



THE CHURCHES

OF VIEUX-NICE

'the buildings' collection



NICE
PATRIMOINE



VILLE DE NICE

ABUNDANT BAROQUE

Colourful churches, chapels, houses and palaces are the trademark of Vieux-Nice, the old town of Nice. It is here that the majority of Nice's Baroque buildings are to be found, with the notable exceptions of the Abbey of Saint-Pons and the Saint-Marie de Cimiez Monastery. Fully integrated into the urban fabric and often adjoined to the surrounding buildings, the churches of Vieux-Nice do not benefit from lavish facings onto the street. The only outdoor space of some stature, la Place Rossetti facing Sainte-Réparate Cathedral, was opened only in 1825 and later extended at the end of the 19th century. Up until the French Revolution, the urban city was limited to the current Old Town. It was organised into clusters of houses bordered by small streets whose layout has remained essentially unchanged since the end of the Middle Ages. Almost all of these clusters carried the name of a saint, with an oratory or chapel in their honour. Almost nothing remains of the early 14th and 15th century buildings, with disasters and reconstructions eventually leading to the disappearance of the medieval city. It was the 16th and 17th centuries that most marked Nice's urban history. With Villefranche providing Nice's owners, the House of Savoy, with their only access to the sea, Nice became an important stronghold and cultural centre. It was paid lavish attention by the Princes of Savoy and ecclesiastical authorities, notably for the construction of religious buildings. They made the most of the extraordinary spiritual and aesthetic revival spread across Europe by the Roman Catholic Church, imposing the themes and ideas of the Counter-Reformation. This led to the construction of numerous buildings in Nice by the new religious orders, such as the Jesuits (the Church of Saint-Jacques) and the Theatines (the Miséricorde Chapel), and the Confraternities of Penitents (see the heritage sheet The chapels of the Confraternities of Penitents in Nice).

This movement, which only became known as the "Baroque" movement in the 19th century, was more than just a style appearing between the Renaissance and the return to Antiquity of Neo-Classicism. It was a way of life, a way of thinking and a cultural practice that pervaded all aspects of life, from changes to clothing to courtly festivals. As for the "Baroque style" itself, it is all too often reduced to the Rococo and its decorative excesses and exaggerations, which are nonetheless found in abundance in Nice, for example in the interior of the Church of Saint-Jacques, the Notre-Dame-du-Mont-Carmel Chapel, and the Church of the Annunciation. But the true richness of the Baroque is seen primarily in its many borrowings and reinterpretations of very different styles. Thus the churches of Vieux-Nice often combine the formal starkness of the Roman Renaissance and the curvilinear architecture of Piedmont with the exuberant interiors of Liguria. The decoration of many buildings, particularly their façades, was not completed until the Restoration. Determined to reinstate their authority and mark the historical and aesthetic continuity of their reign, the Kings of Piedmont employed a late Baroque style where the classical and monumental elements typical of Turinese architects prevailed.

THE CHURCH OF THE ANNUNCIATION

1, rue de la Poissonnerie.
Historic monument since 1942

This church is better known by the name of one of its chapels, Sainte-Rita, which remains very popular with the people of Nice as Saint Rita de Cascia is the "Patron Saint of Lost and Impossible Causes" [1]. Before the 10th century, the Benedictines had blessed the site with a prayer dedicated to James the Great. The Carmelites followed in 1558. In 1604, they established the Confraternity of Notre-Dame-du-Mont-Carmel and decided to extend the chapel and build an adjoining



[1] The choir of the Church of the Annunciation (Sainte-Rita),
© Photo City of Nice.

monastery by acquiring the neighbouring houses. But the city refused to move the municipal loggia built not long before in 1584. This loggia is still in place. From 1677 to 1690, the church was fully renovated in the Baroque style and the bell tower then built in 1740-1741. Emerging from the buildings that once made up the monastery, it is crowned with a Rococo dome clad in

glazed scales and overlooked by the three stars of the Carmelites. Ravaged by a fire in 1834, the building was entrusted to the Oblates of the Virgin Mary, who renovated it with new frescoes on the vaults and a simplified façade. It then took the title of the Annunciation, with the title of Saint-Jacques being given to the nearby church of Gesù. The congregation of the Oblates still runs



[2] Transept and choir of Sainte-Réparate Cathedral,
© Photo Michel Granjou.

the church today. As for Saint Rita, her cult was only introduced in 1934 by Father Andrea Bianco.

The church's plan very clearly divides the rectangular nave and the semicircle choir with a triumphal arch.

The restoration campaigns of the 1980s helped restore the magnificence of the Baroque interior with the large loggia-windows of the apse, and the opulent stucco, marble and gilded décor, statues and altarpieces of the six lateral chapels. Separated from the nave by a rich palisade in yellow and black marble, the Notre-Dame-du-Mont-Carmel Chapel offers a stunning polychrome backdrop for the white marble statue of the Virgin and Child holding the scapular. Remarkable sensuality and softness were combined with the powerful ascendant energy of this collection by the Genoese sculptor Gio-Andrea Ansaldi.

LA CATTEDRALE SAINTE-RÉPARATE

3, place Rossetti.
Historic monument since 1906

The patron saint of Nice and of many other provincial and Italian cities, including Florence, Reparata was originally from Caesarea in Palestine and died in 250 at the age of 15, during the persecutions led by the Roman Emperor Decius. According to the legend behind the name of the Bay of Angels, her body was placed in a boat pulled by angels to Nice. In the 11th century, a chapel was built at the foot of the castle hill to preserve the relics of Saint Reparata brought from Rome. Developed into a church between 1455 and 1468, it became a cathedral in 1590 at Place de Sainte-Marie du Château, once the people of Nice had left the castle hill for the lower city of what is now Vieux-Nice. To accommodate

the growing population, the Nice engineer and architect Jean André Guibert was charged in 1649 with designing a larger building. He chose a basilica floor plan in the shape of a Latin cross, crowned with a cupola at the intersect of the transept. Work dragged on due to a lack of funding and the collapse of the vault in 1658, which caused the death of the bishop of Nice. Architect Marc-Antoine Grigo, designer of the Prince's Palace of Monaco, eventually finished the work, and the new cathedral was consecrated on 30 May 1699. But the building was not yet complete. Further construction projects followed, with the bell tower being built between 1731 and 1757 and the façade between 1825 and 1830. In 1899, the lateral aisles were extended and Baroque ornaments deemed outdated removed. The incredible restoration works carried out from 2009 to 2015 helped restore Sainte-Réparate's magnificent décor. It is the only cathedral in France to boast such a Baroque ensemble [2]. The staging of the façade, on which the statue of Saint Reparata is surrounded by those of the four Nice saints, Syagre, Bassus, Pons and Valérien, is brought to life in the distribution of the paintings adorning the choir. The lateral chapels paid for by the families and corporations of Nice offer a rich décor. The most impressive are those of Saint Rosalie and the Virgin, as well as that of the Holy Sacrament, with its stunning altarpiece upon a double barley-sugar column altar. Sainte-Réparate is the largest religious building of the Old Town of Nice. The cathedral was raised to the honorary rank of minor basilica on 27 May 1949. In this capacity, it can house an umbraculum and Tintinnabulum, and its canons are allowed to wear the cappa magna.

THE CHURCH OF SAINT-JACQUES- LE-MAJEUR

Place du Gesù, rue Droite.
Historic monument since 1971

Its common name, the Gesù, refers to the construction of the Church of Saint-Jacques by the Jesuits and their college [3]. As the

small chapel built by the Society of Jesus upon its arrival in Nice in 1606 soon proved to be too small, various neighbouring houses were bought and razed so that the current church could be built in the second half of the 17th century, from 1742. As their order was suppressed in 1773, the Jesuits were expelled, and the college and church assigned to the Ecoles Royales. Following the Concordat in 1801, the church became a parish a year later under the patronage of Saint James the Great. Its décor was completed in the 19th century, notably with a new façade in 1825, frescoes painted on the vault and the addition of stained-glass windows. Its very simple layout follows the style of the Jesuit order, with a single, large nave without pillars, lateral chapels, no transept, and a barrel vault allowing followers to both see and hear the preacher. But the Roman model of Gesù is adapted here to meet restrictions



[3] The façade of the Church of Saint-Jacques-Le-Majeur (Gesù), © Photo City of Nice.

on space, which may explain the narrow choir, and the architectural choices from the Renaissance, such as the rhythmic rows of the neat Bramante lateral chapels and the Mannerist Baroque found in the typical use of Palladian windows (three bay windows grouped together). The most striking feature, however, is the opulence of the stucco décor in the nave, which magnifies its architectural frame and those of the chapels. A veritable encyclopaedia of Baroque figures and motifs, this ornamentation typical of late Mannerism from Liguria echoes that of the Santissima Annunziata del Vastato basilica in Genoa. The theme of the angel dominates; there are almost two hundred putti resting on the arches, framing the bay windows and running through the friezes of foliage [4]. This abundance of Baroque style gives the Gesù exceptional gaiety.



[4] The ornaments and cherub frieze of the Church of Saint-Jacques-Le-Majeur, © Photo City of Nice

THE CHURCH OF SAINT-MARTIN-SAINTE-AUGUSTIN

Place Saint-Augustin.
Historic monument since 1946

Installed in Nice at the end of the 13th century, in 1406 the Hermits of Saint Augustine received permission to move into and clear the Saint-Martin parish near the northern ramparts of the city. They created

an adjoining monastery and then rebuilt the church in 1424. It was completely rebuilt in the Baroque style between 1683 and 1689 and the monastery renovated between 1716 and 1719. In 1793, the monastery complex was sold as a national asset and transformed into barracks in 1821-1822; it is still owned by the Ministry of Defence. The church was subject to various major alterations in the 19th century. The street façade was knocked through to create a new entrance in 1854 (until then access was via the east side, via the monastery) and it was completely reworked in the Baroque style in 1895. At the same time as this, the depth of the choir was extended and the vault decorated with frescoes. Ultimately, after the earthquake of 1887 shook one of the two 18th century bell towers, it had to be knocked down. Saint-Martin-Saint-Augustin is one of Nice's most original churches. Its ellipsoidal plan marked by its three large rows gives this



[5] The vault in the Church of Saint-Martin-Saint-Augustin, © Photo City of Nice.

huge nave a powerful sense of movement strengthened by the lateral lighting from the six lateral chapels and the choir. It was the first church in the county of Nice to break with the traditional rectangular plan, contemporary to the choice of ellipses found in various Ligurian religious buildings, such as the sanctuary of La Madonnetta in Genoa, also built by the Augustines. It boasts rich interior décor, with altars, columns and gates in polychrome marble, gilded wood and statues, stucco décor [5] and altarpieces, including a Pietà in the choir attributed to Louis Bréa. Martin Luther was one of its visitors, then an Augustine monk, who celebrated a mass there on 20 June 1510 and Guiseppe Garibaldi, who was baptised there on 19 July 1807.

THE CHURCH OF SAINT-FRANÇOIS-DE-PAULE

9, rue Saint-François-de-Paule.
Historic monument since 1946.

Saint-François-de-Paule is one of the churches in Nice whose architecture and decoration most resembles that of the churches of Piedmont. Its construction was connected to the development of the new town at the western extremity of Vieux-Nice on the former marshland known as Pré-aux-Oies, a town planning operation made possible by the destruction of the city's ancient fortifications. The church and its adjoining monastery were built between 1722 and 1723 by the Minims, an order of mendicant hermits established by François de Paule in 1436 and present in Nice from 1633. The Church of Saint-François-de-Paule was extended and renovated in 1736-1741, before receiving its current appearance during the works carried out from 1762 to 1767. Its façade, created in 1773, bears the Minim motto Charitas (charity) in a radiant medallion [6]. The street bearing the name of the building's patron saint was known during the 18th century as Nice's most stylish street. The



[6] The façade of Saint-François-de-Paule, © Photo City of Nice.

Minims disappeared during the Revolution. The church was erected as a parish in 1838, connected to that of Saint-Reparate in 1934 and conferred to the Dominicans. The monumental Neo-Classical character of the façade, scattered with only a few Baroque elements, such as the oculus that adds curves to the cornice, are found inside the church. Its stark plan with a single nave is softened by the use of gentle curves, double arches moulded into the vaults and the horseshoe semicircle of the choir. All of these architectonic choices lead Saint-François-de-Paule to echo the Church of the Madonna del Carmin designed by the famous architect Filippo Juvara. The grey coating covering all of the walls and the vault, also the colour of the façade before its restoration in 2004, further lead this Nice church to resemble the buildings of Turin.

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