

## Sante Rufina e Seconda



The **Church of Sante Rufina e Seconda** is a church of Rome in the Trastevere district, in the Lungaretta. The church is inside the monastery building and from the street the viewer can only see its campanile.

### History

According to its foundation tradition, the church stands on the site of a house belonging to Asterius, father of the two 3rd century martyrs Rufina and Secunda. They were martyred in a wood called Silva Nigra to the west of the city, the locality is now on the Via di Boccea near a suburb called Selva Candida.

The first documentary mention of the Trastevere church is in a list of parochial churches dependent on Santa Maria Maggiore, part of a papal bull of Pope Celestine II in 1123. The actual foundation was possibly around the end of the 10th century, although the circumstances are unknown. The only hint is that the bishop of the diocese of Santa Rufina was resident on the Isola Tiberina back then -Trastevere and the Isola were actually in his diocese, not in that of Rome.

The parish failed and was suppressed in the early 16th century, as many small parishes in the city were then. The church was obtained by Spanish Mercedarians in 1569, but they did not stay here for long. It was then passed on to a reformed branch of the Ursulines in 1611 by Pope Paul V.

This Ursuline convent was an independent foundation by a Parisian expatriate called Francesca Montiou, who had arrived in Rome for the Jubilee of 1600 and stayed to found a convent for poor girls who did not wish to submit to perpetual enclosure and who could not make solemn vows as nuns.

The new community built the adjacent convent, where the foundress died in 1628 and was buried in the restored church. The foundation proved a success, and the sisters embarked on a six-year rebuilding and expansion campaign in 1711 which resulted in the present complex. They re-used the ancient Roman foundations of an insula or tenement-block in the process.

The work involved the demolition of the church's mediaeval apse, also the sequestration of the piazza on which it stood so that the church became completely enclosed within the convent.

The convent website mentions that the community had declined seriously by 1800 (during the French occupation), and were united with some nuns called Monache della Santa Croce.

In 1831, the convent had failed and the complex was given to the Society of the Sacred Heart, based at Santissima Trinità dei Monti. The proviso was that the few remaining Ursuline sisters were to remain in residence until they died off.

The Sacred Heart sisters decided to build another convent in Trastevere at Sacro Cuore di Gesù a Villa Lante, and so the Sisters of Charity of the Immaculate Conception of Ivrea took over here in 1917. They have been in charge ever since. When they took over, the area was a slum dominated by working-class people to whom the sisters ministered. However the gentrification of the area started in earnest in the 1960's and, like other active convents in the area, the sisters here found their reason for existence challenged.

Unlike the Carmelites at San Benedetto, however, who gave up and became derelict, the community here in the 1980's converted part of their convent into a hall-of-residence (Pensionato) for university students. This now seems to be their main outreach.

There was an alarming restoration of the church in 1974.

## **Exterior**

The church structure is 12th century, restored in 1711 and 1974 but thought to preserve much of its original fabric.

The church itself has no civic presence, being completely within the convent. From outside there is not much to see, except the simple entranceway with a triangular pediment supported by strap corbels in an ochre-yellow wall. This leads into a little courtyard. In fact, the church is easy to miss as this door is never open. The convent entrance is further to the west.

## Campanile

To see the 12th century Romanesque campanile, one needs to stand at the south side of Piazza di Santa Rufina. It is of re-used ancient Roman bricks and has three storeys above the entrance, with double arches in each storey separated on the east by a marble column with capital. On the south, only the top bell-opening has a column and the others are blocked up, as is the double-arched doorway on the ground floor.

## Interior

The interior of the church has a nave of four bays with side aisles, separated by eight ancient marble columns with mutilated capitals. The apse has been demolished, and there are no side chapels.

### Nave

Those vaguely expecting a mediaeval church with Baroque decorations are in for a shock. The 1974 restoration left the interior completely in bright white with no applied decoration, a sort of pastiche of the Scand minimalist-modern style of the time.

The side aisles have no arcades, but instead the four ancient Corinthian columns on each side support a trabeation or horizontal entablature. The restoration has left the latter with no division into architrave and frieze, although a projecting cornice survives. Above the latter are lunette windows, which also occur in the aisle side walls.

The eight ancient columns comprise: Two fluted, one in white marble and one in white and grey; two in grey granite, and four in cipollino marble. These have been cleaned, and the last especially look attractive.

The capitals have been mutilated, possibly in order to remove the faces of pagan deities. They are enclosed in odd wire cages from the 1974 restoration, as if the church contained pigeons to be deterred from landing on them.

### Artworks

There are now no artworks in this church worth much notice.

The original high altar is now completely gone, and a modern altar provided for Mass facing the congregation which is on an ancient marble cippus (inscribed low square pillar).

On the far wall of the sanctuary is what looks like an 18th century wooden crucifix, and a 1970's tabernacle assembled from marble slabs in a rather Cubist manner, with the actual tabernacle being a silvered cube with an impressionistic cross motif in beaten metal on its door.

The two Baroque side altars have been chopped down, and have lost their aedicule or altarpiece frames. Some polychrome marbelling survives, looking rather sad.

The right hand one is dedicated to SS Rufina and Secunda, and has a little 18th century oval painting of them hung over the altar on the blank wall.

The left hand altar is now dedicated to Bl Antonia Maria Verna, the foundress of the congregation, since she was beatified in 2011. There is a portrait of her over the altar, in a frame of the same size and shape as that over the other altar.

A wall monument exists in the right hand aisle of the foundress of the Ursulines, Francesca Montieux 1628, with an attractive painted portrait and polychrome marble decoration.

### **Access**

There is no access to ordinary visitors. However, apparently you can contact the pensionato to ask for permission to visit. Guided tours have been advertised online to the underground areas in the convent, which display ancient Roman archaeology but which don't seem to have any online description.

### **Location:**

Address: Via della Lungaretta 92 - 00153 ROMA

Coord: [41°53'23.5"N 12°28'20.2"E](#)

**Exterior links**

[Roman Churches Wiki](#)

[Official diocesan web-page](#)

[Italian Wikipedia page](#)

[Nolli map](#) (look for 1171)

["De Alvariis" gallery on Flickr](#)

[Info.roma web-page](#)

[Congregation's website](#)

[Pensionato website](#)