



Le Nôtre and the National Domaine of Saint-Cloud

The development of a remarkable site



The skill of Le Nôtre's intervention in Saint-Cloud between 1660 and his death in 1700, has been praised by his contemporaries. The Princess Palatine, Monsieur's second wife, confessed in a letter in 1691 : « Between us, I find our gardens

more pleasant than those of Versailles » and in the *New description of France* (1722) Piganiol de la Force wrote : « Although the gardens are quite irregular, not only by the layout of the ground, but also by their form and their enclosures, Le Nôtre has spared all these things with so much art that everything seems regular, and that he makes it a masterpiece »
More than documents or testimony of contemporaneous people, the visible traces on the park let us see the work of Le Nôtre. The modern visitor can discover his fantastic organisation and use of space.
Le Nôtre submitted the estate to a clever grid pattern of roundabouts and basins, combining forest squares at the top of the hill, terraces on the hillside and beds along the Seine.

The Castle's terrace

The Hôtel d'Aulnay was the beginning of the castle's story. In the 1577, the Queen Catherine of Medicis offered Jérôme de Gondi a mansion at Saint-Cloud, the Hôtel d'Aulnay. After the death of Jérôme de Gondi in 1604, his son Jean-Baptiste II de Gondi sold the castle to Jean de Bueil, Comte de Sancerre, who died shortly afterward. The castle was bought back by Jean-François de Gondi, archbishop of Paris. His embellishment notably included fountains by Thomas Francine. After the death of Jean-François de Gondi in 1654, the property was sold to Barthélemy Hervart, financial controller and protégé of Mazarin.
At the request of Louis XIV, Hervart sold his property to the king's younger brother, Philippe d'Anjou, known as Monsieur, in 1658. The castle built for him from 1676, to the design of Antoine Le Pautre, follows a regular U-shaped plan around a main courtyard. Monsieur also had the park enlarged to 1,000 acres by the time of his death in 1701, compared to about thirteen at the time of the Gondi family. He entrusted the development of the gardens to André Le Nôtre, even before the latter entered the service of Louis XIV at Versailles. Called « house of delight » by Saint-Simon, Saint-Cloud became the ideal place for celebrations.
In 1870, the castle is destroyed by fire during the war with Prussia. The ruins stand during 20 years before the new Republic decide to razed them in 1892. The layout of the lawns planted on the terrace traces the U-shaped ground plan of the vanished castle.
The terrace of the château is the point of origin of the two axes created by André Le Nôtre to structure the composition of the park : the grand perspective, which runs from east to west, and the allée de la Balustrade, which linked the southern facade of the castle to the Sèvres hillside



Orangery terrace

- The Orangery was located on the right-hand side of the terrace, where the stone bench-lined pathway is today. Built around 1680 as an extension to the castle, it was intended for the winter protection of citrus fruits and frost-sensitive plants. As usual in this type of building, big windows were opened in the south facade and the north one without any was used to remain the heat.
Paved with marble and decorated with trompe-l'œil paintings, the gallery was used in summer as a ballroom. It was destroyed in 1861.
The Orangery terrace is the starting point of the great east-west axis created between 1685 and 1695 by André Le Nôtre. A succession of spaces follow one another, over more than two kilometres, following a gentle upward slope: the Orangery alley (which has since been called the Statue alley), the basin of the 24 jets, the Tapis Vert, the rond-point de la Grande Gerbe and the Marnes alley.
Le Nôtre used the garden as an experimentation and application of his scientist theory. Each part of the composition was studied to increase the architectural effect using the optical and geometrical law.
The elements are dimensioned in relation to each other and respond to each other, from terrace to

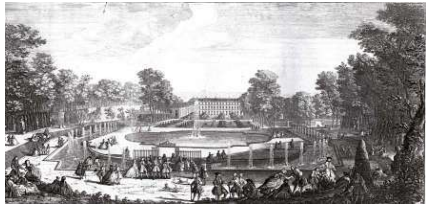
terrace. Thus, the diameter of the round pool on the orangery terrace determines the distance between the two central beds of the Statue alley



The 24 Jets

3 Halfway between the castle and the Grande Gerbe pool, the 24 Jets are designed as a transitional space between the ordered gardens and the forest squares of the park. The name 24 Jets comes from the two side pools, each with twelve jets. Drawing a virtual fence, these water grids symbolically reinforce the separation between the central space and the plant cover on the periphery.

In the centre, the Petite Gerbe pool is the major element of the composition, since its geometric shape, a square flanked by four semicircles, determines the dimensions of the park's paths in their width.



The Grande Gerbe

4 The height of the jet and the dimensions of the pools on the large perspective increase in size as one moves away from the castle terrace, up to the Grande Gerbe pool, which is the largest on the estate.

It constitutes the apogee of the great perspective, which continues with the Marnes alley, the longest in the park. Placed in the centre of a star, its jet is visible from all the surrounding alleys and constitutes a lively and ephemeral viewpoint during the water show.

Le Petit Parc (the Small Park)

The Petit Parc was originally designed by Le Nôtre, but today only the perspective of the Goulottes alley (the thin masonry channel), the Bassin aux Chiens (the dogs pool) and the Trois Bouillons green room (three bubbling jets greenery room) remains of its original work. Other spaces were redesigned in the 18th century by the architect Pierre Contant d'Ivry.

5 Trois Bouillons (Three bubbling jets)

This room of greenery owes its name to the three jets of water of low height of the basin. Initially, it was called the room of chestnut trees, because of the alignments of chestnut trees that delimit the alley on both sides.

A room of greenery is an open space in a grove. It was composed of decorative elements like statues, vases, pools, fountains. It was encircled by benches of greenery or by high palisades of greenery that formed a regular carved vegetable wall. Like extension of the castle's halls, it was used in particular for the realization of sumptuous outdoor parties, during which concerts and snacks were offered.

6 Bassin aux chiens (Dogs pool) et allée des Goulottes (downspouts alley)

The Bassin aux chiens is one of the most ancient pool of the park even if it was very transform over the years.

It was formerly called a rockery fountain, in reference to the two superimposed rockery basins from which the water flowed in a sheet from one basin to the other. The appearance today is a restitution of its decoration under the First Empire combining a cast of the *Venus Callipyge*, a marble copy of an ancient statue, the *Dancing Fauna* and two casts of the *Dogs* sculpted by Pierre Biard for the fountain of Diana in Fontainebleau.

In the same path you can find the Goulotte alley, the name given to the narrow, masonry canal cut from distance to distance by small pools with water features. This water path ended at the foot of the façade of the castle and allowed its occupants to enjoy the shade and freshness.

Le bassin du Fer-à-Cheval (Horseshoe pool)

7 The creation of this pool by the contractor Jean Girard was parallel to the castle's construction. Initially called the Swan Pool, it was decorated with three jets and twelve statues attributed to the sculptor Guillaume Cadaine. Designed as a water mirror, its purpose was to highlight the monumentality of the southern facade of the castle, which was the arrival point for the king and the court coming from Versailles.

The pool was redesigned by Jules Hardouin-Mansart, who added the two side ramps and five leaning fountains. This new shape gave the basin its name of Fer-à-Cheval.



This pool starts the north/south axis made by Le Nôtre from the castle to Sèvres. In the middle of this axis, you find the roundabout of the Balustrade with a panoramique point of view over Paris and the park. The alley to this point of view was changed in the 18th century by an open air amphitheater of greenery which decoration and basins have disappeared but we can still see the monumental lawn curves of it.

The domaine national de Saint-Cloud

Located west of Paris, in the Hauts-de-Seine department, the domaine national de Saint-Cloud is a 1136 acres park classified as a Historic Monument since 9 November 1994. With the «remarkable garden» label, it remains one of the undisputed successes of André Le Nôtre, alongside the gardens of Vaux-le-Vicomte and Versailles.

Creating a true masterpiece of a French garden, he had the merit of having been able to adapt to the irregularity of the terrain and the unusual topography of the site. The monumental scale of the garden, its openness to the surrounding landscape and its geometric perfection result from a perfect mastery of topographic and cartographic survey techniques.

Since the destruction of the castle by fire, the gardens and fountains have preserved the memory of the princely, royal and then imperial residence, the parties and sumptuous receptions it hosted, thus giving it a role as a witness in French history.

Useful informations

Average journey time: 1 hour 15 minutes

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