

ROME

An Illustrated Guide to Its Monuments & Art

The Palatine Hill

From Rome with Love

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Photographed on site · Notes compiled for viewing

The Palatine Hill

Location: The Palatine Hill, above the Roman Forum, Rome



The brick-and-concrete chambers of the imperial palace (the Domus), built into the hilltop.



A great vaulted passage beneath the palace platform, framing the umbrella pines beyond.



Pavilions and fountain-niche of the Renaissance Farnese Gardens, laid out over the imperial ruins.



Cypresses and clipped hedges of the Farnese Gardens — the imperial hill turned Renaissance idyll.

Description

The centremost of Rome's seven hills, and the most storied. Legend made it the spot where Romulus founded the city; history made it the home of the emperors — so completely that the hill's Latin name, Palatium, became our word 'palace.' These views climb among the ruins of the imperial palace and the Renaissance gardens later laid over them: the brick-and-concrete chambers of the Domus, a great vaulted passage beneath the palace platform, and the elegant pavilions and cypresses of the Farnese Gardens.

Inscription & Translation

No carved inscription features here — but the hill itself named a thing. From Palatium, the emperors' residence on the Palatine, come the English 'palace,' the Italian 'palazzo,' the French 'palais' and the German 'Pfalz.'

In other words, every 'palace' in Europe is, at root, named after this one hill — the place where Roman emperors lived so grandly that their address became a word.

Date & Age

The Palatine has been lived on for some 3,000 years — from Iron-Age huts (traditionally linked to Romulus) through the aristocratic houses of the Republic. From Augustus onward it became the emperors' hill; the great palace whose ruins dominate it was built by Domitian (81–92 AD) and extended by Septimius Severus around 200 AD. The Renaissance Farnese Gardens were laid out over the ruins in the 16th century.

Artist / Creators

The vast imperial palace — the Domus Flavia (the public state rooms) and the Domus Augustana (the emperor's private quarters), with its sunken garden 'stadium' — was the work of Domitian's architect Rabirius, one of the few Roman architects whose name survives. Septimius Severus later extended the complex southward on huge brick substructures overlooking the Circus Maximus. The garden pavilions belong to the Farnese Gardens (Orti Farnesiani), created for Cardinal Alessandro Farnese in the 1500s — among the first botanical gardens in Europe.

Significance

For three centuries this hill was the seat of the Roman emperors, the command-centre of the Mediterranean world — and its name passed into half the languages of Europe as the word for any great house. Layered over the imperial ruins, the Farnese Gardens turned the hill into a Renaissance idyll of terraces and cypresses. To walk it today is to move through three thousand years at once: the legendary cradle of Rome, the palace of its emperors, and a Renaissance garden, all on the same ground.