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## UNEXPECTED ROME

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# Unexpected Rome

If you've come to Rome expecting to find nothing but ancient ruins, baroque churches, spectacular fountains, and Renaissance palaces, prepare to be taken by surprise. All you have to do is keep your eyes open and you'll be wowed by a wider variety of artistic styles and movements than you could ever have expected in one city.

**Tiffany Parks** takes a look.

## EGYPTIAN INFLUENCES

The ancient sites clustered around the Forum and the Palatine Hill are an archeology lover's dream come true, and the crumbling temples, theaters, bath complexes, triumphal arches, and porticos create a visual testimony to the ancient Rome of the history books. But

head south of the Circus Maximus to the neighborhood of Testaccio, and you'll find yourself face to face with an ancient site that may have you wondering if you're in Giza instead of Rome. After the conquest of Egypt in 30 BC, Egyptian culture became all the rage in Rome, and the magistrate Gaius Cestius decided on a pyramid—as opposed to a more traditional Roman mausoleum—as his final

resting place. **The Pyramid of Cestius** (Via Raffaele Persichetti), completed in 12 BC and measuring nearly 120 feet, is faced in Carrara marble and has a steeper angle than that of the famous pyramids of Giza. It resembles instead the pyramids of Nubia, a region in southern Egypt where Cestius most likely served during a military campaign in 23 BC. The pyramid's surprisingly stable condition can be attributed to that fact that it was incorporated into the city walls by Emperor Aurelian in the late 3rd century AD. Right now, only the upper half of the pyramid is fully visible, as it is in the process of getting a deep cleaning. Japanese business tycoon Yugo Yazi is financing the million-Euro project, restoring the pyramid's marble façade; the original bright white glow can now be admired (at least partially) for the first time in centuries.





## OLD AND NEW

As you cross the threshold of the Vatican Museums, ready to ogle works by Michelangelo, Raphael, and countless other Renaissance masters, one of the first pieces of art you encounter is probably the last thing you'd expect. In the center of the monumental Pinecone Courtyard, Arnaldo Pomodoro's massive bronze sculpture, *Sphere within a Sphere* (above), donated to the Vatican in 1990, makes an arresting juxtaposition with the dome of St. Peter's in the distance, and the ancient bronze pinecone the courtyard was named for. The conventionally held belief is that the work represents the world as it revolves within the Christian faith, although some have controversially claimed it depicts a New World Order being born out of the



suffering of war. Other versions of this work in varying dimensions can be found across the globe, in cities such as New York, Dublin, Washington, DC, Tel Aviv, Tehran, and Hakone.

## INNOVATIVE AUDITORIUM

Planning a night at the symphony? If you're expecting an old-school concert hall, dripping with chandeliers and neoclassical architecture like the ones you'd find in most European capitals, think again. Rome's most prestigious classical music venue, **Auditorium Parco della Musica** (Viale Pietro de Coubertin, 30) in the Flaminio neighborhood, was designed by one of the most celebrated Italian architects of our time, Renzo Piano, and completed just over a decade ago. The complex's three concert halls are isolated from one another to ensure complete soundproofing, and their odd shape has caused some to compare them to a family of beetles or even various-sized computer mice. The halls surround an octagonal piazza that doubles as an amphitheater for outdoor concerts in warmer weather. Despite its odd appearance, the Auditorium has been warmly embraced by Romans and is one of the most visited performing arts centers in the world.

## ART NOUVEAU WHIMSY

If you happen to stumble upon Piazza Mincio in the **Coppedè neighborhood** (above), northeast of Villa Borghese, you might think you've been magically transported to turn-of-the-century Prague or Paris. This enchanting residential neighborhood was designed by Gino Coppedè between 1916 and 1926 in the Art Nouveau style, with intricate floral decorations and fanciful details. Passing

under the arch at Via Tagliamento, hung with a massive chandelier, you'll feel as if you're stepping into the pages of a fairy tale, where bizarre marvels abound. In addition to Art Nouveau, the neighborhood features a charming mishmash of contrasting styles from medieval to ancient Greek, from Roman Baroque to Venetian Renaissance. Toss a coin in the gurgling Fountain of the Frogs, and admire the Fairy Cottages, also designed by Coppedè, with whimsical decorations such as sundials, zodiac motifs, sculpted animals, and portraits of Dante and Petrarch, as well as rich interior details like enameled majolica in the kitchens and Pompeii-style mosaics in the bathrooms. Arachnophobes beware: an image of an enormous eight-legged beast guards

*"One of the first pieces of art you encounter is probably the last thing you'd expect."*

the entrance to the Palace of the Spider, one of many other fantastical buildings in the neighborhood.

## FASCIST SHAPES

All first-time visitors to Rome no doubt plan to see the wonder of engineering and human accomplishment that is the Colosseum. What they might not have anticipated is the square version. Imagine the Colosseum, squeezed into a skinnier, taller, four-cornered version, and you have the **Palace of Italian Civilization** (Quadrato della Concordia) in the EUR district. This neighborhood south of the historic center was conceptualized to be the hub of the 1942 World Exposition (which, due to the outbreak of World War II, never took place) as well as a commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the March on Rome, that is, the beginning of the Fascist era. The palace was envisioned as a monument to Fascism, and is now an architectural icon of 20th-century Rome and the centerpiece of



## WHERE NOW | SIGHTSEEING



EUR. Since being rented by the high-end fashion label Fendi, who plans to use the space as an enormous multi-level mega-store, the building is sadly closed to the public. However, its most arresting features can be appreciated from the outside, and a stroll around the neighborhood is a great way to see a completely different side of Rome.

### SWISS CHALET MEETS MEDIEVAL HAMLET

**The Casina delle Civette** (Via Nomentana, 70) (above) is something you'd expect to find on a Swiss mountainside or in a Bavarian village. Instead, it's located just north of the historic center of Rome in Villa Torlonia, a sprawling park with numerous residences, built for the noble family of the same name in the early 19th century, and later used by Mussolini as his official residence. The *casina* was designed by Giuseppe Japelli in a deliberately rustic style, with steep layered roofs and diverse building materials, and was used by Prince Alessandro Torlonia as a retreat from the conventionalism of the principal residence. In the early 20th century, the *casina* got a face-lift, when architect Enrico Gennari transformed it into a medieval hamlet, complete with picture windows, loggias, turrets, porticos, and stylized details. As delightful as the exterior effect is, the real treasures are within. Find minute stucco decoration, polychrome majolica, mosaics, carved wood paneling, and wrought-iron

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details. Most notably, more than 70 Art Nouveau stained glass windows decorate the space, designed by Duilio Cambellotti and other artists of the Italian Liberty style, and crafted in the studio of master glassmaker Cesare Picchiarini. The windows depict lush images of owls, fairies, mermaids, peacocks, swans, butterflies, and plants, and miraculously survived heavy damage to the *casina* in the fire of 1991, as well as years of vandalism, theft, and neglect.

### MINI-MILANO

If you've been to Milan, you've no doubt seen its magnificent Gothic cathedral, one of the largest and most impressive churches in the world. Gothic architecture never took off in Rome, and the towering pinnacles, rosette windows, and pointed arches so abundant in France and Germany are strikingly absent in the Eternal City, with one tiny exception. Facing the Tiber on the right bank, and

wedged between two incongruent buildings, the church of **Sacro Cuore del Suffragio** (Lungotevere Prati, 12) sticks out like a sore thumb. The diminutive church, which looks like a thumbnail version of Milan's Duomo, was built in neo-Gothic style at the turn of the last century. With its low light and towering pilasters, the interior is eerily haunting, but more disturbing by far is the Museum of the Souls in Purgatory located in the church's sacristy, where signs of tormented life beyond the grave look out from the pages of singed prayer books.

## Art in Unexpected Places

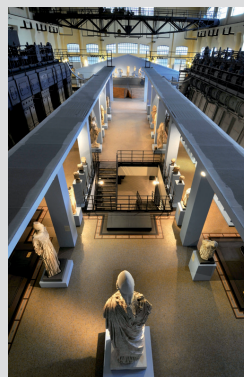
Rome's finest works of art are not only to be found in the opulent galleries of Renaissance palaces or over the altars of baroque churches. Sometimes they pop up in places you would least expect.

### > FANCY A PINT?

The principal location of the **MACRO** (p56), Rome's contemporary art museum, occupies the modernized site of the former Peroni beer factory. The permanent collection contains works by some of the most important names in Italian art since the 1960s, including Carla Accardi, Mario Schifano, and Mimmo Rotella, as well as numerous pieces of Arte Povera.

### > ANCIENT ROME MEETS THE INDUSTRIAL AGE

For centuries, the vast Ludovisi collection of ancient sculptures, mosaics, and sarcophagi sat ignored in the warehouses of the Capitoline Museums. The precious collection was finally given the attention it deserves when it moved into Rome's long-abandoned and newly restored early-20th-century power plant, now **Centrale Montemartini** (p57). The behemoth black industrial-era machinery creates a dramatic backdrop for the 2000-year-old works of art.



### > ART IN THE ABATTOIR

In 2003, the ex-slaughterhouse or *mattatoio* of the formerly working class Testaccio neighborhood was transformed into the futuristic branch of the **MACRO** (p56). Today, instead of the blood, meat, and other gruesome images that would once have been commonplace here, you can see an innovative permanent collection as well as numerous temporary exhibitions.