



Interview with Jane McIntosh of [Jane's Smart Art Guides](#)™

The following is an interview with Jane McIntosh, who is the narrator of a new series of audio guides focusing on the artistic and architectural treasures found throughout Europe. Her first work titled, '[ST. PETER'S BASILICA: Audio Guide to St. Peter's Basilica in Rome and its Remarkable Art Treasures](#)' has already won The Communicator Award of Excellence.

[Welcome](#)
[Floorplan](#)
[Square & Area](#)
[Documents](#)
[Images](#)

[Grottoes](#)
[Vatican City](#)
[Colonnade Saints](#)
[Floorplan #2](#)

[Altars](#)
[Monuments](#)
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[Chronology](#)

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So Jane, what's your background?

Jane

My interest in art started as a teenager, living in Europe, and I studied art history in university. Early on, I worked as a tour guide at Boston City Hall, but my career took a different track when I got an MBA at Columbia University and I spent two decades in consumer marketing, in both large corporations and start-up companies. But as so often happens, I began to feel that there was something missing. I started to read and travel again, and my love of art was rekindled.

I'm a more mature student now, of course ... I can appreciate that art history is so much more than artists' bios and artistic styles, and being able to array them on a timeline. The study of art through the ages is actually the study of social history, economics and politics, philosophy and religion ... it's the visual expression of the history of human experience.

While following my curiosity about the role of Christianity and the Church in the history of architecture and art, I've encountered a personal, spiritual element in my studies. Perhaps it's this conjunction of the intellectual and the spiritual that feeds my passion for exploring the history of churches and their art treasures.

Rome is my favorite place in the world. I feel so alive when I'm there. The layers and veins of history in Rome are endless ... it's for good reason that it's known as the Eternal City! But it can be overwhelming without some sort of structure to contain one's focus. I have found that learning about history within the context of the art at a particular site provides the structure that makes it meaningful.

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Why did you choose St Peter's for your audio guide?

Jane

The simple answer is, "When in Rome ... one visits St. Peter's!"

I did wonder if it was wise to tackle the most important church in western Christendom as the first title in the Jane's Smart Art Guide™ series! But I was inexorably drawn to it ... St. Peter's and the Vatican have been at the hub of society and culture and politics for two millennia. To delve into St. Peter's is to experience 2000 years of history. After which, one has the foundation to begin to peel back more layers at the dozens - hundreds -- of other churches around Rome, and Italy.

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What were your primary sources for information?

Jane

When creating a Jane's Smart Art Guide™, I gather and synthesize scholarly and not-so-scholarly writings in a variety of fields. Then I focus on making the material interesting and compelling for a lay person --- that is, people like me. I have an extensive library of books about art, artists, architecture, history ... and I'm always borrowing books, and scouring second-hand and out-of-print sources.

Of course, over the past few years, the internet has become a fantastic resource. But one has to be cautious and check the facts. As you know, there's a tremendous amount of misinformation out there. But used with care, the web is a tremendous tool, which allows me to quickly investigate even somewhat obscure details. And of course I have your website book-marked!

I could go on and on about books I'd recommend ... perhaps one day soon I'll add a bibliography to my website. One book that pops into mind is by one of my favorite historians, Michael Grant. I would recommend his biography, Saint Peter, to anyone who's interested in learning about the man -- Simon-Peter -- disentangled from faith, legend and artistic convention.

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What has been your personal experience in St Peter's?

Jane

It takes my breath away, every time! I find the sheer magnificent scale of the place to be awe-inspiring. And I love the way the light changes over the course of a day.

If you can be there late in the afternoon, when the crowds have thinned and the sun is low behind the Glory window ... it's a memorable sensation. The Glory is Bernini's great gilded burst of angels and rays representing light and spiritual wisdom, and billows of clouds framing the west-facing amber-colored window. At the center of it all is the dove, symbolizing the Holy Spirit. At day's end, the whole extravaganza is glorious, glowing! It's hard to fathom the scale of this fantastic theatrical construct, even when you learn that the dove's wingspan is 4-1/2 feet!

Another thing that always strikes me is how dazed so many of my fellow visitors look! St. Peter's provides a perfect demonstration of tourists being overwhelmed by so much to see ... with few clues as to the significance of any of it. Who were all those popes whose monuments line the side passages? And why are three women, Matilda, Christina and Maria Clementina memorialized here? And who are the figures in the two tiers of niches that line the nave and transept? What about the artists whose labors produced these dozens of sculptures, some of which are acknowledged masterpieces, while others have technical or stylistic importance in the history of art? So many people don't even realize that all but one of the huge "paintings" aren't paintings at all. They're actually mosaic copies of paintings that were removed soon after they were installed because the humid atmosphere was damaging them.

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What inspired you most about the basilica?

Jane

I like to think about the historical figures who have walked that pavement before me. And the timeless beautiful art treasures ... Michelangelo's Pieta of course, and his dome, and ...

But also ... the pilgrims. Among the flocks of tourists the pilgrims are easy to recognize. Many of them are realizing a long-cherished dream -- to come to Rome, to the Vatican, to pray at St. Peter's -- and they're virtually aglow with faith and spirituality. A sensitive observer can absorb much of the meaning of the place by taking in the emotion exuded by these pilgrims.

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What areas of the basilica would you like to visit?

Jane

I've never taken a tour of the "scavi". To be underground in the excavations, in the presence

of the 2000-year-old human remains that scholars believe to actually be St. Peter's, and to walk the street that was buried for 16 centuries, lined with beautifully decorated pagan mausolea ... that's definitely high on my list!

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What additional items would you add to your guide?

Jane

I think one day I'd like to do a separate guide to the grottoes. In the space between the floor of the new St. Peter's and the ancient floor of Constantine's church, Pope Gregory XIII laid out an extensive area to preserve the tombs that had stood under, in, or near the original building. The grottoes are filled with beautiful early Christian sarcophagi - including recycled pagan ones - and wonderful early history ...

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What are your plans for new audio guides?

Jane

I've just published the audio guide to Sta. Maria del Popolo, which is one of my favorite churches in Rome ... with its two magnificent Caravaggios and a good deal of other important art. Located where it is, adjacent to what was the principal North gate in and out of the city, Sta. Maria del Popolo has seen some fascinating history. Martin Luther lodged at the convent there during his single, disillusioning visit to Rome.

I'm hoping that the next audio guide to a church in Rome will be for San Clemente, which is another church with two millennia of history in its foundations. But I have just gained the audio rights to a series of books published in the 1990s, about the Great Fresco Cycles of the Italian Renaissance, so the next few Jane's Smart Art Guide™ titles will be drawn from that series. First will be a guide to Fra Angelico's frescoes at San Marco in Florence, which will be available, at least in MP3 format, in a couple of months. Michelangelo's Sistine ceiling and the Raphael rooms in the Vatican, Lorenzetti's Allegories of Good and Bad Government in the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena, Signorelli's San Brizio Chapel in the Duomo di Orvieto ... those are high on the list.

My original idea was to produce guides to "the remarkable art sites of Europe". But I'm personally such an Italophile, that my title plans are heavily weighted to Italy. But a Jane's Smart Art audio guide to Our Lady Cathedral in Antwerp is already available. Antwerp is wonderful little gem of a city that was once known as the Metropolis -- the most important city in Northern Europe. The cathedral has no fewer than four Rubens altarpieces! And I may have an audio guide to Chartres Cathedral out next year, if all goes well.

Editors Note:

More information on Jane's Smart Art Guides™ can be found at:
janessmartart.com

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