



The Church and Monastery of St. Catherine of Siena

Buenos Aires, Argentina

Founded in 1745, the Church and Monastery of St. Catherine of Siena was the first convent for cloistered nuns in Buenos Aires. The buildings were the work of Italian architect and Jesuit Giovanni Andrea Bianchi, known locally as Andrés Blanqui, also known for City Hall, other important buildings in the capital, and for the façade and portico of the Cathedral of Córdoba. Soon after the construction of the church and monastery, the neighborhood became known as St. Catherine's. Since 2001, the monastery functions as a spiritual care center for local residents and visitors alike. For many, it is a divine oasis nestled in the dense, historic urban core of the Argentine capital.

In recent years, local preservation groups have come together to raise awareness about development pressures in the historic center of Buenos Aires and the insufficient enforcement of protection laws for built heritage. Despite its location within a protected area with height regulations, the city has approved plans to build an 18-story tower, with six levels of underground parking, adjacent to the church and monastery, on the site of the old church cemetery. Construction of the tower would cast a permanent shadow on St. Catherine's and destroy the historic context around this important religious complex. Inclusion on the Watch seeks to draw attention to the need to balance new development and heritage concerns within historic urban areas, so as to preserve the assets that characterize these centers and maintain quality of life for their communities.