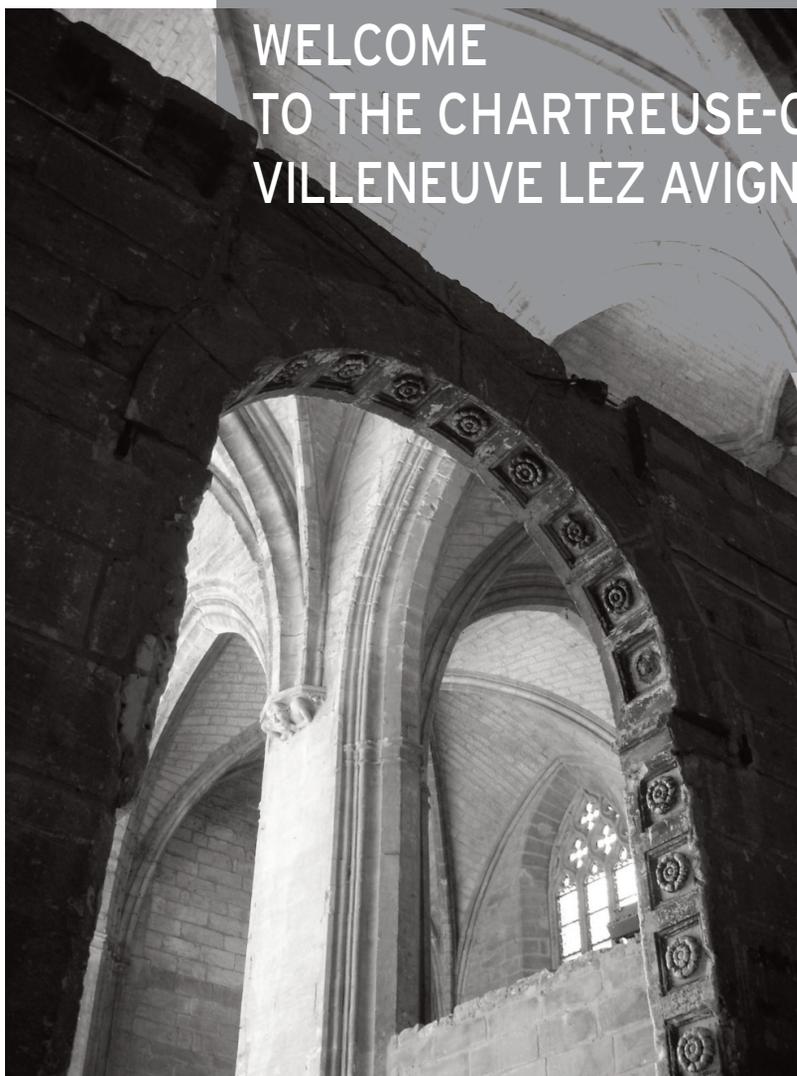


■ ■ ■ LA CHARTREUSE  
Villeneuve lez Avignon Centre national des écritures du spectacle

## VISIT GUIDE

WELCOME  
TO THE CHARTREUSE-CNES  
VILLENEUVE LEZ AVIGNON



SOME ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL ELEMENTS TO ENRICH  
YOUR VISIT

# VISIT GUIDE



## LA CHARTREUSE

La Chartreuse du Val de Bénédiction owes its beginnings to Pope Innocent VI. After his election in 1352, the then cardinal donated his lands and a private residence he owned at Villeneuve lez Avignon. Works began quickly on the initial foundations, originally planned for twelve monks, and the monastery was granted numerous privileges. The decoration of its private chapel was entrusted to Matteo Giovannetti, who had painted the frescoes in the Palace of the Popes.

Pope Innocent VI had close ties with the monastery and, at his request, he was buried there when he died in 1362.

His mausoleum, a monument which was removed after the Revolution, was returned to the church in 1959. The work begun by Innocent VI was carried on by his nephew, Pierre Selva de Montirac, Cardinal of Pamplona, who finished building the Saint John Cloister in 1372. Over the centuries, the monastery grew richer, more influential and more beautiful, with decorations by François Des Royers de la Valfenière in particular. Its three cloisters made it the biggest Carthusian monastery in France.

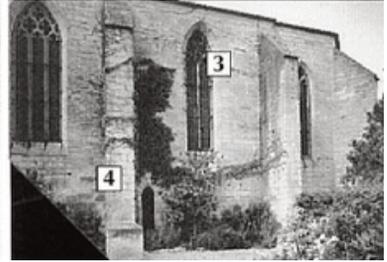
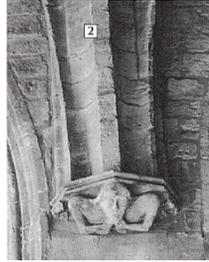
At the time of the French Revolution, it was divided into lots and sold, its library and works of art were scattered and the monastery was severely damaged. In 1835, the deterioration of the church and its frescoes attracted the attention of the writer Prosper Mérimée, who was then Inspector of Historical Monuments. He immediately started conservation proceedings.

In 1909, the State began to rehabilitate the monastery, commissioning architect Jules Formigé to make a complete survey of all buildings.

The first restoration work was begun and the decision was taken to buy back, little by little, all the buildings in the original precinct. Today, much of the monastery has been restored and visitors enjoy its harmonious proportions, the secluded charm of its cloisters and the shafts of light which penetrate the gloom of the church through a collapsed apse.

The monument's present (artist's residencies) role has grown out of its rigorous construction around areas open to the sky, planned for solitary and communal life.

A cultural center dedicated to artists residencies has been housed in the monastery since 1973, with support from the Caisse Nationale des Monuments Historiques et des Sites, the Ministry of Culture and local bodies. In this prospect, restoration is being done to host a cultural program of national scope. The National Playwriting Centre (Centre national des écritures du spectacle) is a major venue in France and in Europe for residencies for playwrights and drama groups. Each year the Centre has nearly sixty residencies, hosting authors, companies, research and experimental laboratories, training and master classes. The Centre also often opens to the public for rehearsals and other events prepared by the residents and guest artists, particularly in July in partnership with the Avignon Festival.



## THE CHURCH



### Stages of construction

Construction of the monastery began in 1353 with the church which comprised a single nave with three bays.

The side chapels were added from 1360 onwards and comprise the Trinity Chapel (1360-1361) and the double chapel of Saint Bruno and Saint Michael (1363-1365).

In 1372, as the number of Carthusians had increased, the fathers' choir was enlarged to take up the whole nave. A bay for the brothers was added to the west including the Chapel of the Annunciation and the belfry.

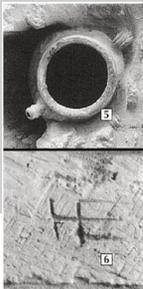
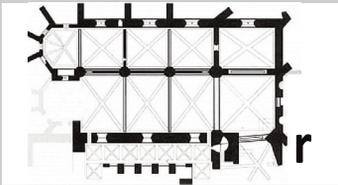
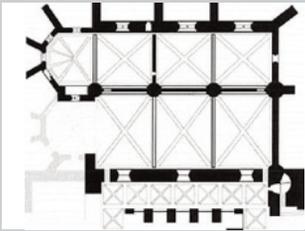
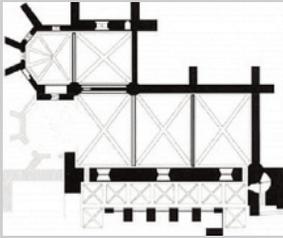
The rood screen separated the *fathers'* choir from the *brothers'* choir III.

The church is in the Southern Gothic style characterised by : faceted diagona ribs, solid walfs with narrow windows, massive buttresses against the outside wall, and an overall impression of sobriety and completeness. On the north wall we can see where three *clay amphora* were placed to absorb the echo.

Many *jobbing workers* were employed on the huge construction site. As they were paid by the job, that is, the work actually done, these stonemasons signed their work with a personal mark.

From the 17th century onwards, the walls and altars were decorated with works by renowned artists from Italy, Paris and Provence.

The apse and the sacristy collapsed at the beginning of the 19th century. The *high altar* carved by Duparc was taken to the *Notre Dame Collegiate* church in 1793, after the departure of the Carthusians.



## THE TOMB OF POPE INNOCENT VI

Etienne Aubert, a native of Beyssac in Limousin and a cardinal at the papal court, owned a private mansion or "livrée" at Villeneuve. When he was elected pope in 1352 under the name of Innocent VI, he gave his mansion and the surrounding lands to the Carthusian order.

In 1360, he built a funeral chapel consecrated to the Holy Trinity. Bertrand Nogayrol designed the chapel, Thomas de Tournon was responsible for much of the sculpture and Barthelemy Caravier carved the recumbent figure.

The tomb was made of stone from Pernes and its rich carvings contrast strikingly with the sparseness of the church. The pope died on 12 September 1362 but was not buried at Villeneuve until 22 November.

A wall separated this chapel from the nave of the church where the fathers' choir was situated. In 1835, Prosper Mérimée had the tomb transferred to the local hospice. It was returned to its original site in 1959. The Pope's remains, laid in a leather casket, were transferred to the tomb on 23 October 1960 by the papal nuncio to France.

## THE HERB GARDEN



Throughout the Middle Ages, medicine and pharmacy were practised within two broad movements, one secular and the other religious. The monasteries had conserved the essentials of Greek and Latin knowledge of the cultivation and use of plants.

Monastery gardens were divided into five parts : the vegetable and condiment garden ("hortus"), orchard, flower garden, private garden and the herb garden ("herbularius"). An active communication network between the monasteries enabled the monks to exchange cuttings and seeds of plants frequently used in the medieval pharmacopoeia.

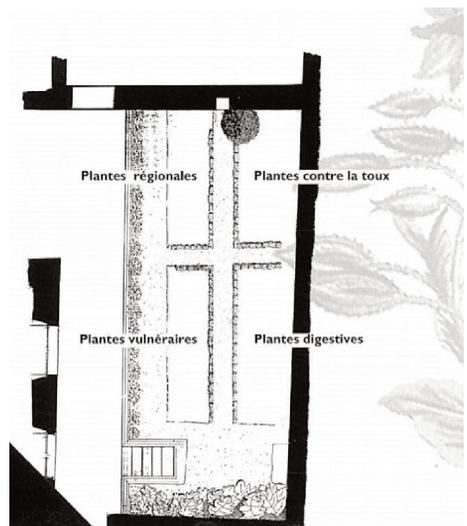
However, various councils in the 12th century forbade the monks to practise medicine outside the monasteries. Little by little, medicine became almost exclusively secular and separated into three professions : medicine, surgery and pharmacy.

Two French kings who were closely attached to Villeneuve lez Avignon had a powerful influence on pharmacy :

- In 1312, Philippe le Bel granted apothecaries the privilege of verifying and keeping weights and measures,
- In 1352, Jean le Bon detailed the body of knowledge they had to possess.

For Carthusian Monks, the herb garden was an integral part of the cell. Contact with the soil and its produce played a role in communion with the Creator, so the garden was a place where manual labour and prayer could be reconciled. The monastery library contained books on botany which testified of the interest the monks showed in medical matters - to which they had recourse when the therapy prescribed by the cook "coquinarius" proved insufficient.

Yet, in 1397, the Carthusian general chapter passed a decree confirming that no Carthusian monk had the right to practise medicine on outsiders. The plants grown in the garden, dried on racks in the sun (sofeiller) and taken to the dispensary at the end of Mulberry Lane could be used only within the monastery walls, with a few rare exceptions (at Durbon in the 17th century, for example, the monks sold drugs to earn money).



## Plants specific to our regions plants specific to our regions :

### **Burdock** - *Aretium minus* L - "ringworm grass"

The juice extracted from the roots, leaves and seeds was used as an antivenomous drug for insect bites and skin diseases.

### **Camomile** - *Chamaemelum nobile* All

The ancients used camomile to treat "women's complaints". Used in powder form to drive off insects.

### **Nettle** - *Urtica dioica* L - "ourtigo"

A prehistoric vegetable, used in soup to treat anaemia. An effective antihemorrhagic.

### **Rosemary** - *Rosmarinus officinalis* L - "wreath grass"

An aromatic herb symbolising love and immortality. It was sometimes burnt during religious ceremonies.

### **Savory** - *Satureia hortensis montana* L - "winter savory" / *Satureia montana* L - "pebre d'ase"

Symbol of innocence and monastic life. A condiment prized for its stimulating properties, used in infusions and decoctions.

### **Soapwort** - *Saponaria officinalis* L - "ditch soap"

In ancient times it was used to scour wool. Washerwomen used the rhizome as soap.

## Plants for treating coughs :

**Borage** - *Borago officinalis* L - Originally from the Mediterranean area, believed to have given its name to flannel or rough homespun. Used as a culinary herb in the Middle Ages, eaten both as a vegetable and in salads.

**Hyssop** - *Hyssopus officinalis* L - Commonly used during the Middle Ages to flavour soup, stuffing and roasts. The flowers are used as a plaster for coughs and steeped in wine as a remedy for lung ailments.

### **Nepeta** - *Nepeta cataria* L - "Catmint"

A plant which soothes people and excites cats. Used in herb teas and ointments. The leaves were chewed to soothe toothache.

**Mallow** - *Malva silvestris* L - Used to treat digestive and urinary complaints. A medicinal herb since 700 B.C.

**Violet** - *Viola odorata* L - An effective expectorant, used in infusions and decoctions. Violets are among the medicinal plants prescribed in Hippocrates' treatises.

**Verbena** - *Verbena officinalis* L - Used to prepare magic ointments in the Middle Ages and long known as an effective remedy for insomnia.

## Plants for healing wounds :

**Agrimony** - *Agrimonia eupatoria* L - "wild tea", "eupatorium", "St Wiliam's herb". The whole plant was

used as a poultice to heal wounds and keep singing voices pure.

### **Betony** - *Stachys officinalis* L - "guards' tobacco"

This plant was a remedy for 47 different illnesses! The roots and leaves were used in drinks, poultices and taken as snuff. It heals ulcers.

**Lavender** - *Lavandula officinalis* L - Mainly used as an essential oil obtained from the flowering tops. An antiseptic which can bring down a fever and keeps insects away.

### **Saint-John's Wort** - *Hypericum perforatum* L - "ipéricon"

A plant offering protection against evil spells and said to heal wounds. An anti-inflammatory and healing drug still used in folk medicine.

### **Ribwort** - *Plantago lanceolata* L - "carpenters' grass"

Its broad leaves look like footprints. A major remedy in ancient medicine, used for soothing and healing. Peasants used its leaves as handy bandages.

**Rue** - *Ruta graveolens* L - One of the Romans' favourite aromatic herbs. Reputed to be a cure-all in the Middle Ages. An anti-aphrodisiac which the monks mixed with their food. It can be toxic and dangerous.

## Plants with digestive properties :

**Wormwood** - *Artemisia absinthium* L - "incense", "holy herb". Regarded in the Scriptures as a symbol of trials and of life's sorrows (because of its bitterness). The leaves or the whole plant are used in decoctions and juices.

### **Smallage** - *Apium graveolens* L - "wild celery"

Wild celery, a condiment also used as a vegetable in the Middle Ages. All parts of the plant were used.

**Fennel** - *Foeniculum vulgare* Gaert. - "lou fanoun", "little hay". Aromatic plant which sweetens the breath. Used in decoctions, juices and as a dressing for liver, spleen and stomach ailments.

### **Pennyroyal Mint** - *Mentha pulegium* L - "flea grass"

From the Greek name of the nymph whom Persephone, in a fit of jealousy, turned into a plant. Used as a juice obtained from the leaves and flowering tops. A remedy for colds, leprosy and lice.

### **Sage** - *Salvia officinalis* L - "holy herb", "sauvi"

"He who has sage in his garden needs no doctor". A cure-all since ancient times. Used in baths, drinks, dressings, pills and ointment.

### **Thyme** - *Thymus vulgaris* L - "farigoule"

Used in ancient Egypt for embalming. The flowering tops are used in infusions and decoctions. An aromatic, used as a remedy for chills, coughs and influenza.

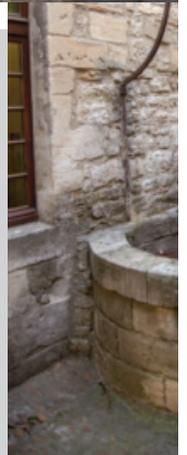
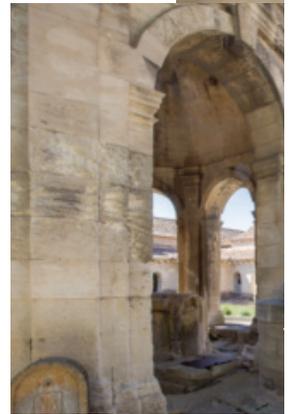
## THE WASH-HOUSE

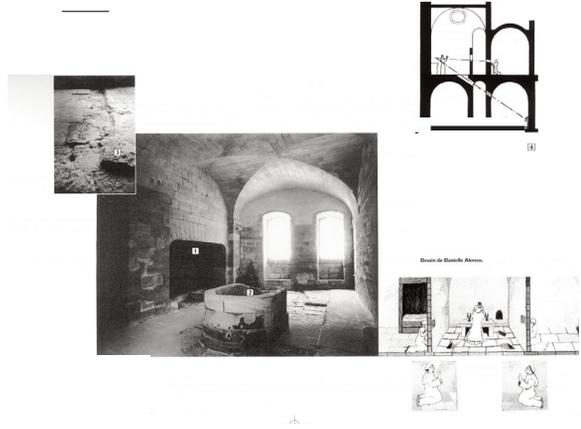
This building dates from the XVIII century. The first part is made up of two large rooms, one above the other, used for laundry - "bugade" in Provençal. The brothers did the washing in silence. We can see the fireplace, the well, the place where the washing was done and the old drains.

The building next to the wash-house was used as a place of confinement and isolation. It was built to an unusual design : dormer windows enabled the occupants of the cells to listen to the service being celebrated on the upper floor of the small chapel.

Alchery, possession of personal belongings and commerce with women was punished by confinement. It was also a place where a monk could examine his conscience if he could no longer live in the order. Sentences could not exceed a year, with penitence and fasting.

Beyond that, the monk was relieved of his vows. It was said that penitence had to be done in the world for transgressing the values of monastic life.





## WATER SUPPLY

The spring water used by the monastery comes from the Ermitage hill to the west, passing through a settling tank before reaching the main well in the Saint John cloister, the highest part of the monastery. The water was pumped into a reservoir for distribution round the monastery.

Clay pipes carried water into the cells so that the monks would not have to go outside.

The monastery's other two wells - in the wash-house and in the sacristy - are supplied by the water table (about 10 metres underground) which is in turn fed by the Rhône.

## FRESCO CHAPEL



Despite a lack of written evidence, a stylistic analysis attributes this decoration to a Siennese painter, Matteo Giovanetti, who was working in Avignon about this time. The frescoes date from 1354-1355.

### The technique of fresco painting :

“Fresco” comes from the Italian word “affresco” which means that the pigments are laid on a layer of wet plaster which fixes them by chemical reaction as it dries.

Before the first rough plaster layer (“abrisicio”) is applied, the artist makes a sketch called “sinopia” with red earth from Sienna.

The pigments are applied over the smooth second coat called “intonaco”. The mortar area needed for the day’s work is called “giornata”, or “pontata” if it is applied in horizontal strips.

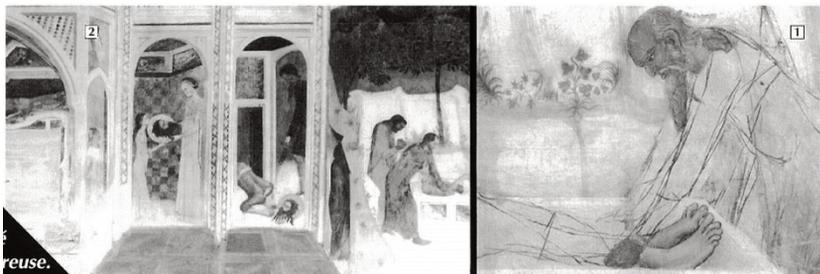
### Perspectives and trompe l’oeil :

Matteo Giovanetti was intrigued by the problem of portraying the impression of space and his inventiveness here reached an astounding degree of virtuosity for his time. His taste for perspective led him to paint numerous interiors, obtaining great depth through linear structure and subtle handling of light and shade.

He even painted the same scene on two walls meeting in the corner of a window recess. The scene flows from one wall to the other.

The illusion is sometimes heightened when the corner of the recess coincides with the corner of a painted building delineating the two parts of the scene.

The figures painted in some window recesses seem not only to participate in the action, but to move into the scene depicted on the adjoining wall.



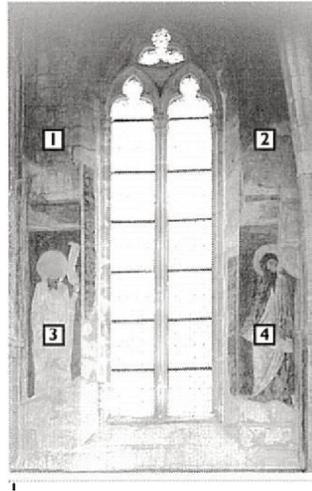
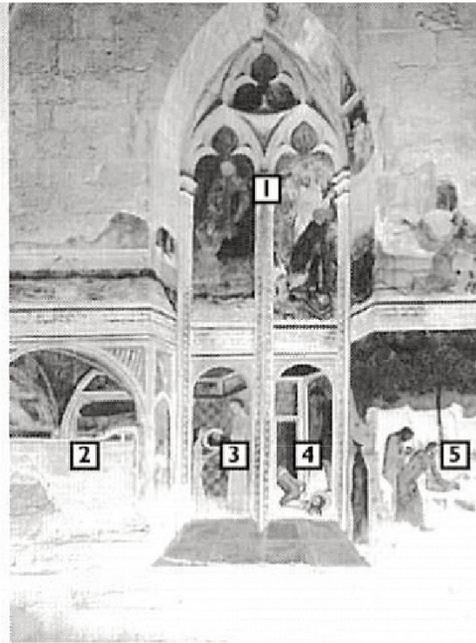


## THE CHAPEL OF THE DEAD

Opposite the Fresco Chapel is the Chapel of the Dead. It was built to open on to the cloister in the 18th century. When a monk died, his body was washed and clothed in his scapular. The monks kept a vigil over the body on the eve of his burial directly in the ground of the large cloister as the Customs strictly instructed.



## FRESCOS : HISTORY OF SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST

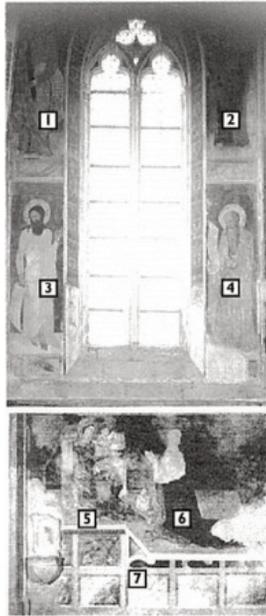


- 1- Christ 's mirades narrated to Saint John the Baptist (remains)
- 2- Herod's banque (remains)
- 3- Presentation of Saint John the Baptist's head to Herodlade
- 4- Saint John the Bapdst's beheadina
- 5- Saint John the Baptist's bunal

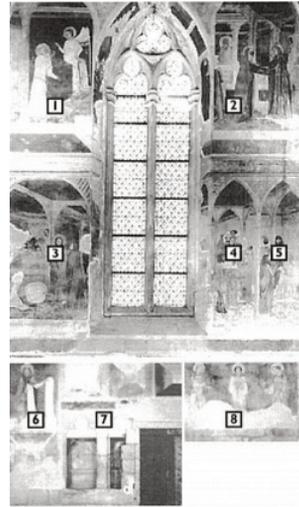
1 to 4 Aposties



- 1 to 4 Aposties  
 Crucifixion :  
 1- Saint John the Baptist  
 2- The Virgin Mary  
 3- Christ on the cross  
 4- Saint John the Evangelist  
 5- A bishop  
 6- Marble Imitations



- 1 to 4 Aposties  
 5- The Virgin Mary seated  
 with the Christ Child on  
 her knees  
 6- A Pope kneeling, the  
 tiara at his feet (the head is  
 missing) probably Innocent  
 VI  
 7- Harble imitations



- 1- The Angers Annuncia-  
 tion to Zachary  
 2- Visitation of the Virgin  
 Mary to Elizabeth  
 3- Saint John the Bap-  
 tist's birth  
 4- Circoncision  
 5- Imposition of the name  
 6- Pope standing, holding a  
 phylactery (probably a  
 benefactor of the order)  
 7- Marble imitations  
 8- The 3 deacons : Saint  
 Laurent, Saint Étienne,  
 Saint Vincent.



THANK YOU

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