

# Italian Baroque Architecture

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial covers Italian Baroque architecture. By the end of this lesson, you'll be able to identify and define today's key terms, and identify examples of Baroque architecture. This will be accomplished through the exploration of:

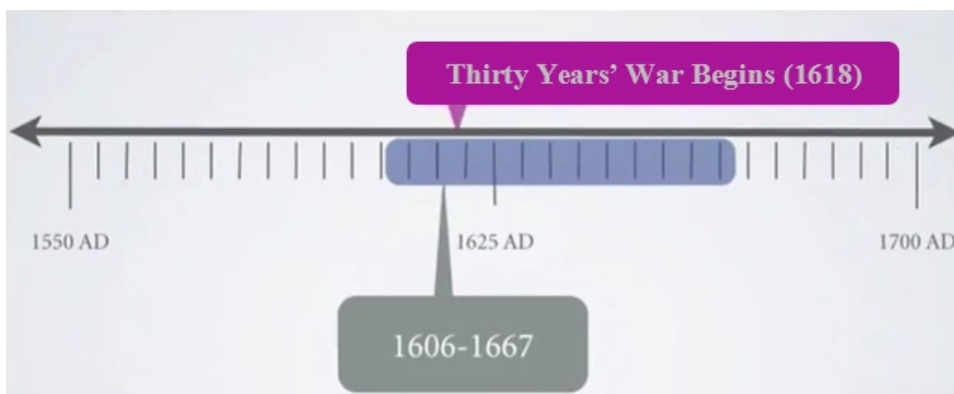


### BIG IDEA

The Baroque is a style of art and architecture characterized by grand scale, movement, and dramatic effects.

## 1. Period and Location: Italian Baroque Architecture

The sculpture and architecture that you will be looking at today dates from between 1606 and 1667 and comes from Rome, Italy.



## 2. Examples of Baroque Architecture

### 2a. Façade of St. Peter's Basilica

The architectural design and construction of St. Peter's took place under many architects and over many years. Given the magnitude of the project and the variety of artists commissioned to work on the project, it's quite remarkable that the building looks as cohesive as it does.

Many critics argue that the façade of St. Peter's is the least appealing aspect of the church, despite its overall impressiveness. Although others have thought that it looks rather nice, it doesn't quite live up to its technical expectations. This wasn't necessarily the fault of the designer, Carlo Maderno, who was a well-respected architect, and had already proven himself with projects such as the façade of Santa Susanna in Rome. It was more an issue of design by committee, with changes being made to his original design that altered the final plan and overall effectiveness of the façade.



**Façade of St. Peter's Basilica by Carlo Maderno**

**1606-1612**

**Rome, Italy**

Notice, in particular, the addition of the two bell towers on either end, which stretched out the front of the façade, removing the verticality that was articulated in the earlier design. Catholic officials desired to lengthen the nave of the church, which forced Michelangelo's gorgeous dome even further back. You can see in this example how the dome is barely visible from the front, much less the drum that it rests upon.

The **piazza** of St. Peter's, also called St. Peter's Square, which exists in front of the façade, is considered to be a glorious achievement of the artist and architect Bernini. Notice the two arching colonnades of Tuscan columns, which symbolize the embracing arms of the Church.



#### **DID YOU KNOW**

The center obelisk is, in fact, an ancient Egyptian obelisk repurposed as a form of Christian symbology. It symbolizes the connection between heaven and earth, just as it did in the religion of ancient Egypt.





**Piazza of St. Peter's (St. Peter's Square) by Bernini**

**1656-1667**

**Rome, Italy**



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### **Piazza**

A central square in an Italian town or city.

## **2b. Baldacchino of St. Peter's**

Bernini's talents were remarkable, and aside from his architectural endeavors, it was his skill as a sculptor that is most widely recognized. The baldacchino of St. Peter's is a breathtaking example of Baroque sculpture that marks the location of the central altar of the church as well as the tomb of St. Peter beneath it.



**Baldacchino of St. Peter's by Bernini**

**1623-1634**

**Bronze**

**Rome, Italy**

The **baldacchino** is a huge type of canopy, almost 100 feet tall, thought to be constructed with bronze repurposed from the Pantheon in Rome.





It's meant to symbolize the triumph of the Church, an important symbol after the Counter-Reformation, and serves as a bridge of space between the vast architectural scale of the church's interior and that of the humble viewer below.





**Baldacchino**

A permanent ornamental canopy that is either supported by columns or hanging over an altar.

**2c. Façade of San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane**

Francesco Borromini was considered one of the leading Baroque architects of his time. The façade of the Church of San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane is one of his most well-known works, and marks a departure from the flat Renaissance and classically inspired façades you may have seen up to this point.



Façade of San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane by Francesco Borromini

1665-1667

Rome, Italy

Embodying the qualities of drama and dynamism essential to the Baroque design, Borromini created a curving and rippling exterior in his façade. It resembles the undulation of a wave, as if the façade were almost inhaling and exhaling, causing the banner of inscription above the Corinthian-style columns to seemingly flap as if in a breeze. This movement is extended to all the elements of the façade, and genuinely blurs the line between architecture and sculpture.

**SUMMARY**

Today you learned about **Italian Baroque architecture**. You learned how to identify and define today's

key terms, and by examining structures such as the **façade of St. Peter's Basilica**, the **baldacchino of St. Peter's in Rome**, and the **façade of San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane**, you learned how to identify **examples of Baroque architecture**. These are all examples of the common Baroque characteristics of grand scale, movement, and dramatic effects.

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Ian McConnell.



## TERMS TO KNOW

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### **Piazza**

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