

## Church of San Gottardo in Corte

When Leonardo da Vinci arrived in Milan in 1482, the Church of San Gottardo in Corte had already been standing for 145 years. Nearby was the bustling “Fabbrica del Duomo,” the building site of the Cathedral whose foundation stone had been laid on 13 June 1386.

Living and working in Corte Vecchia, which, in later centuries, Maria Theresa of Austria would transform into the Royal Palace, Leonardo da Vinci was following in the footsteps of Giotto, who stayed here in 1337. Giotto, progenitor of our modern ideas of space and colour in art, had been invited by Azzone Visconti, the then lord of Milan, to fresco the halls of Broletto Palace. Nothing remains of this fresco. Yet the Lombard painters of the fourteenth century learned from his technique. One such was the otherwise unknown artist who around 1340 put his signature to the Crucifixion, which was found by chance in 1929 affixed to a wall at the base of the church bell tower, which used to serve as the palace chapel. The painting has been conserved where it was found. Commissioned by Azzone Visconti, the Crucifixion was dedicated to the “Benedictine Bishop-Saint from the North,” Saint Gotthard, patron saint of many ailments, including gout, from which Azzone suffered greatly.

The church has changed over the centuries, but the bell tower has remained the same. Since 1337 it has stood proud over its neighbourhood, becoming known as the “Torre delle ore” when Azzone turned it into a clock tower by installing one of the city’s first public clocks at the top. Designed by Francesco Pecorari, the octagonal tower stands on a square base made of large stone blocks. Graced by an abundance of soaring white marble columns and multiple terracotta arches, the bell tower is surmounted by a steeple whose particular basket shape would become characteristic of many later bell towers in Lombardy.

**Via Francesco Pecorari, entrance from the Cathedral Museum**

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