

ROME

An Illustrated Guide to Its Monuments & Art

Sant'Andrea delle Fratte

From Rome with Love

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Sant'Andrea delle Fratte

Location: Via di Sant'Andrea delle Fratte, near the Spanish Steps, Rome



The nave looking toward the high altar, with its cycle of paintings of the martyrdom of St Andrew.



Borromini's dome, frescoed by Pasquale Marini — the drum, and the famous bell tower outside, are among Borromini's last works.



The sanctuary: the paintings of St Andrew, a marble angel by Bernini at left, and (at right) the venerated Madonna del Miracolo.

Description

A 17th-century Baroque church near the Spanish Steps, dedicated to St Andrew the Apostle — ‘delle Fratte’ meaning ‘of the thickets,’ from the days when this was the edge of the built-up city. Its dome and celebrated bell tower are the work of Francesco Borromini; inside, a richly painted sanctuary tells the story of St Andrew’s martyrdom, and a venerated image of the Virgin still draws pilgrims.

Inscription & Translation

The church’s name, Sant’Andrea delle Fratte — ‘St Andrew of the thickets’ — recalls the open, half-wild ground on the city’s edge where a small church stood as early as 1192; its old cardinalatial title is ‘de Hortis,’ of the gardens.

Rebuilt across the 17th century, it became one of Rome’s great stages for the rival geniuses of the Baroque — Borromini in its architecture, Bernini in its sculpture.

Date & Age

A church has stood here since 1192; the present building was begun in 1604 by Gaspare Guerra, carried on by Francesco Borromini in the mid-17th century, and completed by Mattia de Rossi in 1691. The neoclassical facade was added in 1826.

Artist / Creators

Borromini designed the apse, the drum of the dome and the extraordinary bell tower (left incomplete at his death in 1667). The dome and apse were frescoed by Pasquale Marini; the great paintings of St Andrew’s martyrdom at the high altar are by Lazzaro Baldi, Francesco Trevisani and Giovanni Battista Leonardi. The church belongs to the Order of Minims, founded by St Francis of Paola.

Significance

Sant’Andrea delle Fratte is a meeting-place of the two titans of the Roman Baroque: Borromini built its soaring dome and its restless, inventive bell tower, while Bernini’s hand survives inside in two of

his finest angels. It is also a living shrine — the ‘Madonna del Miracolo’ — where in 1842 the Virgin is said to have appeared to a young Jewish banker, Alphonse Ratisbonne, who converted on the spot, and where in 1918 St Maximilian Kolbe celebrated his first Mass.

Sant'Andrea delle Fratte: Bernini's Angels and the Chapels

Location: Inside Sant'Andrea delle Fratte, Rome



Bernini's Angel with the Crown of Thorns (1667–69) — one of the two angels he carved for the Ponte Sant'Angelo, the only ones from that project by his own hand.



St Michael the Archangel by Ludovico Gimignani, treading the rebel angel underfoot.

I.N.R.I. — Iesus Nazarenus Rex Iudaeorum, 'Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews,' the inscription Pilate ordered placed on the Cross.

Date & Age

Bernini carved the two angels in 1667–69; they were given to the church by his heirs and set up here in the early 19th century. The St Michael and the chapel sculptures are of the late 17th and 18th centuries; the Mauroceni memorial dates to 1739.

Artist / Creators

The angels are by Gian Lorenzo Bernini — the Angel with the Crown of Thorns and the Angel with the Superscription, the only two of the ten Ponte Sant'Angelo angels he carved himself; Pope Clement IX judged them too precious for the open air and had copies placed on the bridge instead. The St Michael is by Ludovico Gimignani; the reclining figure in the Chapel of St Anne is by Giovanni Battista Maini, openly indebted to Bernini's Blessed Ludovica Albertoni.

Significance

These angels are Bernini at the height of his powers — marble made to look weightless, grief and tenderness carved into stone — and the fact that the originals stand here, indoors, rather than on the windswept bridge is why they survive so crisp and luminous. The church gathers around them a cross-section of Baroque Rome, down to the memorial of a Moroccan prince, a grandson of the King of Fez, who came to Rome, was baptized, and was buried here in 1739 beneath a winged skull.