

## Inside the Gucci Archive: A Living Legacy of Heritage and Innovation in Florence

Discover the rich history and evolution of Gucci at the brand's Archive in Florence, where the brand showed its cruise 2026 collection on May 15.



FLORENCE – Those lucky enough to visit the Gucci Archive are in for quite a few surprises.

A Gucci paper knife? A lighter shaped as a tiny equestrian boot finely detailed with the GG logo? These are only a few of the discoveries elegantly displayed in one of the rooms of Palazzo Settimanni, where the archive has been located since 2021.

There's plenty more in this area of the building, from shaving, beauty and sewing kits to desk sets and fountain pens, porcelain tea sets and hip flasks, to name a few.

Of course, these are dwarfed by the dizzying range of Gucci clothes and accessories present across the five floors of the building. Gucci exceptionally opened the archive for its cruise 2026 show on May 15, in a moment of transition following the exit of Sabato De Sarno in February and the arrival of newly appointed creative director Demna after his Balenciaga swan song haute couture show on July 9 and his start at Gucci shortly thereafter.

In fact, chief executive officer Stefano Cantino says “choosing Palazzo Settimanni for the cruise 2026 show is a deliberate gesture. The archive is a living testimony to over a century of creativity, craftsmanship, and innovation. It is where our roots and our future come together with clarity and purpose.”

The archive is not open to the general public because, Cantino says, this is “an intimate space, one that demands time, care, and emotion. We welcome passionate researchers and true brand connoisseurs, because entering the heart of Gucci isn't something you purchase — it's something you earn.”

The venue is open to guided tours, friends of the house, clients, celebrities and the press and to students in collaboration with Polimoda and Bocconi University, for example.

By contrast, Gucci has a dedicated public exhibition space in Palazzo Gucci in the city's Piazza della Signoria, the former Gucci Garden. Guccio Gucci founded the brand in 1921 in Florence, which







remains central to its identity.

Palazzo Settimanni, on Via delle Caldaie, dates back to the 15th century and is nestled in the Santo Spirito neighborhood, in the area known as "Oltrarno," on the left bank of the Arno River. This is where artisans and artists had their workshops, and by the 16th century, following the Medici family's move to Palazzo Pitti, they had established themselves near the residences of the aristocratic families gravitating around the political and banking dynasty.

Despite its grandeur, over the centuries the palace proved to be a flexible structure, capable of accommodating additions, splits, partitions, changes of ownership and use. The building was acquired by Gucci in 1953 — a milestone year for the company, which saw the death of its founder. That year, Gucci also opened its first store outside Italy, in New York, and launched its first moccasin.

Over the years Palazzo Settimanni became an integral part of the brand, serving as a factory, a workshop and a showroom. Conservatively restored starting in 2018 under the lead of former president and CEO Marco Bizzarri and then-creative director Alessandro Michele, it has housed the Gucci Archive since June 2021, helping to mark the house's 100th anniversary celebrations that year.

The archive now comprises 46,000 pieces plus documents, look books and editorials — both physical and digital.

"What struck me the most when I first visited Palazzo Settimanni was how tangibly you can feel the soul of Gucci," says Cantino of his first visit to the location. "It's a layered narrative, where history and passion, beauty and creativity, past and future continuously intertwine."

Cantino believes the archive is "first and foremost, a place of belonging." Asked what kind of emotions he thinks the location triggers, he says "it conveys a sense of deep affection for our heritage and a forward-looking perspective. It is a shared legacy for all those who have shaped Gucci's story over time."

A memorable comment that stayed with him once came from an Italian visitor who said "they had never experienced a place where culture, fashion, beauty and history coexisted in such perfect harmony." This remark "speaks to the unique emotional balance of the space," Cantino says.

Of the curatorial approach, the executive says the archive "is shaped by a continuous process of research and renewal. The displays evolve regularly to highlight different facets of Gucci's identity — bringing forward elements that resonate with the present while remaining deeply rooted in our heritage. It's never static: each object contributes to a narrative that is always moving forward."

The work of all creative directors, from Tom Ford through Frida Giannini and Michele to De Sarno, are represented in the archive, which "reflects Gucci in its entirety, and that means honoring every creative director who has contributed to making our legacy contemporary and relevant. It's a dynamic evolution, and just as we preserve the work of the generations of artisans who have shaped Gucci's identity, we also celebrate the creative visions that continue to define our journey," Cantino says.

Incidentally, the first Gucci menswear show by Ford as creative director was held here in 1995.

Across the five floors, which include the ground floor and the basement, all the structures accumulated in recent times were stripped away during the restoration to reveal 19th century decorations, 18th century trompe l'oeils, late 17th century frescoes and even earlier ornamentation.







The main alteration was the restoration of the central portico to its original proportions, removing a canopy in the entrance hall that had been added in the 1990s, a move which allows for more light. Local specialists were recruited, who, for example, painstakingly produced each terracotta floor tile in wood-fired ovens — one by one. Intriguing details include handles that replicate a pair of scissors.

The archive is divided into themed areas. On the ground floor, in one room dubbed “the Swan” for its beautiful fresco depicting the waterbird, Gucci highlights three of its iconic bags — from the very first Bamboo dating back to the end of the 1940s to the first examples of the Jackie 1961, and the first Horsebit from 1955. Row after row they reflect the evolution of each of Gucci’s signature bags through the years, presented in different versions and materials, bridging the past with the present.

The oldest bag, a velvet clutch with a floral pattern, dates back to the end of the 1920s.

On the ground floor there is also a window display dedicated to its signature web motif in green/red/green and in blue/red/blue established in the mid-1950s.

Another signature code, the diamond pattern from the 1930s, first seen on hemp suitcases, evolved into the GG monogram in 1969. A fashion show of a men’s and women’s collection entirely embellished with the monogram was held that same year at the Smithsonian and those designs are also presented at the archive.

The GG logo has gone through changes over the years, from the rounded motif in 1971 on the Blondie bag to interlocking on the brand’s first fragrance in 1975.

Luggage is also part of the location’s treasure trove, from the trunk dating back to the end of the 1930s to the first printed canvas luggage and bags trademarked in 1959, and suitcases with the patterns of pinecones and pomegranates. Small leather goods and jewelry are on display in a salon near the suitcases.

Scarves, dresses, textile designs and footwear are shown on the first floor. There is a focus on the Flora scarf, which was created in 1966 when Princess Grace of Monaco put in a request for a colorful and exuberant design and Rodolfo Gucci, son of the founder, asked illustrator Vittorio Accornero de Testa to assist.

The motif was painted by hand, inspired by the flowers blooming naturally in Tuscany and by 15th-century artist Sandro Botticelli’s “Allegory of Spring.” The elaborate composition required 37 distinct colors, each applied through separate printing steps. The motif inspired the brand’s first silk dress in 1969 and has been reimagined by Gucci’s different creative directors over the years across the categories. There are also 58 original watercolor designs by Accornero de Testa on display.

Ahead of the cruise show, Cantino said returning to Florence and to Palazzo Settimanni was “both a tribute and a declaration of intent,” describing the archive “as not merely a repository of our past; it is a living space where Gucci’s identity codes are preserved and reinterpreted through an ongoing dialogue.”

The choice of the location in his view reaffirms Gucci’s “bond with the cultural and artisanal heritage that defines us, while projecting it into the future with coherence and ambition.”

