



Santa Maria Novella in Florence is situated near the main train station, of the same name, in the historical center of Florence.

Chronologically speaking, it is the oldest church in Florence and its first great basilica.

Novella, meaning new, was built on the 9th century site of the oratory of Santa Maria delle Vigne. In 1221, the site was given to the Dominican Order who decided to build the new church and adjoining cloister. Building began around 1246 on the design of two Friars, Sisto and Ristoro. Work on building the church took over 100 years and it was finally completed in 1360 with the Romanesque-Gothic bell tower and sacristy. The church was consecrated in 1420. Between 1456 and 1470, the architect Leone Battista Alberti designed the upper part of the inlaid black and white marble façade which was done in harmony with the already existing part of the façade.

The church, cloister and chapter house contain one of the richest collections of art treasures, funerary monuments, and extraordinary frescoes mostly financed through donations by important Florentine families to ensure themselves funerary chapels.

The interior is designed in a Latin cross and divided into a nave, two aisles, and a short transept. The nave is large measuring a hundred meters long but seems even longer due to a trompe l'oeil effect, an art technique involving extremely realistic imagery in order to create an optical illusion.

The church includes a collection of exquisite stained glass windows which date to the 14th and 15th centuries. The pulpit found in the church was designed by Brunelleschi in 1443.

On the left aisle one can admire The Trinity done by artist Masaccio and on the left aisle is the Tomba della Beata Villana done by Bernardo Rossellino in 1451.

Situated on the right of the main altar is the Chapel of Filippo Strozzi, dedicated to the Apostles Philip and James. The frescoes found in the chapel are a collection done by Filippino Lippi who completed them in 1502. On the right wall of the chapel the artist depicted the scene St Philip Driving the Dragon from the Temple of Hieropolis, above it in the lunette the Crucifixion of St Philip can be seen. On the left wall: St John the Evangelist Resuscitating Druisana, while

above in the lunette The Torture of St John the Evangelist is represented.

The tomb of Filippo Strozzi is found behind the altar and the bronze crucifix on the altar was done by Giambologna. The choir, called Capella Tornabuoni contains another series of famous frescoes by Domenico Ghirlandaio and Michelangelo.

Other chapels in the church are the Gondi Chapel designed by Giuliano da Sangallo, the Chapel Strozzi of Mantova, containing frescoes inspired by Dante's Divine Comedy, the Della Pura Chapel done in 1474 and redone again in 1841 by Baccani, the Rucellai Chapel which houses other treasures like the statue in marble of the Madonna and child by Nino Pisano, the Bardi Chapel with the Madonna of the Rosary by Giorgio Vasari.

The Spanish Chapel, located north of the Green Cloister, is called so because Cosimo I dedicated to Eleonara of Toledo and her Spanish attendants and the Sacristy was built as the Chapel of the Annunciation in 1380 by the Cavalcanti family. The first remodeling of the church was done by Giorgio Vasari in 1567 by the request of Grand Duke Cosimo I. The Piazza located in front of the church was once used for chariot races from 1563 up until the late 19th century. The two obelisks, dating back to 1608 and set on bronze tortoises designed by Giambologna, marked the starting and finishing points.

The church of Santa Maria Novella, and its piazza, hold an array of magnificent art and history to be admired by all.