

Torrigiani to showcase their work. Just like that in February 1951—Italian fashion shows were born. A multi-billion-dollar industry was launched in this garden. The Marquis Torrigiani recalled, “I was there and only five-years-old but I still remember the beautiful girls!” Spoken like a true Italian.

Armed with this fashion information plus lingering over the beauty of the garden on web page photos, I was sure I had stumbled onto something great. I was correct.

Giardino Torrigiani is a lush, beautiful park-like garden complete with villas, sculptures, and varieties of plants and trees. Dating back to the 16th Century, it was first a small botanical garden and then later, in the 19th Century, it was transformed into an English-style garden, right in the heart of Florence.

The Marquis Torrigiani was born in one of the garden’s villas and has lived there his entire life. His charming stories, told as we leisurely strolled through the gardens, only added to the enchantment of the secret garden. Our group was small and private, my family of four and two sisters, one from Switzerland and one from America. The Marquis Torrigiani is a wealth of knowledge, and was joined by his white English bulldog, Luna. He shared mounds of information, such as the names of all the trees, bushes, plants, buildings, walls and even his own tower — a neo-gothic stone tower designed by the famous architect/engineer Gaetano Baccani in 1824 with a forbidding observation platform and external spiral staircase and flag that bears his family coat of arms.

The noble family even has its own mausoleum at the base of the tower, though now, by Italian law, the dead must be buried outside the city. As we peered into the darkness, he said he remembered exploring that opening when he was a boy. Looking up we saw a dark



The Marquis Torrigiani conducts the tour, alongside his white English bulldog, Luna. (Below) The family’s neo-gothic stone tower serves as both an observation platform and mausoleum.

blue dome ceiling painted long ago, which reminded us of the heavens above. What an angelic touch.

Each stone bench and garden gate among the maze of “Italian style” boxwoods, with roses and lemon trees blooming inside, competes with the sea of iris. We lingered in a lovely, relaxed trance. No rushing on this tour—each tour is one and one-half hours long. We have ample time to ask questions, take photos and listen to the Marquis Torrigiani weave the garden history into the May tour.

The Marquis Torrigiani’s charm and graciousness is as enchanting as the garden. He interlaces his childhood stories such as one about the ancient stonewalls that surrounds the property, one built by the family and the other by Cosimo I in 1544 to protect the city of Florence from its longtime enemy, the City of Siena. As a child, he would peer over the wall and wistfully watch children his age playing in the street and wished he could join them. He and his five brothers and sisters were not allowed to leave this paradise. They even received their schooling on the estate. He would later realize the benefits of being raised in such a lovely garden.

Today, the two noble families, the Torrigiani Malaspina and the Torrigiani Santa Cristina families, have found a way to share their little “gem” of a garden and continue the family tradition by offering private tours. The 32 family members living there today have found a way to keep the garden alive and continue to benefit from its beauty. Today, each of the family members has their own section of a villa and a business on the property. His sister has a popular antique store in the orangery, while another family member recently opened a “bed and breakfast” inn with a terrace opening into the garden. The Marquis Torrigiani’s

son renovated the horse stables into a comfortable residence.

The Marquis Torrigiani, fueled by his love of plants and his garden, began a nursery in 1975 that provides plants and flowers to Florence hotels and businesses. The nursery, located on one corner of the garden, also serves as an event center. The night before our tour, the Ferrari Company hosted a dinner for 300 in the nursery, among the nursery plants. The Marquis Torrigiani points out that it is costly to keep up the garden with its many stone buildings and even a “London Style” bridge — after all; the garden was designed to be an English garden. The soft stone native to the Florence area requires additional upkeep. Two gardeners keep up the entire 16-acres and restoration work is an ongoing need.

When Marquis Torrigiani completed the nursery tour for my family, to our surprise and delight, he insisted we join him in his villa for an Italian aperitivo- a cocktail paired with small snacks. It was one of our favorite parts of the tour: To sit down and relax with a true Italian nobleman, a Marquis, a European nobility title, whose love of his land and his family was shining through like the sitting sun. What a perfect ending to perfect afternoon in a secret garden.

As we leisurely strolled down the gravel path to exit the garden, the Marquis Torrigiani whizzed by on a Vespa. “Arrivederci”, he says with a huge smile and a wave, leaving his garden sanctuary and into the streets of modern-day Florence. We left and walked among the Florentines and tourists with a new inner peace, relaxed, happy and ready for more pasta!

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