



A canopy with a tasseled canopy protects the tabernacle, as required by the liturgy.

On the entablature, musician angels have acrobatic positions. The upper register of the altarpiece is no less animated by angels and saints. Two angels crown the Virgin, welcomed by the Holy Spirit's dove, and the Eternal Father with his arms opened hangs atop a curved pediment.

Most of the components of this altarpiece are made of arolla wood, cembro pine, which has the double quality of being easy to cut and of having an essence that keeps insects away from the wood. In a dry place, the conservation is excellent for centuries.

The gilt has kept all its brilliance qualities. A recent restoration (around 25 years ago) fixed the broken pieces.

A component accompanies this major altarpiece and separates the nave from the choir and the profane from the divine world; it is the rood beam.

There are two other altarpieces in the lateral naves:

- The rosary altarpiece, originally the main altarpiece, located in the nave of the right.
- The Saint Michel altarpiece, in the left nave.

Photos: Tourist office of Champagny en Vanoise

Introductory text of the outside and the inside of the church:
Father HUDRY

For more information, contact the Tourist office



LA PLAGNE
CHAMPAGNY EN VANOISE

SAINT SIGISMUND CHURCH

On the way to Baroque



Impossible to miss it, it stands sentinel at the entrance of the village of Champagny en Vanoise.

Push the doors, you enter in the Baroque style with a magnificent main altarpiece, full of gold and cherubs, dated back to 1710. It is the exuberance of the Baroque! Take your time to seat and observe this ode to joy. You will find, under the guise of artistic expression, the essentials of the Catholic faith, Trinity, Incarnation, Redemption, Virgin and Saints...

A first structure, in the Romanesque style, might have been built at the hillock from the 5th century; but the first mention in the St Sigismund church's records are from 1171.

Following a blaze, the church has been rebuilt in 1648 by the two brothers of Samoëns, Claude and Jacques Riondet. Cost: 900 florins. A restoration more complete with extension was made in 1683 by two masters builders of Valsésia (Piedmont in Italy): Nicolas Calcia et Pierre Graullo.

Since then, numerous restoration and repair works have been made, due to the unsteady gypsum promontory where the building is built. Nowadays this church figures among the most beautiful Baroque edifice of the valley.

Historical context:

Following the 16th century schism that gave birth to the Protestantism, the Catholic Church gathered at Trent for an ecumenical council which was held thrice between 1545 and 1563. The Counter-Reformation that came out of it re-established the Church by taking another look at the dogma points, by reasserting the practice of the cult and by codifying the priests and the episcopacy.

It was in this context of modernity and reassertion of the catholic dogmas that Baroque art grew. It is the art of abundance and motion, in contrast to the austerity of the Protestantism.

Baroque art started from Italy and reached Savoy at the beginning of the 17th century. This time coincided with the end of two wars, famines, and plague epidemics. The population was increasing, which led to the creation of new parishes and the enlargement of Church buildings.

The archbishop of Tarentaise, who applied the prescriptions of the Council of Trent, were the real architects of Baroque art.

The outside :

The Saint Sigismund church as we see it today, dates from 1683 and totally corresponds to the Baroque period, by its outside appearance as much as its inside. The building is built on a gypsum's promontory, which leads to a lot of instability problems, and is located at the centre of an amphitheatre visible from all hamlets of Champagne.

It is a typical church of the 17th century: hall church with three naves and radiating chapel. The building is impressive and austere. The only decoration outside is the portal on the frontage. This stepped portal (suggesting an elevation), made of ashlar, consists of two columns of Tuscan order supporting a pediment interrupted by a niche containing a statue of the Virgin. On either side of the doorway are two niches with statues of Saint Sigismund, patron saint of the church, and Catherine of Alexandria.



The inside:

The church has three naves: one central and two laterals. The nave vaults were substituted for a wooden ceiling to suppress the pressure on the walls, which were themselves hopped due to the instability of the ground.

Above the entrance is the tribune, originally kept for the Brotherhood of the Blessed Sacrament (see the painting above the tribune), which was for men only. To the left is the covered baptismal font, dating from the 17th century.

The main piece of the church, where the light and the eyes meet, is the main altarpiece, or high altar, located in the choir.

At this location, there used to be the work of François Cuenot (from the county of Franche Comté), which is now the altar of the Rosary in the nave of the right.



Four twisted columns with composite capitals frame a painting representing the Virgin and Child and the 15 mysteries of the Rosary in medallions.

The current altarpiece, made by Jacques Clénant, replaced in 1710 the one of François Cuenot.

Despite restorations, it has retained its original uniformity. It is the best example of Savoyard Baroque where we find all the characteristics: curved line, breaking of the straight line, exuberance of the decoration, pathos of the characters, symmetry in the whole composition and in the details.

The bas-relief panel of the antependium (before the altar) depicts Jesus in the middle of musician angels and expresses the joy of heaven.

The apparent disorder of the moving angels' heads hides an admirable symmetry.

The tabernacle (containing the eucharistic reserve) is treated as a self-sufficient construction: twisted columns framing the door and the side niches, extended on each side by cartouches representing scenes from the Passion.

Framed between two mixed columns with caryatids in the centre of the altarpiece, a high relief evokes the Virgin in Assumption contemplated by Saint Sigismund and a Virgin Martyr.