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Arts & Entertainment

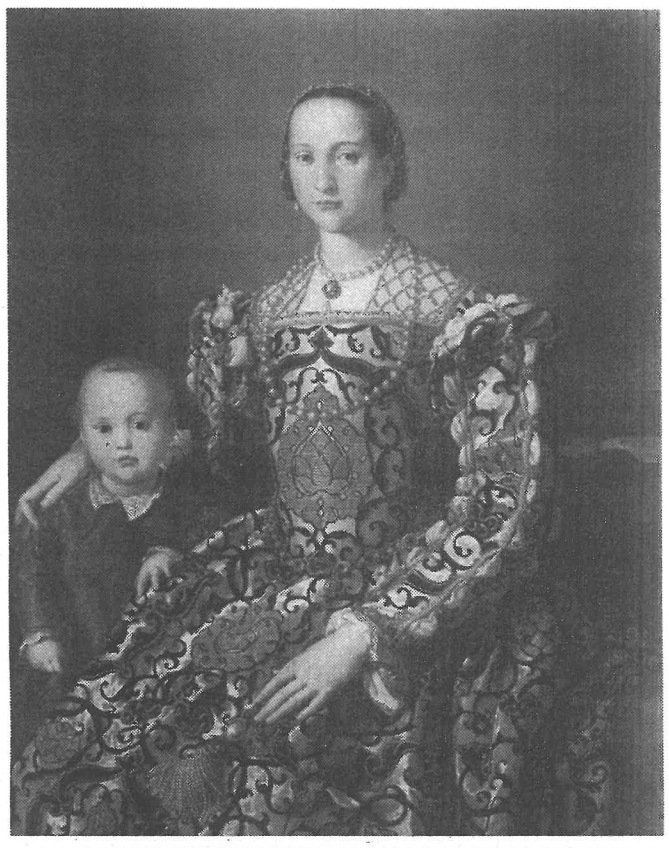
INSIDE:

MEDICI MASTERPIECES

A LANDMARK EXHIBITION SHOWCASING WORKS BY MICHELANGELO AND OTHER FLORENTINE RENAISSANCE ARTISTS ARRIVES AT THE DETROIT INSTITUTE OF ARTS.

STORY on page 74

Cristofano Allori: "Judith and Holofernes," ca. 1616-18; oil on canvas. Florence, Palazzo Pitti, Galleria Palatina.



Top: Agnolo Bronzino: "Portrait of Eleonora of Toledo with her son Giovanni," ca. 1545; oil on panel. The Detroit Institute of Arts; gift of Mrs. Ralph Harman Booth in memory of her husband Ralph Harman Booth.

Bottom: Agnolo Bronzino: "Young Man with a Lute," ca. 1532-34; oil on panel. Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi.

Medici Masterpieces

A landmark exhibition showcasing works by Michelangelo and other Florentine Renaissance artists arrives at the Detroit Institute of Arts.

CINDY FRENKEL
Special to the Jewish News

Among the nearly 200 objects on view in the Detroit Institute of Arts' March 16-June 8 special exhibit, "Magnificenza! The Medici, Michelangelo and the Art of Late Renaissance Florence," is Michelangelo's life-sized marble sculpture *David-Apollo*, on loan from Italy's Museo Nazionale del Bargello in Florence.

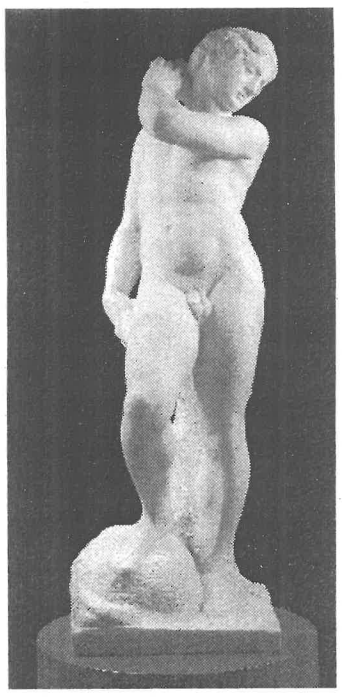
It is the first time ever a sculpture by Michelangelo has been on loan to museums in the United States. (The show originated in the U.S. at the Art Institute of Chicago before its final stop in Detroit; it debuted at the Palazzo Strozzi in Florence.)

Although David is a figure from the Old Testament, "he's Christianized in [a] sense because he's the patron saint of the city of Florence, a protector figure," says Dr. Larry Feinberg, a curator of European painting at the Art Institute of Chicago.

"Originally, Michelangelo intended the sculpture to be of David reaching back with his sling, but he transformed the figure into the mythological Greek god Apollo, reaching for an arrow in his quiver," Feinberg says.

With Marco Chiarini, former director of Florence's Pitti Gallery, Feinberg helped organize the exhibit under the leadership of exhibition project director Dr. Alan P. Darr, Walter B. Ford II Family Curator of European Sculpture and Decorative Arts at the DIA.

The exhibition is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, presenting an extraordinary array of masterpieces, including some of the finest art in Europe from the best museums in the world.



Michelangelo Buonarroti: "Apollo-David," c. 1530; marble. Florence, Museo Nazionale del Bargello.

The pieces come from 77 lenders, including such prominent museums as the Uffizi Galleries in Florence; the Collections of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in Windsor, UK; and the Musee du Louvre in Paris.

In addition to a newly discovered Michelangelo drawing, *Design for a Candelabrum*, in pristine condition, works in the exhibit include paintings by Bronzino and Vasari, drawings by Pontormo and Salviati, fountains, furniture, tapestries and porcelain.

Meet The Medici

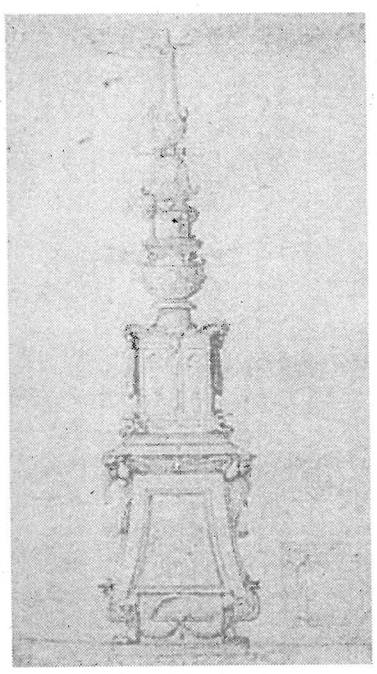
The Medici (pronounced MED-dih-chee), a family of bankers, princes and patrons of the arts, ruled Florence almost continually from the 1420s to 1737, producing cardinals, popes and even two queens of France.

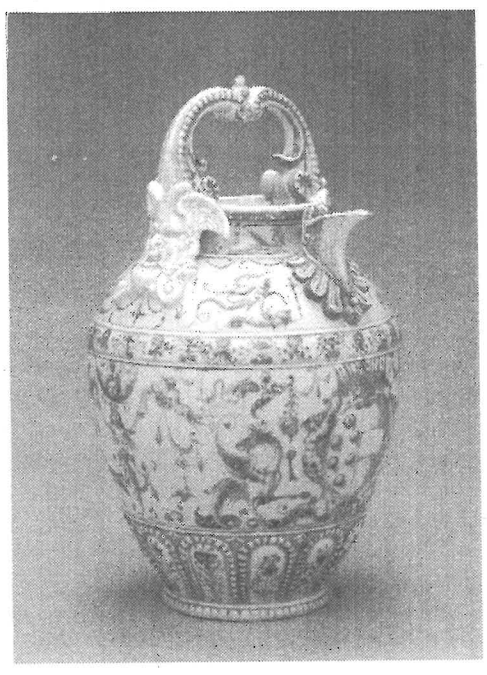
With an unmatchable thirst for power, interest in the sciences and commitment to art, the Medici were closely associated with the finest of minds — from Michelangelo to Galileo. They had enormous wealth, which they used calculatingly.

The DIA show focuses on a group of leaders who expanded their reach beyond the first generations and reigned over not just Florence but surrounding cities in Tuscany as well.

From their home base in Florence, the four Grand Dukes of Tuscany — Cosimo I; his son, Francesco I; another son, Ferdinando I; and Ferdinando I's son, Cosimo II — ruled from 1537 to 1631.

The show also explores Michelangelo's relationship to the Medici — first fostered when he was a young man by Lorenzo de' Medici ("The Magnificent"), Italy's most brilliant Renaissance prince who ruled





Michelangelo Buonarroti: "Design for a Candelabrum," ca. 1535; black chalk, brush and brown wash, incised lines and compass marks on cream laid paper. Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution; museum purchase in memory of Mrs. John Innes Kane, 1942-36-4.

Medici Porcelain Manufactory: "Ewer," ca. 1575/87; soft paste porcelain. The Detroit Institute of Arts.

Grand Ducal Workshops: "Panel with Vase of Flowers," early 1600s; pietre dure mosaic on black marble ground. Florence, Museo dell' Opificio delle Pietre Dure.

two generations before Cosimo I — and the artist's lasting legacy still on view in Florence.

The Medici had an inexhaustible hunger for the arts, intertwining beauty and power with a consistency no family has ever come close to matching. They began as bankers and merchants and became true patrons of the arts, elevating art to the highest status, literally shaping Florence into the treasure it is today.

Art not only enhanced their wealth, stature and reputation throughout Italy but in the finest courts of Europe as well. The Medici commissioned portraits of themselves, remarkable buildings and objects of such great beauty that these creations remain among the most awe-inspiring works in existence.

Art was a tool by which gifts were commissioned to seal deals, fend off wars and secure friendships. If this sounds rather admirable and erudite, it's countered by the family's autocratic rulings.

The family made many artistic contributions to Florence. They are responsible for the Arazzeria, Italy's first major tapestry manufactory; the formation of the first grand-ducal artistic workshops, including the creation of the *pietre dure* industry (exquisite pictures made of inlaid semiprecious stones); and the first porcelain production in Europe. Moreover, they introduced modern urban planning, including the famed Uffizi, which housed both the government and the family's extensive art collections.

The best way to enjoy the show is to soak it in slowly, delving into the past without getting dizzy from the unbelievable pool of talent and amount of history covered.

Family History

The rule of the Grand Dukes began, ironically, in a naive, yet manipulative, way.

Lorenzo de' Medici's son had been expelled from Florence in 1494 after a popular uprising that established a democratic republic. But the family was restored to power in 1512. After the assassination of the intensely disliked, tyrannical Alessandro de' Medici, his young and remote cousin Cosimo — a mere 18 years of age — was chosen to lead Florence.

Considered a neophyte, the future Cosimo I was plucked from obscurity, and although his position was one of status, those in power had every intention of using him as their pawn.

Reigning from 1537-1574, he surprised them by being a great military strategist, intoxicated by power, and surpassed all expectations as a ruler, consolidating his domain through ruthless conquering of cities throughout Tuscany, the region of modern-day Italy where Florence is located.

All of the Medici marriages were political, and a few Medici married into the royal Hapsburg family, as did Cosimo I, when he wed Eleonora of Toledo. Their union, however, was also a love affair, producing 11 children.

Eleonora purchased the half-finished Pitti Palace, making it the family home, and completing it according to its original design. She also had Nicolo Tribolo and his followers redesign the Boboli Gardens behind the palace. Cosimo I was influential in setting the family standard so his children would follow his lead.

The exhibit is chronologically ordered, beginning with a lush portrait of Alessandro, and equally notable images of Cosimo I.

The most telling portrait is Cosimo's own commission by Agnolo Bronzino, only two to three years into his reign, where he is portrayed as a naked Orpheus, his taut body draped in a deep red cape.

Subdued yet remarkably suggestive, this art is no doubt erotic. It also sets the tone for the fascinating, eccentric and often decadent personalities and times ahead.

Cosimo's portrait as Orpheus prepares us for the personality of his son and successor, Francesco I, a paranoid leader who ruled from 1574-1587 and required his followers to submit written notes to him rather than speak first.

Still, he was extremely dedicated to the arts and sciences and is known for the Studiolo, a secret, vaulted room in the Palazzo Vecchio in which he displayed his precious works of art and natural specimens.

In the exhibition, there's an interactive area allowing viewers to experience the feeling of being in the Studiolo itself; one can open drawers in which natural specimens are stored and actually experience how the Medici may have felt studying both natural and artistic objects.

Grand Duke Ferdinando I de' Medici's wedding to Christine of Lorraine (she, too, was a Hapsburg) was a public relations extravaganza, costing the equivalent of about $7 million today. Ruling from 1587-1609, he also spent lavishly on grand public works and

MASTERPIECES on page 76

Cindy Frenkel *is a Huntington Woods-based freelance writer.*

SPECIAL EVENTS

To celebrate the Sunday, March 16, opening of "Magnificenza! The Medici, Michelangelo and the Art of Late Renaissance Florence," the DIA's Department of European Sculpture and Decorative Arts hosts a preview "Study Day" of lectures and discussions on exhibition themes 10:30 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday, March 15, in the Auditorium (enter via Woodward Avenue entrance).

Subjects include the "Myth of Michelangelo"; Michelangelo's legacy in 16th-century Florentine painting, sculpture and decorative arts; and Medici art patronage from Cosimo I to Cosimo II.

A viewing of the exhibition for "Study Day" participants will follow, from 4-5:30 p.m.

For information on "Study Day," call (313) 833-1720. For a full list of special events and programs associated with the exhibit, go to the Web site at **www.dia.org**.

The Medici And The Jews

Despite general tolerance, Florence's Jewish ghetto was created under Medici rule.

CINDY FRENKEL
Special to the Jewish News

The upcoming exhibition at the DIA, "Magnificenza! Michelangelo, the Medici and the Art of Late Renaissance Florence," has special resonance for the Jewish community of metropolitan Detroit because the Medici Grand Dukes, especially Cosimo I, had a special relationship with the Jews of northern Italy.

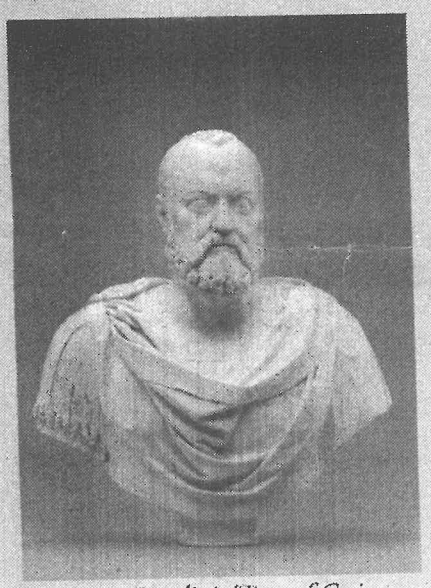
It is believed that in 1544 when a Jewish "gentlewoman" had a conversation with Cosimo I and (his wife) Eleonora de' Medici about religious matters, that the woman was Benvegnita Abravanel. Her family had been tutors to the Spanish royal court in Naples, Italy, where Eleonora lived before her marriage to Cosimo in 1539.

Eleonora had befriended Benvegnita, and this friendship continued after Eleonora's marriage, when the Abravanel family moved to Florence to be near her.

How do we know this? Through minutely detailed archival material, consisting of a virtually complete collection of Medici correspondence known as the Medici Grand Ducal Archive.

The Archive includes receipts, transcripts of conversations and records of all kinds of activities of the Medici during their daily business as the rulers and Grand Dukes of Florence between 1537 and 1743.

These papers are collected in more than 6,000 volumes, which take up literally a kilometer (5/8 of a mile) of shelf space in the Archivio di Stato (state archives) in Florence.



Giovanni Bandini: "Bust of Cosimo I, Grand Duke of Tuscany," ca. 1572; marble. The Detroit Institute of Arts.

The Medici papers are now partially available on the World Wide Web, thanks to the Medici Archive Project (MAP), a nonprofit scholarly research organization established in the United States in 1995.

With the establishment of MAP to fund the technology and provide research scholarships, project head Dr. Edward Goldberg, headquartered in Italy, is realizing his dream of supervising a staff of scholars as they retrieve the mountains of information and "shovel" it into a specially tailored state-of-the-art humanities database system.

Sarah Weiner Keidan, a metro Detroiter who is a vice chair of the MAP board of trustees and who teaches at Oakland Community College, describes the archive this way:

"The information is fascinating; it takes you straight back in time, as if you've dropped into life in the late Renaissance. You can read about events in the planning or just after they happened; you can read about the most important artists, sculptors, architects and political alliances of the time, more like reflections from a personal diary than a history of the Medici and their empire. That's the fundamental value of the Medici papers."

Jewish Connections

The Medici family had substantial connections to the Jews of northern Italy during their years of dominance. The family, pre-eminent in Florence for 200 years before the beginning of the Grand Ducal period and then for another 200 years, early on established business relationships with many northern Italian Jews.

These Jews were solid members of both society and the business community, where they worked as bankers and in the artisan guilds as producers of wool and weavers of the finest silks, satins and brocades for which Florence became well known.

Some historians praise the members of the Medici family as being quite "liberal" in their dealings with the Jews. The reality was that the Jews' relationship to the Medici and their degree of autonomy were defined by which pope ruled in Rome and his relationship with the Medici.

When Cosimo I assumed power as Grand Duke in 1537, he was anxious to afford the Jewish community opportunities in finance and other businesses. But when he believed that maintenance of his political and religious position required him to follow Rome's orders, he acquiesced to the pope's demands for the creation of a Jewish ghetto.

Between September of 1570 and the fall of the following year, a census of Tuscan Jews was conducted, and all of them were brought to Florence. The Florentine ghetto was the only place in Tuscany where Jews were then allowed to live and work. Apart from their separation in the ghetto, the authorities and people of Florence treated the Jews with rare tolerance.

The ghetto was finally liberated in 1848, but the area remained visible in Florence until about 1890, when it was totally destroyed. Elegant city blocks were created in its place. It was located in the area where the Savoy Hotel is now located, on the Piazza Strossi.

Two volumes in the Medici Archive, *Magistrate Supremo 4449 and 4450*, clearly document the ghetto's creation. Soon, the Medici Archive Project will publish these two newly found volumes for scholars and members of the world Jewish community.

Also included will be essays written by contemporary historians and experts on Jewish history. Although the full work is to be published in Italian, the essays and several explanatory pieces also will be published in English. □

The public may view the Medici Archive Project online at **www.medici.org**.

For a more complete history of the Jews in Florence, go to **www.usisrael.org/jsource/vjw/Florence.html**.

MASTERPIECES from page 75

brought internationally renowned artists to Florence.

His son, Cosimo II, ruled only about 10 years, from 1609-1621, due to ill health. He focused his attentions indoors, decorating the Pitti Palace, and filling his court with music and theater.

Michelangelo And The Medici

The pieces by Michelangelo allow us to see how he influenced the entire European art world. A wooden crucifix he was carving just before his death — a sketch for a larger work for his nephew — is among the exhibit's most spiritually moving pieces. One can see the knife marks, as if he is about to return to finish it.

David-Apollo (ca. 1525-30) is an extraordinary sculpture, which was also left unfinished. It exemplifies Michelangelo's revolutionary influence on composition by employing a *figura serpentinata*, or twisted figure, which he intended to be viewed equally from all angles.

"He had a great intellectual capacity for seeing the figure within the marble block,' says curator Alan Darr about this unfinished work. "Some people believe that sometimes when [Michelangelo] carved, he may have left the figure unfinished or unpolished because he could foresee the final form."

Additionally, he was always pulled away from his work by various patrons — particularly by popes in Rome (two of whom were Medici) to work on the Sistine Chapel and the rest of St. Peter's Cathedral, where he was the architect.

In 1534, Michelangelo had began a self-imposed exile to Rome that was to last for the rest of his life, both because of his commitments there and his political views. He harbored republican sympathies and didn't approve of the Medici's autocratic control of Florence, says Larry Feinberg of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Indeed, "because *Apollo-David* was a republican symbol, Michelangelo's sculpture would have been perceived as politically incorrect, especially by Cosimo I," who acquired it and sought to rekindle the relationship Michelangelo had enjoyed under the patronage of Lorenzo de' Medici during the artist's youth in Florence.

Nevertheless, Cosimo I continued to commission pieces by Michelangelo, who was 62 when Cosimo came to power.

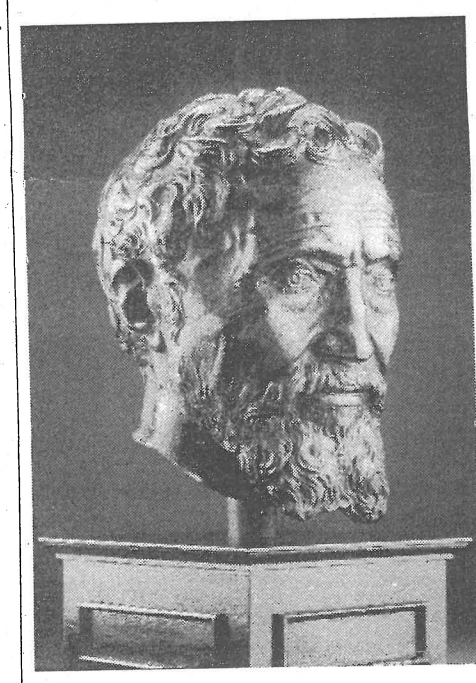
In 1563, the two founded Florence's

first Academy of Art (known as the Accademia del Disegno), where artists studied, among other things, Michelangelo's techniques. A gallery there is devoted to his followers and the grand-ducal workshops.

Michelangelo was known as "the divine" by his contemporaries, and when he died in 1564 at age 88, his body was brought to Florence by Cosimo I. There, he was given an elaborate state funeral in the Medici Church of San Lorenzo, decorated by artists from the Accademia del Disegno.

Feasts For The Eyes

An entire gallery of the DIA exhibit houses stunning *pietre dure*, which became increasingly sophisticated and intricate. Patterns of stones are inlaid so precisely they fool the eye; the gradation in a piece of malachite, for example, is inlaid so that the subtle



Daniele (Ricchiarelli) da Volterra: "Michelangelo Buonarroti," ca. 1564-66, bronze with dark brown patina. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum.

coloration appears to be dappled-looking leaves. Another gallery contains garden sculpture, and is designed as an Italian loggia with benches.

Among the many spectacular pieces on display is a DIA-owned, cobalt blue-and-white porcelain ewer (vessel) from the Medici manufactory, one of some 59 surviving complete pieces of Medici porcelain produced in Florence, beginning about 1575.

Agnolo Bronzino's painting *Young Man with a Lute* graces the exhibition catalogue's cover. It is a striking example of Michelangelo's influence (the angle of the body), while alluding to a Jewish heroine from the Apocrypha (texts not included as part of the Hebrew Bible but considered part of the Old Testament by the Roman Catholic Church) — a statuette of Susannah covering herself from the view of the Elders appears in the background.

Another notable character from the Apocrypha appears in a work that achieved great popularity in its day: the violent, dramatic and widely reproduced *Judith and Holofernes* by Cristofano Allori.

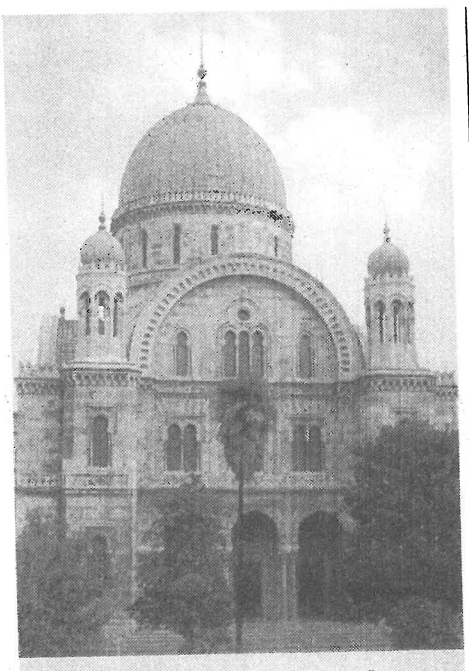
In this painting, the Jewess Judith holds the enemy general's chopped-off head by his hair (Allori painted Holofernes in his own image and Judith in the image of his mistress).

"Although the Medici were very intolerant of political insurrection, they were extremely tolerant intellectually — tolerant of ideas," says Feinberg of the Art Institute of Chicago.

"They sought the best and the brightest of various nationalities and ethnicities; they protected philosophers, such as Pico della Mirandola, who studied and taught the Medici family about Jewish ideas, including Kabbalah; and they protected Galileo from the [Catholic] Church.

"In the Renaissance, one of the largest Jewish communities thrived and remains to this day in Livorno, the port city that the Medici developed." □

"Magnificenza! The Medici, Michelangelo and the Art of Late Renaissance Florence" runs March 16-June 8, 2003, at the Detroit Institute of Arts. Museum hours are 10 a.m.- 4 p.m. Wednesdays-Thursdays, 10 a.m.-9 p.m. Fridays, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays. Timed tickets are required and include an audio tour and museum admission: $12 adults/$6 youth ages 6-17/$10 adult groups/free for DIA members. Tickets can be reserved in several ways. By phone: individual tickets, (866) 334-2784; group tickets, (313) 833-1292 (a $3.50 per ticket handling charge applies to all phone orders); at the DIA box office; and online at **www.dia.org**. The show is free on Wednesday with paid museum admission, although there are no advance reservations, and admission is on a first-come, first-served basis only, subject to availability.



The synagogue in Florence reflects a Moorish style.

Going To Firenze

Florence's Jewish travel sites.

According to Ben Frank, author of *A Travel Guide to Jewish Europe* (Third Edition, Pelican Publishing Company), "of all the cities in the world, the synagogue in Florence (called *Haknesset Firenze*) is one of the most outstanding.

"You can see the cupola from far away — the guides really point it out," he writes.

"The synagogue in Florence has suffered two catastrophes — the war (World War II) and the [1966] flood. The Germans' bayonet marks are still around the doors to the Holy Ark. The Germans repaired trucks in the temple, using it as a garage"

Florence's synagogue has its own Jewish museum attached to it. It's not as extensive as the Jewish museums in Berlin, Paris or Amsterdam, but it's rich with artifacts and well worth a visit if you're stopping to see the synagogue.

With a Jewish population of 1,000-1,200, Florence also has a Chabad House, which is very active, and a hospitality center for kosher food.

Travel agent Shirley Mopper, of Gateway Travel in Farmington Hills, has been to Italy numerous times.

"Many of the merchants are Jews, and they're the pillars of the community," says Mopper, who just made arrangements for clients to attend a seder in Florence.

"The *sinagoga* in Florence was built between 1874 and 1882. They have two seders, so there's room for people traveling during the holiday season."

Both Frank and Mopper also mention Ruth's, a kosher restaurant adjacent to the synagogue, which serves vegetarian cuisine.

— *Cindy Frenkel*