

QUATTRO CANTI

Early modern city planning

The districts of Albergheria, Capo, La Loggia and Kalsa meet in Quattro Canti, a baroque square conceived by Mariano Smiriglio, also the architect of Porta Felice. It was commissioned by the Spanish viceroys between 1608-1620. Four near-symmetrical façades confront the square, decorated by fountains representing the four seasons and statues of the four Spanish kings of Sicily. Ostensible in design, the square is among the first major examples of European town planning.

The Museo d'Arte Contemporanea della Sicilia is right around the corner, housed in Palazzo Riso. The palace was destroyed during World War II, but was restored to become a regional contemporary art museum in 2008. This part of Vittorio Emanuele is the home of many bookshops, such as Libreria Agati Roberto for used books and Libreria del Corso for rare books.



CATTEDRALE DI PALERMO

Less is a bore

For Norman Sicilians, big and beautiful was the modus operandi. In the case of Palermo Cathedral, the more-is-more, less-is-a-bore stratagem has been bolstered through centuries of strong personalities adding their mark to this most holy site.

The cathedral is Roman-Catholic and was built in 1185 by King William II's minister and archbishop, Walter Ophamil. It was built on the grounds of what had first been a Byzantine basilica, and centuries later, a mosque. The archbishop is buried in a sarcophagus in the crypt.

The cathedral's original size and splendour is the product of stark competition with the stirring Monreale Cathedral that had been commissioned in 1174, as well as the beautiful Muslim mosque that the new cathedral was replacing. Since the 12th century, the cathedral has undergone changes according





to emerging architectural styles, designating it a locus where Norman, Arab, Gothic, baroque and neoclassical heredities coalesce. Notably, architect Ferdinando Fuga made a baroque move in the 18th century when he crowned the complex with a dome and added a level of smaller cupolas to the façade.

Safe to say, it is the only cathedral in the world that bears a passage from the Qur'an on its exterior wall. The plaque is a gesture to the skillful Arab craftsmen who laboured on the building, promising their safety under the new Catholic rule.

Via Incoronazione offers a hidden and uncrowded entrance to the cathedral: look out for a plain timber door, topped with a eagle like Porta Felice. The quiet street leads to Piazza Sett'Angeli. Here, ancient ruins are visible through a glass awning, and palm trees stretch towards the sun, granting an intriguing side-perspective of the cathedral.