

DISCOVERING SANTA SABINA

The Basilica was founded by Peter of Illyria, a fifth century priest. In the piazza named after him is a splendid fountain, with a basin and a mask brought to this site on the Aventine Hill from the Roman Forum in 1593. This priest from the Orient decided to build a church on the foundations of the home of the matron, Sabina. Over the centuries, Sabina had come to be identified with a saint from the region of Umbria. Considerable changes were made by Domenico Fontana and Francesco Borromini in the seventeenth century. However, in the early twentieth century, the building was returned to its pristine state. This is now one of the best-preserved of all Early Christian basilicas, with its mosaics, the iconostases in marble and the austere columns brought here from other sites. The structures of an old Roman domus were unearthed. Recently, in the arcade, an old fresco with the Virgin, Child and Saints was discovered. Here, Gambardella is confronted by a group of little girls dressed as novices. The girls taunt him from behind the tall railings. A woman, a nun, scolds them.

On the upper floor is a fine museum with works collected by the Dominican monks, as from 1222 (the year in which Pope Honorius III entrusted the basilica to their care). Here, we may admire a panel by Antoniazzo Romano, a sculpture attributed to Arnolfo di Cambio and a Madonna by Sassoferrato, as well as a remarkable view of the basilica's interior from the window (through which, it is said, Saint Dominic followed the ceremonies while sick).

For visitors

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