

**Church of Santiago  
(St. James)**

**Town:**

Ermua.

**Location:**

Plaza Santiago.

**Opening hours:**

Mornings: 10 a.m. – 12 noon,  
Afternoons: 6 p.m. – 7 p.m.

**Other places of interest  
nearby:**

Palacio Valdespina (Town Hall),  
c/Marqués de Valdespina, 1.  
Ermua.

Palacio Lobiano.  
c/Goienkalea 8-10.

Casa Zarra.  
c/Izelaíeta, 12. Ermua.

Torreata.  
Avda. Vizcaya, 25. Ermua.

Church of San Andrés  
(St. Andrew).

ENGLISH

CULTURAL  
HERITAGE  
OF BIZKAIA

No.

# Church of Santiago

ERMUA

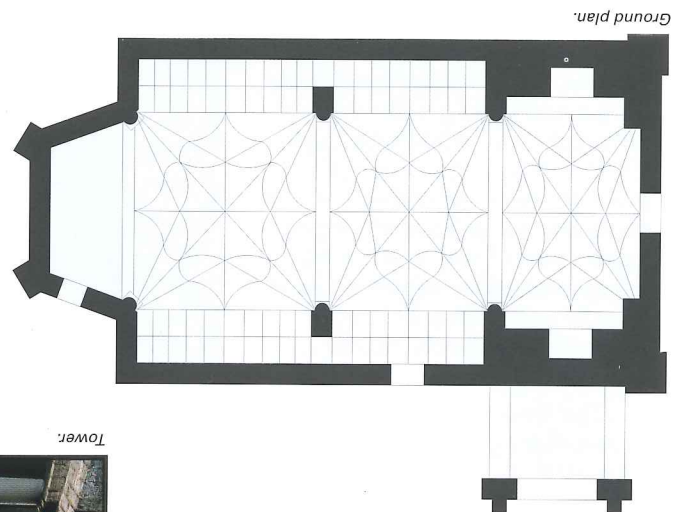


**Bizkaiko Foru  
Aldundia**  
Kultura Saila  
Ondare Historikoaren  
Zerbitzua

**Diputación Foral  
de Bizkaia**  
Departamento de Cultura  
Servicio de Patrimonio  
Histórico



Interior.



Tower.



The best-known view of Ermua is one shown in an engraving by L. Urgellés from 1890: the old Valdespina *palacio*, now the Town hall, with the local parish church in the background.

Sufficient evidence, beyond the purely visual, exists to show that the dialogue between church bell-tower and palace lantern is deliberate. The similarities between the two are accounted for by the fact that both were planned and executed by Guipúzcoa-born master mason Sebastián de Lecuna (or Lecuona), commissioned in 1729 by Cardinal Andrés de Orbe y Larreátegui to build the latter's own mansion.

Grateful for his fellow countrymen's decision to allow him to be buried beneath the choir, the Cardinal undertook to complete work on the church of Santiago, bell tower included.

### Building

Work on the church had been started more than one hundred and twenty-five years previously. Since approximately 1600, a beautiful Renaissance church, with a three-sectioned nave and high lateral chapels between buttresses, had slowly and painfully been taking shape. Also, at the end of the nave, there is a narrower octagonal chancel. The end result is a large, functional church, more economical than the three-nave type and yet managing to offer the same kind of image. The main body of the church is a pure parallelepiped prism, without external buttresses, as they were sited on the interior, although later additions make it difficult to appreciate this properly. No such difficulties are encountered in appreciating the upper part of the tower with its octagonal belfry crowned by a cupola and pinnacle in a different, decidedly more Baroque idiom.

The beauty of the church's interior lies in its harmonious formulation of space and in the way the buttresses are faced as if they were Tuscan columns. Another attractive feature are the two roofing styles used, with the traditional Gothic (groin vaulting with highly complex designs in the nave) contrasting with the more modern, Romanic-style variations employed in the chapels.

The church was conceived that way from the beginning, but the pace of work was remarkably sluggish until Cardinal Orbe and master mason Lecuna arrived on the scene late in the 18th century. Lecuna clearly understood the original intention and continued the project almost completely unaltered, except for the keystones, with larger buds given much greater

protagonism than originally planned. The project was opened up further with the choir, also with groin vaulting, and two later, distinctly Rococo chapels. Lecuna did not live to see the church completely finished, the commitments entered into being honoured by his brother-in-law Joseph de Zuaznabar.

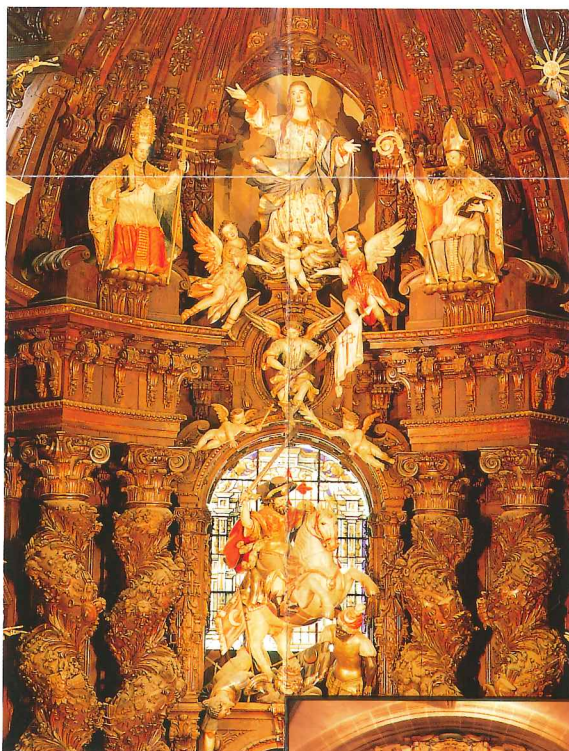
### Furniture

Cardinal Orbe's splendid legacy is also to be seen in the church's furniture, and particularly in the main reredos, the organ and the Cardinal's own funerary monument and private chapel.

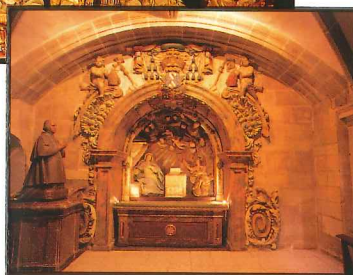
The reredos is a spectacular Baroque creation in unpolychromed walnut wood with highly decorated columns, which display some largely military-style trappings. The piece does boast a number of polychromed sculptures, the most spectacular undoubtedly being the one of Santiago (St. James) riding victoriously over the Moors at the battle of Clavijo. The sculptures have often been related to the habitual style of Juan Antonio Hontanón, from the neighbouring province of Cantabria.

A number of formal elements in the reredos coincide with the huge, unpolychromed wooden organ, and it is likely that both were designed by the same man, possibly Zuaznabar, who was also something of an expert in structures in wood.

Rather more modest are the other four wooden gold-polychromed, proto-Rococo and Rococo reredoses. A marble image of the Virgin with Child, German in origin, is the centre of attention in the one on the left. According to the inscription, the image was a gift from native Ermuan Lope de Bustinza in 1542. An interesting feature of the one on the right is the excellently dynamic and credible image, executed in wood, of St. Joseph holding the Child's hand. The quality of the image suggests a sophisticated, almost certainly foreign hand. Simpler and somewhat less compelling are the images in the chapels underneath the choir and the bust of the Cardinal, executed in jasper, on his funeral urn.



Main reredos.



Chapel underneath choir.