



# 50 ARCHITECTS

You Should Know



 PRESTEL

# 01

**A skilled goldsmith as well as a painter and sculptor, Brunelleschi became one of the great architects of the early Renaissance. He was inundated with commissions in the wealthy city-state of Florence, as influential families and guilds built an abundance of architectural works in their own honor.**



## FILIPPO BRUNELLESCHI

- 1377 Born in Florence, Italy
- 1401 Takes part in the competition for the design of the Baptistery Doors in Florence, which is won by Lorenzo Ghiberti
- 1404 Becomes a member of the guild of Florentine goldsmiths
- 1418 Submits plans for the competition for the design of the Florence cathedral dome
- 1420 Begins work on the cathedral dome
- 1420s The Old Sacristy in San Lorenzo, Florence
- 1430 Begins work on the Pazzi Chapel, Santa Croce, Florence
- 1436 Receives the contract to build the cathedral's dome lantern
- 1446 Dies April 16, in Florence

# FILIPPO BRUNELLESCHI

In about 1419, Brunelleschi, the son of a notary, was pleased to receive two important commissions at once. The guild of silk makers commissioned him to build a house for the foundlings of Florence. In creating the Ospedale degli Innocenti, he returned to classical elements of building, always intent on symmetry of design and harmonious proportions, from façades to interior rooms. The second commission that year came from the very highest of circles. A member of the influential Medici family, Giovanni d'Averardo, ordered a chapel for his tomb from Brunelleschi. He designed the Old Sacristy (as it was later called, to distinguish it from Michelangelo's New Sacristy) in the Florentine church of San Lorenzo as a central-plan building. On a square ground plan, a hemisphere arches over the space—the decisive forms are the cube and square. The client was so enthusiastic about Brunelleschi's design for the Old Sacristy that he immediately entrusted to him the rebuilding of the entire church.

But not all Florentines expected great things of Brunelleschi. The wool workers' guild, for example, which was responsible for building the cathedral, seemed rather hesitant. It was a question of crowning the cathedral, the flagship of the city, with a dome. The diameter of the octagonal substructure already stood at a proud 45 meters. There was no question—for such a task, a first-class master architect had to be engaged. Several applicants believed themselves capable of it and took part in a competition. The judges were undecided. It was only after two years that they were convinced by Brunelleschi's proposal. The new project manager was not afraid of innovations: he clothed the dome in two shells, of which only the inner one is load-bearing, so that he could reduce the overall weight of the dome. Brunelleschi was also inventive with regard to the organization of the work; in order to spare the workers in the dome the tedious and time-consuming climb up and down at midday, he had wine taverns and kitchens built under the church roof.

But the clients were skeptical about Brunelleschi's inventiveness. In 1432, when it was a question of the design of the crowning lantern of the dome, the guild preferred to hold a further competition, rather than leave this task to Brunelleschi. In the end it was his design that was executed, but he did not live to see the completion of the dome: he died in 1446. Giorgio Vasari reported on the funeral of the great architect in Florence cathedral, without concealing that his native land "honored him far more greatly after his death than it had done during his lifetime."



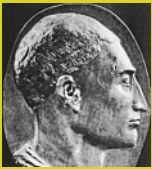


Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore (dome), Florence, 1420–1436

# 02

## LEON BATTISTA ALBERTI

**Archaeologist and painter, musician and scientist—to call Leon Battista Alberti multi-talented would be an understatement. Particularly since Alberti also found time to dedicate himself to architecture, and thus definitively secure his reputation as a Renaissance “universal man.”**



### LEON BATTISTA ALBERTI

1404 Born February 14, in Genoa, Italy from 1418

Studies in Bologna

1435 Publishes his treatise *Della pittura*

1446 Work begins on the Tempio Malatestiano in Rimini

1452 Publishes his treatise *De re aedificatoria*

after 1456

Designs the façade of Santa Maria Novella, Florence

1472 Work begins on the church of Sant'Andrea in Mantua, designed by Alberti

1472 Dies April 25, in Rome

1485 *On the Art of Building in Ten Books* is published

Alberti approached architecture in a roundabout way. At first he made an intensive study of the buildings of classical antiquity, above all as they were still to be admired in Rome, and at the same time read with enthusiasm the writings of classical architects. Spurred on by their works, Alberti also wrote a treatise on architectural theory, *De re aedificatoria*. But his knowledge of classical buildings was reflected not only on paper: the palaces and churches designed by him also clearly mirror this deep admiration.

Alberti's first large commission came from the Rucellai, a wealthy Florentine family of merchants; he was to design their spacious residence on the central Via della Vigna. Alberti drew up the plans and the Rossellino workshop carried out the execution. The façade of the palace alone showed the architect to be a fan of the classical style: he adorned the house with an order of columns similar to those of the Colosseum in Rome. But in doing this he did not use rounded columns, but flat wall columns known as pilasters for the vertical emphasis. At the same time, he stressed the horizontal lines by placing cornices between the stories. In this way, the façade of the mansion appears clearly structured, and the impression of symmetry and fine proportions is achieved.

It was not only Giovanni Rucellai who had confidence in Alberti's talents. Not far from his city mansion, the Dominican church of Santa Maria Novella was awaiting completion. The Gothic structure was already nearly finished, and even the foundation of the façade had already been begun when the clients commissioned Alberti to complete it. He therefore had to incorporate his knowledge of classical temple architecture into the existing fabric. Thus Gothic pointed arches stand under niches and portals in the lower zone, and above them are superimposed round arches. Sweeping volutes lead from the broad substructure to the sharp gable, forms from the Gothic and Renaissance styles combine harmoniously, and everything glows in white and green stone.

It was on Alberti, who remained unmarried all his life, that the choice of the ruler of Rimini fell when he planned to erect a memorial to his wife. Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta commissioned a tomb for himself and his family, conceived, in disregard of Christian traditions, as a pagan temple. He himself and his Isotta were to be buried there, and instead of symbols of the cross, it was decorated with the entwined letters *S* and *I* in abundance. Alberti admittedly did not concern himself with the adornment of the interior, but once again designed the façade. In the Tempio Malatestiano, too, the architect did not conceal his preference for classical forms: the central part of the frontage, for example, goes back to the closely related triumphal arch of the Roman Emperor Augustus.



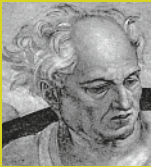


Santa Maria Novella, Florence, façade 1456–1470

# 03

## DONATO BRAMANTE

**Bramante's father had decided that his son should be a painter. Donato submitted, but met with a distinct lack of success, as noted by Gorgio Vasari: "So he determined, in order to view an important building at least once, to go to Milan and look at the cathedral."**



### DONATO BRAMANTE

- ca. 1444  
Born near Urbino in today's  
Fermignano, Italy
- 1476 Moves to Milan
- ca. 1480  
Extension to Santa Maria presso  
Santo Satiro, Milan, begun
- 1499 Moves to Rome
- 1500–04  
Cloistered courtyard of Santa  
Maria della Pace, Rome
- 1502 Monastery of San Pietro in  
Montorio, Tempietto, Rome
- 1503 Pope Julius II commissions him  
to build St. Peter's Basilica
- 1514 Dies April 11, in Rome

Bramante's visit to Milan was momentous, for the young painter decided on the spot to become an architect. He began by making an intensive study of the classical buildings of Rome. His first commissions brought him back to Milan, but finally, after all, he settled in the capital. In the early 16th century Rome was a great and prestigious place to build, and above all it was the popes who brought many notable architects to the city.

It was on the Gianicolo, a hill on the right bank of the Tiber, that Donato Bramante worked on his first architectural commission. The monastery of San Pietro in Montorio was to be enriched by a memorial building to recall the martyrdom of the Apostle Peter, which was said to have taken place there. Bramante decided in favor of a central-plan structure on a circular base—that the surrounding monastery courtyard would eventually be rectangular was something the architect could not have foreseen. Three steps, arranged in circles around the structure, lead up to the small temple, the *Tempietto*. Columns surround the circular building, crowned with a dome, and there is a balustrade on the upper level. Bramante's *Tempietto* was regarded by the next generation as a perfect central-plan building, an architectural type that was considered the epitome of ideal beauty.

The Renaissance embodiment of the mania for building was undoubtedly Pope Julius II. Soon after his election in 1503 he took in hand the rebuilding of St. Peter's Basilica—the old building could neither accommodate the throngs of pilgrims nor satisfy the pope's ambitious demands. Julius had big plans and Bramante was part of them: he was to build a church that would do justice to the importance of Rome as the heart of Christendom. By 1506 Bramante's plans had progressed so far that the foundation stone could be laid. Bramante designed St. Peter's on the ground plan of a Greek cross, with four arms of equal length—another central-plan building, again crowned with a mighty dome.

With the basilica of St. Peter, Bramante had taken on the most important project in Rome, but the pope was no ordinary client: "To be honest," Bramante once summed it up, "they give you water and words, smoke and hot air. If you ask for more, you are dismissed." His fee was a comparatively small expense; the outrageous costs of the new building, despite the lively and controversial trade in indulgences, could not be covered. When Bramante died in 1514, only the choir area had made any progress, and subsequent generations of architects largely overruled his design—today's basilica reflects Bramante's plans at most in its gigantic proportions.





Tempietto, Rome, 1502–1505

# 04

## MICHELANGELO

**By his mid-30s, Michelangelo was already used to illustrious clients lining up to secure his services for their projects. So it seems only logical that at the advanced age of 71 he was personally requested by the pope to take over the most important building project of the era, the completion of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.**



### MICHELANGELO

- 1475 Born March 6, in Caprese near Florence, Italy
- 1488 Begins an apprenticeship with the painter Ghirlandaio
- 1489 Received at the court of Lorenzo de' Medici
- 1504 Completes the monumental statue of David
- 1508–12  
Paints the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican
- 1520–34  
New Sacristy, San Lorenzo, Florence
- 1535 Pope Paul III appoints him chief sculptor, painter, and architect to the Vatican
- 1547 Appointed architect of the St. Peter's Basilica
- 1564 Dies February 18, in Rome

Michelangelo was already widely regarded as the greatest sculptor and painter of his day when he turned to architecture. The friend of his youth, Giovanni de' Medici, now Pope Leo X, had great plans for the family buildings in his home city of Florence. From 1516, Michelangelo gave expression to these wishes. For the church of San Lorenzo he designed a façade without parallel: twelve monumental columns, each one several tons in weight, were to adorn the marble frontage. However, only one of these survived unbroken from the quarry on the building site, and the many failures caused the building costs to soar. Michelangelo became enraged, the pope cancelled the contract, and promptly signed up the architect for another project. It was not the façade but a family vault that Michelangelo was now to tackle in San Lorenzo: between 1520 and 1534, the New Sacristy took shape (as a counterpart to Brunelleschi's Old Sacristy). The next commission followed immediately with the next Medici Pope: Clement VII had Michelangelo plan and execute the library of the monastery of San Lorenzo. The Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, designed in close cooperation with the pope, became Michelangelo's most important architectural work: the most prestigious one was still to come.

Equally at home with all genres of art, Michelangelo was now known as simply the universal genius. It was only to him that Pope Paul III would entrust the task of bringing the work on St. Peter's, which had been dragging along for decades, to a successful conclusion. Giorgio Vasari, friend and biographer of Michelangelo, noted the latter's enthusiastic reaction to the enquiry from Rome: "At last His Holiness decided, as I believe, by divine inspiration, to send for Michelangelo. Michelangelo tried to avoid the burden, saying that architecture was not his real field, and since his requests were of no avail, the Pope in the end positively ordered him to accept the commission." Admittedly, Paul III sweetened the deal for his chosen candidate, appointing the Florentine as chief director of building in 1547 and granting him powers that no other architect was ever to be given by a client: Michelangelo alone was to decide what should be torn down and what should be added. So much freedom summoned envious rivals who were not sparing in their criticisms. One reproach was that Michelangelo was designing only a small church of St. Peter, a "San Pietrino," instead of the greatest church in Christendom. Undeterred, Michelangelo reduced the size of his predecessor's model, certain that the effect of the central-plan building would only be increased as a result.

The chief architect of St. Peter's was already 71 when he took over the building project, and to provide against further changes to his plans by potential successors he ordered work to begin simultaneously on all the important areas of the building. It was a strategy that largely worked.





St. Peter's Basilica, Rome, Architect 1547–1564 (planning and construction)





Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence, 1523–1560



New Sacristy in San Lorenzo, Florence, 1520–1524



# 05

## ANDREA PALLADIO

**Palladio's career reads like a rags-to-riches story: a miller's son from Padua, he went on to become one of the most sought-after architects of the wealthy. More than 60 villas, churches, and city mansions were built to his designs.**



### ANDREA PALLADIO

- 1508 Born Andrea di Pietro della Gondola, in Padua, Italy
- 1521 Begins an apprenticeship with the stonemason Pietro Cavazza
- 1524 Settles in Vicenza
- 1537 Villa Godi near Vicenza
- 1542 Palazzo Thiene, Vicenza
- 1549 Becomes chief architect in the rebuilding of the Palazzo della Ragione, Vicenza
- 1554 Writes an architectural guide to Rome, *Antichità di Roma*
- 1565 San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice
- 1570 Publishes his *Four Books on Architecture*
- 1575 Il Redentore, Venice
- 1580 Dies August 19, in Vicenza

The skilled stonemason Andrea di Pietro was in his mid-20s when the writer and aristocrat Gian Giorgio Trissino recognized his talent. He bestowed the name Palladio on his protégé and traveled with him to Rome—a momentous trip for the young man. Back in the Veneto, over the next four decades Palladio followed classical principles of building—mainly for very wealthy clients, for Trissino opened many doors in high society to the young man in his lateral career move. In the 16th century, few prosperous families were without their own country villa, and their preferred architect was Andrea Palladio. His client Paolo Almerico commissioned from him a villa on a hill on the outskirts of Vicenza. A circular hall surmounted by a cupola forms the center of the building and gave it its name: the “Rotonda” is presented as a central-plan building—a daring design, for this ground plan was more usual in ecclesiastical buildings than in private houses. In the design the Rotonda’s entrance, Palladio oriented himself to the temple frontages of classical antiquity, and gave the Rotonda no fewer than four of these. The comfort of the residents was not forgotten by the architect: he placed the utility rooms in the basement, while the piano nobile was reserved for celebrations, and the family lived in the mezzanine floor above.

When Palladio finally succeeded in establishing himself in Venice, many of his villas already adorned the mainland, the Veneto. In his mid-50s, he could at last make his mark in Venice, and with the location, the building tasks also changed: the Benedictine monks of the monastery on the island of San Giorgio commissioned an impressive three-aisled church with a dome, whose splendid façade (admittedly probably altered by a successor) faces towards the city. On the neighboring island of the Giudecca, Palladio, then almost 70 years old, also created an imposing house of God for the Capuchins. “Il Redentore,” the church of the Redeemer, came into being as a memorial to mark the end of a plague epidemic, and this building too is adorned by a tiered, brilliantly white temple frontage. Palladio could no longer complain of a lack of variety.

His final commission too was a challenge: he was to build a theater *all’antica* (in the antique style) for the scholars of Vicenza. Once again he needed to satisfy cultured tastes, and once again he fell back on his studies of classical buildings and architectural treatises. With the help of ingenious perspective, the architect of villas was now in addition creating the theater of the Renaissance.





Rotonda, near Vicenza, 1566–1591