

Montepulciano

The city has a very particular configuration: it is constructed along a geological ridge running down from the highest point. Today we find an extremely long main street (about 11 and 1/2 Km) leading from the Porta al Prato through a 60 drop to the Piazza Grande. The houses are organised around this main street in a series of perpendicular short, narrow lanes- often extremely steep. The most important buildings are practically all on the main street, presenting a long procession of facades, almost an "exhibition" of high level architectural design. There have been the main periods of architectural significance in Montepulciano, the XVI Century, and those years bridging the XVII and XVIII Centuries.

During the XVI Century the urban development is practically completed and it was only the nobility who carried out projects for new frontages to boost their personal prestige. The construction outside the gates of the imposing "Temple of San Biagio, on a project of Antonio da Sangallo il Vecchio create a "Style" taken up by most of the master builders, it inspires the palaces of the Avignonesi, Cocconi Cervini, Gagnoni-Grugni, Contucci and Tarugi, to mention only the main names to which can be attributed many houses that are considered "minor" in Montepulciano but might well be considered "major" in other places (one remembers the Palazzo Bellarmino, the palazzo which today houses the School of Mosaic in Talosa, for its beautiful courtyard). The other period saw the presence and influence of the celebrated architect Fra-Andrea Pozzo, the Jesuit who gave Montepulciano the imposing Church of Jesus with its unusual quasi circular plan, the dining salon of the Palazzo Contucci with its perspective effects, and numerous interiors which he reorganised.

Santa Chiara outside the walls and, above all the church of Santa Maria are examples of sober and graceful late baroque style. Another group of buildings exemplify a late 11 th Century tendency of particular relevance. The Cathedral and its interior, the monumentality of which is found- uniquely- in the play of line and form- by Ippolito Scalza from Orvieto (1532-1617) to whom the Loggia delle Erbe and the church of the Madonna delle Grazie are traditionally attributed.

We have deliberately left to last, two 15 th Century buildings, the Palazzo Comunale inspired by the Palazzo della Signoria in Florence and the church of San Augustino in which we find humanistic and late gothic elements- both work by Michelozzo Bortolomeo, and lastly the Temple of San Biagio, an imposing sanctuary on a centered Greek plan, its facade flanked by two bell-towers (one unfinished) and a perfect dome, a direct assumption of Renaissance architectural theory and perhaps the major work of Antonio da Sangallo the Elder, and the ideal source of inspiration for the new church of St Peters in the vatican of Sangallo the Younger.

The surrounding territory of the Council of Montepulciano cannot match the architectural treasures of the capital, but the little town of Valiano, situated on a hilltop beyond the master canal of the Chiana, nevertheless has its particular fascination, a splendid panorama over Valdichiana to the west and the hills of the Cortonese to the east. The two hills of Totona which face Montepulciano, and the Cappuccini, a short distance to the south, and covered with woodland, offer walks and climbs in varied and attractive landscape.

