

Wish you lived here?

Florence

A former tobacco factory in the heart of the city is one of Italy's most exciting residential redevelopments. Buy in from £326,000, says Emanuele Midolo

On a hot August day in Florence, a batch of tobacco was drying out in the sun when a short, sudden downpour washed the leaves. They started to ferment in the heat, but once rolled and smoked the tobacco turned out to be unexpectedly good. The year was 1815 and the Toscano cigar was born.

For 70 years these cigars, which are synonymous with Tuscany, were made in Florence's Manifattura Tabacchi. Today the former factory, northwest of the city centre, is at the heart of a huge regeneration project that will turn it into homes, shops and offices.

Valentina Tosato, communications manager for the development, describes it as "a city within the city" — it is Florence's version of Battersea Power Station or King's Cross in London, a new neighbourhood on an old neglected industrial site.

Originally designed by the architect Pier Luigi Nervi, who collaborated with Le Corbusier and Louis Kahn, the factory spans 110,000 sq m (1.1 million sq ft) over 16 buildings.

The place has a young, buzzy, colourful vibe. The factory's courtyard is decked in art installations. In the middle there is a large screen and hundreds of seats ready for film projections. Chichi students sit in the café and co-working space or chill outside in the gardens. Most of them study at the Polimoda fashion school, housed in the first building that was restored.

Michelangelo Giombini, the project's chief executive, has commissioned a different architect to design each residential building. In the first phase 45

flats will be built, split between two blocks: Puro and Anilla. Both names are a nod to the building's heritage — puro is a cigar made from tobaccos grown in a single country, anilla the paper ring round the cigar.

Puro is a two-storey block with 24 flats. Described in the brochures as loft living, the interiors, designed by the local architects Q-bic, reflect the manufacturing heritage of the site. "It's the oldest building in the complex, dating from the 1920s, before the Manifattura," says Danilo Orlando, founder of the estate agency Beliving, a Savills associate in Italy, and joint selling agent for the flats. "Puro is also a pun on its 'pure' industrial nature." Prices here start from €387,000 (£326,000) for a one-bedroom flat.

Anilla, designed by the Spanish architect Patricia Urquiola, is more sophisticated. The semicircular building will house 21 flats over four floors, with prices ranging from €441,000 for a one-bedroom flat up to €2.1 million for a four-bedroom penthouse, through Savills.

The flats are due to be finished by December 2023, but Orlando says some of them have already sold or are under offer. The properties have been popular with British, American, Chinese, French and German.

From the rooftop, which will be open to residents, you can see the Duomo just a mile and a half away. According to Bill Thomson, the head of Knight Frank's office in the city, it is here that most buyers want to be.

Thomson says that the key trend in Italian cities such as Florence, Venice, Verona and Milan is luxury "lock up and leave" apartments, in renovated palazzos



Manifattura Tabacchi (impression, above left) is close to the Duomo (top) and Boboli gardens (above right)

(there is little space for new-builds in the centre of these old cities), with services such as 24/7 concierges for which buyers will pay up to €20,000 per sq m.

More typically, flats in the centre of Florence will cost between €6,000 and €12,000 per sq m. South of the River Arno, but within walking distance of the centre, lies the district of Oltrarno, also popular with international buyers; nearby Santo Spirito tends to attract a "younger, hipper crowd", Thomson says.

Prices in sought-after suburbs — such as Poggio Imperiale to the southwest and Fiesole to the north — range from €3,000 to €7,000 per sq m for larger apartments and villas with gardens.

According to Knight Frank, prices in Florence rose by 1.5 per cent in 2020 and 3 per cent in 2021. "Property prices have not been increasing [substantially] as yet but negotiation margins have narrowed considerably and there is increasingly a lack of stock," says Jeremy Onslow-Macaulay, managing director of Casa & Country estate agency. "We suspect prices are going to start rising this autumn."



Need to know

■ Good schools include the International School of Florence (isfitaly.org), with its junior campus in Bagno a Ripoli and upper school closer to the centre. There is also the Canadian School of Florence (csflorence.it).

■ There are several property taxes, notary fees and agency fees, which add up to about 10-12 per cent of the purchase price. The buying fee is 3 per cent plus the

standard VAT rate (22 per cent in Italy). However, Onslow-Macaulay says: "Don't be put off by the 9 per cent tax on purchase of a 'second home' — on resale properties this is calculated on the 'cadastral' [fiscal] value, which tends to be considerably lower than the purchase price, in many cases 50 per cent lower than the purchase price."

■ If you work for a British company while living in Italy,

you can register as a taxpayer there and receive a five-year, 70 per cent income tax exemption.

■ Wealthy individuals relocating to Italy can choose to pay a flat-rate tax of €100,000 a year on foreign income, regardless of the amount earned.

■ British passport holders are allowed to stay 90 days in any one 180-day period in the Schengen area.

Carol Lewis

Location lowdown Dulwich, SE19

Where? A leafy pocket neighbourhood nestled between the effortlessly modish Herne Hill, the edge of Peckham, Brixton and suburban Crystal Palace.

What is it about SE19?

The area is split into three distinct regions. East Dulwich is centred around Lordship Lane, which is peppered with independent shops and hipster watering holes. Then there's historic West Dulwich, home to £22,971 a year (day pupils) Dulwich College. The grade I listed All Saints church, HQ to the Lambeth Orchestra, is

a draw for musicians, and the Rosendale pub, with its Royal Doulton tiling, is highly rated. Third, there is Dulwich Village, right, full of chichi shops and grand houses with picket fences.

How do I get there?

Although SE19 does not have a Tube station, the railway stations at East, North and West Dulwich offer fast access to central London — the North Dulwich to London Bridge train takes 15 minutes. And the trusty N63 night bus will get you back to your Dulwich den after hours.



Watch out for the many cyclists who pedal to work each day — or you could join their Lycra-clad tribe.

What else is on offer?

Dulwich Picture Gallery, designed in the early 19th

century by the Regency architect Sir John Soane, is the oldest public art gallery in Britain. In May the Dulwich Festival returned after being on hold during the pandemic. Nearby Brockwell Lido in Herne Hill is the place to practise your breaststroke. There are fab cinemas in the area, including the East Dulwich Picturehouse.

Can I go shopping?

Birkenstock-wearers will find it hard to resist the shops, from homeware at Mrs Robinson to Willow for art supplies. The Dulwich Trader is a one-stop

shop for gifts, and it's a minute away from the beloved (and award-winning) Dulwich Books. On the hunt for a bargain? Head to Boutique by Shelter, Mary's Living and Giving shop and St Christopher's Hospice, all in East Dulwich.

Green spaces? I challenge you to find a greener London suburb. The name Dulwich, meaning a "marshy meadow where dill grows", was first recorded in AD967. Dulwich Park, a jogger's paradise, includes 69 acres of ancient woodland.

Do move here if... You are yearning to be a part of a thriving community driven by eco-friendly standards. Like Flora Balthway, 35, whose business Washed Up Cards sells handmade cards created using plastic collected from beaches.

Don't move here if... You're not prepared to put down a big deposit. According to Rightmove the average house price is £872,348. Most sales are flats, Victorian terraces and semi-detached houses, which go for about £1.5 million.

Georgia Lambert