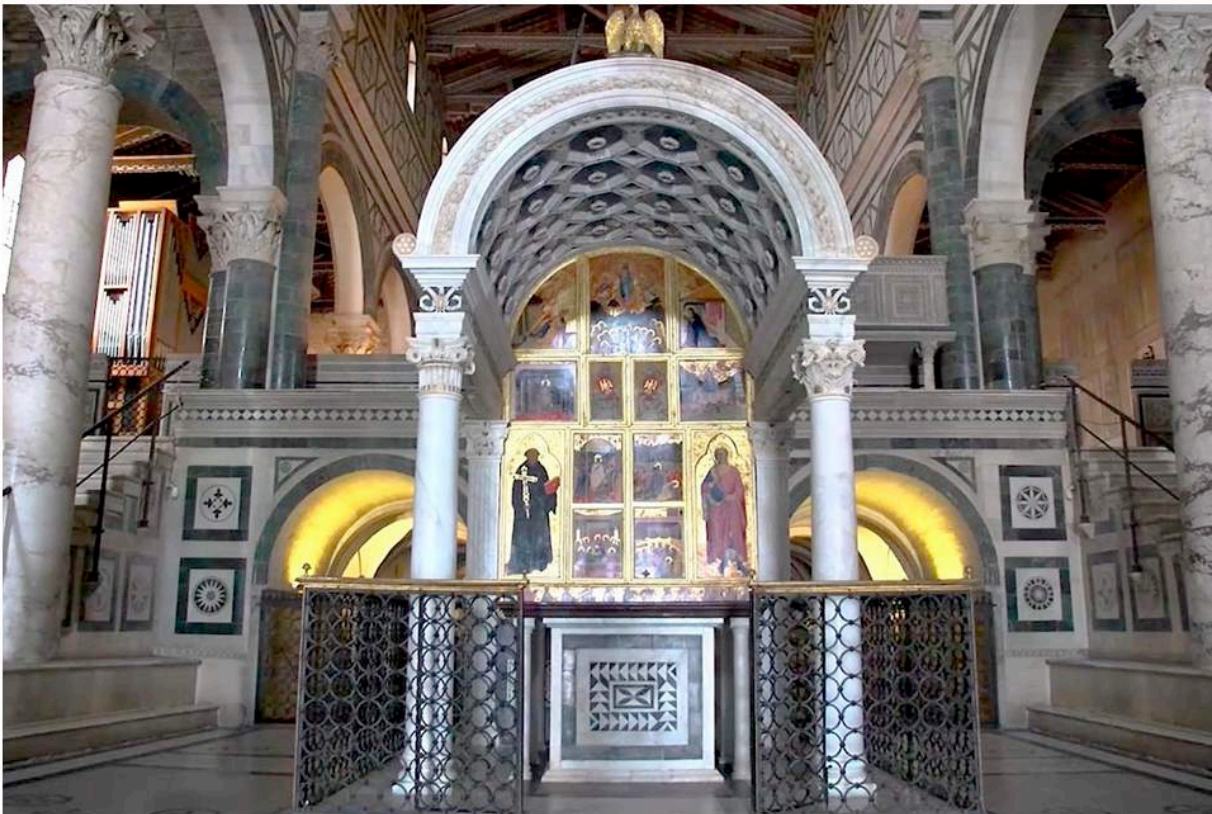


## San Miniato Basilica celebrates 1,000th anniversary with restoration of 15th century chapel



Chapel of the Crucifix, San Miniato al Monte, Florence, Italy. Restoration completed in 2018 with support from Friends of Florence. Photography by: Antonio Quattrone. Courtesy of Friends of Florence.

**FLORENCE.-** The basilica of San Miniato al Monte, a Romanesque masterpiece established a thousand years ago as a basilica by Bishop Ildebrando, celebrates its millennial anniversary with the meticulous restoration of its Chapel of the Crucifix. The project was funded by the [Friends of Florence](#), a nonprofit devoted to cultural heritage preservation in Florence, Italy. Friends of Florence celebrates its 20th anniversary this year having funded hundreds of restoration projects in Florence and the Tuscan region thus far.

Designed by Michelozzo and completed in 1448, the Chapel of the Crucifix features a ciborium in Carrara marble with inlay and gilding, an altar, thirteen paintings by Agnolo Gaddi, a vault with glazed terracotta panels by Luca della Robbia, bronze eagles attributed to Maso di Bartolomeo, and a gilded wrought-iron gate from the 19th century.

The restoration process was extremely complex, employing a team of twelve restorers supervised by Dott. Daniele Rapino and taking fourteen months to complete. The variety of materials and modifications made over centuries presented numerous challenges. The most traumatic event occurred during World War II when the shrine was hurriedly dismantled, taken to a secure place, and then reassembled around 1950.

Simonetta Brandolini d'Adda, president and co-founder of Friends of Florence, said, "A beloved Florentine treasure, San Miniato al Monte is considered among the most beautiful churches in Italy. It's easy to see why. Walking through the exquisite interior realized over centuries, and seeing the range of artistic and architectural achievement, is an astonishing experience. We are delighted to share a birthday with this venerated institution and are profoundly grateful to our generous donors who helped us provide a truly memorable gift—the restoration of the Chapel of the Crucifix. We are also indebted to the tenacity and skill of the restoration team."

#### The Restoration Project

The classical architecture of the ciborium, the central structure within the Chapel of the Crucifix, features an elegant barrel vault with two marble arches decorated with finely carved plant motifs. The vault rests on an inlaid, carved entablature with gold highlights. Green and white marble inlays form a repeating pattern of the emblems of Cosimo the Elder and Lorenzo the Magnificent: three plumes encircled by a gold ring with a ruby and a scrolling ribbon containing the word "semper" (always). The surface of the back wall is decorated with an exquisitely carved tondo of a falcon with bells tied to its feet and holding a ruby ring, Piero de' Medici's emblem in its talons. Two columns support the vault in front, while at the back there are two fluted pilasters. Luca della Robbia clad the inner surface of the vault with glazed tile panels. The outer surface is also covered with glazed tile "shingles" in green, white, and reddish purple.

This restoration involved the removal of accumulated layers of dirt and dust from all the surfaces and inside crevices. Missing parts, such as the metal stars on the inside of the vault, were replaced and deeper cracks in the marbles were addressed. Laser cleaning of the bronze eagles restored their bright patina and gilding.

The wooden crucifix for which the chapel is named was once also present on the altar. It was said that the crucifix miraculously bowed to Saint John Gualberto after he had pardoned his brother's murderer. In the 1600's the crucifix was moved to the church of Santa Trinità in Florence.

A highlight of the project was the restoration of the thirteen wood panels painted by Agnolo Gaddi in the 1390s, with scenes of the Passion of Christ, Saint Miniato, and Saint John Gualberto that had also been tampered with over time. At some point, the panels were modified and the original frame removed to adapt it to the back wall of the chapel. The dismantling of the panels was extremely difficult because each panel was fastened to a wooden lattice-like structure set tightly into the back wall.

The restoration of the poplar panels—covered in linen and a thin preparatory layer—included careful analysis of modifications to the frames, gilding, paint and pigments, glue and gesso, and wooden supports. Using infrared reflectography, the artist's drawings are still visible under layers of color. Gaddi's gilding is remarkable both for its fine quality and the variety of techniques. He used water gilding for the gold grounds and the elegant "sgraffito" decorations and sizing for the many decorations along the edges of garments and for details like an angel's harp strings.



Chapel of the Crucifix, San Miniato al Monte, Florence, Italy. Restoration completed in 2018 with support from Friends of Florence. Detail of Ascension painting on poplar wood by Agnolo Gaddi (1390) Photography by: Antonio Quattrone Courtesy of Friends of Florence.