

LA FOCE

DISTANCE FROM THE BORGO: 35KM



American born Iris Origo saw Italy through a stage of incredible change, from Savoy monarchy through Mussolini and the Second World War, from the centuries-old peasant farming system to Italy's much-belated industrialization. She left a collection of literature, a personal account of German occupation and thrilling escape during wartime, a legacy of conscientious farming in a land hard to conquer, and a beautiful, manicured estate in the picturesque Val d'Orcia.



Her house, **La Foce**, sits on one of the most comely and typically Tuscan roads in the area, its winding grade marked by even cypresses. A visit to La Foce is an opportunity not only to experience the famous estate and gardens, but to learn about Iris Origo who was an enormously intriguing individual, as well as her circle of expatriates which included Bernard Berenson and Edith Wharton among others, and about the evolution of Tuscany as we know it today.

New York-born Origo's early years, following the loss of her father, were spent traversing the world with her mother before establishing a base at the Villa Medici in Fiesole, outside of Florence. There she grew up among her mother's circle of wealthy English expatriates. In the 1920s she married Italian Antonio Origo and escaped to a very different world of their choosing, a dilapidated farm on a vast landholding south of Siena. They transformed the dry valley into a working estate with rebuilt farmhouses and a school. They also rebuilt the villa at La Foce and its gardens.



During World War II, they took the side of the Allies, heroically sheltering POWs in addition to looking after their own community. Origo's *War in the Val d'Orcia* is one of the great nonfictional works on the war in Italy. Nonpolitical and told from the limited perspective of her location, it is an account of the war's effects on everyday life in rural Italy.

Given adequate notice and pending availability, it is possible to arrange a private tour and lunch with Benedetta Origo, Iris's daughter and the current owner of La Foce. (Borgo staff will be pleased to help you arrange the tour.) Join her midday for a tour of the gardens before taking lunch outside or in the beautifully frescoed dining room. Next, retire to the salon for coffee and discussion.

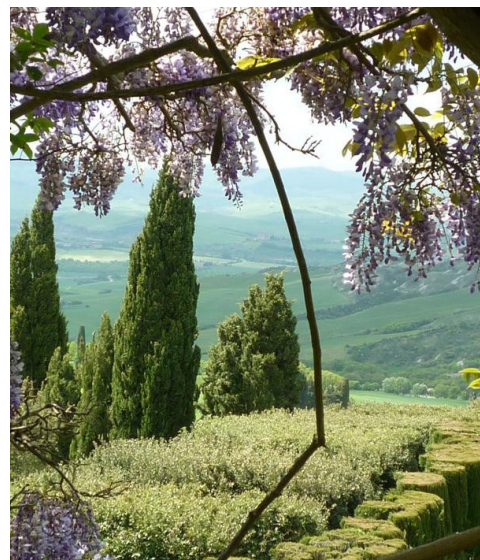
If it is not possible to make such arrangements, on Wednesdays La Foce's gardens are open to the public with guided tours leaving on the hour from 3-6 pm in the summer, at 3 pm only from October to March. See www.lafoce.com for more information.

Getting to La Foce:

The 30 to 45 minute drive to La Foce is one of the prettiest in the province. Start by traveling south on the S2 out of Buonconvento. After passing the town of San Quirico, turn left in the direction of Chianciano Terme. After 13.5 km, turn left (still in the direction of Chianciano) for La Foce and follow the signs (~ 6 km.) When you are almost there, the road begins a winding uphill climb amid stately cypresses. To your left is the iconic Tuscan road made famous by the film, *The English Patient*. As you reach the top of the hill, La Foce is on your right. Continue past the house and park in the large lot where signs indicate.

Gardens and the Villa

The gardens are the design of **Cecil Pinsent**, one of Tuscany's great twentieth century landscape architects. He got his start working for Bernard Berenson at Villa I Tatti, now Harvard's center for Renaissance studies, which led to projects at the Villa Medici and Villa La Foce. In the middle of what can be a very dry landscape, the dense, shadowy greens of La Foce's gardens are quite a surprise. Pinsent's geometric box hedges, a nod to traditional Italian formal gardens, define a space that is manicured to the last detail and lush in all seasons. The rose garden contributes splashes of bright color. In spring, the pergola overflows with purple wisteria. Walking down the pergola leads to one of Tuscany's best views, that of the winding road below in the Val d'Orcia.





BORG
FINOCCHIETO



The three-story villa was originally built as a tavern for travelers in 1498, but became the core of an estate maintained by Siena's Santa Maria della Scala hospital until the Origos purchased it in 1924. The dining room is a stand-out, its high ceiling ringed by a second-tier gallery and its walls frescoed with scenes of the beautiful, surrounding landscape.



The Borgo library contains a number of books related to your La Foce visit: Origo's collection of works, including *Light and Shadows*, *The Merchant of Prato*, and *War in the Val d'Orcia*; Caroline Moorehead's biography; and *La Foce: Garden and Landscape in Tuscany* by Benedetta Origo, among others.