

## **Basilica of St Peter's**

Michelangelo was appointed architect of the fabrication of St Peter's in 1546, taking the place of Antonio da Sangallo the Younger who had just died. His position as superintendent of the works permitted the master to get rid of Sangallo's hated assistants and reduce the size of the work gangs. The proud secrecy in which Michelangelo cloaked his plans attracted a great deal of criticism and envy. He reduced the dimensions of Sangallo's design but, as Vasari points out, increased the majesty of the building. He took the pointed-arch section, the double-vault structure, and the colossal tambour lightened by openings from the dome of Santa Maria del Fiore. The horizontal fascia of the tambour, punctuated by coupled columns and windows with alternating gables, is perfectly in harmony with the great bulk of the dome, itself segmented by ribs. Michelangelo also designed the outer walls of the apsidal section of the basilica, together with their external facing of travertine, subdivided by a colossal order of pillars exactly like those of the palaces on the Capitol and intended to reflect the internal state of the building on the outside. His studies for the Basilica concluded with the construction of a splendid model in limewood, made between 1558 and 1561. All that Michelangelo was able to see built was the tambour, while the dome and the small lantern were constructed more than twenty years after his death by Giacomo della Porta, who accentuated the verticality of the whole structure.