

Historic Centre of Siena

PART 3

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The Siena Cathedral complex, a masterpiece of Gothic-Romanesque architecture, is home to some of Europe's most significant monuments, featuring works by renowned artists such as Duccio di Buoninsegna, Pinturicchio, Donatello, Michelangelo, and Gian Lorenzo Bernini, spanning five centuries of Italian art history. It is distinguished among Italy's remarkable cathedrals for its architectural grandeur and artistic richness. With over a million visitors annually, the Cathedral serves as its focal point, complemented by the Crypt, the Baptistery, and the Museo dell'Opera, all-encompassing the grandeur of the "Duomo Vecchio" (Old Cathedral) and the "Duomo Nuovo" (New Cathedral). Visitors embark on a profound journey through cultural and artistic treasures, spanning over a millennium of Western history, to discover the essence of self and the truth of faith.

Built between 1215 and 1264, the Cathedral's construction was interrupted by the Black Death in 1348, leaving behind the unfinished New Cathedral walls. Constructed with black and white marble reflecting Siena's coat of arms, the Cathedral's striped marble gives it a distinctive appearance. Contributions from Renaissance artists like Giovanni Pisano, Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Donatello, and Michelangelo enhance the Cathedral's beauty. Its west façade showcases

a blend of French Gothic, Classic, and Tuscan Romanesque architecture, making it one of Italy's most stunning architectural wonders. Visitors are mesmerized by the contrast of black and white marble columns, surrounded by numerous masterpieces, including exceptional floor artwork considered one of the finest in Italian art history.

Inside the Cathedral, amidst an abundance of unparalleled masterpieces, the floor stands out as an extraordinary work of art. This unique artwork, unparalleled worldwide, conceals allegorical messages and encourages the continual pursuit of wisdom. The 56 inlays of the Siena Cathedral floor were created using the marble clerk and graffito technique, with preparatory cartoons designed by esteemed artists. Over the centuries, renowned artists from Siena and beyond contributed to its creation, such as Sassetta, Domenico Beccafumi, Matteo di Giovanni, and Pinturicchio. Notably, Pinturicchio's 1505 painting, "The Mount of Wisdom," adorns the floor, symbolically depicting the path to virtue and inviting admiration from all who behold it.

Giorgio Vasari, the celebrated art historian of the Renaissance era, hailed this marble floor as "the most beautiful, largest, and magnificent ever to exist." This floor is a remarkable masterpiece, a marble

carpet meticulously crafted by esteemed artists from Siena and beyond, spanning five hundred years of artistic expression. The floor of the Siena Cathedral symbolizes a profound journey in search of human virtues. Comprising 56 squares, known as "tarsie," its intricate designs were crafted by esteemed artists such as Sassetta, Domenico di Bartolo, Matteo di Giovanni, Domenico Beccafumi, and Pinturicchio. These designs were then meticulously translated into marble inlays by skilled marble workers, utilizing a range of exquisite local marbles, from the gray of Sienese Montagnola to the precious yellow brocatello.

In the churchyard, atop the steps before the Cathedral, the initial marble inlays depict Jews and pagans, symbolizing their exclusion from the Cathedral and the path to salvation due to their non-Christian status. Initiation ceremonies with a deacon, a priest, and a bishop precede the portals, underscoring the sacredness of the Cathedral. Inside, the three naves feature depictions of episodes and figures from Greek and Roman humanist culture who foretold the coming of the Savior, such as Hermes Trismegistus, seen as a precursor to the prophets. The Siena Cathedral's floor layout strategically places the Madonna and Christ near the altar, while under the Dome, narratives from the Old Testament unfold, including Domenico Beccafumi's innovative portrayal of the sacrifice of Isaac, characterized by a futuristic landscape teeming with contorted animals and trees. Beccafumi's adept use of the marble clerk technique achieves striking chiaroscuro effects. In the transept and choir, the history of the Jewish people intertwines with the salvational events initiated by Christ, who, although constantly evoked, is never directly depicted on the floor. Pinturicchio's renowned work, "Monte della Sapienza," symbolizes the pursuit of virtue, featuring Fortune as an angelic figure shaping humanity's destiny, reminiscent of Botticelli's Venus.

Visitors to the Siena Cathedral should take advantage of designated "discovery" periods to explore the extraordinary floor, typically concealed with protective coverings for two-thirds of the year. Annually, from August 18 after the Palio dell'Assunta until late October, the floor is uncovered for visitors to admire, offering a unique opportunity to experience one of Siena's most magnificent treasures during late summer and autumn.

The inlays depicting the Massacre of the Innocents, created by Matteo di Giovanni, utilize colored marble to produce a striking chiaroscuro effect. Additionally, the depiction of the Story of Judith showcases battle scenes reminiscent of Paolo Uccello's style. Notably, Beccafumi's depiction of Moses stands out, illustrating the moment when water flows from the rocks of Mount Horeb. Several famous Renaissance artists created sculptures

and paintings for the Siena Cathedral. These include:

- Sculptures of St. Peter, St. Paul, St. Pius, and St. Augustine by Michelangelo
- Sculpture of St. John the Baptist by Donatello
- Sculptures of St. Mary Magdalen and St. Jerome by Gian Lorenzo Bernini
- Madonna of the Vow by Dietisalvi di Speme
- The pulpit was sculpted by Nicola Pisano and several other artists from 1265 to 1268. It is made of Carrara marble, shows scenes from the Life of Christ, and has statues of Prophets and Evangelists. It is the earliest remaining work in the Cathedral.
- The colorful stained-glass windows. The rose window is a replica. The original is located inside of the Opera del Duomo museum. However, the stained-glass window of The Last Supper dates back to 1549.

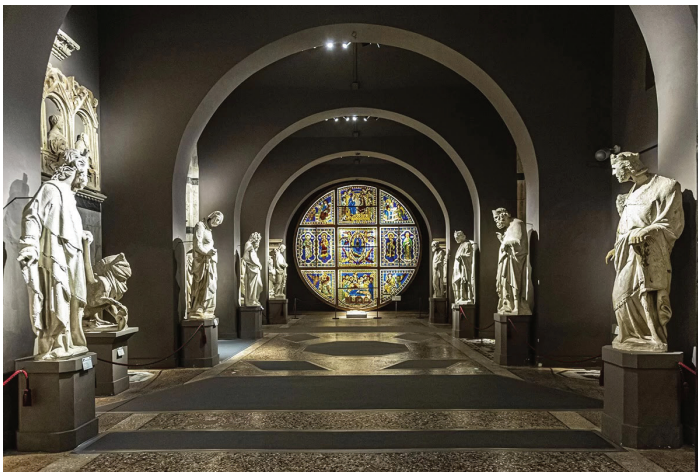


Piccolomini Library of Illuminated Manuscripts

The Piccolomini Library is a grand room commissioned in 1492 by Francesco Todeschini Piccolomini. It was created to honor his uncle, Pope Pius II, and to house the pontiff's extensive book collection. You can find the entrance to the library within the Siena Cathedral on the left side of the nave. The Piccolomini Library, inspired by French cathedral libraries and Sixtus IV's Vatican Library, aims to be both a hub for scholarship and a display of Renaissance art. The library walls are adorned with frescoes depicting the life of Pope Pius II. Painted by Pinturicchio and his assistants, including Raphael, between 1503 and 1508, these frescoes are inspired by Giovanni Antonio Campano's "Life of Pius II" and Pius II's "Commentarii." They depict ceremonial events and characters, richly adorned with colorful garments and jewels. Notable scenes include the meeting between Emperor Frederick III and Eleanor of Portugal near Porta Camollia and the canonization of Saint Catherine of Siena, featuring figures believed to be a young Raphael, distinguished by his red stockings and Pinturicchio himself, wearing a red cap.

The New Cathedral, a section of the Siena Cathedral left unfinished due to the Black Death in the 1300s, offers a unique terrace viewpoint overlooking Siena. Inside the New Cathedral's north aisle lies the Cathedral Museum, or Museo dell'Opera, showcasing original artworks created for the Cathedral, including the stained-glass Rose Window by Duccio di Buoninsegna, sculptures by Pisano and Donatello, Duccio di Buoninsegna's altarpiece, and the Treasury.

The Cathedral Museum, also called the Museo dell'Opera, is inside the New Cathedral's north aisle. This museum contains a lot of the original works of art that were made for the Siena Cathedral. This list includes the stained-glass Rose Window by Duccio di Buoninsegna, Pisano and Donatello sculptures, Duccio di Buoninsegna's altarpiece, and the Treasury. This museum is distinguished by its breathtaking view, which can be accessed by ascending a narrow winding staircase to reach the top of the Nuovo Duomo's façade. From here, visitors can enjoy a 360-degree panorama, including the magnificent Siena Cathedral and sweeping vistas over the city's rooftops, with the iconic Torre del Mangia standing tall over the Campo, providing a captivating sight.



The Crypt of the Siena Cathedral was discovered only in 1999, amidst rubble, as part of a restoration project for the Cathedral's underground areas. It is a hidden gem showcasing late 12th-century frescoes. The frescoes depict stories from the Old and New Testaments and are remarkably well-preserved due to being hidden for centuries. Their unveiling has been hailed as one of the most significant recent archaeological discoveries.

The Baptistery of San Giovanni, constructed between the 1310s and 1320s, is an integral part of the Siena Cathedral complex. It stands as a prime example of 15th-century Siennese artistry, boasting exquisite frescoes within its interior. Its Gothic façade, characterized by black and white marble like the Cathedral, leads into a space divided into three



aisles adorned with frescoes. Painted by Lorenzo di Pietro, known as "Vecchietta," between 1447 and 1450, these frescoes illustrate the Twelve Articles of the Christian Faith. Vecchietta also painted scenes in the apse, depicting the Assumption of the Virgin and scenes from the Passion of Christ. Other notable works include Benvenuto di Giovanni's Miracles of St. Anthony of Padua and Pietro di Francesco degli Orioli's Washing of the Feet. The highlight is the Baptismal Font, a marble, bronze, and enamel masterpiece crafted between 1417 and 1431 by renowned sculptors such as Lorenzo Ghiberti, Donatello, and Jacopo della Quercia. It features gilded bronze panels depicting scenes from the life of St. John the Baptist, including Lorenzo Ghiberti's Baptism of Christ and Donatello's Feast of Herod.

The Gate of Heaven, or Porta del Cielo, offers a unique guided tour of the roof and terraces of the Siena Cathedral. Visitors can explore hidden areas of the Cathedral and enjoy panoramic views of both the interior and exterior. Limited to groups of 18 people, the tour includes access to rooms rarely open to the public, providing a glimpse into centuries-old architectural history. Participants can walk along outdoor walkways for stunning views of Siena, the Cathedral, and the unfinished façade of the New Cathedral.



The Oratory of San Bernardino

The Oratory of San Bernardino is a museum showcasing Siennese paintings from the 13th to the 18th century. Originally dedicated to the Virgin Mary and Francis of Assisi, it was later rededicated to Brother Bernardino Albizzeschi in the 16th century. This historic space, renovated in the 16th century, has

housed the Diocesan Museum of Religious Art since 1999. Featuring a simple gabled brick façade adorned with a travertine portal, it offers a comprehensive overview of Sienese painting from the 13th century onwards. The highlight is the upper Chapel, decorated with frescoes by Domenico Beccafumi, Giovanni Antonio Bazzi, and Girolamo Pacchia from the early 16th century. The building stands adjacent to the Basilica di San Francesco on the opposite side of town from the Siena Cathedral.



The Santa Maria della Scala is a monumental complex once a civic hospital for people in need and pilgrims, but it is now a museum spanning seven levels. It houses the National Archaeological Museum, the Children's Museum, a treasury of relics, and the Briganti Library. Overlooking the Cathedral, it descends from Piazza Duomo to the valley behind. Historically, it was a medieval pilgrims' hostel and orphanage, then served as a hospital from the 10th century to the modern day. After extensive restoration, it hosts museums, exhibitions, and service facilities today. The Piazza Duomo entrance opens to monumental halls, with ancient apothecary rooms now used for educational activities. The floor plan centers on the male pilgrim frescoes from the 1440s by Lorenzo di Pietro in the Old Sacristy, alongside his depictions of the Apostolic Creed. The sacristy now holds the hospital's collection of reliquaries. The former women and children's section features the recently exhibited Piccolomini Spannocchi collection, comprised of works from the united Piccolomini and Spannocchi families. The lower level, arranged around the small corticella courtyard, displays Fonte Gaia's original marble sculptures by Jacopo della Quercia and 19th-century replicas by Tito Sarrocchi. The courtyard overlooks the Santa Caterina della Notte Brotherhood's historical premises and stairway to the Santa Maria Sotto le Volte Brotherhood.

Levels I and II feature large vaulted areas and long underground tunnels. The underground route of Siena is organized into sections that narrate and revisit the city's history from its inception to the latter half of the 14th century. Among these sections, one focuses

on the findings of excavations on the Duomo Hill by the University of Siena. These excavations shed light on pivotal stages in the city's evolution and follow a road integrated by the hospital's expansion. This road links various building levels. The renovated spaces house the National Archaeological Museum, displaying Sienese artifacts and local collections. The museum also hosts the exhibition "Siena: Story of the City from its Origins to the Middle Ages."



The Medici Fortress of Siena, also known as Forte di Santa Barbara, has a unique history. Unlike typical fortresses built for defense against external threats, they were constructed to suppress any attempts by the Sienese people to regain their independence. With an impressive outer perimeter of about 1,500 meters, the fortress symbolized Medici authority. Initially built by the Spanish and refurbished by Florence, the fortress symbolized oppression for the Sienese people. Constructed as the Citadel by the Spanish army under King Charles V of Habsburg in the mid-16th century, it was destroyed by the Sienese during a revolt in 1552. After surrendering to the Spanish and Florentine armies, Cosimo I de' Medici ordered its reconstruction from 1561 to 1563 to suppress future rebellions. The fortress, with its four-sided layout and pentagonal bastions named after saints, bears the coats of arms of the Medici family. The Medici Fortress is a public space for leisure and cultural activities today. Visitors can enter from the gardens in front of La Lizza, formerly featuring a drawbridge, and stroll along the walls and ramparts amid tree-lined avenues and sports facilities. Its elevated position offers sweeping views of Siena, including landmarks like the Torre del Mangia, the Duomo, and the Basilica of San Domenico. The surrounding square hosts outdoor events and gatherings. The central amphitheater within the fortress is a venue for open-air cinema screenings, live performances, and concerts. It also houses the Enoteca Italiana and the Siena Jazz Association, enhancing the area's cultural offerings. The fortress is a cherished recreational hub in Siena, with the Parco della Rimembranza and the Lizza Gardens nearby. □