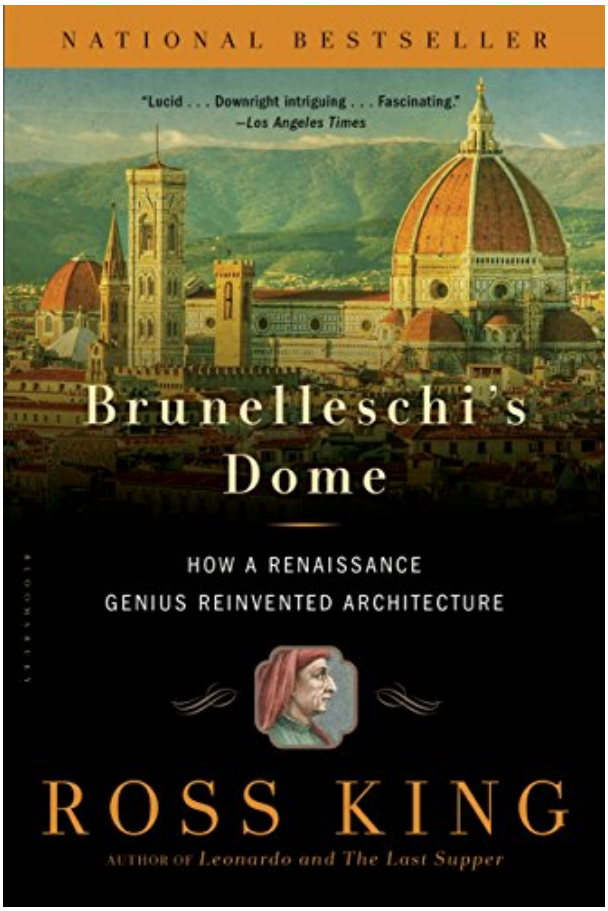
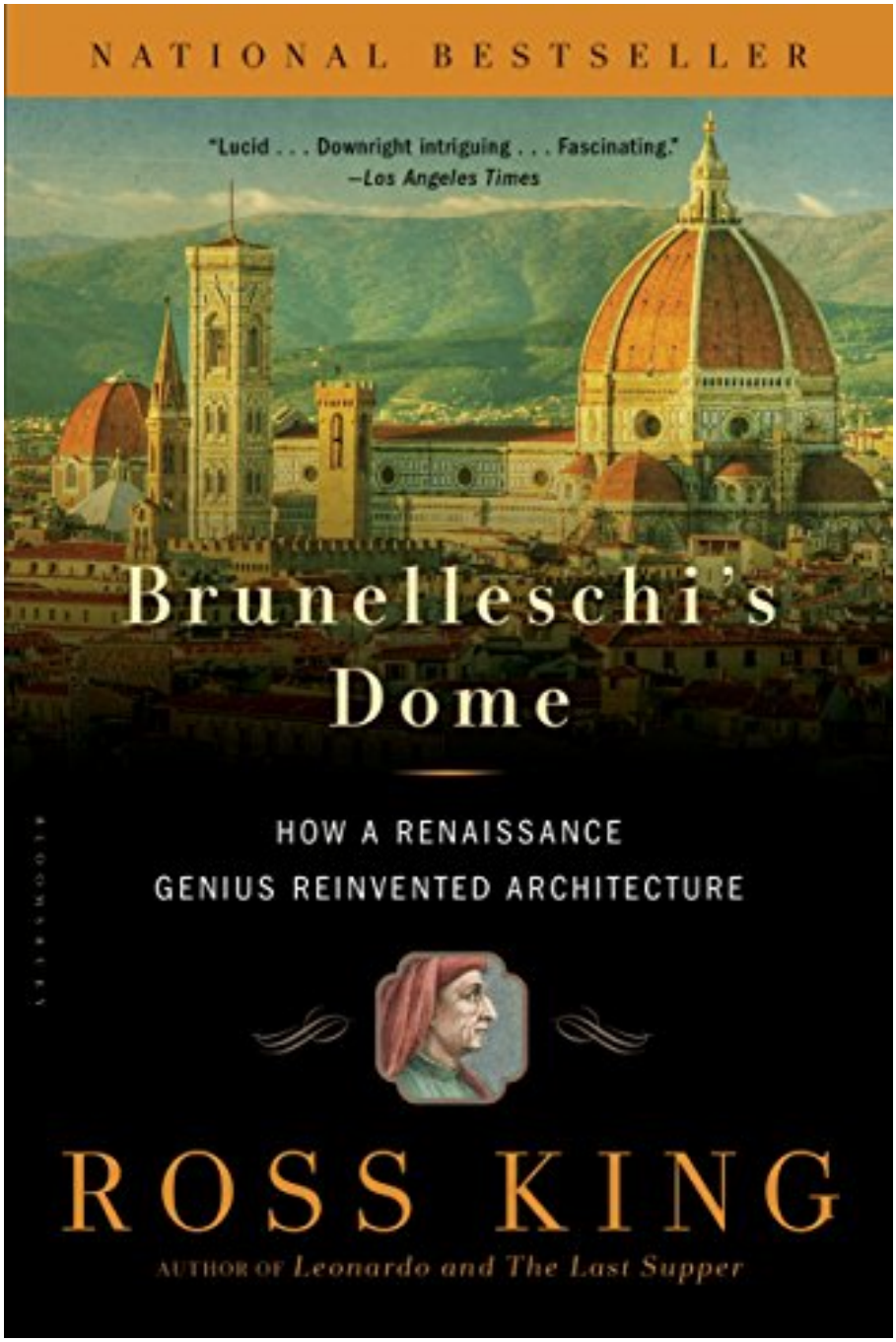
BRUNELLESCHI'S DOME: HOW A RENAISSANCE GENIUS REINVENTED ARCHITECTURE BY ROSS KING





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Amazon.com Review
Filippo Brunelleschi's design for the dome of the cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore in Florence remains one of the most towering achievements of Renaissance architecture. Completed in 1436, the dome remains a remarkable feat of design and engineering. Its span of more than 140 feet exceeds St Paul's in London and St Peter's in Rome, and even outdoes the Capitol in Washington, D.C., making it the largest dome ever constructed using bricks and mortar. The story of its creation and its brilliant but "hot-tempered" creator is told in Ross King's delightful Brunelleschi's Dome.

Both dome and architect offer King plenty of rich material. The story of the dome goes back to 1296, when work began on the cathedral, but it was only in 1420, when Brunelleschi won a competition over his bitter rival Lorenzo Ghiberti to design the daunting cupola, that work began in earnest. King weaves an engrossing tale from the political intrigue, personal jealousies, dramatic setbacks, and sheer inventive brilliance that led to the paranoid Filippo, "who was so proud of his inventions and so fearful of plagiarism," finally seeing his dome completed only months before his death. King argues that it was Brunelleschi's improvised brilliance in solving the problem of suspending the enormous cupola in bricks and mortar (painstakingly detailed with precise illustrations) that led him to "succeed in performing an engineering feat whose structural daring was without parallel." He tells a compelling, informed story, ranging from discussions of the construction of the bricks, mortar, and marble that made up the dome, to its subsequent use as a scientific instrument by the Florentine astronomer Paolo Toscanelli. --Jerry Brotton, Amazon.co.uk

From Publishers Weekly
Walker was the hardcover publisher of Dava Sobel's sleeper smash, Longitude, and Mark Kurlansky's steady-seller Cod: A Biography of the Fish that Changed the World. This brief, secondary source-based account is clearly aimed at the same lay science-cum-adventure readership. British novelist King (previously unpublished in the U.S.) compiles an elementary introduction to the story of how and why Renaissance Italian architect Filippo Brunelleschi (1377-1446) designed and oversaw the construction of the enormous dome of Florence's Santa Maria del Fiore cathedralAdesigning its curves so that they needed no supporting framework during construction: a major Renaissance architectural innovation. Illustrated with 26 b&w period prints, the book contains 19 chapters, some very brief. Although the result is fast moving and accessible, King overdoes the simplicity to the point that the book appears unwittingly as if it was intended

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From Booklist
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On August 19, 1418, a competition concerning Florence's magnificent new cathedral, Santa Maria del Fiore--already under construction for more than a century--was announced: "Whoever desires to make any model or design for the vaulting of the main Dome....shall do so before the end of the month of September." The proposed dome was regarded far and wide as all but impossible to build: not only would it be enormous, but its original and sacrosanct design shunned the flying buttresses that supported cathedrals all over Europe. The dome would literally need to be erected over thin air.

Of the many plans submitted, one stood out--a daring and unorthodox solution to vaulting what is still the largest dome (143 feet in diameter) in the world. It was offered not by a master mason or carpenter, but by a goldsmith and clockmaker named Filippo Brunelleschi, who would dedicate the next twenty-eight years to solving the puzzles of the dome's construction. In the process, he did nothing less than reinvent the field of architecture.

Brunelleschi's Dome is the story of how a Renaissance genius bent men, materials, and the very forces of nature to build an architectural wonder we continue to marvel at today. Denounced at first as a madman, Brunelleschi was celebrated at the end as a genius. He engineered the perfect placement of brick and stone, built ingenious hoists and cranes to carry an estimated 70 million pounds hundreds of feet into the air, and designed the workers' platforms and routines so carefully that only one man died during the decades of construction--all the while defying those who said the dome would surely collapse and his own personal obstacles that at times threatened to overwhelm him.

Even today, in an age of soaring skyscrapers, the cathedral dome of Santa Maria del Fiore retains a rare power to astonish. Ross King brings its creation to life in a fifteenth-century chronicle with twenty-first-century resonance.

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How a 15th century clock-maker built the magnificent dome of Santa Maria del Fiore's Cathedral in Florence
By Bibliophile
This is the true story of how Filippo Brunelleschi, a goldsmith and clockmaker, not an architect, built one of the greatest architectural achievements in all of human history, the main dome on top of Santa Maria del

Fiore Cathedral in Florence, Italy.

The story begins in 1400 during another outbreak of the Black Plague. In order to "appease the wrathful deity", the Guild of Cloth Merchants held a competition for a new set of bronze doors for the Baptistery of San Giovanni. Each candidate was given four sheets of bronze and asked to illustrate the biblical account of Abraham sacrificing his son Isaac in Genesis 22:2-13. They were given a year to complete it. First, they had to model the figure in seasoned clay, then cover it with wax. The wax was then carved into the desired relief-work with extreme precision. A third layer was added, a paste which consisted of burned ox horn, iron fillings, and cow dung mixed with water. Several layers of soft clay were applied. This was placed in a kiln and baked until the clay hardened and the wax melted. A hollow was thereby left into which melted bronze was poured. Afterwards, the husk of clay was broken away. The bronze figure would then be chiseled, engraved, polished and gilded. Working with bronze was so difficult that Michelangelo would request a Mass to be said whenever he began pouring a bronze statue!

The competition came down to two competitors. Lorenzo Ghiberti, the son of a goldsmith, shaped his piece according to advice he cunningly sought from other artists and sculptors, many of whom comprised the 34 judges. His piece was graceful and elegant, and used less bronze. Brunelleschi worked in isolation for fear that someone would steal his plans and take credit for them. His piece is more dramatic, portraying Abraham and the angel in melodramatic and even violent poses above the contorting Isaac.

One of two things happened next. Either Lorenzo was awarded the commission "without a dissenting voice," according to his autobiography, or both were awarded the commission provided they work together. Brunelleschi refused to do this, so he withdrew and spent the next 15 years making clocks in Rome. Ghiberti spent the next 22 years working on the bronze doors. They weighed 10 tons, and are one of the greatest masterpieces of Florentine art.

In 1416 or 1417, Brunelleschi returned to Florence. There, he is credited with having invented (or rediscovered) linear perspective, the representation of three-dimensional objects in recession on a two-dimensional surface. Sitting 6 feet inside and facing the doorway of Santa Maria del Fiore Cathedral, he painted onto a small panel, in perfect perspective, everything that was visible through the "frame" of the doorway. When finished, he drilled a small hole into the painting. Then he stood on the exact spot where he painted, turned the painting away from him in one hand, and held a mirror in the other hand. When he looked through the hole, the mirror reflected what he had painted as though he was looking at the actual scene through the doorway.

In August 1418, a competition was announced to build a model for the dome for the Santa Maria del Fiore. A major challenge was "centering", the need to build a wooden framework to support the dome while the mortar cured. The actual dome would require a massive structure made from 700 trees. One competitor proposed building the dome on a temporary mound of dirt piled 300 feet high! Filippo had an even more ridiculous notion. He would build the dome without any supporting structure at all! When the committee asked him how he planned to do that, he would not tell them, preferring that no one steal his ingenuity. The frustrated committee called him "an ass and a babbler." In spite of this ridicule, Brunelleschi's plans intrigued the committee. The project would cost far less without a supporting structure, if it could be done.

Again, history repeated itself when the committee narrowed down the competition to two models, one by Lorenzo Ghiberti and the other by Filippo Brunelleschi. In the end, the committee awarded the design to Brunelleschi as chief architect, but also assigned Ghiberti as one of his 3 assistant architects. Another assistant, Giovanni da Prato, harbored resentment against Brunelleschi because his dubious design of putting 24 windows around the base of the heavy dome was rejected. He believed Brunelleschi's design would result

in a church that was too "murky and gloomy."

After more than 50 years of planning and delay, work on the dome began on August 7, 1420. Most of the workers came from poor families and were called popolo minuto, "little people." The unskilled laborers who carried the bricks and the lime were called uomini senza nome e famiglia, "men without name or family." They worked from Monday to Saturday, from dawn to dusk, 14-hour days in the summer. They were paid every Saturday. Sometimes they were dismissed an hour or two early so they could buy food in the stalls, which were closed on Sunday. Work was forbidden on Sundays and religious feasts, except for men who had to water the masonry to keep it moist and workable. Their most important festival was November 8th, the feast of their patron saints, the Quattro Coronati: four Christian sculptors martyred by the emperor Diocletian for refusing to carve a statue of the pagan god Aesculapius. When it was too cold or wet to work, Brunelleschi's foreman, Battista d'Antonio, drew five names of all the masons and set them to work in the shelter, plastering and bricklaying, while the rest of the workers were sent home without pay.

Each morning church bells rang to rouse the workers from their beds. They carried their own tools: chisels, T-squares, hammers, trowels, and mallets. Upon arriving at the cathedral in semidarkness, they inscribed their names on a gesso board. They climbed several hundred stone steps to the working level. (Ten years later they would climb the equivalent of a 40-story building just to begin their workday.) Their climb was illuminated by a system of lighting that Filippo devised to keep them from stumbling and falling in the dark stairwell. In all, four sets of stairs rise from the ground to the top, each one built into one of the four enormous piers on which the dome rests. Two were used for climbing up, and two for climbing down. (Today, after more than five centuries of use, these sandstone steps are remarkably unworn.)

Their work hours were recorded by a sand hour glass. At eleven o'clock they ate food they had carried with them in leather pouches. A cookshop was installed between the two cupolas without fear of an open fire on the dome, since the masons also served as Florence's firemen. They were the only ones who owned the tools to create firebreaks by tearing down walls! To slake their thirst on sweltering summer days they drank wine, since water carried bacteria, and therefore disease.

To hoist the 70 million pounds of brick, stone, and mortar up to the workers, Brunelleschi designed a remarkable machine (which is much better explained by the diagrams in the book). One or two oxen were yoked to a wooden tiller which turned a vertical shaft with two cogged wheels. The loads were raised or lowered depending upon which wheel was engaged at the time. These wheels meshed with a horizontal shaft which had one end of a rope tied to it. The other end of the rope went up to the height of the dome, threaded through a pulley, and was tied to a loading bucket down at ground level. As the oxen walked, the rope wound around the horizontal shaft, pulling up the loaded bucket.

Sounds simple, but what made Brunelleschi's machine so innovative was something not previously found in the history of engineering. At the base of the vertical shaft was a helical screw which acted like a reversible gear. Notched into this screw was a square hole or pinion to insert the tiller. A hole was also notched into the vertical shaft. A load was raised when the tiller was inserted directly into the pinion of the vertical shaft. This engaged one of the two cogged wheels that turned in that direction. When the tiller was put into the hole in the helical screw, the vertical shaft was lowered and then engaged the second cogged wheel which turned everything in the opposite direction. This was ingenious because then the oxen could keep walking in the same direction. Using this machine, one ox could raise a 1,000 pound load to an elevation of 200 feet in 13 minutes. On average, the hoist raised 50 loads per day.

This machine solved the problem of raising and lowering loads. What was now needed was a way to move the loads sideways after they reached the top. Once again, Brunelleschi designed a machine called the

castello, a wooden mast surmounted by a pivoted horizontal beam. The horizontal crossbeam had screws, slideways, and a counterweight. One of the screws moved the counterweight along the slideway, while the other manipulated the load, which could be raised or lowered by a turnbuckle. Thus, large stone beams could be laid in place with pinpoint accuracy.

When domes are constructed, their weight tends to push outward, threatening collapse. Most people have seen external buttresses that hold up the walls of cathedrals. To contain this pressure, called "hoop stress", Brunelleschi built 4 sandstone chains that surround the dome at intervals of 35 feet. These chains served as internal, invisible buttresses against the dome's outward pressures. Each chain consisted of two concentric rings of stone laid horizontally around the octagonal circumference of the dome. These long beams rested on, and interlocked with, shorter beams laid transversely, like railway ties, at intervals of every three feet. A fifth chain, made of chestnut, also encircles the dome.

The dome is actually two domes, one inside of the other. The outer shell, an eight-sided octagon, gives impressive height to the building and shields the inner shell from the weather. The inner shell, which partially supports the outer dome, conforms better to the interior proportions of the cathedral.

How was it possible for 8 teams of masons, each working on one side of the octagonal dome, to raise their separate walls so that they would all converge at the top? Downstream from Florence, Brunelleschi had a large area of the Arno River bank leveled, about one half mile in each direction. Here, in the sand, he traced a full-scale plan of the dome. Then templates for each of the 8 vertical ribs were made from this enormous design. The templates were made from pine and reinforced with sheets of iron. They were then fitted onto the outside wall of the inner shell, allowing them to serve as guides for both shells.

Without a supporting structure for the dome, the masons moved around the dome on ponti, narrow platforms made from willow withes and supported on wooden rods inserted into the masonry. To calm their nerves, Brunelleschi built a parapetto, or balcony, on the inside of the vault. It served as a safety net and prevented the masons from "looking down." Other safety measures included wearing safety harnesses and diluting their wine with water. To Brunelleschi's credit, in the many years of building the dome, only one worker lost his life.

As each layer of brick was laid, how did Brunelleschi keep everything centered? He left no written plans or diagrams for posterity. In the 1490's, a Florentine historian said that Brunelleschi stretched a cord from the center of the dome to the inside edges of the bricks. This cord, which could sweep 360 degrees around the cupola, would have risen and progressively shortened as each layer of brick was added, and the dome's radius shrank from 70 feet at its foot to only 10 feet at the top. Thus, every brick was laid in its exact position from the center of the dome.

About 4 million bricks were laid: rectangular, triangular, dovetailed, bricks with flanges, and bricks shaped to fit the angles of the octagon. The mortar was made by heating limestone in a kiln, turning it into powdery quicklime (calcium oxide), and then mixing it with water and sand. As the dome rose in height, it leaned inward more and more. The bricks were not laid completely flat, but at ever-increasing angles. At 57 feet high, the dome angles 30 degrees to the horizon. At the top, 60 degrees. What prevented the dome from collapsing inward as it rose without supporting scaffolding?

Here is what Brunelleschi instructed his builders to do. After every three feet of horizontal brick was laid (about 5 bricks), the mason took a larger brick and place it vertically on end. As the dome ascended, these vertical bricks formed a zigzag or herringbone pattern. It was this herringbone pattern that helped to kept the dome (the two shells) from falling inward. The vertical bricks acted like clamps, or book-ends, by applying

pressure to the row of bricks on either side of them, locking them into place. Because the vertical bricks passed through several horizontal rings of brick, each three-foot section of brick was connected to several completed layers below it. These new sections of brick became self-contained, horizontal arches capable of withstanding the inward pull of gravity.

But the herringbone pattern of the bricks was not the only thing that kept the inward-leaning walls from collapsing. The inner shell was 7 feet thick at the base and 5 feet thick at the top. Within the inner shell, Brunelleschi constructed nine continuous circular rings at 8-foot intervals. Each of these brick rings was 3 feet wide and 2 feet high. They connected the corner spurs of the 8 vertical ribs of the octagonal walls, thus giving strength to the outer shell and preventing it from falling inward. This is how Brunelleschi was able to prevent two shells with different shapes from collapsing. The inner shell is a spherical dome. The outer shell is an eight-sided dome. Both shells were connected by these nine horizontal rings.

On March 25, 1436, the Feast of the Annunciation, the cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore and its new dome were consecrated by Pope Eugenius IV, 7 cardinals, 37 bishops, and 9 members of the Florentine government, including Cosimo de' Medici. The dome had been under construction for 16 years and 2 weeks. It still required work. The exterior surface needed to be tiled with terra cotta, which took another 2 years. And the facings of colored marble would take another generation to complete.

To top off the dome, a lantern was needed. It brought light and fresh air into the dome. Octagonal in shape, it sits on a marble platform supported by the final sandstone chain. Its eight buttresses rise in line with the eight ribs of the dome to support 30-foot-high pilasters crowned with Corinthian capitals. Between the pilasters are eight windows, each 30 feet high. The lantern's interior features a small dome upon which sits a 23-foot high spire. This is capped with a bronze ball and cross. Inside one of the buttresses (all of which all hollow to lighten the weight of the lantern) is a stairway leading to a series of ladders, which lead up into the bronze ball itself. This giant ball is fitted with a small flat window that, at 350 feet above the streets, offers the highest panoramic view of Florence.

Unwittingly, the lantern would later perform an esteemed service for astronomy. In 1475, Paolo Toscanelli, one of the greatest mathematicians and astronomers of the century, climbed to the top and placed a bronze plate at the base of the lantern. In the center of the plate was an opening for the sun's rays to pass and then fall 300 feet to a special gauge on the cathedral floor. This allowed Toscanelli to calculate the exact moment of both the summer solstice and and the vernal equinox. Now, essential religious dates such as Easter could be established. But more importantly, the true position of the sun to the horizon could be calculated. Toscanelli used these observations of the motion of the sun to correct and revise the maps and tables used in navigating the open seas. His calculations vastly improved global exploration, and may have helped Columbus in his discovery of America 17 years later in 1492.

On April 15, 1446, after working on the dome for over a quarter of a century, Filippo Brunelleschi died from a brief illness in the house where he had lived for his entire life. Having never married, he passed away at the age of 69 with his adopted son and heir, Buggiano, at his bedside. His sudden death brought tremendous grief to the people of Florence. His funeral took place beneath the dome he had built. Thousands of mourners filed past, including all the masons who had laid the bricks in the dome. He was buried within the cathedral under the south aisle in the simplest of tombs. A marble slab reads, "Here lies the body of the great ingenious Filippo Brunelleschi of Florence." His outward appearance is known from a plaster cast of his head and shoulders made shortly after his death. In 1972, his bones were exhumed. Forensic tests showed him to stand 5 feet 4 inches tall with an above-average cranial capacity. The chancellor of Florence, Carlo Marsuppini, composed his epitaph, and referred to Brunelleschi as having divino ingenio, divine genius. This is the first recorded instance of an architect or sculptor being said to have received divine inspiration for his work.

The weight of the dome is estimated at 37,000 tons (74 million pounds). How well was the dome constructed? Three earthquakes have occurred since it was made, in 1510, 1675, and 1895. None of the quakes caused damage to the cupola. In 1540, after being named chief architect of St. Peter Basilica in Rome, Michelangelo climbed to the top of Brunelleschi's dome. He was also a proud Florentine, and he claimed he would build a dome that could equal Filippo's dome. He missed it by 10 feet!

Brunelleschi left no diagrams or written instructions on how he built this dome. It has been a mystery for centuries. But in 2012, twelve years after this book was written, a mini-dome measuring 9 feet in circumference was unearthed near Florence's cathedral. It was found under a construction workshop used during Brunelleschi's day. It is believed to have served as Brunelleschi's scale model for the actual dome, since it is made of brick arranged in a herringbone pattern!

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.
I LOVED IT
By E. Piper
I loved this book. Perhaps because I love Florence, have stood spellbound looking up at the dome of the church of Santa Maria del Fiore or perhaps because the story of how a man's dream of building a dome without buttresses or wooden centering (wooden support posts) actually came to pass. Whatever the reason, I found the book both beautiful and fascinating.

Though the book was about the building of the dome it was about so much more. It told the reader about life in renaissance Florence and brought us into the lives of the people, how they lived, what they ate, the inner workings of their guilds and political system and even how they made bricks. It was truly a wonderful read and I will now order Ross King's book about the painting of the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel by Michelangelo.

If you love renaissance history, Florence, art or just enjoy reading a well written story, this is a book is for you.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.
If you are trying to understand the architectural/structural brilliance of the dome -- you are better off reading the wikipedia
By Saul Kravitz
See the review entitled "Brisk Narrative, Busted Contract" for clearer elucidation of my gripe with this book.
If you are looking for the "story" of how the dome was built, and how Brunelleschi navigated the politics of florence to get it done -- 5 stars.
If you are trying to understand the architectural/structural brilliance of the dome -- you are better off reading the wikipedia article http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Florence_Cathedral#Dome . The figures in the book are inadequate to provide understanding. Annotated pictures would have been worth tens of pages of descriptions. I was disappointed.

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Amazon.com Review
Filippo Brunelleschi's design for the dome of the cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore in Florence remains one of the most towering achievements of Renaissance architecture. Completed in 1436, the dome remains a remarkable feat of design and engineering. Its span of more than 140 feet exceeds St Paul's in London and St Peter's in Rome, and even outdoes the Capitol in Washington, D.C., making it the largest dome ever constructed using bricks and mortar. The story of its creation and its brilliant but "hot-tempered" creator is told in Ross King's delightful Brunelleschi's Dome.

Both dome and architect offer King plenty of rich material. The story of the dome goes back to 1296, when work began on the cathedral, but it was only in 1420, when Brunelleschi won a competition over his bitter rival Lorenzo Ghiberti to design the daunting cupola, that work began in earnest. King weaves an engrossing tale from the political intrigue, personal jealousies, dramatic setbacks, and sheer inventive brilliance that led to the paranoid Filippo, "who was so proud of his inventions and so fearful of plagiarism," finally seeing his dome completed only months before his death. King argues that it was Brunelleschi's improvised brilliance in solving the problem of suspending the enormous cupola in bricks and mortar (painstakingly detailed with precise illustrations) that led him to "succeed in performing an engineering feat whose structural daring was without parallel." He tells a compelling, informed story, ranging from discussions of the construction of the bricks, mortar, and marble that made up the dome, to its subsequent use as a scientific instrument by the Florentine astronomer Paolo Toscanelli. --Jerry Brotton, Amazon.co.uk

From Publishers Weekly
Walker was the hardcover publisher of Dava Sobel's sleeper smash, Longitude, and Mark Kurlansky's steady-seller Cod: A Biography of the Fish that Changed the World. This brief, secondary source-based account is clearly aimed at the same lay science-cum-adventure readership. British novelist King (previously unpublished in the U.S.) compiles an elementary introduction to the story of how and why Renaissance Italian architect Filippo Brunelleschi (1377-1446) designed and oversaw the construction of the enormous dome of Florence's Santa Maria del Fiore cathedralAdesigning its curves so that they needed no supporting framework during construction: a major Renaissance architectural innovation. Illustrated with 26 b&w period prints, the book contains 19 chapters, some very brief. Although the result is fast moving and accessible, King overdoes the simplicity to the point that the book appears unwittingly as if it was intended for young adults. (Donatello, Leonardo and Michelangelo, for example, "took a dim view of marriage and women.") This book feels miles away from its actual characters, lacking the kind of dramatic flourish that

would bring it fully to life. Despite direct quotes from letters and period accounts, the "would have," "may have" and "must have" sentences pile up. Still, the focus on the dome, its attendant social and architectural problems, and the solutions improvised by Brunelleschi provide enough inherent tension to carry readers along. (Oct. 23)

From Booklist
Like the poetry of Petrarch or the artistry of Giotto, the architecture of Filippo Brunelleschi radiates the talent of a Renaissance genius. King illuminates the mysterious sources of inspiration and the secretive methods of this architectural genius in a fascinating chronicle of the building of his masterwork, the dome of Santa Maria del Fiore. Unsurpassed by St. Peter's in Rome or St. Paul's in London, Filippo's sublime dome required an imaginative leap in its conception and a stubborn relentlessness in its execution. King details how Filippo waged and won his 28-year battle to raise the magnificent structure, surmounting every technical, political, and artistic obstacle. And just as his dome created a visual focus for the city of Florence, his exploits in building it wove together numerous strands of municipal history--war, disease, intrigue, commerce--making one glorious narrative cord. King demonstrates a remarkable range, explaining everything from how Filippo engineered the hoists for raising stone to why the masons working on the dome drank diluted wine, but he always brings us back to the one incandescent mind performing the one matchless feat that would forever transform architecture from a mechanical craft into a creative art. Bryce Christensen

Brunelleschi's Dome: How A Renaissance Genius Reinvented Architecture By Ross King. Someday, you will discover a brand-new experience and knowledge by investing more cash. But when? Do you believe that you require to get those all demands when having significantly money? Why do not you attempt to get something basic at very first? That's something that will lead you to know more about the world, experience, some locations, past history, entertainment, as well as a lot more? It is your very own time to proceed reviewing practice. One of the e-books you can appreciate now is Brunelleschi's Dome: How A Renaissance Genius Reinvented Architecture By Ross King right here.