

# I REVEALING THE HALL OF MIRRORS

Versailles, 12 September 2025  
Press Release

This summer marked for the Château de Versailles the culmination of a rigorous heritage project aimed at restoring the volumes, lighting effects, and perspectives of the Hall of Mirrors. This intervention brings it closer to its true historical state and reveals its full coherence, exceptional majesty, and artistic richness, notably by reinstating the view of the ceiling painted by Charles Le Brun, a masterpiece of 17th-century French painting.

## THE TRUE GRANDEUR OF JULES HARDOUIN-MANSART'S MASTERPIECE

The Hall of Mirrors' current appearance, with three rows of modern chandeliers running its full length, reflects an exceptional historical use of the space—its transformation into a ballroom. Such occasions were rare under the Ancien Régime, occurring only about ten times, mainly for the weddings of France's dauphins, as well as for the Duke of Burgundy in 1697 and the two brothers of the future Louis XVI in 1771 and 1773. The number and arrangement of the chandeliers, which were never part of the gallery's original décor, varied each time, and the Menus Plaisirs would remove them immediately after the festivities.

In the 1970s, there was a growing desire to enliven a Château that was perceived as empty and somber. The decision was made to evoke the lighting scheme used for the wedding of the future Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette. Twenty chandeliers and twenty-four torchères with girandoles were then crafted and inaugurated in 1980. This permanent presentation of the Hall of Mirrors

as a ballroom soon raised questions. Today, the new configuration—with a single central row of chandeliers—restores a more authentic state of the Château de Versailles, closer to its historical reality as the seat of the Court and government of the Kingdom of France in 1682. At that time, the Hall of Mirrors replaced a terrace that was poorly suited to French climate conditions. It provided a prestigious link between the Grand Apartments of the King and Queen, offering the Château a suitably grand space to host major ceremonial events, such as the reception of ambassadors.



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Maintaining six central chandeliers, as was the case under the Ancien Régime, allows the Hall of Mirrors' original experience to be restored. This choice reestablishes the subtle dialogue between the windows overlooking the gardens and the mirrors facing them, creating an expanded sense of space enhanced by the baroque ceiling, full of trompe-l'œil perspectives that open the gallery to the sky. The extraordinary proportions of the hall, the pilasters with French-order capitals supporting a cornice that seems freed from gravity, the rhythm of the bays, and the monumental scale of the two large windows opening onto the corner salons—all these elements of an architectural masterpiece could be obscured by the false ceiling formed by the chandeliers.

### REDISCOVERING THE EPIC OF LOUIS XIV PAINTED BY CHARLES LE BRUN

Thus, the full legibility of Charles Le Brun's masterpiece has been restored. A dazzling embodiment of the spirit of the Grand Siècle and the true Sistine Chapel of French art, this majestic vault had until now been largely concealed, with visitors' gazes drawn instead toward the gallery's perspective, breaking the sense of verticality and preventing a comprehensive view. From now on, visitors will be able to take in the full height of the room at a single glance and will naturally be led to lift their eyes toward the ceilings, whose lighting has been entirely renewed.





In this way, the magnificence of the scenes celebrating the great deeds of the Sun King will be rediscovered. The cycle of paintings is centered on the Dutch War, in which French victories brought Europe into a new order, revealed to the visitor when moving from the Salon of War to the Salon of Peace. The royal epic is interwoven with mythology, punctuated with references to Antiquity and at times enriched with exotic elements such as a splendid suit of samurai armor, recalling the kingdom's openness to the wider world. Each scene is accompanied by a trompe-l'œil cartouche, with texts by Racine and Boileau—an eloquent reminder of the importance the king placed on the proper understanding of the program.

### IN THE TIME OF THE SILVER FURNITURE

While the torchères recall the decoration of the gallery at the end of the reign of Louis XV, this rediscovery of the Hall of Mirrors is accompanied by an unexpected evocation: the orange trees displayed along the walls of the gallery in large silver vases during the 1680s, the decade preceding the melting down of the legendary silver furniture in 1689. Vases of the same model, designed by Claude Ballin but cast in bronze, have adorned the château's parterres since the 17th century. As work currently occupies the North Parterre, a series of these vases is temporarily presented inside the Hall of Mirrors, filled with highly illusionistic orange trees created by a bronzesmith and a wax sculptor. This recalls a forgotten ornament, lacking only fragrance to transport visitors back to the time of Louis XIV.

Thus, the Château de Versailles and the museum's management continue their never-ending quest for a state of the château that is both accurate and faithful to history—without ever renouncing the exuberance of Versailles' unique splendor.

#### THE HALL OF MIRRORS, BEATING HEART OF FRANCE'S HISTORY

- 1678 - 1684 : Construction of the Hall of Mirrors
- 1685: Reception of the Doge of Genoa
- 1686: Reception of the Siamese embassy
- 1715: Reception of the Persian embassy
- 1742: Reception of the embassy of the Ottoman Empire
- 1770: Wedding of the future Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette
- 1843 et 1855: Visits of Queen Victoria
- 1871 : Proclamation of the German Empire
- 1919: Signing of the Treaty of Versailles
- 1957: Luncheon in honor of Queen Elizabeth II
- 1961 : Dinner in honor of the Kennedys
- 2023 : Dinner in honor of King Charles III



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