

= San Sebastian Church ( Manila ) =

The Basílica Menor de San Sebastián , better known as San Sebastian Church , is a Roman Catholic minor basilica in Manila , Philippines and the seat of the Parish of San Sebastian .

Completed in 1891 , San Sebastian Church is noted for its architectural features. an example of the revival of Gothic architecture in the Philippines , it is the only all @-@ steel temple in the Philippines , and is the only prefabricated steel church in the world . In 2006 , San Sebastian Church was included in the Tentative List for possible designation as a World Heritage Site . It was designated as a National Historical Landmark by the Philippine government in 1973 .

San Sebastian Church is under the care of The Order of the Augustinian Recollects , who also operate a college adjacent to the basilica . It is located at Plaza del Carmen , at the eastern end of Recto Avenue , in Quiapo , Manila .

= = History = =

In 1621 , Bernardino Castillo , a generous patron and a devotee of the 3rd @-@ century Roman martyr Saint Sebastian , donated the land upon which the church stands . The original structure , made of wood , burned in 1651 during a Chinese uprising . Succeeding structures , which were built of brick , were destroyed by fire and earthquakes in 1859 , 1863 , and 1880 .

In the 1880s , Esteban Martínez , the parish priest of the ruined church , approached the Spanish architect Genaro Palacios , with a plan to build a fire and earthquake @-@ resistant structure made entirely of steel . Palacios completed a design that fused Earthquake Baroque with the Neo @-@ Gothic style . His final design was said to have been inspired by the famed Gothic Burgos Cathedral in Burgos , Spain .

= = = Construction = = =

The prefabricated steel sections that would compose the church were manufactured in Binche , Belgium . According to the historian Ambeth Ocampo , the knockdown steel parts were ordered from the Societe anonyme des Enterprises de Travaux Publiques in Brussels . In all , 52 tonnes ( 51 long tons ; 57 short tons ) of prefabricated steel sections were transported in eight separate shipments from Belgium to the Philippines , the first shipment arriving in 1888 . Belgian engineers supervised the assembly of the church , the first column of which was erected on September 11 , 1890 . The walls were filled with mixed sand , gravel , and cement . The stained glass windows were imported from the Heinrich Oidtmann Company , a German stained glass firm , while local artisans assisted in applying the finishing touches .

The church was raised to the status of a minor basilica by Pope Leo XIII on June 24 , 1890 . Upon its completion the following year , on August 16 , 1891 , the Basílica Menor de San Sebastián was consecrated by Bernardino Nozaleda y Villa OP , the 25th Archbishop of Manila .

According to Jesús Pastor Paloma , an Augustinian Recollect priest , the structure was also supposed to have a prefabricated retablo ( reredos ) altar , which was lost at sea when the ship carrying it from Belgium capsized in a storm ; a wooden altar was made locally in its stead . Paloma also noted that the bottom part of the church was designed to resemble a ship 's hull , so that it would sway during an earthquake .

= = = Gustave Eiffel = = =

It has long been reputed that Gustave Eiffel , the French engineer behind the Eiffel Tower and the steel structure within the Statue of Liberty , was involved in the design and construction of San Sebastián , but this was never confirmed .

= = Features = =

San Sebastian Church has two openwork towers and steel vaulting . From its floor , the basilica 's nave rises 12 meters ( 39 ft ) to the dome , and 32 meters ( 105 ft ) to the tip of the twin spires .

The faux finished interior of the church incorporates groined vaults in the Gothic architecture style permitting very ample illumination from lateral windows . The steel columns , walls and ceiling were painted by Lorenzo Rocha , Isabelo Tampingco and Félix Martínez to give the appearance of marble and jasper . Trompe l 'oeil paintings of saints and martyrs by Rocha were used to decorate the interiors of the church . True to the Gothic revival spirit of the church are its confessionals , pulpit , altars and five retablos designed by Lorenzo Guerrero and Rocha . The sculptor Eusebio Garcia carved the statues of holy men and women . Six holy water fountains were constructed for the church , each crafted from marble obtained from Romblon .

Above the main altar is an image of Our Lady of Mount Carmel , given to the church by Carmelite sisters from Mexico City in 1617 . The image withstood all the earthquakes and fires which had destroyed previous incarnations of San Sebastian Church , but its ivory head was stolen in 1975 .

= = Cultural and historical declarations = =

San Sebastian Church was a declared National Historical Landmark by President Ferdinand Marcos through Presidential Decree No. 260 in 1973 . State funding was accorded to the church through the National Historical Institute which undertook restoration in 1982 . The Recollect community has likewise expended funds for the church 's maintenance and restoration .

On May 16 , 2006 , San Sebastian Church was included in the Tentative List for possible designation as a World Heritage Site , on account of its architectural and historical heritage .

The church was declared a National Cultural Treasure by the National Museum of the Philippines on August 15 , 2011 and unveiling of the marker on January 20 , 2012 .

= = Preservation = =

In recent years , San Sebastian Church has encountered threats to its structural integrity . The steel structure has been beset by rust and corrosion due to sea breezes from nearby Manila Bay . In 1998 , it was placed on the biennial watchlist of the 100 Most Endangered Sites by the World Monuments Fund , though it was not retained in the subsequent watchlists .