avoid damage in the case of a fire and to minimize odours from cooking.¹³³ A number of items were almost always present in the medieval kitchen: a large table to prepare food was set in the middle of the room, as well as a fireplace with a kettle to boil water and to prepare many kinds of food. A corner was also reserved for household chores. The women of the palazzo household provided clothing and linen, produced using small weaving looms.

During the reconstruction of Volpi's Palazzo Davanzati, special marks were found in the kitchen. On the walls a rather extraordinary inscription could be found: "1478 A dì 26 d'aprile fu morto Giuliano de'Medici in Santa Maria de' fiore",

¹²⁹ Benefield, 2013, p. 4.

¹³⁰ Benefield, 2013, p. 7.

¹³¹ Benefield, 2013, p. 7.

¹³² Oledzka, 2016, p. 119.

¹³³ Oledzka, 2016, p. 92.

recalling the death of Giuliano de Piero de' Medici (1453–1478), once co-ruler of the city with his brother Lorenzo the Magnificent (1449–1492).¹³⁴ Piero de' Medici was killed in 1478 during the Pazzi conspiracy, stabbed nine times in the Duomo of Florence by Francesco de' Pazzi (1444–1478) and Bernardo Baroncelli (1420–1479). On the opposite kitchen wall another inscription read: "A dì 15 de luglio 1503 vene a Fiorenz il gardenal. de pietro [cancellato] Sodarino".¹³⁵ This recalls the arrival of Cardinal Francesco Soderini (1453–1524). Volpi could have plastered over the walls in the kitchen, but he chose to leave this insight into the Davizzi era and a tangible memory of their time in the palazzo, to remind the modern visitor of an event which was important enough for the residents to write it on their wall.

Next to the kitchen, the Camera delle Impannate was also situated on the top floor. This bedroom was similar to other rooms in the palazzo and was painted with frescoes giving the illusion of wall hangings. In the upper frieze many types of natural elements were displayed, such as plants, birds, trees and flowers, and were divided by small columns. This frieze almost surpassed the frieze of the Sala dei Pappagalli in its quality and detail. A notable detail of the room was the depiction of the family weapons on the chimney piece and at the corners of the painted curtains. This painting displayed the family weapons of Florentine nobility, such as the Albizzi, Strozzi and Capponi families, as well as various family and business relations of the Davizzi family.

The Camera delle Impannate exemplifies Volpi's prioritisation of experience over authenticity. While the items therein seem to originate from the Middle Ages, they actually derive from later sixteenth- to seventeenth-century craftsmanship. Furthermore, while this room displays various items from the Middle Ages and the palazzo itself was built at this time, three different families lived in the palazzo during the Renaissance. Consequently, some items in the palazzo derive from the

¹³⁴ Proto Pisano, Vaccari, 2011, p. 126.

¹³⁵ Proto Pisano, Vaccari, 2011, p. 207.

Middle Ages and some from the Renaissance. Volpi maintained this eclectic design. One of the most distinctive aspects of the Palazzo Davanzati was its multiple rooms. Oledzka argues that most medieval houses featured one large room in which all daily activities took place, and that new types of rooms, such as dining rooms, were not created until the mid-sixteenth century.¹³⁶ However, the palazzo consisted of different rooms. While Antonio Orfei changed the plan of the building when he divided it into apartments, Volpi restored the original layout. At the time, the building of different rooms was quite a modern feature. This was no surprise for wealthy Florentine families, who often became “precursors of new Renaissance trends and lifestyles. Not coincidentally this development was reinforced, associated and connected with visible changes in architecture, furnishings and domestic material culture”.¹³⁷ It is possible that the salas of the Palazzo Davanzati were used for various purposes, but this cannot be proven. Nevertheless, Volpi created a palazzo that was accurate, according to the comparison of his interpretation with research into the Italian medieval and Renaissance domestic household. The authenticity of the palazzo could never be fully achieved because it was a reconstruction. In comparing contemporary research and Volpi’s reconstruction, it is clear that he attempted to renovate the building as accurately as possible. Almost all of the rooms that according to research could be found in a medieval Renaissance household are represented in the reconstruction of Volpi, including their matching furnishings and items. The wall paintings were carefully reconstructed, and from comparing the reconstruction to the research, it can be stated that Volpi came very close in his recreation of an old Florentine home. The literature compared with the Alinari photos prove that all of the rooms are renovated in a historically correct fashion. To create such an accurate reconstruction Volpi must have consulted sources. The possible sources that Volpi could have used

¹³⁶ Oledzka, 2016, p. 79.

¹³⁷ Oledzka, 2016, p. 79.

to create his version of an Italian Renaissance household are discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

INSPIRATION FOR VOLPI –

REPRESENTING THE ITALIAN DOMESTIC INTERIOR

“Above all it is important not to make haste in restoring...It is better to have adequate studies and only partial restorations than superficial studies and a finished job”.¹³⁸ Laurence Vail Coleman proposed this as the optimal way to approach restorations in his book *Historic House Museums* (1933), in which he examined the preservation and restoration of historic houses. When Volpi began the renovation of the Palazzo Davanzati, it is likely that he researched the subject and period before he initiated restoration activities. Unfortunately, little is known about the renovation itself and sources are difficult to find. As a consequence, little research has been done on this subject. It is known that Volpi delayed the opening a number of times because the restoration was not finished. These postponements were made to ensure that the renovation was complete, and the amount of work that Volpi put into the house demonstrates his dedication to the palazzo. To Volpi, the Palazzo Davanzati was his entrance to the world of art dealing and to becoming an antiquarian, independent of his teacher Stefano Bardini.

To make his palazzo as authentic as possible, it is likely that Volpi conducted research or consulted visual reproductions of the Italian medieval and Renaissance interior for inspiration. Sources that Volpi could have used to create his version of the old Florentine house are discussed in this final chapter.

Problems in researching possible sources

The first thing to remember when discussing the Volpi interior of the Palazzo Davanzati is that it is a representation and not an original interior. Nevertheless,

¹³⁸ Coleman, 1993, p. 55.

Turpin called it “an enhanced version of the original” as a result of how carefully it was reconstructed.¹³⁹ The research required to perform such a reconstruction is, as mentioned in the introduction, beset with problems. The evidence available for interior design research, such as woodcuts, paintings, miniatures, inventories, books and diaries, is “not only scarce and uneven, but it is also problematic” argues Patricia Allerston.¹⁴⁰ These sources are problematic because of their reliability and because some of them do not even discuss existing domestic interiors. While most scholars use inventories to create an image of life inside the medieval and Renaissance palazzi, these cannot always be fully trusted because they provide only “a snapshot of a person’s possessions at a particular moment in time” and not a full, dynamic description of a household.¹⁴¹ Luke Syson, a curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, addresses this problem in his article ‘Representing the Domestic Interior’, saying that “any attempt to envisage the domestic spaces of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Florence or Venice is beset with problems” – these problems are inherent to the sources that researchers have to work with.¹⁴²

Scholars must also acknowledge that the appropriate research approach is constantly changing. In the past, the idea that the house was a private and sheltered place was widely accepted, but in recent years this belief has been challenged. This idea originated from descriptions such as those of Nicolò Gozze, who wrote in 1589 on the subject of families: “There are many things that the father of the family should do not openly, but secretly, under his own roof for reasons of modesty and honour . . . such as feeding, admonishing and instructing his children, training his wife and similar things, which can legitimately be carried out in the home and under cover, but not outside the home in public. This is one of the reasons for which

¹³⁹ Turpin, 2013, p. 218.

¹⁴⁰ Allerston, 2007, p. 7.

¹⁴¹ Allerston, 2007, p. 7.

¹⁴² Syson, 2006, p. 86.

houses have been built".¹⁴³ Ajmar-Wollheim, Dennis and Matchette discovered that this private aspect could be replaced with "a more dynamic perspective establishing a direct relationship between the broad changes that affected Italian Renaissance society and the developments that are visible within the home".¹⁴⁴ Discoveries like these make it clear that existing research needs to be continually critiqued and studied.

Research into the Italian Renaissance domestic interior is further complicated by the many objects that did not survive. While missing furniture, tableware, artwork and other decorations can be understood to some degree by researching written documents such as diaries or inventories, the precise location of such furniture cannot be determined using these documents. Such documents only offer limited information about this particular aspect. Consequently, many historians and scholars have turned to paintings, woodcuts and other visual representations of the domestic interior. While these could be legitimate sources, it is important to bear in mind that a painter may have placed pieces elsewhere in the painting, in contrast to where they were actually placed in real life, or added items to the painting.¹⁴⁵ For example, as Willemijn Fock explains in her article 'Semblance or Reality? The Domestic Interior in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Genre Painting', chandeliers were often placed in seventeenth-century paintings of the domestic interior, as can be seen in paintings of Frans van Mieris I [fig. 14] and Gerard Dou [fig. 15]. However, these chandeliers were almost never present in the actual interior, as Fock concludes by researching inventory lists. Because these problems complicate scholarly research, the Palazzo Davanzati cannot be taken as fully authentic because there is no clear

¹⁴³ Ajmar-Wollheim, Dennis, Matchette, 2007, p. 1. Nicolò Gozze, *Governo della famiglia*, 1589, 10. '... e perche anchor assaissime cose sono, lequali alli Padri di familia conviene per modestia, & honore operare secretamente sotto il tetto ... e non in palese, come nodrire, correggere, & instruire gli proprii figliuoli, & ammaestrare le moglie, e simil altre cose, che sono lecite d'esser essercitate in casa, & instruire gli proprii figliuoli, & ammaestrare le moglie, e simil altre cose, che sono lecite d'esser essercitate in casa, & in coperto, e non fuor della casa in publico: e questa ancora egli una di quelle cagioni, per lequali sono state fabricate le case ...'.

¹⁴⁴ Ajmar-Wollheim, Dennis, Matchette, 2007, p. 2.

¹⁴⁵ Fock, 1998, p. 187.

evidence of the interior of the Davizzi, Bartolini or Davanzati families. Unfortunately, no inventories or account books of the three families have been found. Even if inventories did remain, they would not provide the exact location of where the various artworks and furnishings were placed in the interior.

Depictions of the domestic interior

The sources that Volpi could have used for inspiration are discussed in different pairs, following a discussion of how domestic interiors have been depicted in various artworks.

The visual depiction of the domestic interior dates back to wall paintings in antiquity, but the number of representations increased in the late medieval period when oil painting techniques started to develop. Painting scenes of daily life became more straightforward and cheaper. With the establishment of painting in this way, depictions of the domestic interior increased. Most representations of the domestic interior made in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries can be found in depictions of religious subjects.¹⁴⁶ These scenes could be depicted on church walls and miniatures, but following the development of oil painting, the interior would also be represented on wood panels that were erected in the house. Visual sources that represent interiors often occurred in popular subjects such as the bedroom, birth scenes and the death bed, as well as annunciation scenes.¹⁴⁷ Italian art does not include an interior genre, such as the Dutch interior representation of the seventeenth century that Fock described in her article 'Semblance or Reality?'. As a result, scholars of Italian art must study religious representations since there is no Italian genre which depicts the domestic interior and thus provides further information about the Italian interior. The visual representations of religious matter started to close the gap between the audiences of the fourteenth and fifteenth

¹⁴⁶ Dennis, 2006, p. 24.

¹⁴⁷ Dennis, 2006, p. 24.

centuries and biblical events, argues Flora Dennis in *Imagined interiors – Representing the domestic interior since the Renaissance*: “The messages of sacred texts were given additional visual power and resonance by setting the episodes they describe in a contemporary context – thus the beds in birth scenes or the vessels on dining tables bore a familiar relationship to objects that the viewer might have experienced in everyday life”.¹⁴⁸ In other words, they would have been an appropriate and usable source for Volpi.

The Birth of the Virgin

In the case of the Palazzo Davanzati, religious scenes could very well have been a source of inspiration for Volpi. One of the beds in the palazzo can be easily recognised to recall the popular scene of the birth of the Virgin. Several artists have painted the scene and depicted Saint Anna in a bed; this type of bed was in place in the Palazzo Davanzati prior to the first American auction in 1916 [fig. 11]. The bed is now known as “the Davanzati bed”, with a large headboard and a levelled mattress. While it was initially thought to be a fifteenth-century piece, later examination revealed that the bed was a “modern fake, made by covering old wood with an intarsia-like veneering – a technique never used in the Renaissance – now peeling off to reveal the bed’s true status”.¹⁴⁹ The birth of the Virgin theme has been portrayed, among others, by Andrea del Sarto in a fresco at the Santissima Annunziata in Florence, painted in 1514 [fig. 16]. Another example is the same religious scene painted by Domenico Ghirlandaio, one of the painters admired by Volpi during his studies at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Florence [fig. 17]. In the scene produced by Ghirlandaio, a bed similar to the Davanzati bed is pictured. The headboard is absent but detailed wall decorations give the illusion of a headboard. In the Sant’Agostino in Siena, a fresco by Francesco di Giorgio depicting the birth

¹⁴⁸ Dennis, 2006, p. 24.

¹⁴⁹ Ajmar-Wollheim, Dennis, 2006, p. 20.

scene also depicts the same type of bed [fig. 19]. In addition to frescoes, a similar style of bed can be identified in various paintings. For instance, Benedetto da Maiano painted *The Birth and naming of John the Baptist* in 1477, and Filippo Lippi painted *The Miracle of Saint Ambrose* in 1439–1447. In both paintings the same type of bed is present [fig. 18, 20]. The bed is even present in the illumination of *Comedies of Plautus* created by Guglielmo Giraldi [fig. 21]. It seems clear that Volpi looked to religious depictions to decide which type of bed he had to place in the bedroom. In all of the depictions discussed above the bed is the most important piece of furniture in the room, and the inclusion of other pieces is limited. The same can be seen in Volpi's representation, in which he used a small number of other items of furniture in the room. He used a couple of pieces, such as the cassoni, to decorate the room. However, the bed was the most important piece of furniture, similar to the representations of the bed found in the various artworks discussed above.

The kitchen has also been represented by various artists. While no proper evidence exists of how the kitchen at the Palazzo Davanzati functioned and which items it contained, with representations an image can be formed. An example of a kitchen in full use is found in the painting by Vincenzo Campi, painted between 1575 and 1585 [fig. 22]. It depicts a large table in the centre of the room, a chimney piece in the corner used to cook meals and boil water, space along the walls to prepare other kinds of food and to store various tableware, and many servants working to create a meal for the family. A woodcut by an anonymous artist shows the same kind of arrangement; a fireplace at the back of the room and a table positioned in the centre on which to prepare food [fig. 23]. A niche in the wall with shelves for vessels is a form that can also be seen in the kitchen of the Palazzo Davanzati. Even so, the lavabo depicted with the chair next to it, which according to Eva Olezka is a typical Tuscan form, is not present in the kitchen of the Davanzati

palace.¹⁵⁰ In the woodcut is next to the fireplace a sink installed, where water “was drawn from the well at the landing”.¹⁵¹ The central table is also clearly present in the palazzo, but in Volpi’s arrangement the table is set for three. Since the family dining room was situated one floor below, on the Sala dei Pappagalli, it is likely that the servants would have eaten at this table in the kitchen.

Written sources

In addition to visual sources, Volpi could also have used written sources to restore the palazzo. These could have included work by Attilio Schiaparelli, the author of *La Casa Fiorentina ei suoi arredi nei secoli XIV e XV* (1908), who advised Volpi on the restoration of the Palazzo Davanzati, according to one of the former directors of the Palazzo Davanzati, Maria Fossi Todorow. Schiaparelli studied various Florentine palazzi for his research. It is a distinct possibility that Schiaparelli advised Volpi on the different rooms and their functions: in his publication Schiaparelli described various elements of the Palazzo Davanzati (which he continued to call the Palazzo Davizzi), such as the chimney pieces and the lavatory system. Schiaparelli gave a highly detailed description of the elements of various palazzi, starting with the exterior structural elements of the architecture such as the roof, ceilings, facade and windows. In the second chapter he describes all of the general rooms and spaces inside the palazzo, including the stairs, sinks, latrines, doors and different types of windows. In the third chapter he continues with the decoration of the floors, ceilings and wall frescoes. For the renovation of the building, this information from Schiaparelli was probably very helpful for Volpi. However, it is likely that little information on interior design was provided by Schiaparelli, since he focussed on the architecture of the building.

¹⁵⁰ Oledzka, 2016, p. 92.

¹⁵¹ Vaccari, Proto Pisani, 2011, p. 58.

Other palazzi

Aside from the above-mentioned written sources, it is difficult to find an example of a palazzo that was renovated at the beginning of the twentieth century with the same intention as the Palazzo Davanzati. The palazzo was a place of business for Volpi and he renovated the entire building to have the look and feel of a medieval Renaissance palazzo, as opposed to one stand-alone period room. Other contemporary palazzi, such as the Palazzo Mozzi of Stefano Bardini, the Palazzo Corsi of Herbert Horne and the Museo Stibbert of Frederick Stibbert, would not have acted as examples for Volpi, considering that two of the three did not represent an old Florentine interior. Every room in the Palazzo Mozzi of Bardini was decorated as a small interior and functioned as a showroom.¹⁵² These rooms were not connected to create a complete house. Meanwhile, the Museo Stibbert housed the collection of Frederick Stibbert, which ranged from armour to antiques and artefacts. In both the Palazzo Davanzati and the Museo Stibbert the collections of their owners were exhibited; however, Stibbert's goal was not to sell items but simply to display his collection, although the Museo was not designed as an old Florentine home. The palazzo that was most similar to the Palazzo Davanzati in terms of interior design was the Palazzo Corsi of Herbert Horne, who purchased the building in 1905 and attempted to "acquistare opere che potevano trovarsi in un palazzo fiorentino abitato da una famiglia dei ceti dirigenti della città, in età rinascimentale".¹⁵³ Volpi and Horne were in contact, and Horne visited the Palazzo Davanzati after its opening in 1904. Their ideas were similar in the way that both Horne and Volpi designed a complete Florentine home, including the various rooms and their functions, but their intentions diverged. Horne was above all a collector and wished to exhibit his collection, while Volpi was a businessman and prioritized the selling of his artworks. Brunella Teodori argues in her article "Attraverso il

¹⁵² Craven, 2005, p. 59.

¹⁵³ Nardinocchi, 2017, p. 273.

Novecento: dal museo di Elia Volpi al museo attuale” (2017) that Volpi must have studied the houses of Stibbert, Horne, Bardini, Berenson and Arthur Acton.¹⁵⁴ Arthur Acton acquired the Villa la Pietra in 1903, which he renovated, and subsequently arranged his own collection inside in a “decorative ensemble in which works of art play off each other and the styles of the historic villa building itself”.¹⁵⁵ Later, his son would give the villa to the New York University, to preserve the collection and to enable students to learn from it. Finally, Bernard Berenson moved into the Villa i Tatti with his wife in 1900, where his large collection of photographs, a research library and a collection of Italian primitives and Chinese and Islamic art were housed.

While Volpi could have been inspired by these collectors and their collections, his objective to recreate an old Florentine house differed from the intentions of his contemporaries. In the case of Horne, it is strange for Teodori to state that Volpi was inspired by him, since Horne bought his palazzo one year after Volpi opened the Palazzo Davanzati. For Volpi to be inspired by a place that was not even visible to the public is bizarre. Moreover, Teodori provided no arguments to explain how Volpi was inspired or which features of the other palazzi can be traced back from the Palazzo Davanzati. The various palazzi are alike in their wish to exhibit their collections and open Florentine history to the public. They all offered a way to experience the surroundings and interior of a Renaissance household.

Because it is difficult to locate sources regarding the renovation of the palazzo, it is challenging to know definitively which sources Volpi consulted. However, he had many items both in his collection and in Florence that could have inspired him. While the extensive 1916 auction catalogue presented no depictions of the interior in any of its artwork, during his time at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Florence, Volpi studied the works of Ghirlandaio, among others, who painted

¹⁵⁴ Teodori, 2017, p. 198.

¹⁵⁵ Website Villa la Pietra, (n.d.).

several interior situations. Volpi could also have been inspired by the various other palazzi that were realized in Florence around the same time as the Palazzo Davanzati, with the same intention of recreating the Renaissance look and feel. Furthermore, the business aspect would have played a particular role in Volpi's decisions. The Renaissance period was highly popular at the time and Volpi responded to the interest of the public. This move bestowed Volpi with financial success and the status of a well-known art dealer in Europe and the United States.

CONCLUSION

Scholars have recently become more interested in the history of interior design, particularly in Italian medieval and Renaissance interiors. The central question of this thesis, whether Volpi used sources while restoring the Palazzo Davanzati, is a subject of discussion because the evidence and documents produced by Volpi himself are limited. Sources such as religious depictions from, for example, Ghirlandaio must have given Volpi an idea of the interior of an Italian medieval and Renaissance house. The assistance of Schiaparelli could also have assisted Volpi with his restoration. Schiaparelli's detailed information about Florentine houses provided vivid information for the antiquarian. Likewise, other palazzi that were renovated by Volpi's contemporaries could have inspired Volpi to buy the Palazzo Davanzati. Indeed, all of these sources could have influenced Volpi. By comparing the representation of Volpi with recent interiors research, it is clear that Volpi's recreation came very close to an authentic Italian Renaissance palazzo. The educational function of the palazzo is thus confirmed, and it offers students the opportunity to experience an old Florentine house and to study the surroundings and habits of the fifteenth-century inhabitants of the city.

The general opinion is that Volpi wished to create a private museum with the representation of a medieval Renaissance Florentine house. The actual intentions of Volpi are more difficult to determine, especially since the primary sources originated from Volpi himself. As discussed in this thesis, researching intentions is challenging, since intentions are personal and can change over time. While Volpi initially stated that he had no intention of selling his items, later research identified two auctions that took place in 1910 and 1916 at which Volpi sold various items from the Palazzo Davanzati; at the 1916 auction in New York he even sold its entire collection. The trustworthiness of Volpi was also damaged by the discovery of several forgeries within his collections. Hence it is clear that the profession of art dealer was always

present in Volpi. Even though later authors and scholars have presented Volpi as a businessman who decided to create a private museum and save the Palazzo Davanzati from demolition, it seems that the Florentine art dealer focussed his intentions more on his business than on the creation of a museum. The palazzo functioned as a showroom for Volpi, as a place where he could attract new customers for his collection and later introduce himself to a completely new client base in America with the 1916 auction. This profession as an art dealer was taught to him by his teacher Stefano Bardini, the “prince of antiques”; although after the discoveries made by Catterson, “villain of antiques” would probably be a more appropriate term. Volpi learned from Bardini how to connect with customers and how to present a collection, and was also introduced by him to clients in America. Volpi would help Bardini years later with the organisation of an auction in New York. Both dealers were important for the representation of Italy on the international art market at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. Together with collectors such as Stibbert and Horne, they opened up Florentine history to the public and inspired later research. The research of Catterson on Stefano Bardini inspired this thesis to examine whether such an interesting history could be found behind the Palazzo Davanzati, as it could with the Palazzo Mozzi. Combined with the expanded interiors research of recent years this developed into the question of whether Volpi used any sources while creating the Palazzo Davanzati. Due to limited sources and the lack of a Volpi archive in Florence, this is difficult to determine. However, this thesis could pave the way for further research on Volpi, the creation of historical house museums in Florence and the way that art historians, collectors and art dealers opened up the history of Florence. It also broadens the research field of the representation of interiors and, more importantly, their trustworthiness.

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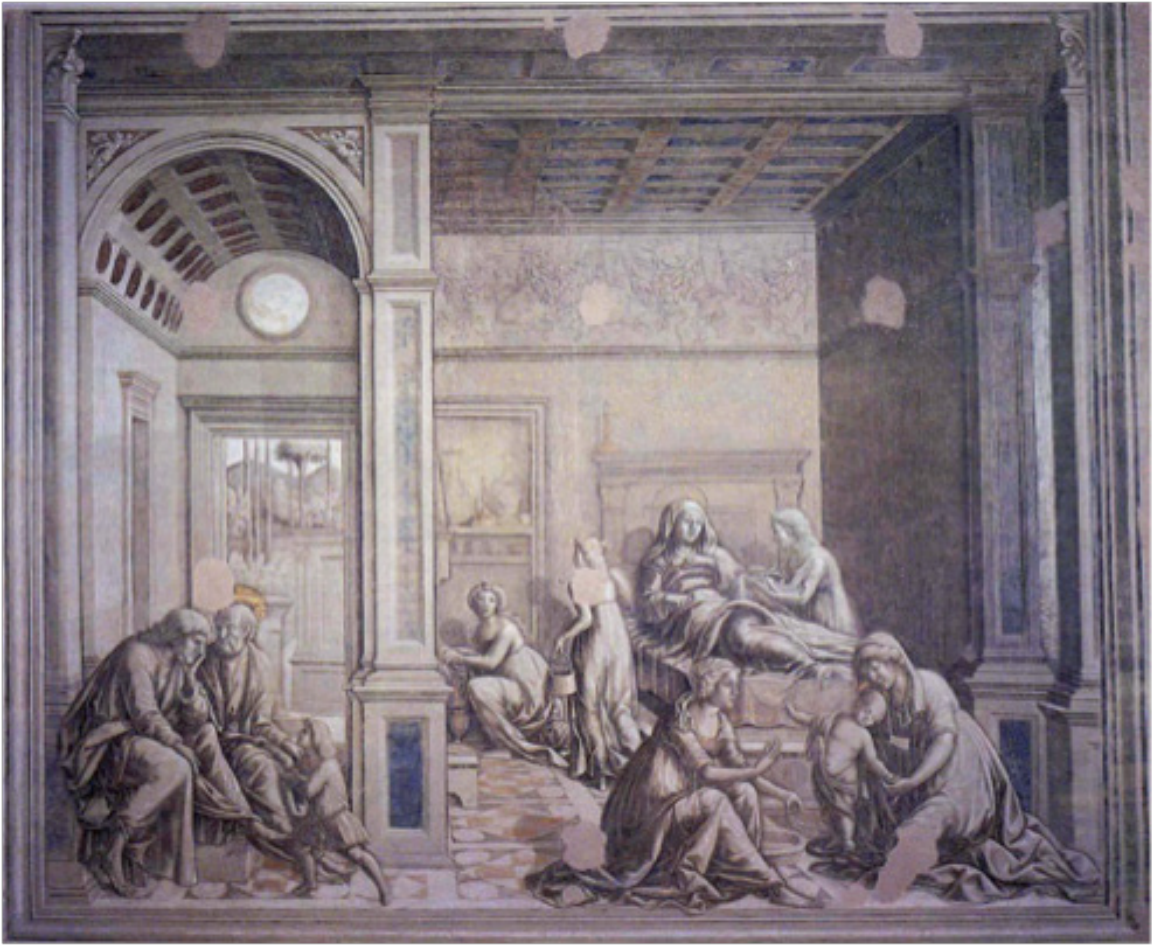


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Fig. 22. Downloaded 17 July 2018.
https://www.google.nl/search?q=vincenzo+campi+kitchen&rlz=1C1GCEV_en&source=lnms&tbn=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiT18WYqvzeAhWHZFAKHWS8DoIQ_AUIDigB&biw=1920&bih=969#imgrc=X6o2WXAEMDEoxM:

Fig. 23. Oledzka, 2016, Ill. 80.

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