



CHÂTEAU DE VERSAILLES

MADAME DU
BARRY'S RESTORED
APARTMENT



View of Madame du Barry's restored apartment
© Palace of Versailles, C. Fouin

CONTENTS	Press release	p.4
	“Welcome to Madame du Barry’s world”	p.6
	“From humble beginnings to the heart of the King’s apartment”	p.7
	MADAME DU BARRY	p.9
	THE SECRET LIFE OF AN APARTMENT	p.13
	From the King’s private cabinets to an apartment fit for a mistress	p.14
	One of Versailles’ best-preserved apartments	p.17
	THE RESTORATION	p.19
	A much-needed restoration	p.20
	Interview with Frédéric Didier, Head Architect of Historical Monuments	p.22
	A restoration with an eye for detail	p.26
	THE REFURBISHMENT	p.31
	A challenging endeavour	p.32
	Pieces restored within the Palace of Versailles’ ateliers	p.34
	Showcasing the porcelain pieces in a new light	p.36
	OUR PATRON	p.39
	FURTHER INSIGHT	p.43
	Louis XV, Passions of a King exhibition	p.44
	Louis XV’s Versailles	p.45
	Books	p.48

PRESS CONTACTS

Hélène Dalifard, Violaine Solari, Elodie Mariani,
Barnabé Chalmin
+33(0)1 30 83 75 21 - presse@chateauversailles.fr
chateauversailles.fr/presse

MADAME DU BARRY'S RESTORED APARTMENT REOPENS

22 OCTOBER 2022

Press release

Following a major restoration spanning more than 18 months, from 22 October 2022 on Madame du Barry's apartment is reopening to the public in a series of guided tours. Thanks to the AXA Group's support, the fourteen rooms — one of the most refined spaces in the former royal residence and a testimony to Louis XV's intimate experience of Versailles — have now been reunited with all their charm and harmony of yesteryear. The works were conducted in line with traditional techniques, drawing on a stable of talented craftsmen, including carpenters, gilders, marble workers, stuccoists and locksmiths.

AN EXCEPTIONAL APARTMENT

Madame du Barry's apartment is nestled on the Palace's second floor, within striking distance of the King's private apartments. In 1770, Louis XV decided to move his mistress to this prestigious, much-coveted location serviced by a network of private staircases. On Madame du Barry's request, the main rooms were decorated in white and gold — the privilege of princes. The other half of the apartment boasted a dazzling collection of multi-coloured décor, rare and invaluable witnesses to 18th-century tastes, few of which still remain today. Far from the spectacle of court, the mistress' extraordinary refinement shines through here in these private spaces she decorated with cutting-edge furniture and art.

A MUCH-NEEDED RESTORATION

The apartment had gone without restoration for over seventy years. It was last restored from 1943 to 1947, when a number of works were carried out and the apartment was returned to the layout Madame du Barry would have enjoyed back in 1770. Over the past few years, the paintwork had aged and warped and the décors and ceilings had suffered as a result of leaks. Tucked away under the eaves, the humidity and intense temperature changes on this south-facing floor had resulted in the rooms ageing at rapid pace — a new restoration was in order. This campaign was a continuation of the efforts made in the 1940s, with most work aiming to achieve an identical restoration, merely correcting a few inconsistencies.



© Palace of Versailles, D. Saulnier

The now-complete restoration sets out to plunge visitors into the refined, intimate atmosphere that these rooms would have once exuded, in a quintessential expression of 18th-century art de vivre.

The work allowed professionals to conduct structural consolidations and upgrade all lighting networks to current safety standards and norms, and to insulate the attic and roof break, thereby upgrading the apartment's energy efficiency. Touched up on the woodwork sculptures, the old gilding has now been cleaned, restored and enriched in the apartment's main rooms. The "regal white" glue-size painting was also marked out and refreshed using traditional techniques. Finally, major works were carried out on the rooms adorned with colourful décors: rare and precious testimonies to 18th-century tastes. The stucco cornices were restored and filled in, and research based on surveys of the panelling was carried out to determine the shades to be used for the motifs before work began on the décor.

THE REFURBISHMENT

Alongside the architectural restoration work, the apartment was refurbished by the Palace of Versailles' conservation team in order to recreate the feel that would have existed in Madame du Barry's day. Typical of the most refined 18th century styles, the 1770 furniture is now scattered around the world. In its absence, the apartment was refurbished with pieces from the Palace of Versailles' collections that would have been used around Madame du Barry's time, and which are best placed to recreate the everyday surroundings that Louis XV's mistress would once have enjoyed. Thus, alongside a handful of art pieces commissioned for Madame du Barry (the corner cabinet chairs, a pietre dure table, a porcelain dinner service embellished with a blue ribbon design), new furniture and items from the archives will be dusted off to enhance the overall sense of cohesiveness. New textiles will also be woven, including green damask curtains and door curtains in the dining room, and upholstery for the seating in the corner cabinet.



1. Chair, Louis Delanois, 1769, Palace of Versailles © RMN-GP (Palace of Versailles)/ © F. Raux
2. Jewellery box, Martin Carlin, Palace of Versailles © RMN-GP (Palace of Versailles)/ © F. Raux
3. Console, Rémy Absille, 1767, Palace of Versailles © Palace of Versailles, D. Saulnier
4. Triangular tray from the "Aux Amours" dinner service © RMN-GP (Palace of Versailles)/ © F. Raux

AXA: RESTORATION PATRON FOR MADAME DU BARRY'S APARTMENT

Ever loyal to its commitment to protecting and handing down heritage, for a number of years now AXA has been working to support symbolic landmarks that promote French culture across a wide global audience. AXA is delighted to be continuing its partnership with the Palace of Versailles and lending its support to restoring Madame du Barry's apartments.

PRACTICAL DETAILS

Guided tour of the apartment.
Information and booking: chateauversailles.fr

AN EPIC EXHIBITION ABOUT LOUIS XV

For the very first time the Palace of Versailles is dedicating a sprawling exhibition to Louis XV to mark three hundred years since his coronation. *Louis XV, Passions of a King* (18 October 2022 - 19 February 2023) gives members of the public an opportunity to delve into the complexity of the man behind the monarch: his family and inner circle, his many passions and love of the arts.

"WELCOME TO MADAME DU BARRY'S WORLD"

The "Degré du Roi" was a private inner staircase that gave Louis XV discreet access to Madame du Barry's rooms, and is one of Versailles' most evocative passageways. Step through the little metal gate accessible exclusively by the monarch, and soak up the atmosphere of the close to 400m² that made up this extraordinary apartment: welcome to Madame du Barry's world. Everything here exudes the King's final surge of passion for his very last mistress. We walked through these rooms just as they were about to be restored, torn between the worry that they would deteriorate past the point of no return, and the fear that their ineffable charm would vanish — a charm that had been preserved despite the passing of the centuries. Tucked away under the eaves, the apartment had withstood Madame du Barry's eviction upon Louis XV's death, as well as the French Revolution and Louis-Philippe's works. Long left in the shadows, it had been reborn at the end of World War II, restored to its original décor through architect André Japy's exacting eye. Work on the apartment had become a matter of urgency and was made possible eighty years later in early 2021 with AXA's patronage. And the project was a challenge in which many facets needed to be balanced: Head Architect of Historical Monuments Frédéric Didier's research, the doubts issued by the Heritage and Museum Departments, the artisans' commitment to understanding the concerns of those who succeeded in the dizzying enterprise that was restoring one of the Palace of Versailles' most authentic spaces as faithfully as possible. It is difficult to convey the unforgettable rush of feeling upon discovering a flash of pink hidden away inside a cupboard. The admiration that rises upon inspecting how meticulously a touch-up has been executed, preserving all the soul of the original shade, or how beautifully a colour has been refreshed with the lightest of touches. The sense of wonder upon watching a gilder revive the golden mouldings so beloved of the Countess du Barry, leaf by delicate leaf. The power of seeing a locksmith carefully replicate the beautifully-cut inner lock of a bookcase.

It is said that when Madame du Barry moved into this apartment at the end of 1770, the works drew on a team of twenty workers. They were succeeded by thirty-five craftsmen and -women who put the same techniques to work in ushering the past into the present, turning this one-of-a-kind space into a shining example of ancestral knowledge-sharing.

In 1774, a visitor to the apartment described it as a place where "all dazzled with voluptuousness". Although we are missing the furniture needed to revive its opulence, this restoration sparks the imagination, allowing us to feel what we cannot see. But for a true glimpse of the sheer beauty that once reigned over Versailles, head to the Louis XV exhibition this autumn, where a host of masterpieces await — some on display for the very first time...

Catherine Pégard

President of the Public

Establishment of the Palace, the Museum and National Estate of Versailles

"FROM HUMBLE BEGINNINGS TO THE HEART OF THE KING'S PRIVATE APARTMENT"

Specialists and enthusiasts who may have dipped into William-Ritchey Newton's *L'Espace du Roi* will know that the Palace of Versailles' apartments are like fireworks: countless, spectacular, fleeting, ever-changing in colour and form, layered beneath one another, sparking and vanishing as swiftly as they arise. Only a handful remain in a readable form, having either been frozen in time or pieced back together in step with a specific era or occupancy. The apartment belonging to the French monarchy's last titled mistress, Jeanne du Barry, is a snapshot of a particular moment in time, when for a few short years — from the death of the Queen (1768) to the death of Louis XV (1774) — a woman rose from humble beginnings to the heart of the King's private apartment, right at the apex of his glory, prestige and opulence. This extraordinary woman was particularly clever, but would go on to be famed for her beauty and most importantly of all her taste. These factors hint at the challenging nature of restoring such an apartment, and the complexity of the issues that arose.

The works were initially kickstarted due to the worrying state of the architecture, and their completion marked a milestone moment and the fruit of a long restorative process. The space had already been altered for its new occupants following the departure of the King's mistress, before gradually deteriorating from the French Revolution on. André Japy's works in the mid-20th century were conducted with a rigour and eye for documenting that were ahead of the times, and served to usher Madame du Barry back into the spotlight. The quality of Japy's undertaking paved the way for the adjustments and additions we see today. The refurbishment, meanwhile, is an entirely other affair. We know that this expansive apartment once contained the most valuable, elegant and modern furniture and objects of the times, pieces that departed the Palace with their owner in 1774. Tracking down the royal items is trickier yet: very few were brought to Versailles. A few relics still bear witness to Madame du Barry's presence here, and help set the tone: Delanois' famed medallion chairs, the Carlin jewellery box, the Brissac collection's pietre dure inlaid table, the Valadier vases. We will need to arm ourselves with patience in the quest to see them all reunited...

Laurent Salomé

, Director of the Palaces of Versailles and Trianon
National Museum



PART 2 | MADAME
DU BARRY

AN EXTRAORDINARY FATE



Jeanne Bécu, comtesse Du Barry, en Flore, François-Hubert Drouais, 1769
Palace of Versailles © Palace of Versailles, Dist. RMN/© C. Fouin

“She is tall, shapely, as blonde as an angel, with a high forehead and beautiful eyes, arched eyebrows and an oval-shaped face with small signs on her cheek that render her more enticing than any other: lips curled in a provocative smile, a fine complexion, a bust to take one’s breath away, with many others advised to seek shelter from any comparisons that may be drawn.”

Prince of Ligne

HUMBLE ROOTS

Jeanne Bécu, known as Mademoiselle Vaubernier, was born out of wedlock on 19 August 1743. Raised in Paris by a seamstress mother, the latter’s employers took her as their ward, caring for the girl as their own daughter. She was sent to a convent in 1749, where she received a dozen years of strict and extensive schooling. It was here that her love of reading and religion blossomed.

At the end of this period, bereft of her childhood protection, she jumped from piecemeal job to piecemeal job to survive: street merchant, apprentice hairdresser, lady’s maid and companion, and finally shop girl at Labille’s, one of the most prestigious modistes in Paris. Her time here spent advising the women of Court and influential bourgeois deepened her flawless taste and knowledge of fabrics, jewellery and fashion accessories. Her beauty captivated all who encountered her.

In 1763, Jeanne met Jean-Baptiste du Barry, a marriage broker who encouraged her to put her charms to work in seducing a stable of men handpicked for their wealth and influence. Their partnership afforded them a life of great luxury. They moved into a sumptuous mansion where they received famous courtiers (the Prince of Ligne, the Duke of Richelieu) and literary men. Jeanne was interested in the arts and posed for renowned artists such as Drouais, Latour, Labille-Guiard and Pajou.

THE KING’S MISTRESS

In the spring of 1768, Jeanne travelled to Versailles to plead her partner’s case before the Commis de Choiseul, a minister of Louis XV at the time. It was here that Jeanne met the King through his head valet, Le Bel. The monarch was struck by her beauty, and made her his mistress. Louis XV wished to officially seal their relationship, and so married Jeanne Bécu to Count Guillaume du Barry (Jean-Baptiste’s brother). From that point on, Jeanne became the Countess du Barry. Now a married woman with titles, Jeanne was officially presented at Court on 22 April 1769, having earned a legitimate place within the sovereign’s inner circle, and succeeding Madame de Pompadour as his royal mistress.

By the age of 59, His Majesty had grown old and had lost his son, the Dauphin Louis-Ferdinand, his wife, Queen Marie Leszczyńska, and his mistress-turned-friend, Madame de Pompadour, all in close succession.

From the very beginning, the relationship sparked scandal at Court, as the King had chosen a woman who was not of noble extraction for his mistress — a woman of modest and inappropriate status and standing. Yet by the King’s will and her own qualities, despite Choiseul’s scheming and the royal family’s bare-faced hostility (notably Louis XV’s daughters and the Dauphine, Marie-Antoinette), Madame du Barry gained a foothold in Court.

“The backlash against her was atrocious, and mostly unwarranted. They would be kneeling at her feet if... That is the way of the world. [...] Do they desire that I take a girl of good standing? [...] Certainly you shall see no lady of Maintenon from me.”

Extract from a letter from Louis XV to Choiseul in early summer 1770, on the subject of Madame du Barry.

After some time spent in Le Bel’s old apartment on the ground floor of one of the Palace’s wings, in 1770 Louis XV moved Jeanne to a prestigious, much coveted apartment just above his own private apartment, in the heart of the royal residence. And scandal erupted afresh.

THE LAST OF THE MISTRESSES

Madame du Barry was now able to fully inhabit her role as royal mistress. Unlike Madame de Pompadour, she did not meddle in the kingdom’s political affairs, but focused solely on the King’s pleasures. Using her connections with a great many artists, she put on plays and prepared the festivities for the Counts of Provence and Artois’ weddings. She received artists and literary men in her apartment, and held intimate dinners that the King attended. As a protector and patron of the arts, she commissioned a plethora of artworks and furniture to decorate her apartments. She was notably one of the earliest champions of the neoclassical movement, a style that gradually overtook Rococo. Ever at the cutting edge of the latest trends, she adorned herself with the most lavish of dresses and jewels. Hailed by her contemporaries as an empathic and generous soul, she also helped the poor.

Louis XV fell deeper and deeper in love, showering her with gifts of all kinds and bestowing on her the means befitting her rank: a prestigious apartment in Versailles and income deemed colossal for the times. In 1769, he gave her lifelong use of the Domaine de Louveciennes, an estate that became her passion. Overlooking the Machine de Marly, this château belonged to the Crown and was fully renovated and extended by the King’s mistress, who entrusted Nicolas Ledoux and Ange-Jacques Gabriel, the King’s First Architect, with building a bandstand. She put her fine taste to work in decorating the spaces, acquiring sculptures, paintings and luxurious artworks, often gifted to her by the King.

1774: FAREWELL TO MADAME DU BARRY

Her time in the sun came to an end in the spring of 1774. On 26 April, Louis XV was at Trianon when he was struck with the first flushes of smallpox. All too aware of the extent of the King’s illness, despite the risk of infection Madame du Barry watched over him until 4 May, when his condition worsened. His inner circle, including his mistress, had until then kept the King in the dark regarding his condition, but as reality dawned on him, he bid Madame du Barry farewell and Jeanne left the Palace.

*“At present, now that I know of my condition, the Metz scandal must not begin again. Had I known then what I now know, you should never have come. My duty is to God and my people. Thus, you will retire tomorrow.”**

Louis XV to Madame du Barry, 4 May 1774

*Indeed, in 1744 Madame de Châteauroux, the King’s mistress, was hounded away upon fears for Louis XV’s life: the King had developed a high fever in Metz on his way to the Flanders front during the War of the Austrian Succession.

Louis XV knew that upon his final breath, she would be hunted down and shamed by his opponents, and wanted to shield her from being hounded and humiliated. The King died on 10 May. On Louis XVI’s orders, Jeanne was arrested on 11 May 1774 and taken to the Pont-aux-Dames convent in Meaux.

In 1776, the new King gave her permission to permanently retire to Louveciennes, where she lived happily until 1793. She was imprisoned during the Reign of Terror and sentenced to death by the Revolutionary court, and was executed by guillotine on 8 December 1793.



PART 2

THE SECRET LIFE OF AN APARTMENT

FROM THE KING'S PRIVATE CABINETS TO AN APARTMENT FIT FOR A MISTRESS

1722-1770: MULTI-PURPOSE ROOMS

Upon the Court's return to Versailles in 1722, Louis XV began works to transform the Palace. He focused on changing the rooms to the back of the King's grand apartment, where Louis XIV had once showcased his collections, turning them into living rooms for private use instead. This small apartment was where he spent family time, worked alone or with his advisors, and received a select inner circle to dine and play games. Above this succession of rooms, he soon set about creating small cabinets on the second floor and attic, connected through multiple private staircases. These were frequently refurbished to his taste, spaces where he could read, cook, engage in woodturning and ivory carving, practice the sciences and host small groups.



View of the Cour des Cerfs, the courtyard at the centre of the King's small cabinets and Madame du Barry's apartments © Palace of Versailles, C.Milet

When the Dauphin died in 1765, Louis XV suggested that his daughter-in-law, the now-widowed Maria Josepha of Saxony, use a few of these private cabinets' rooms while waiting for works to finish on her new apartment. The princess' time here was fleeting, as she died in 1767.

The King therefore took back possession of the space before gifting this apartment to his new mistress, Madame du Barry, in 1770.

LOUIS XV'S EXOTIC HUNTS GALLERY

Between 1722 and 1770, several rooms succeeded one another at the site of Madame du Barry's apartment, and their timeline is complex. Of note, however, is the fact that from 1735 to 1766 Louis XV's exotic hunts gallery was located where the Grand Cabinet and bedchamber presently are, the only remains of which are the windows' panel jambs. This gallery was once home to eight paintings by the finest painters of the times (Jean-François de Troy, Charles Parrocel, François Boucher, Carle Van Loo, Nicolas Lancret and Jean-Baptiste Pater), depicting *Hunts in Foreign Lands*. Louis XV was a keen hunter, and decorated the space with pieces that expressed his love of trophy paintings and his curiosity for rare animals.



© RMN-Grand Palais/H. Lewandowski

1770-1774: MADAME DU BARRY'S VERY OWN KINGDOM

Ange-Jacques Gabriel, the King's First Architect, supervised refurbishment works on this apartment. Following the addition of a new bathroom, from 1772 on the apartment boasted fourteen rooms, its reception rooms (corner drawing room, Grand Cabinet and bedchamber) giving out onto the Marble Courtyard, while the more private rooms (antechamber and library, dining room, 'buffet' room, bathroom and service rooms) gazed out over the inner courtyards. The apartment had multiple access routes, allowing the King to join his mistress via several private staircases.



Wing of the northern central building giving out onto the Marble Courtyard. The King's private apartment (1st floor), Madame Du Barry's apartment (2nd floor) ©Palace of Versailles, C. Milet

Significant refurbishments for the most exacting of patrons

At the request of Madame Du Barry, who oversaw works on her future apartment very closely indeed and frequently requested changes be made, the main rooms were decorated in white and gold, a privilege generally reserved for royals. The other half of the apartment boasted a dazzling collection of multi-coloured décor, rare and invaluable witnesses to 18th-century tastes, few of which still remain today.

A lady's maid water closet and night watch room were soon added to the service rooms in 1770, at the back of Madame du Barry's bedchamber. These two spaces were nestled into two purpose-made aediculae with canted jambs in the rooftop looking out over the Cour des Cerfs. This intriguing construction was designed to ensure the sun's rays were directed to the King's sundial in the courtyard. Proof indeed of the contortions embarked upon to satisfy the mistress! These large-scale works monopolised twenty-odd workers to the detriment of other members of the royal family. Their own works would have to wait... Madame du Barry moved into her apartment upon returning from her trip to Fontainebleau in late 1770.

The rooms in practice

Facing out over the Cour des Cerfs, the **buffet room** was a room used for serving the dining room and storing the dinner services, located in the first antechamber, the room leading on to the rest of the apartment. On the northern side, a door opened into a corridor leading to the **bathroom** heated with a ceramic stove in keeping with the times, and beyond that, the dressing rooms. This main series of rooms was mirrored on the opposite side by a second antechamber used as a **dining room**, again giving out onto the Cour des Cerfs, where Louis XV and his mistress would serve a small circle of guests a selection of refined dishes. Next came the **Grand Cabinet**, the main reception room preceding the **bedchamber**, where Madame du Barry displayed her collections and received her guests. She would host ministers as well as merchants who supplied her with furniture and finery, and even travellers passing through. A door leads directly from the bedchamber to an annex of the King's library via a hidden staircase. On the other side of the bedchamber is a **night watch room and water closet**. In a continuation of the Grand Cabinet to the east, the **corner drawing room** hosted games sessions where guests were handpicked to be received by Louis XV himself or his mistress. The apartment further extends into a **service antechamber** complete with access to the Degré du Roi staircase. Beyond this room, Madame du Barry had the **library** recreated. Initially made for Madame Adélaïde, it was altered, gilded and refurbished into a plush, comfortable boudoir complete with bookshelves laden with over 1,000 tomes. Other service spaces were scattered across the two floors looking out over the Cour des Cerfs to enrich the apartment, which was extended in 1772 with a new bathing space alongside the library.

A richly furnished apartment at the cutting edge of fashion

Despite being lodged by the King, Madame du Barry did not enjoy the services of the Garde-Meuble of the Throne (an unspoken rule that governed the treatment of royal mistresses). She was therefore obliged to furnish her apartment herself, which allowed her to shrug off the Throne's more conventional tastes, drawing on the most innovative suppliers and aligning with the very latest trends. Residing far from the Court's official reception spaces meant the mistress was afforded greater divergence in her lodgings, too.

She favoured two Parisian merchants in particular: Simon-Philippe Poirier and Jean Dulac. She also made purchases directly from the Manufacture de Sèvres. Cross-referencing a list that was drawn up following her departure from Court with the recollections of suppliers sharpens our insight into the atmosphere that would have reigned here in the mistress's glory days.

Madame du Barry's apartment was richly furnished indeed. The carpenter Louis Delanois, sculptor Claude-Nicolas Guichard and painter and gilder Jean-Baptiste Clagny produced work that was unique in design and "of the very latest taste". **Seating** of all types were dotted around the reception rooms, pointing to a need to host a great many guests. Thirty-one gilded wooden green damask-upholstered chairs, for example, stood in the dining room alone. A couch, twelve armchairs and twelve medallion chairs with intricate frames awaited in the corner cabinet. An even more opulent set of two couches and eighteen chairs were to be found in the drawing room, while the bedchamber was furnished with thirteen chairs and a monumental four-poster bed, its columns sculpted and topped with an imperial. All these pieces of furniture were upholstered in precious, finely wrought fabrics.

The apartment's furniture and furnishings offer a glimpse into one of Madame du Barry's passions as a collector: **Sèvres porcelain-mounted furniture**. Produced by Poirier (who enjoyed almost near-exclusivity in the field), most were assembled by the cabinetmaker Martin Carlin. The apartment boasted no fewer than nine pieces in this style: various types of tables, a jewellery box, writing desks and chests of drawers, to name but a few.

The apartment was also furnished with **Japanese lacquer panel furniture**, as well as **precious wood tables with silver detailing**, and a piano-forte.

These items sat alongside more utilitarian pieces such as games tables and practical furniture. The Manufacture de Sèvres was commissioned to produce several porcelain dinner services to be used in the dining room.

Smaller ornamental trinkets further enhanced this décor, such as clocks, a Passemant thermometer and barometer, vases, and carved ivory pieces (most probably gifts from the King).

In addition, Madame Du Barry surrounded herself with sculptures (by Lemoyne and Pajou) and paintings (works from Greuze, Drouais and the Nordic masters such as Teniers and Van Ostade).

Madame du Barry's contemporaries were unanimous in acknowledging her taste. After the death of Louis XV, some members of the royal family even purchased pieces that had once belonged to her. Similarly, they called on the artists and craftsmen she had once commissioned for her furniture and décor.

Ultimately, Madame du Barry enjoyed the prestigious lodgings she had designed as an ode to refined luxury for a mere four years before leaving Court.



View of the restored, refurbished apartment © Palace of Versailles, D. Saulnier

ONE OF VERSAILLES' BEST-PRESERVED APARTMENTS

NON-STOP OCCUPANCY UNTIL THE LATE 19TH CENTURY

As soon as Madame du Barry departed and Louis XVI took to the throne, the apartment was divided up and a few minimal tweaks were made to the décor. The apartments were then given over to the King's First Valet and two of his closest advisors. From that point on, the spaces were continuously occupied until 1891, allowing the apartment to escape the revolutionaries and their campaigns to disfigure all symbols of the monarchy in October 1793, and ensuring it retained a couple of its original double 'L's and fleurs-de-lis on the fireplaces and woodwork.

During the Restoration, restorative works were even conducted by the architect Alexandre Dufour in 1814 when Louis XVIII was considering returning to Versailles, which ultimately never happened. The apartment was also spared the in-depth changes to the Palace brought about in the 19th century under Louis-Philippe, when architect Frédéric Nepveu opted instead to only "refresh Madame du Barry's apartment" rather than turn it into a painting gallery.

In the wake of the Second French Empire, when the Third Republic's government retreated to Versailles during the Commune, the Palace hosted the State's offices and lodgings. The Minister for Public Works and parliament's civil servants moved into the spaces, much to Pierre de Nolhac's chagrin. A conservation attaché at the time, he would go on to become the Palace's curator, and penned an outraged letter in the papers in 1891. This lambasting in the press prompted the Minister for Public Instruction and Fine Arts to return the spaces to the Museum, triggering works to clean and restore the buildings, such as removing partitions and refreshing historical painted décors. These small-scale works paved the way for the biggest restoration ever conducted on the apartment since the 18th century.

THE 1943-1947 RESTORATION

During World War II, the Palace was closed to the public and reserved for the exclusive use of the German occupiers. Passive defence measures taken to protect the estate, buildings and collections had turned the Palace into a hollow shell of its former self, leaving it practically unrecognisable. The German authorities complained and demanded that the evacuated works be returned, and the former royal residence restored.

It was in this context that André Japy, head architect at Versailles since 1941, conducted the first pre-restoration assessment of Madame du Barry's apartment in 1943. With regard to the rooms giving out onto the Marble Courtyard, it was easy to visualise what spaces were to be brought back to life by removing the late-18th-century partitions, and the décors were still alive and well. The décors on the rooms giving out onto the Cour des Cerfs, meanwhile, required deeper examination: they had been scratched away and concealed under layer after layer of paint from the moment Madame du Barry had left the premises. The architect used stratigraphic surveying to pick out traces of the old colours used. Works began in the summer of 1944.

All the apartment's rooms were returned to their 1770 volumes, and the original panelling that had remained in situ was removed and repositioned in its rightful place. The flooring was reworked (the tiles that had been laid down in some of the rooms at the end of the 18th century were replaced with Versailles-style parquet). The wood panelling made up of multicoloured panels was sanded down and recoloured to match the vestiges unearthed in the cupboards and the panelling itself.

André Japy oversaw this restoration with the greatest of care, meticulously documenting each step in the process despite the tricky political and economic climate to successfully complete the biggest works undertaken on the apartment since 1770. Since the end of the campaign and until the current restoration, only occasional touch-ups and everyday upkeep were carried out on the apartment. André Japy's exacting eye formed the basis for the work that is now drawing to a close today.



PART 3 | **THE
RESTORATION**

A MUCH-NEEDED RESTORATION

THE RESTORATION'S VISION

Madame du Barry's apartment had been overlooked by restoration campaigns for over seventy years (the last having been led by the architect André Japy from 1943 to 1947).

Over the past few years, the paintwork had aged and warped and the décors and ceilings had suffered as a result of leaks. Tucked away under the eaves, the humidity and intense temperature changes on this south-facing floor had resulted in the rooms ageing at rapid pace — a new restoration was in order.

This campaign was a continuation of the efforts made in the 1940s, with most work aiming to achieve an identical restoration, merely correcting a few inconsistencies. The works were intended to plunge visitors into the refined, intimate atmosphere that the rooms would have once exuded, in a quintessential expression of 18th-century art de vivre.

FEBRUARY 2021-OCTOBER 2022: A MONUMENTAL UNDERTAKING

Works kicked off in February 2021, with some of the panelling and parquet partially removed, thereby enabling the teams to conduct the structural consolidation needed and build in the lighting and security networks. Alongside this, insulation work was carried out on the attics and lower slopes of the roof to improve the apartment's energy efficiency. The woodwork sculptures were touched up and the panelling replaced before the old gilding was cleaned, restored and enriched in the apartment's main rooms. The "regal white" glue-size painting was also marked out and refreshed using traditional techniques.

Finally, major works were carried out on the rooms adorned with colourful décors: rare and precious testimonies to 18th century tastes. The stucco cornices were restored and filled in, and research was carried out to determine the shades to be used for the motifs, based on surveys of the panelling. Painters also worked on recolouring the décors.

The restoration was carried out in compliance with 18th-century techniques employed by highly-proficient skilled tradesmen and tradeswomen specialising in masonry, plastering, fine joinery and woodworking, marble working, locksmithing and bronze working, decorative painting and gilding.

CONTRACTOR

Frédéric Didier, Head Architect of Historical Monuments, 2BDM agency

CONTRACTING BODY

Department of Heritage and Gardens at the Palace of Versailles.

COMPANIES

- **Work site set-up:**

CHAPELLE ET CIE

- **Woodwork restoration:**

LES ATELIERS DE LA CHAPELLE

- **Locksmithing/Metalsmithing:**

ELIOTIS - ANTHEMIOS - LUNARDI

- **Painting/Gilding:**

GOHARD

- **Stucco restoration/Plastering:**

TOLLIS SARL

- **Masonry/Marble working:**

H. CHEVALIER

- **Electrics:**

BOUYGUES

- **Fire safety system/Security:**

SPIE FACILITIES

- **Structural consolidation:**

AUBERT LABANSAT



INTERVIEW WITH FRÉDÉRIC DIDIER, HEAD ARCHITECT OF HISTORICAL MONUMENTS AND PROJECT MANAGER

Why this restoration? Why now?

Frédéric Didier: Following the storm in 1999, there were leaks that resulted in water damage. It was time to get started on these works and restore the precious décors.

What makes this apartment at the heart of the Palace so special?

The work undertaken by Louis-Philippe to turn it into a French history museum was radical, especially for the Palace's most private spaces. Most of the courtiers' apartments in the North Wing and South Wing vanished, and the ground floor of the main building was impacted, particularly the Dauphin's apartment. Madame du Barry's apartment, meanwhile, remained relatively intact since it was refurbished in 1770. It managed to avoid the ravages of history for a fairly simple reason: it remained occupied for a long time, notably during the Revolution, making it the only place in the Palace where the royal insignia — the fleurs-de-lis and double 'L's — weren't defaced during the Reign of Terror. In the days of the Commune, it was used as lodgings for the Minister of Public Works, before serving as the Chamber of Deputies until the 1890s. As a result, with each new step in the process we were increasingly struck by how untouched and authentic this apartment is.

Could you describe the spaces in detail for us?

It's a multi-faceted apartment, which makes it incredibly moving. Located on the second floor of the Palace and topped by sloping ceilings that sometimes result in awkward proportions, architects Jacques V Gabriel and Ange-Jacques Gabriel were forced to summon up all their ingenuity to turn the rooms into refined, comfortable lodgings. Boasting magnificent views over the Marble Courtyard, the apartment comprises a succession of reception rooms running on from one another, behind which lies a real maze: several staircases and no fewer than five entrances lead into the apartment!

Once inside, one cannot help but be spell-bound by the rich palette of colourful décor. Once upon a time these would have abounded at the Palace, but most have since disappeared, leaving in their wake more uniform shades of greys and whites at the end of the Ancien Régime — the period most often used as a reference benchmark for works at Versailles. With regard to Madame du Barry's apartment, however, it had long since been deemed appropriate that the rooms be frozen in time, as if the clock had stopped here in 1774, when the mistress fled the Palace upon the King's death. Its colours had therefore been revived by one of my predecessors, who used past traces as a model. You know, there is no one single right way to restore this palace. It is a question of how you sense the elements around you: the vestiges of the past, the spaces themselves, moments in history...



View of the restored, refurbished apartment © Palace of Versailles, D. Saulnier

You mentioned André Japy's 1942 to 1947 restoration...

Yes, the only restoration to be carried out on this apartment took place three quarters of a century ago, led by an architect with the deepest of respect for the place. I hold him in the highest esteem, along with his colleague, Henri Racinais, who meticulously logged each step in the process. He collated an entire glass plate photography catalogue with a view to returning the apartment to its original volumes and layout: after Madame du Barry left court, it had been separated off into three spaces with partition walls. Thanks to André Japy, the Grand Cabinet, dining room and bedchamber were returned to their original spaciousness.

These refreshments were sometimes radical, resulting in an impression of stiffness, but we were able to confirm that everything was in its rightful place in the right shapes and sizes, such as most of the curved woodwork.



Glass plate photograph showing André Japy's restoration of the apartment, Palace of Versailles archives © D.R.

This might be a good time to discuss the cupboards that were in the antechamber?

In this one aspect, Japy abandoned his vision of remaining faithful to the du Barry era, which is baffling. These buffets were taken up to the antechamber after 1774, a room that had until then been attached to Villequier's apartment and used as a dining room. The panelling and colours we found behind it are irrefutable evidence of this. They helped us understand and easily reestablish the earlier layouts, positioning the cupboards symmetrically on either side of the fireplace. The buffets, meanwhile, were stored away. The crockery that had been on display in the old visitor circuit will now be showcased in the room where it used to be tidied away back in Madame du Barry's day: the buffet room, naturally! So simply by adjusting the woodwork, everything regains a sense of logic.

How did you proceed with respect to this earlier restoration?

In every other aspect, Japy's work revealed itself to be incredibly pertinent. We therefore followed in his footsteps, while continuously asking ourselves: might it be possible to go even further?

The architect was working during the World War II, which was a hindrance due to the scarcity of materials and means. We embarked on a game of spot-the-difference, working our way through the whole, point by point, to check for cohesiveness compared to the reference materials we had and the remnants of this first restoration.

So there were still traces of how things had been in Madame du Barry's day?

Indeed, where period finishes existed, André Japy left them visible.

Unlike many a later campaign where no evidence or documentation was kept, these traces were left as a legacy, allowing work to be compared and contrasted at any time. It was this that allowed us to observe, for example, that the colours refreshed by Japy, once cleaned up, did in fact match those used in 1774: the "emerald green" shining through in the jambs in the dining room, the "lilac pink" on the underside of a door and combined with a beige in the buffet room. As for the putty shade in the antechamber, this emerged as being very close to the reference tone, as seen in the preserved panelling found on the mounted cupboards.

What is new here perhaps is the notion of considering the 20th century restoration as its own separate slice of history. We had photographs taken of the adjoining rooms once they had been cleaned and before the backgrounds and gilding were refreshed: this campaign will serve as documentary evidence of our discoveries and bear witness, I hope, to the integrity of our process, for the benefit of our successors.



Buffet room after restoration © Palace of Versailles, C. Fouin

Did you alter these adjoining rooms?

No, we carried out the same restoration as on the Grand Cabinet, the bedchamber and the corner cabinet, merely correcting a handful of details. Medallions on the Grand Cabinet's cornice and in the adjoining dining room had disappeared during the 1774 partitioning work. These were restored. We had also planned on working on the window jambs' medallions: originally, they had been adorned with a sculpture that we were able to easily map from the traces. But why had this sculpture been defaced, when as I said earlier, the rest of the apartment had been spared the ravages of the Revolution? It emerged that these medallions had been encrusted in the 1735 woodwork well before Madame du Barry moved in, and would have felt old-fashioned at the time. They were probably removed with a view to paring back the décor. And it was only right that we respect that. Following Japy's example, we simply recreated this sculpture in the farthest jamb at the very back of the bedchamber, in a nod to the past.

Most of the work concerned the service rooms, is that right?

Yes, the 1940s restoration was somewhat lacking with respect to the small rooms positioned behind the adjoining rooms, at the back of the apartment. In terms of colour scheme, we reestablished a coherent white and gold visual continuity in the corridors. The water closet and bathroom, however, have retained their white and ocean blue décor, as indicated by the rare few vestiges we have to hand. Finally, we restored a partition wall that — according to a 1943 quote — Japy certainly intended to build. This wall closed the bathroom off on the Cour des Cerfs side, and we know the exact layout thanks to the Ange-Jacques Gabriel blueprints and elevations kept in France's Archives Nationales. I like to imagine André Japy experiencing the result for the very first time, wandering around the apartment today, marvelling at the refreshed, cleaned-up colours and the subtle harmonisation work on the glazing...

Interview published in *the Carnets de Versailles*, n°20

IMPROVING PROTECTION FOR THE SPACES

Restoring Madame du Barry's apartment included the external structure of the building, starting from the attic just above and behind the panelling. This insulation ensures fewer air-handling units* are required and aligns with relatively recent environmental policy for historic monuments. Furthermore, electricity subtly conducted into lamps was set up, allowing visitors to explore the apartment at any time of day without having to handle the old shutters.

*Safety works conducted on the northern part of the central building as part of the roadmap in place since 2007.



View of the service rooms' corridor © Palace of Versailles, C. Fouin



A RESTORATION WITH AN EYE FOR DETAIL

ALL ABOUT COLOUR

The rooms giving out onto the Marble Courtyard

The bedchamber, Grand Cabinet and corner drawing room had retained their 1770 white and gold décor under layers of later paint, and demanded particular care.

Indeed, surveys revealed that the backgrounds were painted in “king’s white”, meaning a white with a subtle blueish tint, and these had to be carefully cleared. The handful of alterations were touched up here and there, the old water gilding was nicely preserved and simply needed to be cleaned and refreshed, while parts that were lacking were regilded and evened out to fit with the whole.

As a result, the old backgrounds and gilding all blend seamlessly together.

The flooring

Removing the cupboards in the antechamber revealed yellow finishing paint on the parquet as was customary in the 18th century, a detail found throughout Versailles’ small apartments. All of the apartment’s parquet was therefore repainted in this shade, drawing on a recipe given by Jean-Félix Watin in his treatise*.

Following the same tradition and based on vestiges found in the lady’s maid room, the floor tiles were repainted “Prussian red” in the cupboards and the room itself, thus pulling the space together and lending the apartment the feel it would have had in the Countess du Barry’s day.



View of Madame du Barry’s restored bedchamber © Palace of Versailles, C. Fouin

THE APARTMENT’S FIREPLACES

The apartment’s fireplaces are some of the Palace’s most unique and most beautiful. All are in the Rococo style and were lavished with particular care and attention, especially considering they are the only ones to have retained their original fleurs-de-lis. They stand out in the fine quality of their marble: griotte in the Grand Cabinet, brocatelle in the library, dining room and corner cabinet (originally these last two would have formed a pair), purple breccia in the buffet room, and a rare red Sarrancolin marble in the antechamber.

The astonishing use of white statuary marble in the bedchamber can be explained by the fact that this is a 1769 pastiche, at a time when neoclassical tastes lent towards Antiquity-era styles.

Finally, the sense of ranking is respected in the night watch room, where a much less noble and refined fireplace can be found: stone painted in a Languedoc marble trompe-l’œil, carved into the shelf itself.

During the restoration, all the fireplaces were cleaned, cracks and chipped sections were filled in with artfully applied mastic, and a light wax polishing was performed in accordance with 18th-century techniques to revive the marbles’ colours without creating shine.



View of the fireplace in the library at Madame du Barry’s apartment © Palace of Versailles, D. Saulnier

LOCKS AND BOLTS

All the locks across the apartment were meticulously assessed and restored.

With one exception, **all the original bronze espagnolette locks** are still in place, with the fire-gilding having resisted the ravages of time particularly well. The espagnolette lock in the bathroom is a different design from the rest of the apartment, and probably always has been. Dated to 1770, it is identical to the lock in the bathroom in the Queen’s private apartment, which was refurbished in the same period for Marie-Antoinette when she was still the Dauphine.

On the doors, the original gilt bronze lock cases are still present in some of the rooms that were occupied once Madame du Barry had left, while on others, the locks had been replaced with standard iron versions in the 19th and 20th centuries.

The locks were removed and carefully cleaned, regilded when this appeared necessary, repaired and returned in place.

The gilt bronze lock cases that were no more were remade based on the mounting holes found on the doors, modeled on the design seen in the adjoining rooms. Traces of the bolts that had vanished were visible on the doors and frames. These were recreated, modeled on those still in existence.

In the cupboards, most of the old locks had been replaced with modern locks. In the buffet room, traces in the 18th century paint on the backs of the doors paved the way for faithful replicas of wrought-iron bolts. Elsewhere, other traces of mounting and fixing allowed the two-point locks to be replicated.

In the library, the backs of the glass-fronted cabinets complete with metal reinforcements ending in beautifully intricate fleur-de-lis tips, retained traces of recessed two-point locks. Each recess was carefully examined to craft custom-made locks, each slightly different from the last as a result of 18th-century craftsmanship, the model for which was a lock in the Queen’s bathroom.



© Palace of Versailles, D. Saulnier



© Palace of Versailles, D. Saulnier





PART 4 | THE
REFURBISHMENT

A CHALLENGING ENDEAVOUR

AN APARTMENT AT THE CUTTING EDGE OF TASTE

Contrary to what one might presume, when Louis XV assigned Palace of Versailles lodgings to his mistresses, he played no role in how these apartments were arranged. Just as Madame de Pompadour and the Nesle sisters did, Madame Du Barry proceeded to furnish her beautiful Versailles apartment as she saw fit, and in this way escaped the somewhat conventional tastes of the Garde-Meuble of the Throne. Archive documents show that from 1769 to 1774, her apartment in Versailles was at times ground-breaking in the luxurious furniture it housed, as she called on the suppliers most in step with the very latest trends. The most striking example of this is the delivery of no fewer than nine ornate pieces of Sèvres porcelain-mounted furniture. Upon Louis XV's death, most of the Versailles apartment's furniture was dispatched to the Château de Louveciennes, the Countess du Barry's main residence.

REVIVING THE SPIRIT OF THE APARTMENT

The ravages of time mean that almost all of the furniture that would once have adorned her apartment are no longer at the Palace of Versailles. In fact, the vast majority of the pieces are now in collections abroad. The only items to have found their way back to Versailles are the chairs made by the carpenter Louis Delanois for the apartment's corner drawing room, a pietre dure table



Chair from a series of thirteen, delivered for Madame du Barry's apartment in Versailles. Louis Delanois (carpenter), Joseph-Nicolas Guichard (sculptor), Jean-Baptiste Cagny (gilder). 1769, Palace of Versailles © RMN-GP (Palace of Versailles)/© F. Raux

by cabinetmaker Martin Carlin, and most certainly a pair of gilt bronze Sèvres vases, along with a portable porcelain inkwell. Alongside these pieces is a pair of marble, porphyry and gilt bronze vases and a pair of Sèvres porcelain basins, which have a connection to Madame du Barry as they belonged to her although they had never been at Versailles.



Pietre dure table, Martin Carlin, Palace of Versailles © RMN-Grand Palais (Palace of Versailles) C. Jean/J. Schormans



Jewellery box. Martin Carlin (cabinetmaker) Manufacture de Sèvres (manufacturer) attributed to Poirier, Simon-Philippe (marchand-mercier merchant), Palace of Versailles © RMN-GP (Palace of Versailles)/© F. Raux

The rest of the present-day furniture comprises pieces that aim to recreate the essence of a furnished apartment without claiming to replicate what it would have looked like in the mistress' day, with the exception of a Sèvres porcelain jewellery box that is very similar to one she had owned. Furniture dated 1765-1775 was chosen for the most part: more or less contemporary to the time when Madame du Barry would have occupied the premises.



Pair of girandole vases delivered by the marchand-mercier merchant Dulac circa 1770 for the Countess du Barry's apartment in Versailles, Palace of Versailles © RMN-Grand Palais (Palace of Versailles)/G. Blot



Armchair delivered for the Count of Artois, Jean-René Nadal, 1775. After restoration, white upholstery. Palace of Versailles

Thus, as well as the original chairs, four armchairs made in 1775 for the Count of Artois in Versailles will be moved into the corner cabinet. This decision was taken based on the fact that, like the original armchairs — of which no examples are available — the sculptural detailing here is ornate and the chairs have straight legs and circular backs and seats, similar to the furniture Madame du Barry would have enjoyed.

A pair of gilt bronze and marble consoles will be placed in the dining room, modeled on a design by the architect Victor Louis or sculptor Jean-Louis Prieur for the consoles in the Royal Castle in Warsaw, which stylistically speaking, are entirely in keeping with the furniture that best pleased Madame du Barry. In this same dining room, the chairs to be placed here don't match the description of the chairs supplied by Louis Delanois, but were in fact made by him.



View of Madame du Barry's restored apartment © Palace of Versailles, D. Saulnier

RESEARCH INTO TEXTILES

The refurbishing process was also an opportunity to take a closer look at the fabrics that would have been selected in the mistress' day, for which only the briefest descriptions are available ("green damask" in the dining room, "blue background medallion dauphine" in the main living room, "white dauphine with bouquets of roses" in the bedchamber). The initial idea was to choose a damask featuring a design in step with what would have been popular in the mistress' day for the dining room, and which could be used to upholster the chairs as well as for the curtains and doors. A decision was made recently as to the colour, aligning as closely as possible with the panelling: a shade of green that was rediscovered and revived. Attention will then turn to the corner cabinet and library.



View of Madame du Barry's restored apartment © Palace of Versailles, D. Saulnier



View of Madame du Barry's restored apartment © Palace of Versailles, D. Saulnier

PIECES RESTORED WITHIN THE PALACE OF VERSAILLES' ATELIERS

Restoring and refurnishing Madame du Barry's apartment drew on extensive involvement from the Palace of Versailles' museographic teams. Over and above the cleaning and everyday upkeep, two of their operations stand out from the rest.

FOUR ARMCHAIRS MADE IN 1775 BY JEAN-RENÉ NADAL FOR ONE OF THE COUNT OF ARTOIS' PRIVATE CABINETS IN VERSAILLES

They have now been moved to Madame du Barry's corner cabinet, used as stand-ins due to the fact that their style perfectly mirrors the furniture used by Louis XV's mistress. Deposited at Versailles by the Mobilier National in 2008, they were in varying states of disrepair.

Gilding and cabinetmaking

While the gilding on three of the armchairs required nothing more than a quick clean to reveal its fine quality, the fourth called for a different protocol, as it had been ravaged by wood-eating insects. Its surface had also been sanded down at some unknown point in time. This armchair's structure was therefore consolidated using acrylic injection resin to bolster its robustness and give it the support needed to hold up the upholstery. A second step involved applying new gilding. Once the surface had been slowly degreased, several layers of gesso primer were applied to the wood to ensure the gold leaf would stick.

However, because these layers create bulk over the sculpture, they require extensive recutting work in which the details of the sculpture are re-engraved into the layers of primer to restore the piece's energy and quality. After the yellow adhesive and red gilder's clay had been put to work, the gold leaf was finally applied and burnished with agate for extra shine.



Restoring a chair in the cabinetmaking atelier © Palace of Versailles, D. Saulnier

One final step needed to be conducted: a patina to ensure this new gilding merged seamlessly with the gleam of the old gilding on the three other armchairs.

Alongside this work, the cabinetmakers were able to construct conservation frames perfectly fitted to each seat for the upholstery to be fixed in place, all with a view to preserving the chairs' original structure as far as possible.



Restoring a chair in the upholstery atelier © Palace of Versailles, D. Saulnier

Upholstery

Once the frames have been upholstered, all the measuring, cutting and fitting that has taken place is unfortunately invisible to the naked eye. The upholsterers hand-craft the padding and covers on these removable conservation frames. Painstaking calculations and tweaking are needed to determine the overall shape of the upholstery, tailored to the style of the chair and the height of the cushions. The last step involves upholstering with fabric chosen by the conservation team, which conceals the exhaustive restoration work and close collaboration between the cabinetmaking, gilding and upholstery ateliers, without whom none of this would be possible.



Chair after restoration © Palace of Versailles, D. Saulnier

TWO PAIRS OF CONSOLES RESTORED IN THE PALACE'S ATELIERS IN TWO DIFFERENT WAYS

The first pair of consoles was intended for the dining room, and was truly exceptional: gilt bronze modeled on a Pierre II Deumier design.

The gilding was extremely dirty and was painstakingly cleaned in the cabinetmaking atelier using a clay resin to slough away corrosion and grime, revealing stunning old gilding bursting with matte and glossy contrast.



Applying gold leaf to one of the Absille consoles in the gilding atelier © Palace of Versailles, D. Saulnier



Restoring one of the consoles in the cabinetmaking atelier © Palace of Versailles, D. Saulnier



Buffing one of the Absille consoles to a shine using agate in the gilding atelier © Palace of Versailles, D. Saulnier

The pair of consoles from the Hôtel du Garde-Meuble in Paris, on the other hand, was sculpted from gilded wood by Rémy Absille in 1767.

These had warped significantly and the grime was very pronounced, and so the gilding was first consolidated with an acrylic filler before being cleaned with adhesive and saliva. Once the gaps had been filled in and the missing parts sculpted back on, the gilt was touched up so as to create an unbroken sense of cohesiveness with the console ornaments to be placed in Madame du Barry's main living room.



Console after restoration, Rémy Absille, 1767, Palace of Versailles © Palace of Versailles, D. Saulnier

SHOWCASING THE PORCELAIN PIECES IN A NEW LIGHT

Like Madame de Pompadour, Madame du Barry had a passion for porcelain, notably Chantilly porcelain and Sèvres pieces above all else. She sometimes called on Parisian marchand-mercier merchants Poirier and Dulac for the pieces she acquired, but dealt directly with the Manufacture Royale de Sèvres, too. Up until 1792, sales registers show that she acquired a number of ornamental vases, everyday pieces and at least five different dinner services.

First in her apartment in Versailles and then at Louveciennes, her collection included service pieces, vases, bisques and porcelain-mounted furniture of incredible note and breathtaking opulence.

Versailles' collections of Louis XV-era porcelain service pieces have grown considerably since the 1990s, and now include several porcelain art objects made by the Manufacture Royale de Sèvres and taken directly from the Countess du Barry's collections. These pieces are shining examples of her personal taste when she was the King's mistress and resided in the apartment.

Madame du Barry had several extensive dinner services, like the sky-blue ribbon service delivered in 1769-1770, the small "Aux Amours" service delivered in 1770, and the small service embellished with little vases and wreaths with Madame du Barry's monogram, delivered in 1771. Pieces from each of these sets, once used by Madame du Barry in her Versailles apartment, will be placed in the buffet room, precisely where the dinner services for the adjacent dining room would once have been stored. The mistress also had a dinner service decorated with birds against a sky-blue background, as well as a very expensive service with a Chinese décor. The Palace of Versailles also has a small writing desk, probably acquired from the marchand-mercier merchant Simon Philippe Poirier.



Punch bowl from the sky-blue ribbon dinner service © RMN-GP (Palace of Versailles)/ © F. Raux



Triangular tray from the small "Aux Amours" dinner service © RMN-GP (Palace of Versailles)/ © F. Raux



Plate from the service embellished with little vases and wreaths with Madame du Barry's monogram © Palace of Versailles, C. Fouin



Writing desk, Palace of Versailles © RMN-GP (Palace of Versailles)/ © G. Blot



PART 5 | **OUR
PATRON**



Ever loyal to its commitment to protecting and handing down heritage, for a number of years now AXA has been working to support symbolic landmarks that promote French culture across a wide global audience. Over the past few years, AXA has lent its support to the Palace of Versailles, the Musée du Louvre, the Centre des Monuments Nationaux and the Fondation Notre-Dame, to name but a few.

AXA's commitment to safeguarding and sharing cultural heritage is a natural extension of our work as insurers, in which we strive to protect individuals over the long-term as well as growing what they leave behind them. Our cultural and heritage patronage is intimately bound to our sense of corporate social responsibility and our calling: "to act for human progress by protecting what matters".

In February 2021, major works were kickstarted deep in the heart of the Palace of Versailles. With AXA's support, Madame du Barry's apartment — one of the most refined spaces of the former royal residence and a testimony to Louis XV's intimate experience of Versailles — has now been reunited with all its charm and harmony of yesteryear. The craftsmanship of fifty-odd expert artisans, from carpenters, gilders and ironworkers to locksmiths, painters, marble workers and stucco plasterers, breathed new life into this apartment's innate beauty and cohesiveness.

The eighteen-month restoration ensured that this exceptional space is being reopened to the public for the *Louis XV, Passions of a King* exhibition, another initiative sponsored by AXA.

AXA and the Palace of Versailles enjoy a long-standing relationship. AXA has been a proud patron of the Palace of Versailles since 2013, helping it raise its profile and add to its collections, notably by donating a rug from the Manufacture de la Savonnerie, supporting the *La Chine à Versailles* exhibition in 2014, contributing funding for acquiring King Louis XIV's desk and financing the restoration of the Coronation Room in 2018.

ABOUT AXA

The AXA Group is a world leader in insurance and asset management, and boasts 149,000 employees and agents working to support 95 million clients in 50 countries. In 2021, its IFRS turnover hit €99.9bn, with operating income reaching €6.8bn. As of 31 December 2021, AXA had €1.051 trillion in assets under management.

AXA PRESS CONTACTS
+ 33(0)1 40 75 46 74

The restored bathroom in Madame du Barry's apartment
© Palace of Versailles, C. Fouin





PART 6 | **FURTHER
INSIGHT**

LOUIS XV EXHIBITION PASSIONS OF A KING



From 18 October 2022 to 19 February 2023, the Palace of Versailles is dedicating a sprawling exhibition to Louis XV for the very first time to mark three hundred years since his coronation. Close to 400 works of art, including a number of masterpieces, are on loan and showcased here for

the first time in France, offering the public a glimpse of the man beneath the crown: his childhood, inner circle, family, and the many interests and passions he harboured. The exhibition shall also shine a light on his taste for the arts, and his involvement in the emergence of the Rococo style in the 18th century.

Born in 1710 in Versailles, Louis XV was the son of the Duke of Burgundy and Marie-Adélaïde of Savoy, and Louis XIV's great-grandson. Having been the heir apparent to the throne upon his father's death in 1712, he became king at the tender age of five following the Sun King's death in 1715. In 1722, soon after the government and Court returned to Versailles, the young king was coronated in Reims. This ceremony marked the beginning of a long reign that would stretch over more than fifty years, a chapter in which France's cultural and artistic model gained traction across Europe and the philosophy of the Enlightenment emerged.

This exhibition and landmark event aims to raise public awareness of King Louis XV, a monarch whose reign and personality remain little-known today, through a series of exceptional works on loan from collections around the world. The exhibition shall be structured into three parts.

The first, entitled *the man beneath the crown*, will delve into the King's childhood, his schooling, inner circle and family. This section will deepen visitors' understanding of the monarch known as Louis The Beloved. Quiet and melancholic by nature, Louis XV was more at home in the intimacy of his private apartments than out in public, and surrounded himself with a tight-knit circle of women and men in whom he placed the utmost trust. A devout believer, he paradoxically maintained relationships throughout his life with a series of mistresses, some of whom – Madame de Pompadour especially – had a significant influence on the King.

The second part will be dedicated to the *passions of a King* and will cover the sciences, botany, hunting, as well as Louis XV's interest in buildings and the role they played in influencing the kingdom's politics. Louis XV fed his curiosity and encouraged research. He funded epic sailing expeditions, turned the Trianon into a garden for botanical experimentation, commissioned high-tech scientific devices, and ordered geographers and astronomers to draw up maps of the country.

The final section, *Louis XV and the arts*, will be given over to Rococo masterpieces, providing members of the public with an understanding of the pillars of this style that did away with symmetry and formal rules to revolutionise art in the 18th century. The exhibition shall also showcase the exceptional works of art that adorned the King's everyday spaces.

EXHIBITION CURATORS

Yves Carlier, Chief Heritage Curator at the Musée National des Châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon
Hélène Delalex, Heritage Curator at the Musée National des Châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon

DISPLAY DESIGN

Martin Michel

WITH THE PATRONAGE OF:



LOUIS XV'S VERSAILLES

What places embody Louis XV's time at the Palace of Versailles? Which rooms house furniture in the Louis XV style?

After touring Madame du Barry's apartment, visitors are given the opportunity to embark on guided or self-guided tours to explore the many rooms where the sovereign's spirit still reigns supreme today: **the King's private apartments, the Dauphin's apartment (restored and reopened to the public in 2022), the apartment of Mesdames, the Salon of Hercules, the Royal Opera, the apartment of Madame de Pompadour and the Petit Trianon.**

THE KING'S PRIVATE APARTMENT

Following on from his official apartment, Louis XIV had a series of rooms furnished for his personal use and only open to members of the royal family and a lucky few. It was here that the Sun King kept his collection's finest paintings.

In 1735, Louis XV's quest for comfort and privacy prompted him to convert this mini museum into a genuine home, undertaking a great many changes to lend it the appearance that has remained almost entirely intact today. Drawing on designs by Gabriel, Jacques Verberck completed most of the woodwork which forms the most beautiful ensemble of this type to be found in France, while the best cabinetmakers of the time provided furniture that was further elevated by silk from Lyon, porcelain from Sèvres, rugs from the Manufacture de la Savonnerie and freshly-cut flowers that were continuously replenished.



© Palace of Versailles, T. Garnier

THE CORNER CABINET, AN EMBLEM OF LOUIS XV'S REIGN

The corner cabinet is a sumptuous room inside the King's private apartment and boasts one of the Palace's most stunning examples of Rococo décor. Featuring woodwork by Jacques Verbeckt and home to pieces of furniture amassed here by Louis XV himself, the room epitomises flawless French art at its finest. It is here that the desk on which the King used to work is displayed. The cylinder desk made by Jean-François Ceben and completed by Jean-Henri Riesener between 1760 and 1769 is probably one of the world's best-known pieces of furniture.



© Palace of Versailles, T. Garnier

The room and all its furniture were restored in 2021 with Rolex France's patronage.

THE PRINCES' APARTMENTS

Members of the public have been able to embark on self-guided tours of two prestigious ground-floor apartments since 1 April 2022: the Dauphin's apartment, and that of Louis XV's daughters, known as the 'Mesdames'. These apartments are an invaluable, highly evocative testimony to royal family life in Versailles as the sun set on the Ancien Régime.



© Palace of Versailles, T. Garnier

THE DAUPHIN'S APARTMENT RESTORED IN 2022

Between the 17th and 20th centuries, the three main rooms that make up the Dauphin's apartment (the bedchamber, Grand Cabinet and library) were used and refurbished in such a way as to gradually compromise the unity of the rooms and their décor. Restoration was much-needed in order to return a sense of cohesiveness and logic to these rooms.

Over the course of 18 months, carpenters, sculptors, locksmiths, painters, gilders and stucco restorers got to work in returning the spaces to their 1740 appearance, when architect Ange-Jacques Gabriel was tasked with refurbishing the royal apartment occupied by Louis XV's eldest son, the Dauphin Louis-Ferdinand.



© Palace of Versailles, T. Garnier

The apartment was restored with the patronage of Baron Philippe de Rothschild S.A and the Friends of Versailles Society, with the support of the Fondation du Patrimoine.

THE SALON D'HERCULE

The Salon d'Hercule was the last room to be built in the Palace at the end of Louis XIV's reign. Completed under his predecessor, the décor is a precious legacy of gradual shifts that unfolded in the Palace's official tastes, from the end of the Sun King's reign to the emerging Louis XV style. In 1730, the monarch brought *The Feast in the House of Simon* out of storage at the Gobelins tapestry workshop, a monumental Veronese painting that the Republic of Venice had gifted his great-grandfather in 1664. Works on the Salon d'Hercule continued up until 1736 when François Lemoyne finished painting the ceiling representing *The Apotheosis of Hercules*.



© Palace of Versailles, T. Garnier

THE ROYAL OPERA

Inaugurated in 1770 under Louis XV for the wedding banquet held to celebrate the future Louis XVI's marriage to the Archduchess Marie-Antoinette, the Royal Opera is one of architect Ange-Jacques Gabriel's masterpieces. Europe's largest theatre is a living, breathing example of technical prowess and decorative refinement. Louis XV ordered it be built with his three grandsons' weddings in mind, and Gabriel then delivered a theatre which featured the most significant advances of his time: a truncated ellipse-shaped floorplan, staggered tiers and French-style boxes (without partitions).

The sculpted décor was entrusted to Augustin Pajou and the paintings were commissioned from Louis-Jacques Durameau.

Blaise-Henri Arnoult, the King's machinist, was entrusted with creating the stage machinery and succeeded in creating a genuine masterpiece. The space was intended to be used as a theatre, ballroom and banquet hall. Thanks to his complex system of mobile winch-operated flooring, Arnoult produced a multi-functional venue built to last.



© Palace of Versailles, T. Garnier

MADAME DE POMPADOUR'S APARTMENT



© Palace of Versailles, T. Garnier

Madame de Pompadour's apartment is located on the third floor, above the Mars, Mercury and Apollo salons. Madame de Pompadour lived there from September 1745 until May 1751. The King was able to make discreet visits via his private cabinets. The apartment was laid out in a succession of rooms of which four remain today, and is served by a vast corridor that opens into an antechamber connected to an adjoining bedchamber on one side and the Grand Cabinet and boudoir on the other. This ensemble is unique in how the servants' rooms located behind the main rooms have been kept practically intact. In 1750, the relationship between Louis XV and the Marquise changed: she was no longer his mistress, yet continued to be his friend and confidante. It was at this point that she left this apartment for the ground floor of the Palace.

THE PETIT TRIANON



© Palace of Versailles, T. Garnier

In 1758, Louis XV planned to build a new small château amidst the gardens he had been landscaping and enhancing over the past dozen years. He commissioned his chief architect, Ange-Jacques Gabriel, to design a pavilion large enough to accommodate both himself and some of his entourage. In doing so, Gabriel produced a shining embodiment of neoclassical architecture, a perfect example of the Greek-inspired style that was spreading throughout Europe. Completed in 1768, the new château was named the "Petit Trianon" to distinguish it from the marble Trianon, which became known as the "Grand Trianon" in turn. In 1774, it was here in Trianon that Louis XV experienced the first symptoms of the smallpox that was to carry him off a few days later. The proportions of the building combine in a masterpiece of harmony and elegance that contributed to a renaissance in French architecture.

BOOKS

ÉTATS DES LIEUX

YVES CARLIER, FRÉDÉRIC DIDIER, ALEXIS MULLER AND EMMANUEL SARMÉO

This book covers the freshly-completed restoration works on Madame du Barry's apartment. It pores through the history of this apartment and how it would have been furnished and arranged back when Louis XV's mistress lived here, and documents the works carried out by leading artisans in the purest of tradition.

Published by Rmn-GP - château de Versailles

Page count: 96

RRP: €25

Published: 2023

VERSAILLES AU FÉMININ

FLAVIE LEROUX AND ÉLODIE VAYSSE

This guide leads readers deep into the heart of the Palace of Versailles to meet the women who left their mark

here. Many of them belonged to Louis XV's inner circle, such as his wife Marie Leszczyńska, mistresses Pompadour and du Barry, and his eight daughters, the incorrigible 'Mesdames'. Whether veiled in shadow or hailed in the spotlight, these female characters and their portraits, décors and belongings bring to light another, unique and sometimes secret side to Versailles.



Published by Rmn-GP - château de Versailles

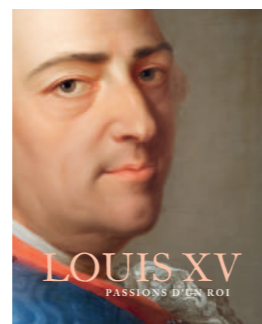
Page count: 176

RRP: €20

Published: 9 November

LOUIS XV, PASSIONS OF A KING

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE



Overseen by Yves Carlier and Hélène Delalex

On 15 June 1722, during the lull of the Regency sparked by Louis XIV's death on 1 September 1715, the Court returned to Versailles and the twelve-year-old Louis XV was reunited with his childhood home. A few months later on 25 October, the young King was coronated in Reims, marking the dawning of a long reign that would span over fifty years and see France's cultural and artistic model spread across Europe. Modernity had begun its steady march, with Louis XV as its melancholic figurehead.

Beyond the King's public image, this catalogue published to mark three hundred years since Court returned to Versailles brings together works from collections from around the world, many of which have never been seen in public or showcased in France before, casting new light on the man beneath the crown and offering up a glimpse of the complex individual behind the monarch. Who was Louis XV? What was he like? How did he live? Who belonged to his inner circle? Where did his passions and interests lead him? Which arts left their mark on his era? Where did his personal tastes lie, and what was his everyday life like?

Published by In Fine Éditions d'art - Palace of Versailles

Page count: 496

RRP: €49

Available from www.boutique-chateauversailles.fr, in the Palace of Versailles boutiques and in bookshops in France and beyond.

Right-hand page: The King's private cabinet © Palace of Versailles, T. Garnier
Next double-page spread and back cover: Views of Madame du Barry's restored and refurbished apartment © Palace of Versailles, D. Saulnier





