

16th-Century “Wine Windows” Return for COVID-Safe Wine Pickup in Italy

ANCIENT "DRIVE-THRU WINDOWS" FOR ALCOHOL MAKE UNEXPECTED COMEBACK DURING PANDEMIC

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By [Jonny Lupsha](#), News Writer

A 500-year-old method of buying a glass of wine is re-emerging in Italy, [CNN reported](#). In the city of Florence, tiny holes in the wall of buildings contain food and drink available to passersby, while providing minimal physical contact, just as they did in the 1500s. In the 16th century, Florence experienced many architectural changes.



In the 16th century, Florence experienced many architectural changes. Photo By Gurgen Bakhshetyan / Shutterstock

The novel coronavirus pandemic has disrupted virtually every aspect of modern life worldwide. Private citizens and businesses have had to adapt to life in a public health crisis almost overnight, with the shuttering of movie theaters, schools, and—at least temporarily—restaurants and bars. According to the CNN article, one adaptation that emerged in Florence was actually five centuries in the making, “using centuries-old wine windows to dole out food and drink.”

They’re called “buchette del vino,” which translates to “little wine hole.”

“The small windows were used to sell wine-to-go during the Renaissance period, and were intended to be cheaper, direct-to-consumer alternatives to taverns and other drinking dens—not to mention a discreet way for merchants to avoid paying taxes on the alcoholic libations they were peddling,” CNN reported.

“Those merchants were Florence’s elites, many of whom had the foot-tall windows built into street-facing walls of their palatial residences.” Each buchette gave these merchants the ability to trade their wine straight from their in-house cellars with a minimal need for physical contact—an idea that’s understandably popular during the COVID-19 concerns.

Unlike the quiet city it is today, the Florence of the 16th century that led to this invention was one in great turmoil.

The Grand Duke of Micromanagement

A far greater architectural change than the little wine holes came to Florence in the 1500s due to Grand Duke Cosimo I.

“The end of the republic in 1530 resulted in an ascendant Medici monarchy, and Cosimo, who took power in 1537, was a total micromanager,” said [Dr. Kenneth Bartlett](#), Professor of History at the University of Toronto. “He wanted to centralize all of the administrative functions of the territories and the city of Florence in one place so he could keep an eye on them.

“So he ordered his court architect, Giorgio Vasari, to pull down the buildings between the Palazzo Vecchio and the Arno, and to construct a block of offices, or Uffizi, in 16th-century Italian.”

Dr. Bartlett said that if there’s a silver lining to all of the destruction of the ancient buildings near the Palazzo Vecchio, it’s that [the Uffizi is now Florence’s main art museum](#). He went as far as to describe the museum as one of the

“truly great repositories of art in the world.”

“The gallery function of the Uffizi began with Cosimo’s eldest son, Francesco I of Tuscany,” Dr. Bartlett said. “He moved many Medici masterpieces and classical statues into the building, especially the upper floor loggias as exhibition space.”

Some of the artwork in the fabled museum includes works by Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Botticelli, and Piero della Francesca. Dr. Bartlett recommended spending at least a full day in the Uffizi during any visit to Florence. He suggested buying tickets online in advance with a guaranteed entrance time.

So although the 1530s spelled certain doom for some of Florence’s beautiful buildings, those that replaced them soon became home to artistic masterpieces by some of the most world-renowned painters and sculptors in Europe. And now another fascinating part of 16th-century culture in Florence is making a comeback, in the form of tiny windows through which you can order a glass of wine.

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