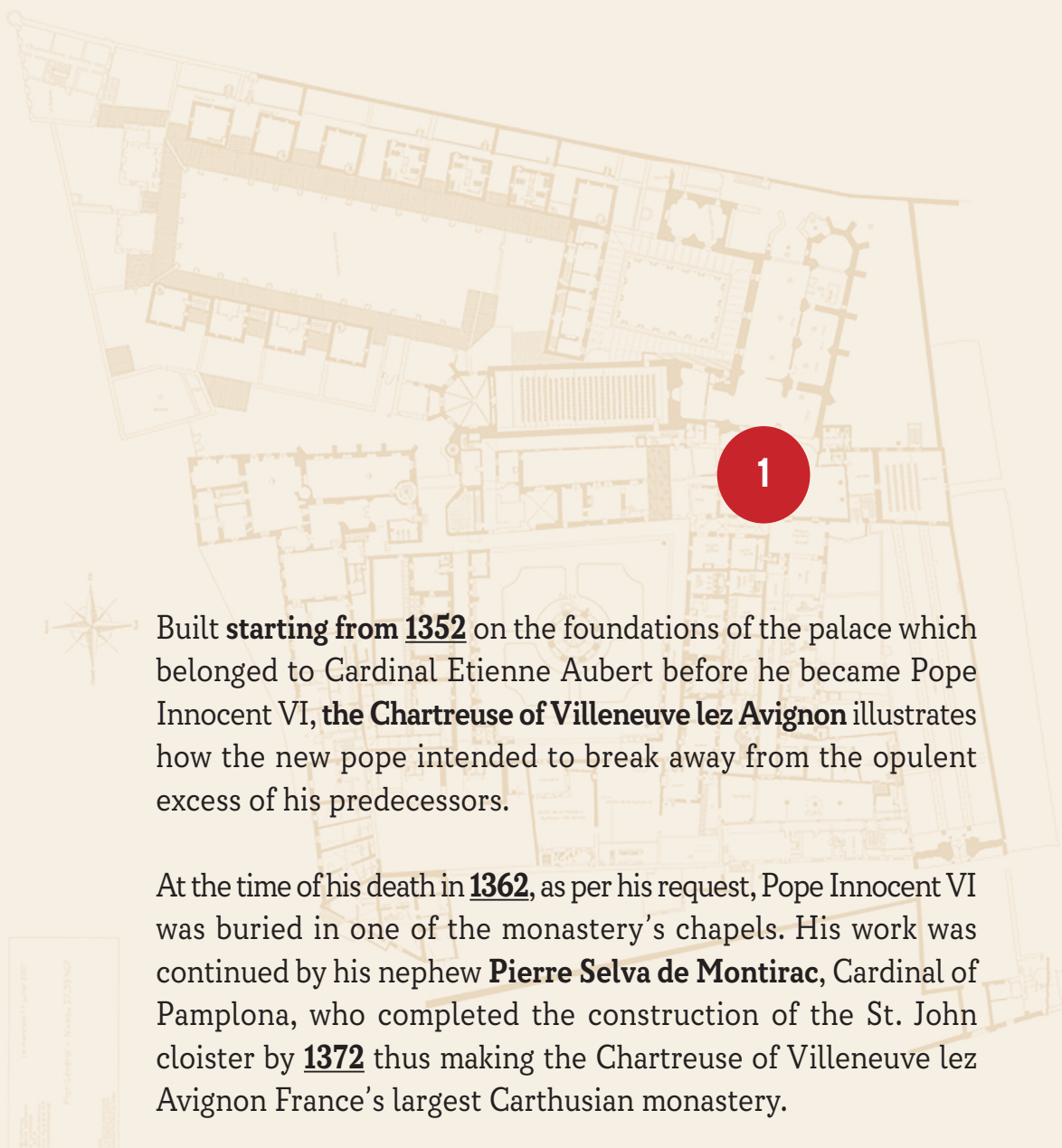




WELCOME

TO THE CHARTREUSE OF VILLENEUVE LEZ AVIGNON

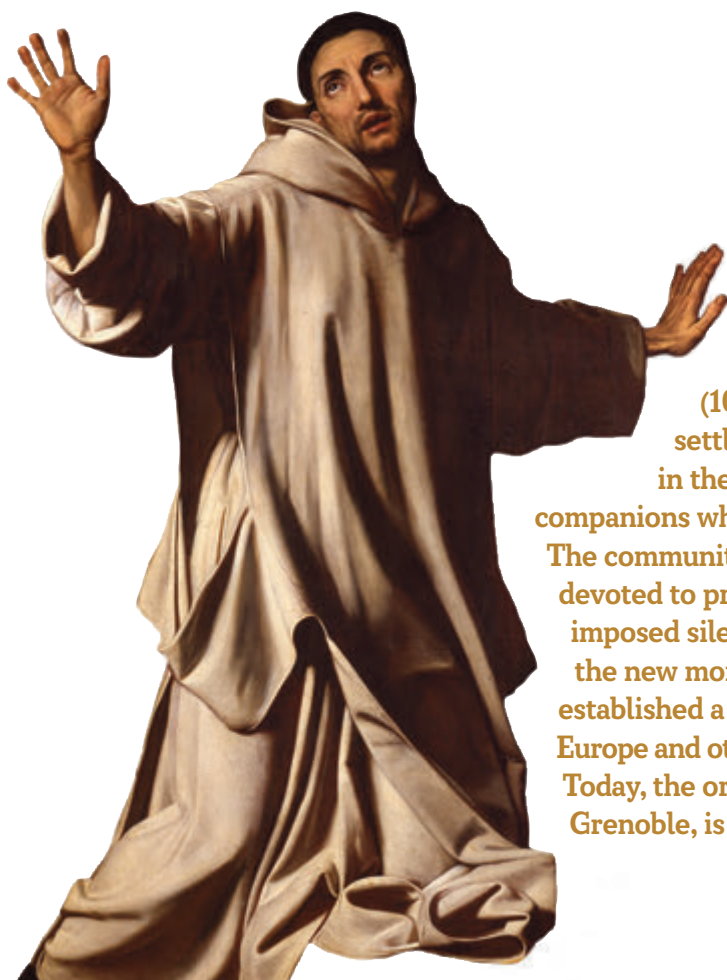




Built **starting from 1352** on the foundations of the palace which belonged to Cardinal Etienne Aubert before he became Pope Innocent VI, the **Chartreuse of Villeneuve lez Avignon** illustrates how the new pope intended to break away from the opulent excess of his predecessors.

At the time of his death in **1362**, as per his request, Pope Innocent VI was buried in one of the monastery's chapels. His work was continued by his nephew **Pierre Selva de Montirac**, Cardinal of Pamplona, who completed the construction of the St. John cloister by **1372** thus making the Chartreuse of Villeneuve lez Avignon France's largest Carthusian monastery.

Nicolas Colombel, *Saint-Bruno refusant l'évêché de Reggio de Calabre*, circa 1685 (detail)
Oil on canvas. © Villeneuve lez Avignon, Pierre-de-Luxembourg museum / Maryan Daspet



St. Bruno

founder of the Carthusian order

In the 11th century, Bruno of Cologne (1030-1101) discouraged by mankind's greed settled far from cities, in the Chartreuse range in the French Alps. He was followed by several companions who adopted the same lifestyle.

The community sought to pursue a hermit's life entirely devoted to prayer and contemplation. The Rule of Bruno imposed silence, solitude and poverty. This rule structured the new monastic order which, through its austerity, established a lasting reputation and spread throughout Europe and other continents over the course of the centuries. Today, the original Grande Chartreuse monastery, near Grenoble, is still the order's mother house.



Over the centuries, the Chartreuse monastery grew in wealth and influence. During the **17th** century architect **François de Royers de la Valfenière** designed numerous embellishments, notably the impressive monumental gate leading to the Women's Courtyard.

After the French Revolution, around **1793**, the Chartreuse was sold off in lots. Its library and the works of art it contained were scattered far and wide. The village took root within the walls of the former monastery and numerous villagers lived there.

By **1835** the deterioration of the church and frescoes was brought to the attention of author Prosper Mérimée, then inspector of historical monuments, who immediately implemented measures for their safekeeping.

In **1909** the French government began restoring the monastery, with a general survey by architect Jules Formigé, the first refurbishment work and the decision to gradually buy back all the buildings within the original confines.

The last residents of the Chartreuse "district" vacated the premises in **1995**.

Today

LA CHARTREUSE
Villeneuve lez Avignon Centre national des écritures du spectacle

The Chartreuse covers nearly two hectares and has been magnificently restored. It charms visitors with the gentle beauty of its cloisters and the wash of light streaming from a collapsed apse directly into the church.

In 1973 the Chartreuse reopened as a **cultural center for hosting artists in residence**.

The monument's present-day vocation grew quite naturally from its austere construction around open-sky spaces, conducive to life in a community and to solitude. Somewhat like the monks who tended the souls of their contemporaries, the artists - the site's new occupants - bear attentive witness to our societies, offering reflections and representations of the world we live in.

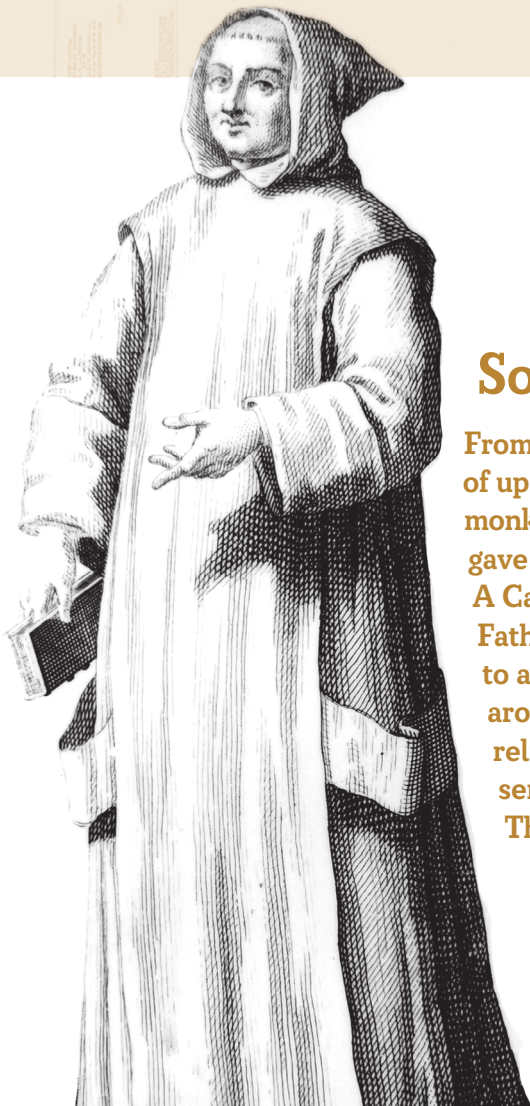
The **Chartreuse - Centre national des écritures du spectacle** is a major European venue for playwriting. Every year it hosts more than eighty residencies for writers or theater troupes, as well as training courses and research and experimentation seminars.

Likewise, it regularly opens up to audiences and visitors for public rehearsals and events and exhibitions, convening its residents and other guest artists, particularly in July in partnership with the Avignon Festival.

2

CHURCH

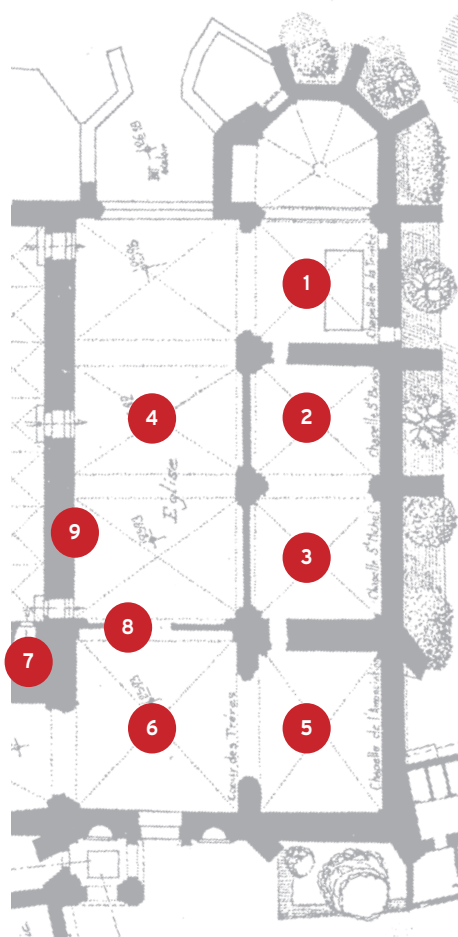
The Church of St. John the Baptist, later called the Church of the Blessed Mary, was built in **1353** for the liturgical offices of the monastic community.



Sons, then fathers and brothers

From the 14th century to the French Revolution, it was sons of upstanding families, mainly the younger sons, who became monks. When entrusting them to the monastery, their parents gave them a dowry to benefit the order.

A Carthusian community has two types of occupants. The Fathers who have taken full vows and dedicate themselves to a life of prayer, mainly in the silence of their cells around the cloisters. The brothers – “converse” if they are religious or “dons” if they are lay – attend light liturgical services and dedicate much of their time to manual labor. They serve the monastery.



The three side chapels (**Trinity** [1], **St. Bruno** [2] and **St. Michael** [3]) were added after 1360 to house the tomb of Pope Innocent VI in 1362, and later the tombs of his two nephews in 1372. As the community grew, the fathers' choir was enlarged, filling in the entire **nave** [4]. A bay portion reserved for brothers was added on the western side and included the the **brothers' choir** [6], the **Annunciation Chapel** [5] and the **belfry** [7].

The **rood screen** [8] separated the fathers' choir from that of the brothers.

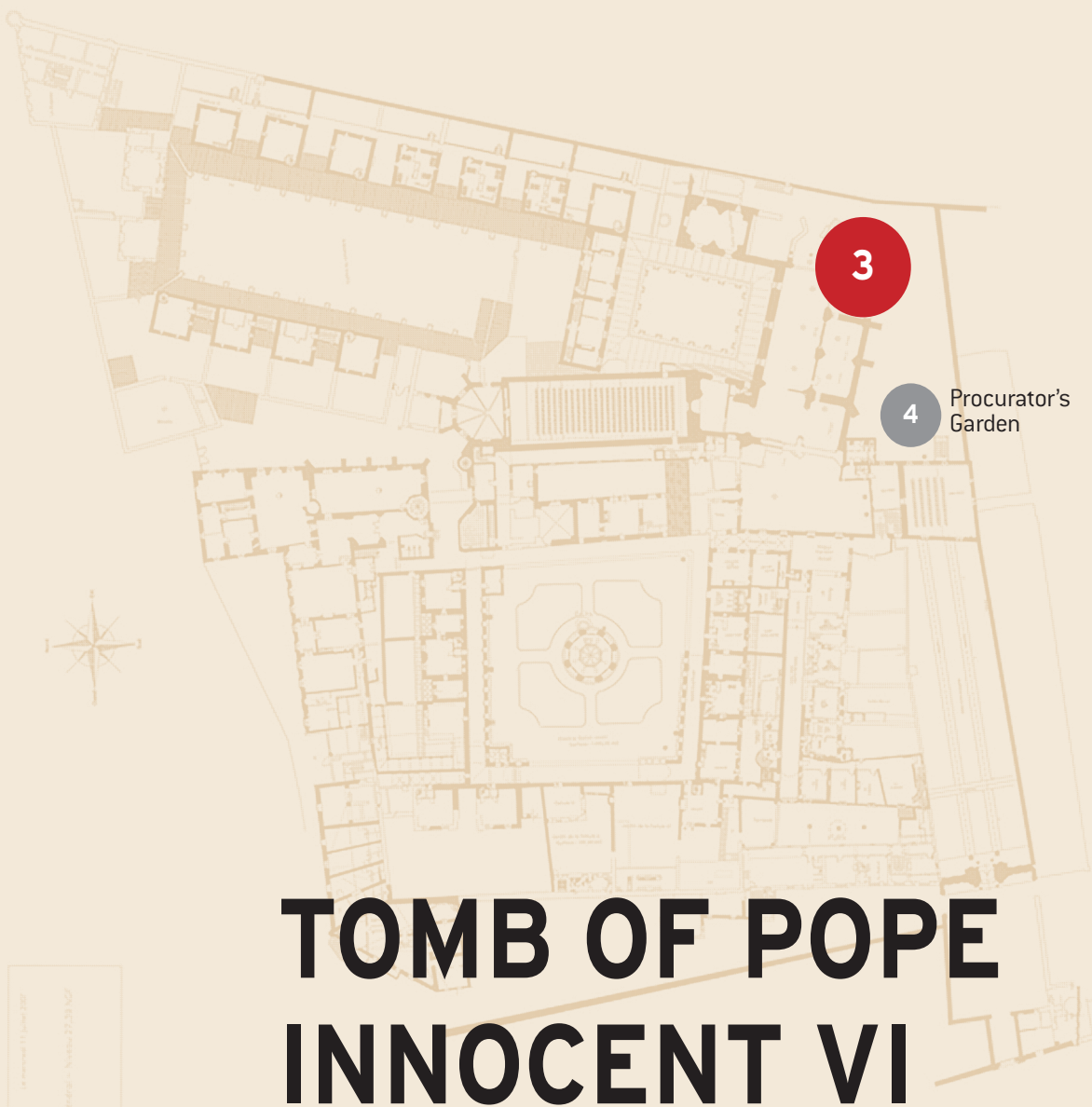
The great solemnness of the Southern Gothic-style building, remarkable for the faceted ribs of the ogives, its massive walls, stricture of openings, tremendous exterior buttresses and its all-encompassing sobriety was the specific choice of the Carthusian order, known for its quest for asceticism. Nonetheless, one should try to remember that between the 15th and 18th centuries, the walls were embellished with magnificent paintings by renowned artists from Italy, Paris and Provence. Today most of these paintings are displayed in the Pierre-de-Luxembourg museum in Villeneuve lez Avignon. The high altar sculpted by Antoine Duparc was removed to the Notre Dame Collegiate church in 1793 after the departure of the Carthusian monks.



9

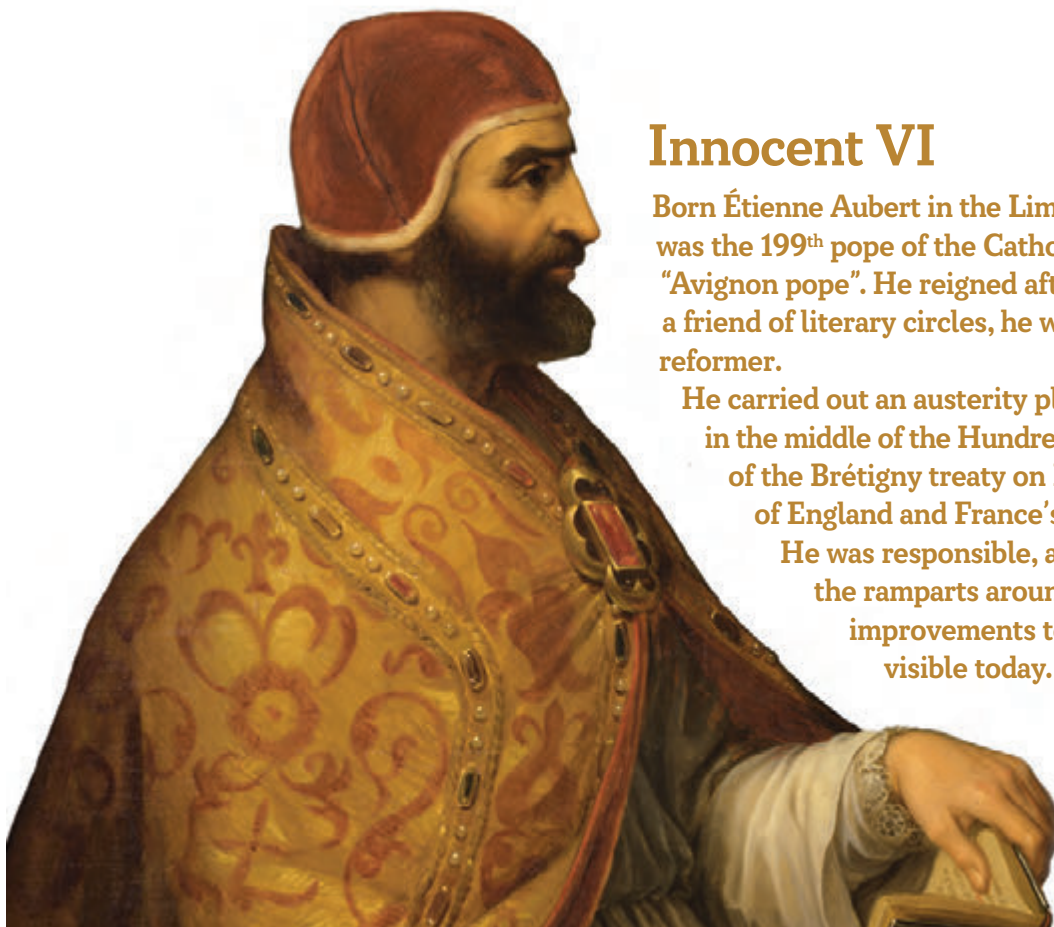
Today

The breach in the main apse dates back to the 19th century and is said to be due to careless workers who took over and worked in this space after the French Revolution. This "accident" provided an awe-inspiring and astonishing view over Mount Andaon, its olive trees and St. André fort. It is still possible to see the distinctive wall insignia of the hired workers, a sort of sign-off for the builders who were paid "by the task". On the northern wall it is also possible to see where three terracotta echo amphoras once stood [9]. They were used to absorb echoes to clarify and beautify the monks' chants. Today the church is regularly used to host readings, performances or concerts open to the public.



TOMB OF POPE INNOCENT VI

Henry Auguste Calixte Serrur, *Portrait d'Innocent VI*, Copied from the paintings of the Parisian St. Sulpice seminary, 1839 (detail)
Oil on canvas, Palais des Papes, Avignon. © Fonds national d'art contemporain / photo by Fabrice Lepeltier



Innocent VI

Born Étienne Aubert in the Limousin region in 1282, Innocent VI was the 199th pope of the Catholic church and the 5th so-called "Avignon pope". He reigned after Clement VI. Although he was a friend of literary circles, he was nevertheless a rather pitiless reformer.

He carried out an austerity plan and intervened, notably, in the middle of the Hundred Years' War for the signature of the Brétigny treaty on May 8, 1360 between Edward III of England and France's John II or John the Good.

He was responsible, as well, for the consolidation of the ramparts around Avignon and made several improvements to the Popes' Palace, no longer visible today.

On September 12, 1362 Innocent VI died and, in keeping with his wishes, was buried in the Chartreuse church on November 22. His funeral was attended by the King of France, John II the Good.

The mausoleum installed in the Trinity Chapel was crafted by architect Bertrand Nogayrol and sculptors Thomas de Tournon and Barthélémy Cavalier.

Nearly a century later, just across from the tomb, the Carthusians hung the masterpiece by Enguerrand Quarton, *Le Couronnement de la Vierge*, now exhibited in the Pierre-de-Luxembourg museum in Villeneuve lez Avignon.

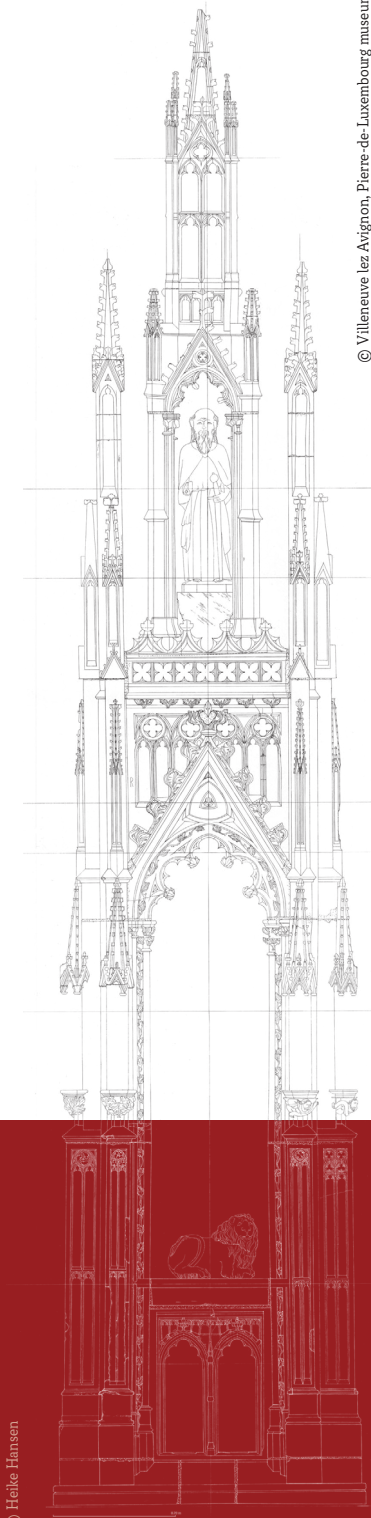


© Villeneuve lez Avignon, Pierre-de-Luxembourg museum

Rediscovered in 1834 by Prosper Mérimée, inspector of historical monuments, the tomb had been heavily damaged during the post-revolutionary period when the Chartreuse had become a simple residential neighborhood of Villeneuve. The tomb was first moved to the Villeneuve Hospice and then back to its original site in 1959. The pope's bones, placed in a leather chest, were carried back there on October 23, 1960 by the French papal nuncio. This is the most complete tomb of a French pope to date.

Today

The tomb of Pope Innocent VI is made in stone from Pernes, and the rich carvings of this monument contrast with the simplicity of the church. The tomb was indeed located in a chapterhouse, nevertheless a certain degree of munificence was required for the tomb of a pope. An enclosing wall isolated this chapel from the church nave where the fathers' choir was located. Currently there is a grid and netting over the recumbent and the lacy stonework of this detailed, highly-fragile flamboyant Gothic architecture, which is scheduled for imminent restoration.



© Heike Hansen

5

SMALL CLOISTER

The church cloister or small cloister dates back to the initial founding of the Carthusian monastery **between 1353 and 1356** under the pontificate of Innocent VI.

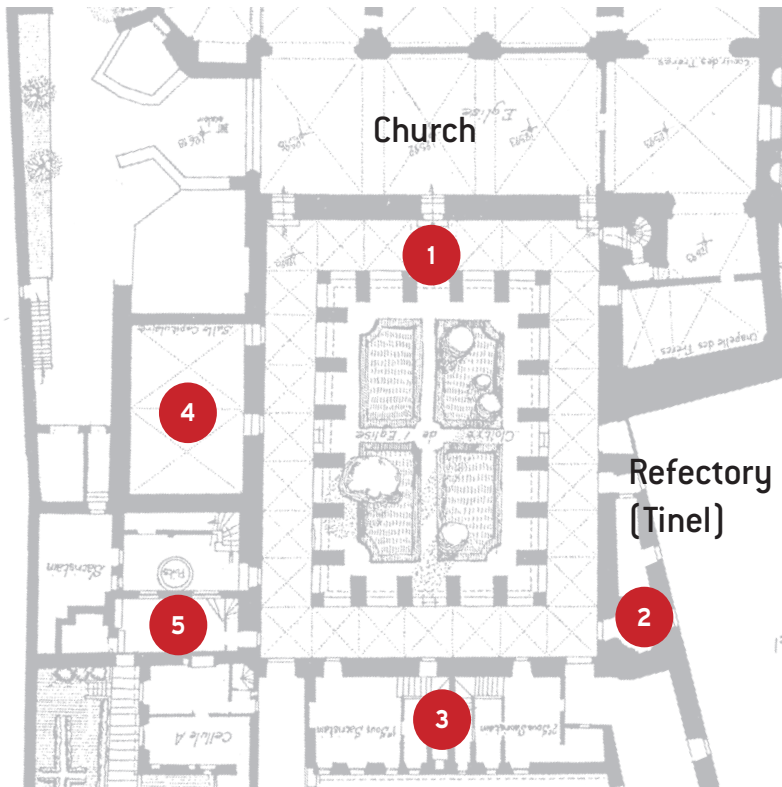
It is the most luxurious cloister in the entire monastery: a passage point, an enclosed Eden, a cool, green, silent and peaceful oasis of shadow and light. Carthusian writings describe it as a prefiguration of heavenly Jerusalem, the gathering place for God's chosen souls.

In the 14th century the small cloister was decorated with frescoes, and the bases of the cross-ribs were carved. The monks broke these bases in the 18th century and replaced them with modern-looking stucco.

Monastic Life

The small cloister is central to all of the monastic areas, meaning that it leads to all of the places where the Carthusians were intended to gather (church, chapter house [4], tonsure [5] and the refectory used on solemn ceremony days, Sundays and days of mourning). The other cloisters and the monks' cells are spaces for hermit-like solitary living.

The **southern gallery** [1] has three doors opening onto the church: the entrance to the brothers' choir, the entrance to the fathers' choir and the entrance for the celebrant. In the corners are **two holy water fonts** dated 1587.



The **washbasin** [2] is to the northwest of the cloister. The Carthusian monks used to gather in the refectory (tinel), originally the ceremonial room of the cardinal's palace and today an auditorium for the cultural center, to share the Sunday meal. They entered the room via this small vestibule which contained a marble washbasin of which nothing remains except the outline of its location. Meals were always eaten in silence. Only one monk was entitled to speak in the refectory, for the purpose of reading the Gospel out loud.

To the north were the **cells of the under-sacristans** [3] today used for temporary shows.

Spaciement

The southern gallery is called "the colloquy gallery" because on Sundays and feast days members of the order were allowed to break silence for a brief period of time: an occasion known as the 'spaciement'. Elsewhere, the spaciement was a weekly walk that took place outside monastery grounds since the Carthusian monasteries in the country were usually built far from towns and people. In Villeneuve lez Avignon, from the start, since the village was not far off, the monastery was considered to be more of a "city chartreuse". The monks were not allowed to go out.





CHAPTER HOUSE

Also known as the **capitular** hall, this room may seem rather small.

Its construction dates back to the **1356** founding when it accommodated twelve monks.

When the number of monks had doubled at the time of the second foundation, there was not enough space to enlarge the chapter house. So this became the chapter for the fathers, with the brothers' chapter located in another part of the monastery.

In Carthusian monasteries, the chapter house has only a single door, always kept closed (hence the French expression: "*ne pas avoir voix au chapitre*" meaning to have no say in a matter). This is quite different from the Cistercian abbeys where the chapter is open to observation and outside light.

The chapter house is the **room for reading** the rule of the order: "a chapter" of it is read.

It is also the **place for confession**, where one receives one's penance.

Likewise it is **in this room that the prior preaches** for high ceremonies or for times when novices are brought into the fold.

And finally, this is a **meeting place** for administrative matters: selling a plot of land, a cask of wine, etc. Here the community weighed matters, because it was making a commitment.



Reynaud Levieux, *La Crucifixion*, circa 1651. Oil on canvas.
© Villeneuve lez Avignon, Pierre-de-Luxembourg museum

The chapter house formerly opened onto the sacristy, which has since collapsed. It held masterful paintings by Reynaud Levieux on the theme of the Crucifixion, today displayed in the Pierre-de-Luxembourg museum in Villeneuve lez Avignon.

Osculum infame

One of the arch's sculpted bases raises a number of questions.

It is thought to represent the osculum infame or the Kiss of Shame.



In satanic rituals, allegiance to the devil involved kissing the anus of a male goat. Is it still an injunction to silence represented here, a warning to be careful of what one does with one's mouth?

It has been suggested that stone carvers could also be quite anticlerical at times...

7

SACRISTAN'S CELL AND TONSURE



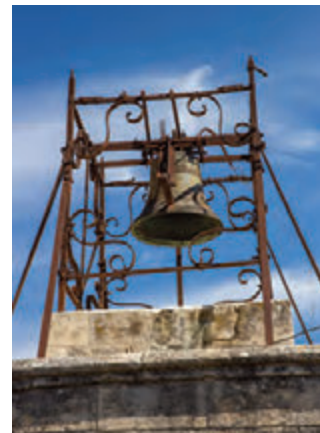
Engravings of Carthusian costumes. Original prints from the Dauphinois museum in Grenoble.

The **sacristain** occupied a cell with two levels: an upper-floor cell and the ground-floor rasure or tonsure.

In a community where everyday life was paced by services and prayers, the sacristan held two vital roles: he was both the master of time and the keeper of the church treasury.

1551 was doubtless an important year in this respect: a gravity-based timepiece was installed in the Chartreuse to toll the bell hanging in the church belfry.

Before this date, less-proven methods or rudimentary technology were used to mark life in the community: the cock's crow, the stars, lit candles, hourglasses, clepsydrae (water clocks), sundials, or even the uninterrupted chanting of psalms.



In addition, the sacristan took care of the liturgical accessories and the furnishings.

The lower room was called **la rasure** (tonsure or shaving room) because that is where the monks were shaved; only the brothers had beards. It was here as well that the tonsure was done (the monks' shaven head was the symbol of Christ's crown).

For all of these purposes, the water supply in the courtyard was a necessity.

9

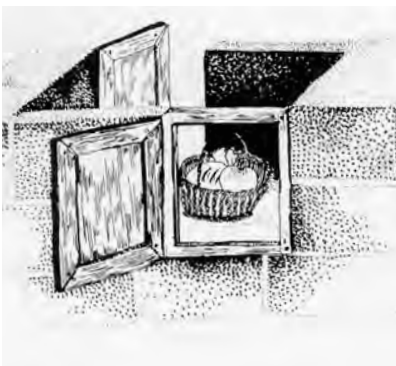
8

CARTHUSIAN MONK'S CELL AND MEDICINAL HERB GARDEN

The **cell** is the living space of a Carthusian monk. It represents his hermitage, an area of reclusion, and a place for manual, physical and intellectual work. The Carthusian monk spent most of his time here. He prayed, ate and slept in his cell, in solitude and in silence.

The cells consist of several spaces.

The **Ave Maria** (or Hail Mary) is a small entryway leading into the cell, denoting the separation from the outside world. When the monk went to church, at least three times a day, he prayed to the Virgin Mary for protection upon entering and exiting.



© Daniele Akmen

Service hatch

Communication was limited to a strict minimum between the cell and the outside, and took place via a service hatch or pass-through, a small double-doored cupboard next to the cell's main door.

The service hatch is positioned at an angle so as to ensure that the father would not see the brother bringing the meals or coming to pick up the little notes by which the father could request books or plants.

Right next to this is a room called **cubiculum** or cubicle, a place where the monk spent most of his time, sleeping, eating his daily meal, as well as praying in solitude and studying liturgical writings.

The **workshop** was situated just above this, a room for manual work or crafts, of prime interest for Carthusian monks. In order to counterbalance the day's prayer schedule, manual activities were to tire the body and free up the mind, which would then be more amenable to meditation and contemplation. The monks could saw lumber there or craft small objects. The Carthusians were reputed for their cabinetmaking tradition.

© Daniele Alkmen



Tending one's own garden

In addition, each monk had a garden adjoining each cell where they themselves grew flowers and "simples" (medicinal plants). A place for enjoyment and especially for observing the changing seasons, the garden sublimates prayer and glorifies the Creator. The gardens and their upkeep played a central role in Carthusian monastery life. In the mountains, it was the Carthusian fathers who created and still keep secret today the composition of the famous Chartreuse liqueur, made from over 130 different plants.



Today

The former monks' cells were transformed into studios and flats equipped to host writing residencies for playwrights or translators, sometimes accompanied by directors, actors, choreographers or dancers or, less frequently, by visual artists in partnerships contracted with structures specialized in contemporary art. These residency periods of research and creativity at the *Centre national des écritures du spectacle* last from 2 weeks to 3 months.

10

BUGADE (Laundry rooms)

Installation by Jeongmoon Choi for the 2015 show: Toward an architecture of light



The bugade is a term of Provencal origin – bugado – designating the great washing of house linens, thus extended to describe the place where laundering was done. This room, equipped with its own well and a huge hearth for boiling water, was where the Carthusian brothers did the laundry.

This area, as you visit it today, was renovated in the 18th century. The beautiful groined vault bears elegant witness to the skills of 18th century stone masons from the school of Avignon.

Upstairs, at the top of the steps of the grand central stairway, one arrives at a drying room under a gorgeous roof frame. It is in this open-air area, of identical size to the laundry room, that the laundry was hung to dry.

Today

The premises composed of the laundry room, the drying attic and the adjacent prison cells have now become a cherished place for temporary artistic and thematic exhibitions.

With two or three different showings every year, the exhibitions of the *Centre national des écritures du spectacle* create a lively ongoing dialogue linking art, the subjects of the artwork, and the architecture of the place, all of them providing perfect opportunities to rediscover this unique monument.

11



PRISON



In the Middle Ages there were many prisons in the Carthusian monasteries. They lasted until the French Revolution in 1789, despite the restrictions of the royal edicts. The prisons were destroyed in all monasteries that were reoccupied after the Revolution: from then on, the prerogative to imprison a person belonged solely to the French justice system.

The proximity between the bugade (laundry room) and the prison has often been discussed. A number of hypotheses have been suggested: the jailed monks could benefit from the bugade's warmth or from the distant company of the brothers working in the laundry room, or be subjected to their near-constant supervision.

Brothers or fathers judged guilty of serious offenses to the Rule could be jailed: taking leave without permission, arriving late for services, practicing alchemy and, for the brothers who did not live in solitude like the fathers: having money in their pockets or relations with women.

This was also the place where the monks went to reflect on their vocations if they felt they could no longer live within the order. The maximum sentence was one year, plus penance and fasting. The Carthusian was subsequently released from his vows. He then left, as it was said, to do penance in the world.



Practical and symbolic architecture

The jail had cells for seven prisoners, a number reminiscent of the seven deadly sins. These were located on two levels: three on the ground floor, next to the bugade, and four upstairs.

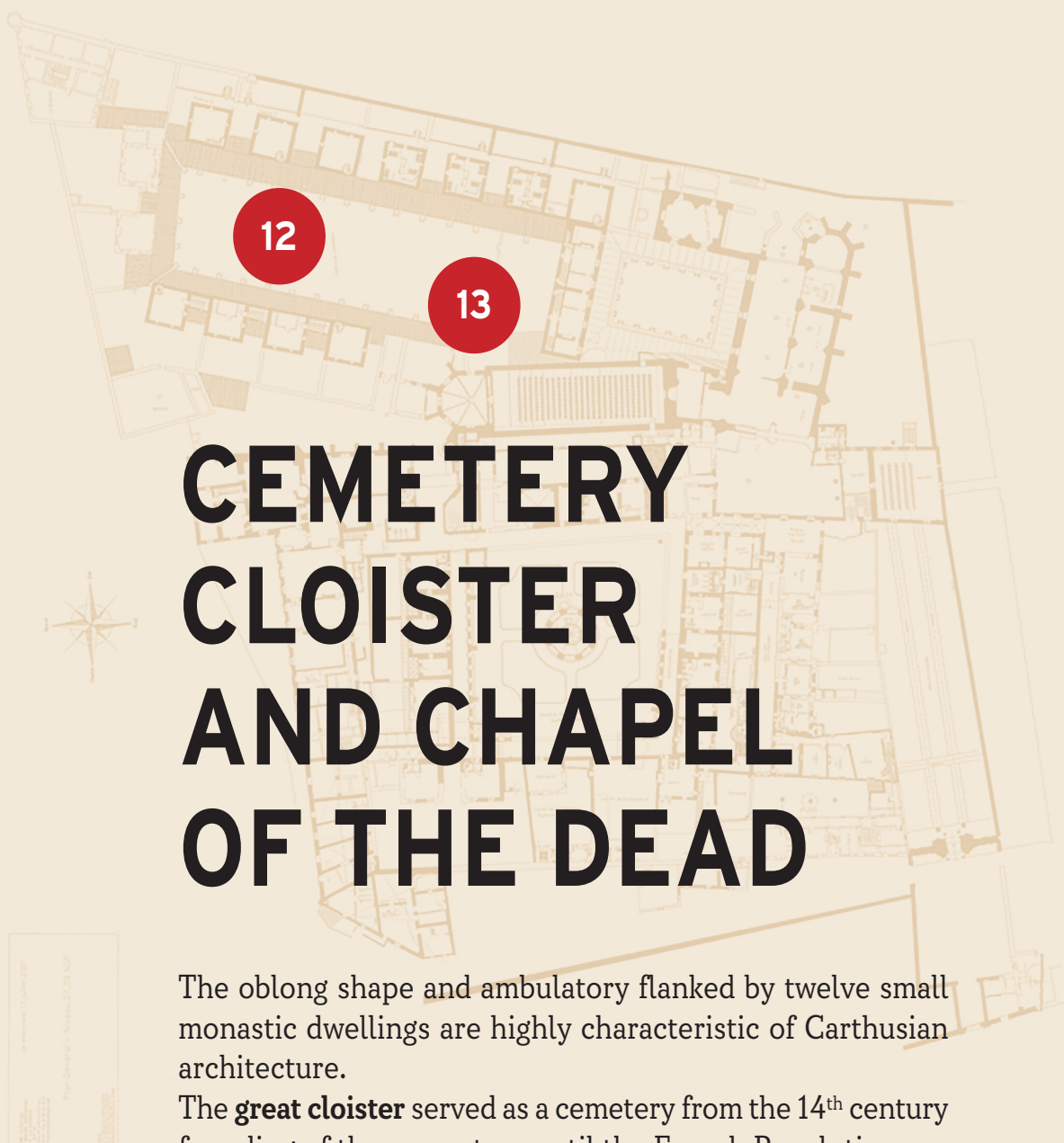
The cells were extremely narrow: about 12 m².

The penitent had only a table and a bed.

In each cell there was a dormer window or skylight oriented toward the upstairs altar so that inmates could attend services without leaving the room – not to be confused with the service hatches of course.

The last area, larger and on the ground floor, was the wood storage place.

This is where wood was kept, especially for use in heating the laundry water.



CEMETERY CLOISTER AND CHAPEL OF THE DEAD

The oblong shape and ambulatory flanked by twelve small monastic dwellings are highly characteristic of Carthusian architecture.

The **great cloister** served as a cemetery from the 14th century founding of the monastery until the French Revolution.

It is thought that over 600 monks were buried here anonymously, in the simplicity of the Carthusian order, with no tombstone, just a plain wooden crucifix.

A single stone cross was erected at the burial place of the head of the community, the last deceased prior.



Unto eternity

Very much present in the cemeteries of Provence, cypress trees are the symbol of eternal life.

Their soaring massive silhouette exudes serenity and strength.

Cypress trees are like a thread tying heaven and earth together.

These trees are also biodiversity havens.

Today there are more than thirty birds' nests in every one of the monumental cypresses at the Chartreuse.

The **Chapel of the Dead** was rebuilt in the second half of the 18th century, adjoining the wall of the under-sacristans' garden. The corpse of the deceased monk was carried into this chapel to be washed, following the instructions established in the Coutumes, a text describing Carthusian practices drafted by Guigues, fifth prior of the Grande Chartreuse.

Robed and bearing the rosary of his professed faith, the deceased was laid out on a board and his clothing and cowl hood were nailed to it.

After High Mass, the cowled Carthusians proceeded to the cemetery to the tolling of the bell.

The body, with head turned toward the church if possible, was lowered on its plank down to the bottom of a grave.

The officiant threw in a fistful of soil and then the brothers and attendants filled in the grave, while the fathers chanted.



Today

After the Revolution, like for all the other buildings in the Chartreuse, the great cloister was used as local housing. The ambulatories were cut away to provide extra rooms for the local villagers dwelling in the cells of the former monks. This space sometimes served as a kitchen, as shown by certain archways partially scorched by smoke.

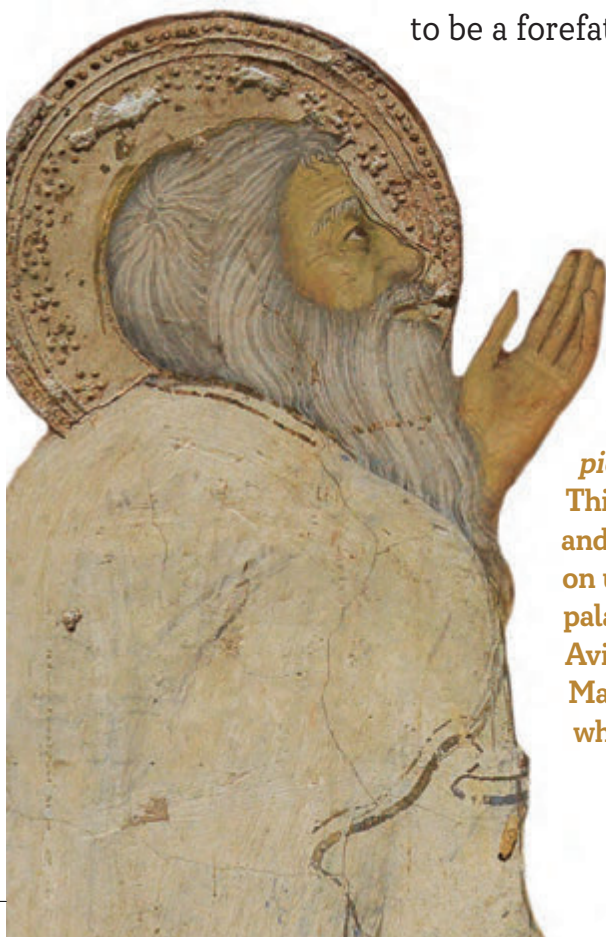
The cemetery's cloister is the largest single space of the entire Chartreuse. Currently, readings, sculpture shows and other artistic events are periodically held there. This space is also a protected zone. Since 1999, for the upkeep of its gardens, the Chartreuse has applied a protocol of good ecological practices for the preservation of living organisms. In 2020 the Chartreuse was granted the special "Refuge LPO" label from the Bird Protection League (*Ligue de protection des Oiseaux - Agir pour la biodiversité*).

Today, the Chapel of the Dead houses the digital interpretation installation for the Chapel of the Frescoes.



FRESCO CHAPEL

When Pope Innocent VI transformed his cardinal's palace into a monastery, he wanted to offer the Carthusian monks a sumptuous place. In the chapel extending from the refectory, he had the walls painted with the life of a saint, the life of Saint John the Baptist who lived in the desert and is considered to be a forefather of the order.



The "Painter of the Popes"

A receipt for the year 1355 from Innocent VI's pontifical accounts mentions artwork done in the "Villeneuve... palace" by *Matheus pictor*.

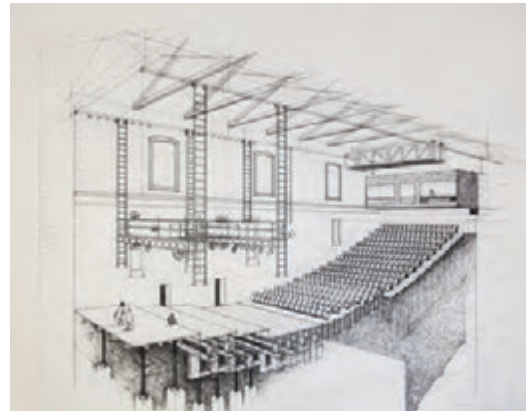
This was Matteo da Viterbo, known as Matteo Giovannetti, priest and painter, born around 1322 and friend of Petrarch, who from 1346 on used his talent to serve Pope Clement VI, covering the Avignon palace with frescoes before working in the future Villeneuve lez Avignon Chartreuse on request by Innocent VI.

Matteo Giovannetti continued painting under Pope Urban V until 1367 when he returned to Rome, where he passed away one year later.

Together, all the scene boxes in which various sequences of the narrative play out form a trompe l'oeil architectural trim along the chapel's perimeter. On the upper elements and on the vaulted ceiling, it is still possible to barely discern a magnificent emerald green and midnight blue sky pierced by pink stratus clouds teeming with angels, though most of them have now unfortunately vanished.

The painter Matteo Giovannetti uncannily anticipated the perspective-based art experimentation of the coming century. He also developed a genuine storytelling art, adding anecdotes and narrative detail to the scenes he painted. He playfully added familiar details and visual illusions.

In your mind's eye, just imagine that this painted background originally extended as far as the refectory, thus composing, with the chapel, one of the most munificent painted spaces in the entire Middle Ages. Today, in the refectory, unfortunately, all that remains are a few painted window frames. The pontifical chambers, probably located directly off the chapel, were most likely decorated with works for which Matteo Giovannetti had been commissioned.



Today

Today, the Chapel of Frescoes has been separated from the former refectory (Tinel) of the monks. The Tinel is now a modular room for performances and rehearsals of artists who are in residence at the *Centre national des écritures du spectacle*.

Directly across from the Chapel of the Frescoes is the Chapel of the Dead which houses a digital application enabling detailed exploration of all the paintings which once embellished the Chapel of Frescoes.



SAINT JOHN CLOISTER

The St. John cloister was originally the courtyard of the palace of Cardinal Aubert, who became Pope Innocent VI.

On this upper area of the premises stood the threshing floor and barn, which Aubert had acquired to build his place of residence.

An ingenious way to move water

The fountain is the center of a hydraulic network that distributed water throughout the monastery. The catchment area was at a spot called "l'Hermitage" on the heights above Villeneuve, and the water descended by simple gravity down through an underground duct and then through an aqueduct.

From the basin of the fountain, underground piping supplied the burial cloister, the Sacristan's Courtyard and the Brothers' Courtyard.

Running water flowed to the cells via a network of gutters carved into the stonework.

To irrigate the gardens, the Carthusians pumped water with a noria (a water wheel) located in the northwest corner of the monastery's land.

The palace was destroyed by fire in 1365. Following the fire, the grand-nephew of Etienne Aubert, **Pierre Selva de Montirac**, decided to build a dozen additional monks' cells there at the time of the "second founding".

The 1372 charter listed all planned construction: a cloister, twelve cells as well as dwellings and annexes needed for the housing and maintenance of the assistants, clerics and converse brothers.

Several wall sections, vestiges of the former cardinal's palace, survived the fire and were preserved when the cloister was built.

In the center of the courtyard there is an Ionic rotunda dating from the late 18th century, encircling the St. John fountain, built in the 17th century.

The aedicula (statue niche) was most likely produced by an Avignon workshop, that of the Franque family, a dynasty of famous builders who have gone down in French architectural history.

The work displays outstanding stonecutting art and is also of interest because it remains unfinished: its decoration was never completed.

The keystones and the capitals, except for one, are simply roughly hewed.



The St. John cloister is located higher up, and its reputedly purer air was reserved for the elderly monks.

After the French Revolution this cloister became the heart and soul of a Villeneuve lez Avignon neighborhood where up to three hundred families lived.

Today the cloister has the charm of a Provencal village square. From there one can access the auditorium, the library-café, the bookshop and, in summer, the seasonal restaurant.

Today

HOPE TO SEE YOU SOON AT THE CHARTREUSE



chartreuse.org

LA CHARTREUSE

Villeneuve lez Avignon Centre national des écritures du spectacle



Photos © Alex Noller/La Chartreuse