

LAUNCH OF THE RESTORATION OF THE CHESTNUT GROVE

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Press Release

A discreet grove in the gardens of the Château de Versailles, located between the Colonnade and the King's Garden, the Chestnut Grove (*Salle des Marronniers*) has a complex history marked by the successive transformations that reflect the evolution of taste and garden use under the Ancien Régime. Initially known as the *Galerie d'Eau* and later as the *Galerie des Antiques*, and endowed with particularly rich ornamentation, it gradually saw its stone and water features give way to vegetation, becoming a true green sanctuary thanks to tall trelliswork enveloping aligned chestnut trees. Restored to this latter state in 1989, the grove has since suffered significant deterioration. The new restoration campaign, which began in November 2025, is scheduled for completion in summer 2026. It will address the ground surfaces, trelliswork, marble elements and plantings, including the double alignment of chestnut trees — an essence that constitutes the grove's defining signature.

A COMPLEX HISTORY REFLECTING TASTE AND USE IN THE GARDENS OF VERSAILLES

The grove took the name *Salle des Marronniers* only in 1704, following its transformation by Jules Hardouin-Mansart. Originally designed by André Le Nôtre as early as 1678, it was first known as the *Galerie d'Eau*, before becoming the *Galerie des Antiques* in 1680, when copies of antique sculptures were installed there. Several plans, paintings and engravings attest to the richness of the grove between the 1670s and 1704: a central island decorated with a polychrome marble pavement at its centre, surrounded by a canal in which water jets alternated with sculptures set on pedestals. A "gouffre" — a spiral-shaped water outlet — was located at one end of the grove, returning the water to the Basin of Apollo's Chariot, slightly below. Finally, two bronze groups adorned the fountains of the central island's basins: two *Amours* by Jean-Baptiste Tuby (one melted, the other sent to Trianon in 1707) and two dolphins by Jacques

Houzeau, now lost. All of this decoration disappeared during the redesign carried out by Hardouin-Mansart in 1704.



Jean Cotelle, *Perspective view of the Galerie des Antiques*, 1688, oil on canvas
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The Chestnut Grove before restoration
© Château de Versailles / T. Garnier



Jacques Rigaud, *The Chestnut Grove*, 1729-1752, etching and burin
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The grove was then simplified by the King's architect. It retained its long, narrow layout and its tall trelliswork, and was fitted with six niches set into the trellis, each housing a statue. Its semicircular ends were occupied by two large basins surmounted by marble vases. The canal, polychrome marble decoration, bronzes and water features disappeared.

With regard to sculpture, a new decorative scheme composed of eight marble busts on terms, arranged in four lateral niches, replaced the antique statuary, of which only two figures remained. Marble benches were added. The two vases at either end were also originally adorned with sculptural elements that disappeared in 1795. Two alignments of chestnut trees finally replaced the central island.

The trellis palisade, restored in 1915-1916 in a low form, was reinstated in 1989 according to the 1704 state, with its height increased in accordance with an eighteenth-century engraving chosen as the reference.

A DEGRADING CONDITION REQUIRING COMPREHENSIVE RESTORATION

Prior to the start of the restoration, the Chestnut grove was in a severely degraded condition, affecting the ground surfaces, plantings, trelliswork, basins, sculpture and furnishings alike. The ground surfaces were heavily eroded by runoff, with exposed foundations, loss of level and visible roots, making circulation difficult and compromising the stability of the layouts.

The plantings — particularly the alignment of chestnut trees and the hornbeam hedges — were in an advanced state of decline, showing widespread degeneration, in some cases irreversible for the hornbeam hedges. The built and decorative elements (trelliswork, basins, sculpture, benches) were also extensively deteriorated: trelliswork at the end of its life, fractured basins, undermining and damage to marble elements, weakened statue plinths and terms, oxidised metal supports, and soiled and degraded furnishings.



The Chestnut Grove
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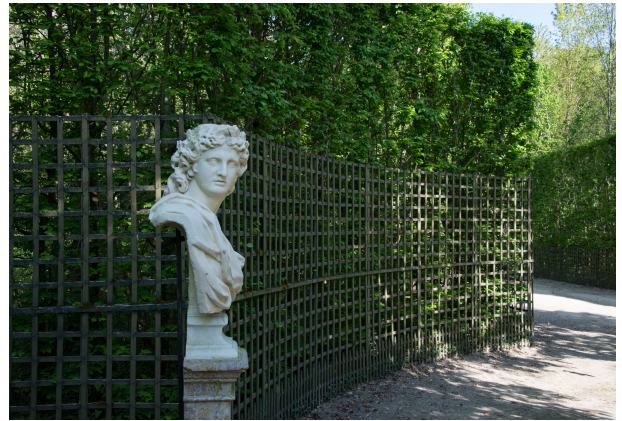


Jacques Rigaud, *The Chestnut Grove*, 1729-1752, etching and burin
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A complete and coherent restoration was therefore essential and will be carried out in three phases: the landscape composition, including both the regrading of the ground surfaces and the replacement or appropriate pruning of plant elements; the trelliswork, which will be entirely replaced; and the masonry and marble works.

The reopening of the Chestnut Grove is scheduled for summer 22026. This restoration forms part of the broader programme for the recomposition of the gardens of Versailles undertaken since the 1990s.

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