

ASSISI,

a new, old look

The floor of the Lower Piazza of the Basilica of San Francesco has been restored, with materials from Italy, Israel, China and Brasil.

by Renato Cucchiarini - Mapei S.p.A.



Assisi's Lower Piazza is one of the town's landmark visitor attractions for Christians and pilgrims. Finally now, after protracted research and tests before the operative stage, the

refurbishment project has been completed. The flooring of the Basilica of Assisi, performed in collaboration with the "Internazionale Marmi e Macchine" firm, was unveiled at Carrara 2000... and it contains Mapei products.

The planning and administration stages were indeed very drawn out. Since 1993, the planners - architects Paolo Leonelli and Mario Struzzi - had been suggesting that materials from throughout the world be used for the floor of the Piazza Inferiore (Lower Piazza) of the Basilica; as if to sanctify and pay homage to the religious significance of the site and the name of San Francesco, and to the mutual exchange of faith between the religions of the world, as acknowledged and endorsed by Pope John Paul II. The idea was immediately embraced by the "Franciscan" order.

Frustratingly, the necessary research and testing extended the project length. Once completed, the project had included the excavation of the asphalt, reconstruction of the out-buildings, the casting of a bed of concrete 20 cm thick and then the installation of tiles following the traditional method, given that significant differences in thickness had to be accounted for.


The refurbished area totals approximately 5000 m² in which a large number of





different floor materials were used in a pattern of "regular alternation". Several were of Italian origin: Trachite Zovonite from the Euganei hills in North East Italy, Gravina Stone from Grotte Marallo, the red stone of Assisi mined from the surrounding area. Others add the "international touch": the Stone of Jerusalem from the Hebron Cave; Yang Sang granite from the Chinese city of Nang An; Rosa Flamingo Quarzite from Brasil; yellow dune granite from Namibia. The total cost of the operation was 9 billion lire, subsidised from the Italian government's Jubilee culture fund. It was also from this budget that the restoration



Marble sheets of various dimensions but uniform thickness – 10 cm – were laid in an end-to-end configuration, with joints of 1.5 cm. Planners aimed to make the surface suitable for pedestrian traffic. 



of the porticos, of the double-ramped eighteenth century staircase, and the exterior perimeter walls was financed, plus, of course, the repair of the serious damage caused by the September 1997 earthquake. The work was completed in just 12 months. So what exactly was Mapei's role? The flooring, composed of marble sheets sourced from a number of different countries and fitted on a dry sand base, needed to be finished with mechanically strong grouting (above all under stress from traffic – the piazza would double as a car park) also guaranteeing strong adhesion of the marble. STABILCEM* was hence the natural choice, with added sand to make it less fluid and so to prevent the surface from "sliding" down the gradient sloping away from the piazza. This product also satisfied the supervising committee which preferred an opaque mortar finish to the glossy look inevitable with a resin.

"The technical Data Sheet of the product mentioned in this article is contained in Mapei binder No. 3 "Building Line".

Stabilcem: Expanding cement binder for injection slurries, mortars and concrete.



TECHNICAL DATA

Piazza Inferiore (Lower Piazza) of the Basilica di San Francesco – Assisi, Perugia - Italy

Year of renovation: 1999

Planners: architects Paolo Leonelli and Mario Struzzi

Mapei product used: STABILCEM

Mapei co-ordinator: Renato Cucchiari