



Palazzo Boncompagni (now Benelli) - via del Monte 8

Ugo Boncompagni, who ascended to the papal throne in 1572 with the name of Pope Gregory XIII and who is credited with the introduction of the Gregorian calendar, was born in this 16th-century palazzo, behind St. Peter's Cathedral. The building, commissioned by the father of the future pontiff Cristoforo Boncompagni between 1537 and 1548 and attributed to the architects Baldassarre Tommaso Peruzzi and Jacopo Barozzi, is distinguished by its sober façade and the large decorated portal surmounted by the papal insignia. The interior opens up to a courtyard dominated by a majestic specimen of evergreen magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*), its foliage towering above the palazzo's roof. At the end of an exquisite series of historiated columns, a beautiful portal leads to a splendid helicoidal staircase attributed to Jacopo Barozzi.

The magnolia in the courtyard is characterised by an unusual growth pattern resulting from the presence of a main trunk with secondary logs that have grown inside the flowerbed housing the plant; the tree has developed in a free form, with several branches touching the ground (some have been able to take root naturally originating the plant's secondary trunks). Patches of evergreen wallflowers mark the corners of the flowerbed, while on the side of the courtyard opposite the loggia a border of hydrangeas rounds off the space's vegetation. The evergreen magnolia is one of the oldest tree species on Earth today; already widespread in the Tertiary Era, it has survived localised in the south-east of the United States and was introduced to Europe in the 18th century; at the beginning of the summer, the large, fragrant white flowers appear, whose shape is believed to be similar to that of the first flowers to populate the Earth.

A second verdant area pertaining to Palazzo Boncompagni is located to the side of the building, along Via del Monte at the corner with Via delle Donzelle. Two majestic horse chestnuts on either side of the gate facing the street introduce the quadrangular garden, circumscribed by a wall with an iron fence surmounted by an evergreen *Rhynchospermum jasminoides*; A circular flowerbed bordered by a low box hedge stands out in the centre of the area, home to another beautiful specimen of evergreen magnolia, while groundcover examples of citrus and camellias in large terracotta pots add to the space's vegetal component. In addition to hosting conventions, conferences and other private events, Palazzo Boncompagni is also home to contemporary art exhibitions and can be visited with guided tours (for information <https://palazzoboncompagni.it/>).