



History of the Elys e Palace

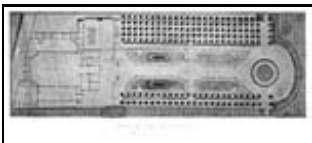


In the early 18th century, the present-day Faubourg Saint-Honor  was just a meadow dotted with scattered grazing land and vegetable patches, and a few thatched houses.



Between the Grande Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honor  - a small road leading to the village of Roule - and the Grand Cours (the Champs-Elys es), the architect Armand-Claude Mollet, a nephew by marriage of the architect Andr  Le N tre, owned a plot of land which he sold to Henri-Louis de la Tour d'Auvergne, Comte d'Evreux, in 1718. Under the terms of the sale contract, Armand-Claude Mollet was to be put in charge of building a town house there, to serve as a residence for the Comte d'Evreux.

At the request of the Comte, the architect situated the town house between the courtyard (facing towards the street) and the garden (facing the Champs-Elys es). This arrangement served as the starting point for the development of the entire Faubourg Saint-Honor  district. As early as 1742, Pignol de la Force considered the neighbourhood to be one of the finest in Paris.



Built and decorated between 1718 and 1722, the house was designed and laid out in accordance with the prevailing principles of contemporary architectural theory.

Today, it is still an outstanding example of the classical model, with an entrance vestibule aligned with the ceremonial courtyard and gardens, a long central building, a great, or State, apartment divided down the middle by a large salon that opens out onto the garden.

The building also comprised a central three-story section, and two single-floor wings: an Appartement des Bains to the right, and a Petit Appartement (private apartments) to the left.



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A monumental gate with four Ionic columns, flanked by windowless walls topped by a balustrade, opened onto a large rounded courtyard. The majestic ceremonial courtyard imparted the requisite degree of splendour to the house, in accordance with the wishes of the Comte d'Evreux. Along the edges ran two walls with arcades where deep insets concealed the offices and outhouses (stables, kitchen, log-room, storehouses, etc.).

A French-style garden, with a central path aligned with the central building, patterned flowerbeds and alleys of chestnut trees edged with hedgerows, completed the town house agreeably.

This arrangement allowed each succeeding owner to adapt the house to his tastes and needs. Major alterations were made, depending on the use to which the building was to be put: town house, princely residence or presidential palace, and in accordance with the tastes of its residents and the dictates of fashion.

Although the decoration of the reception rooms has changed over the centuries, for the most part it has retained its original appearance. The wainscoting in the great salon (the Salon des Ambassadeurs) sculpted by Michel Lange after Hardouin-Mansard, the decoration of the Second Antechamber (the Salon des Aides-de-Camp), the State Chamber (the Salon Pompadour) and the Salon des Portraits are still for the most part as they were originally, and later alterations have left their character intact.

At his death in 1753, the Comte d'Evreux left a town house that was admired by all his contemporaries, including Blondel, who appreciated "the finest country home in the neighbourhood of Paris."



Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson, Marquise de Pompadour, who had been looking for a Paris home, bought it. She ordered her favourite architect, Lassurance, to rearrange the State Chamber and the first floor. The garden too was altered, with the introduction of porticos, hedgerows, waterfalls, a maze, and a gilded grotto.

Madame de Pompadour bequeathed the residence to Louis XV on her death. Initially placed at the disposal of Ambassadors Extraordinary in Paris, by royal decision of August 14, 1765 the house was given over to the presentation of paintings of the Ports of France commissioned by Louis XV from Joseph Vernet, for the benefit of "the curious and lovers of the fine arts."



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The residence then served as a temporary Crown Furniture Store in 1768 pending completion of Gabriel's buildings on the Place Louis XV. The H[^]tel d'Evreux (as the residence was known at the time) was sold in 1773 to the financier Nicolas Beaujon.

He owned the house until 1786, when he transferred the property to Louis XVI while retaining the use of it. Nicolas Beaujon altered the buildings substantially, making extensive use of the architect Etienne-Louis Boull[^]e

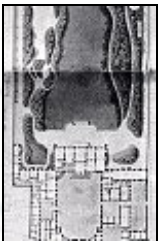
He ordered Boull[^]e to extend the Petits Appartements wing to the Champs-Elys[^]es at a right angle. The present-day Salon d'Argent still retains the proportions of a mirror-walled boudoir.

A gallery running along the salons of the Petits Appartements displayed the banker's collection of paintings, which were lit through a glass roof. His collection contained several outstanding works, including Franz Hals's "Bohemian Girl", and Holbein's "Ambassadors".

Other noteworthy alterations were made to the central building: the State Chamber was transformed into a hemicycle; the Assembly room was divided up, wood decorations were sculpted, and a greenhouse was installed in part of the Appartement des Bains.

The garden was totally transformed and laid out in the English style, with terraces, clumps of trees, winding paths and rivers flowing into a small lake. This layout set the pattern for the park as it is today.

Boull[^]e's work, and Nicolas Beaujon's art collection, made the residence "one of the finest in Paris".



Like his grandfather, Louis XVI set aside the house as a residence for Ambassadors Extraordinary in Paris; then in 1787 he sold it to his cousin, the Duchess of Bourbon. She changed its name to "H[^]tel de Bourbon". Pierre-Adrien P[^]cris modified part of Boull[^]e's work. Part of the picture gallery was used to create a bedchamber for the Duchess. This is now the Napoleon III library.



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During the Revolution and after the arrest of the Duchess in April 1793, the H[^]tel de Bourbon was put to several different uses. In 1794 it housed the Commission for the Transmission of Laws and the press used to print the Legal Bulletin; then, a few months later, it was turned into the national depository for furniture confiscated from [^] ' migr[^] ' s and people condemned to death.



The Duchess of Bourbon was freed in 1795 and regained possession of her Paris home in January 1797. To make ends meet, she let out the ground floor and allowed the tenant, a merchant named Hovyn, to organize public dancing in the drawing rooms and the garden. To facilitate public access, he opened up the two arcades on either side of the door of the vestibule leading to the Great Salon.

It was at that time that the house took the name of Elys[^] ' e, after the nearby promenade.

From her exile in Spain, the Duchess of Bourbon put the property up for sale by auction, and the Hovyn family bought it. Some parts were rented out as apartments, which is how the Comte and Comtesse L[^] ' on de Vigny, and their fourth son Alfred (the future poet Alfred de Vigny), came to live at the Elys[^] ' e. Parties and dancing went out of fashion, and Hovyn's daughter was forced to sell the residence in 1805 to pay off her debts.

It was bought by Joaquim Murat, Marshal of France and Prince of the Empire. To restore it to its former glory, he entrusted the refurbishment and alterations to Barth[^] ' l[^] ' my Vignon, who later designed the Madeleine Church, and Barth[^] ' l[^] ' my Thibault.

These two architects gave the Elys[^] ' e its grand staircase, to the left of the ceremonial hallway, and the picture gallery used as a ballroom (now the Salon Murat), by bringing together the Beaujon dining room and the adjacent chapel. A banqueting hall was installed in the west wing.



The Petits Appartements wing became the apartment of Caroline Murat, but all that remains now is the Salon d'Argent. The first floor of the central building was taken over by the Prince, as was fitting, while his children Caroline and Joaquim occupied the second floor. Napoleon later assigned this floor to his son, the King of Rome.



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Upon being made King of Naples in 1808, Murat made over all of his properties in France, including the Elys[^]e, to Napoleon. The Elys[^]e's name was changed to the Elys[^]e-Napol[^]on, and henceforward its history became inextricably linked with the history of France.

The Emperor moved into Caroline's apartment, and lived there from March 1, 1809 until his departure for the Austrian campaign. After handing the residence over to Josephine on their divorce, Napoleon took it back in 1812. The Elys[^]e was witness to the final hours of the Empire, and it was in the Boudoir d'Argent that Napoleon signed his abdication.

Tsar Alexander of Russia moved into the Elys[^]e during the occupation of Paris by the Allies, and the building was then placed at the disposal of the Duke of Wellington in November 1815.



In 1816, the Elys[^]e definitively became part of the Crown estates, and Louis XVIII granted it to his nephew, the Duc de Berry, on the occasion of the latter's marriage to Marie-Caroline de Bourbon-Siciles. The banqueting hall was transformed into an Orangerie. In 1820, Louis Philippe took possession of the Palace, which thereafter became the residence of foreign State guests visiting Paris, until 1848.



During the provisional government of the Second Republic, the Palace took the name of "Elys[^]e National" and the gardens were opened to the public. On December 12, 1848, the National Assembly issued a decree designating the "Elys[^]e National" as the Residence of the French President.



The Prince-President Louis Napoleon moved in on December 20, 1848, before gaining possession of the Tuileries Palace in 1852. In 1853, the Elys[^]e became home to Eug[^]nie de Montijo, the Emperor's fianc[^]e, and Napoleon ordered a complete renovation of the Palace by a new architect, Joseph-Eug[^]ne Lacroix. The present-day structure of the Palace dates mainly from this time, and these various works, completed in 1867, were the last major alterations.



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The transformation concerned, successively, the west wing bordering the Avenue Marigny, followed by the ground-floor reception rooms, and finally the first-floor apartment.

The Emperor also opened up the Avenue de la Reine Hortense (now Rue de l'Elysée) and doubled the floorspace of the Petits Appartements, adding a new floor without affecting the Boudoir d'Argent.

The reception rooms of the central building were provided with a second series of connecting doors. The portions above the doors in the Salon du Conseil (Council Chamber) were furnished with portraits of the sovereigns of Europe, replacing Mme de Pompadour's Muses and the portraits of the Imperial family (this is now the Salon des Portraits).

The first floor of the central building was completely redecorated. Jean-Louis Godon was given the task of decorating the great salon and the Salle de Bains with the help of Charles Chaplin.

A new chapel was built on the ground floor of the east wing, overlooking the ceremonial courtyard, while a ballroom begun as an extension to the Salon Murat was completed by Marshal Mac-Mahon.

The entrance gate was significantly altered, being replaced by a gate in the form of a triumphal arch, and windows were opened onto the Faubourg Saint-Honoré facade.

The work was completed in time for the Universal Exposition of 1867, and foreign sovereigns, including Tsar Alexander II, the Sultan Abdul-Aziz of Turkey, and Emperor Franz-Josef of Austria, were received at the Elysée.



After the fall of the Empire, the Palace resumed the name of Elysée National. It came through the Commune (1870-71) unscathed. Thiers, named Head of the Executive in February 1871, then President of the Republic in August, spent some time there. His successor, Marshal Mac-Mahon, who was elected in May 1873, made the Elysée his home from September 1874.

From that time on, the Elysée Palace has been the official residence of all French Presidents.

The demands of the Presidential functions necessitated additional work. The Salle des Fêtes (large reception hall) was inaugurated in 1889, in time for the festivities marking the Universal Exposition.

There were no major architectural changes to the Presidential Palace under the Third Republic, although some modernization did occur. Electricity, telephone lines, central heating and modern conveniences were installed. Only the



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distribution of the rooms and their furnishings varied according to the needs and tastes of succeeding occupants.



The Palace was closed between June 13, 1940 and 1946. Vincent Auriol restored the Palace to its Presidential status. Under his Presidency the cloakroom gallery and the semi-circular Salon Pompadour were done away with, and the contemporary designers Arbus and Leleu were commissioned to decorate the first floor of the central building.



The Fifth Republic maintained the Elysée as the Presidential Palace, but the floor plan was thoroughly remodelled in response to the new demands of the President's functions.

The rooms on the first floor of the central building were converted into offices. The Salon Doré (gilded salon) became the President's office, and the President's key staff members took up their quarters in Eugénie's former apartment.

The Council of Ministers' Chamber was moved from the Salon des Portraits on the ground floor to the first floor, in the former private dining room.

The east wing was set aside for apartments, the first floor being reserved for the private apartments, and the ground floor for semi-official apartments.

This new distribution in fact corresponds to the traditional arrangement of the great 18th century residences, and General de Gaulle's successors were to leave it unchanged. Georges Pompidou did, however, move the Council of Ministers' Chamber to the Salon Murat.



Meanwhile, each Head of State decorated the private and semi-official apartments according to his individual tastes. Like President Auriol, both Georges Pompidou and François Mitterrand commissioned work from contemporary designers.

Despite substantial alterations over the centuries, the Elysée Palace has retained its overall architectural coherence.



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As the residence of the Head of State and the seat of the Office of the President, this former private town house is today a powerful symbol of the Republic.

