

GUIDED VISIT OF THE CHATEAU DE BRISSAC

Historical reminder

VALOIS

KING	REIGNS	WIFE (WIVES)
Louis XII	1498-1515	married to Jeanne de France (1474) remarried to Anne de Bretagne (1499) remarried to Marie d'Angleterre (1514)
François I^{er}	1515-1547	married to Claude de France (1514) remarried to Eléonore de Habsbourg (1530)
Henri II	1547-1559	married to Catherine de Medicis (1533)
François II	1559-1560	married to Marie Stuart (1558)
Charles IX	1560-1574	married to Elisabeth d'Autriche (1570)
Henri III	1574-1589	married to Louise de Lorraine (1575)

BOURBONS

KING	REIGNS	WIFE (WIVES)
Henri IV	1589-1610	married to Marguerite de France (annulled 1599) remarried to Marie de Medicis (1600)
Louis XIII	1610-1643	married to Anne d'Autriche (1615)
Louis XIV	1643-1715	married to Marie-Thérèse d'Autriche (1660)
Louis XV	1715-1774	married to Marie Leszczynska (1725)
Louis XVI	1774-1792	married to Marie-Antoinette d'Autriche (1770)

The Façade

In the mid-15th century, an influential minister to King Louis XI (1461-1483), Pierre de Brézé, purchased the site and built a medieval castle with towers. The castle was certainly austere, imposing, but here we have certain embellishments: notice the sculpted gables decorating the machicolations (or look-outs) of the two towers and their sculpted dormer windows. The two towers are all that remain of that 15th century castle.

Pierre de Brézé's grandson, Louis de Brézé, sold the castle in 1502 to **René de Cossé** who took on the name Cossé-Brissac, Lord of Brissac. The Cossé-Brissac family is one of the oldest of France and since **René de Cossé** purchased the castle in 1502, the estate has remained down through the generations within the same family. Today, the **13th Duke de Brissac** is proprietor and lives here.

The last half of the 1500s was a turbulent time in France with the Religious Wars between the Catholic League and the Protestant Huguenots. When he inherited the castle, **Charles II de Cossé** (the grandson of René who purchased the castle) found himself before a castle in half ruin. The rebuilding of the castle began in 1601 working around what was still standing. While new sections were built, others were torn down. Each side of the new façade is partially hidden behind the thick walls of the towers. In addition, the new construction would concentrate on height, which was rare at the time, and would be lavishly decorated.

Charles II de Cossé had in mind to build a perfectly symmetrical façade with a higher, larger central section and in time to tear down the two medieval towers. The five-storey central pavilion was to be the centre of the façade. Like all men of vision, **Charles II de Cossé** thought he had years ahead of him. But he died before the completion of his project in 1621. His son and successor stopped the work in progress and the edifice remained as the workers had left it on the death of the first Duke: « *a new castle partially built, in an old castle partially destroyed* » which is how it looks like today!

The central pavilion is one of the highest in France. Until 1793, a lantern added five more meters and was topped by a bronze statue of Mercury, which added four more meters!

The Grand Salon

In the room, previously called the « *salon doré* » (gilded salon), admire the richly carved coffered ceiling dating from the 17th century. It is gold-leafed. Notice also the four Venetian crystal chandeliers from the Murano glassworks.

The monumental mantelpiece is in the style of Louis XIII, richly sculpted with garlands of flowers, fruit clusters, and scroll motifs. The bust is of **Charles II de Cossé**, the one who rebuilt the castle from 1601-1621 and the first Duke of Brissac. In 1594, **Charles II de Cossé** was governor of Paris. At that time, the city was occupied by the Spanish, supported by the Catholic League. King Henri IV and his troops were just outside of Paris (the city was surrounded by ramparts) and ready to enter by force if necessary. **Charles II de Cossé** conspired against the Spanish to open the doors of Paris to Henri IV, and the French regained Paris with little fighting. Needless to say, **Charles II de Cossé** was amply rewarded with gifts of money. Sully (Henri IV's minister) made him a Field Marshal and later in 1611, Duke-Pair de France.

To the right of the mantelpiece, the portraits painted in 1946 by Bernard Boutet de Monvel are of the **12th Duke de Brissac** and the Duchess de Brissac. She was born May Schneider, a family of steel and iron industrialists from the city of Creusot. They are the parents of the actual Duke. In between, the portrait of the Duchess de La Vallière (a favorite of Louis XIV) is by Mignard.

The Gobelins tapestry, depicting two episodes from the life of Don Quixote, is dated 1782 and signed by Audran. It is unusual for its composition, a sort of picture within a picture.

The large portrait is of the **8th Duke de Brissac**, Louis-Hercule, last governor of Paris under Louis XVI. The statue in the background symbolizes the city of Paris. The page is dressed in gold and black, the colors of the Brissac family. Louis-Hercule was an intimate friend of Madame du Barry, who was a favorite of Louis XV. They both met with a rather violent death: in 1792, the Duke was massacred by the people in Versailles, and Madame du Barry was guillotined.

A beautiful cabinet is in the style of the well-known French cabinet-maker, André Charles Boulle (1642-1732). His pieces are appreciated for their delicate copper and tortoise shell inlaid marquetry.

Spread around the room, you will also notice pictures of members of the Brissac family. Some photographs are of the present Duke and Duchess. Others are of their eldest son, the Marquis de Brissac and his wife who live here with their four children throughout the year.

The Dining Room

Here is a beautiful example of a ceiling « à la française », the beams and joists painted in a floral pattern.

The large mural painting measuring 6 by 3.5 meters shows the Bercy estate. The Château de Bercy (located on the east side of Paris) was expropriated from the Nicolaÿ (ancestors of the present Duchess de Brissac) in 1860. It was subsequently destroyed in order to build covered wine markets which were in turn also torn down. Nowadays, the French Ministry of Finance, a famous stadium as well as a public park occupy the site. The detailing of the painting reveals an array of charming everyday life occupations. In the foreground, you will identify people boarding a boat ready to sail on the river Seine; people picking up wood; planting and also the remarkable embroidery French style gardens of *Le Nôtre* (the famous gardener to the King) and the castle itself. In the background, the neighbouring villages and the fortress of Vincennes.

The extraordinary orchestra balcony was built by Jeanne Say, the marquise who undertook extensive renovation of the castle at the end of the 19th century. The loggia (or balcony) is made entirely of wood and painted to resemble marble.

In the glass display case, china from Meissen and a serving plate and soup tureen of 18th century Sèvres porcelain with the Brissac coat of arms. The wall clock is another example of Boulle.

Just outside the dining room, at the bottom of the stairs leading to the upper level, you will notice a rather unusual 19th century wedding present to the 11th Duke and Duchess de Brissac: a sedan chair (or « chaise à porteurs »). On the side panels, you can read the words « Joy, Happiness and Love ».

As you proceed to the second level, admire the monumental Louis XIII formal, ceremonial **staircase**. Like the entrance hall, it is mainly constructed of the stone called « tuffeau », a soft limestone typical of the Loire region and easy to cut and sculpt. The ceiling is marked with the initials of the Cossé family: two C's intertwined, the monogram of **Charles II de Cossé** who rebuilt the castle.

The Reception Hall or Grand Gallery

This gallery astounds by its length (32 meters). Throughout the centuries, it has served for many a festivity and banquet at the castle. Today, the gallery continues to be used for private receptions, seminars and conferences.

This type of long gallery became rather fashionable in many castles during the 16th-17th centuries. Other examples are: « *François Ist gallery* » at Fontainebleau; Chenonceau and its gallery over the Cher river ; Versailles and the « *Hall of Mirrors* ».

The walls were decorated either with mural paintings or hung with tapestries. The Flemish tapestries are 16th century portraying scenes from the life of Alexander the Great. Other tapestries are Louis XIV Aubusson depicting pastoral scenes.

On the opposite wall, is a portrait of the 4th Duchess of Brissac, Gabrielle Louise de Saint-Simon. She is represented in allegory of the painting. Notice the various paintwork materials (an easel, a sketching book, watercolours, a palette, a painting brush) meant to symbolise her great passion for the fine Arts.

The beamed ceiling is particularly magnificent. Painted in 1625, it is decorated with some 100 small pictures, pastoral as well as biblical and mythological scenes.

Louis XIII Bedchamber

This is the room where Louis XIII and his mother (Marie de Medicis) were reconciled in 1620. Why did mother and son have to be reconciled? When his father (Henri IV) died in 1610, Louis XIII was underage and his mother was named Regent. But it was Marie de Medici's close adviser (Concini), who actually governed. There developed divisions in loyalties: those in favour of the king and those in favour of the regent mother. In 1617, Louis XIII had Concini assassinated and various battles ensued. It was only after the *Ponts-de-Cé's* battle in 1620 that the two sides were finally reconciled. Unfortunately, it was only short-lived. The figurines in the display case portray this event. On each side of the canopied bed are two charming Italian Renaissance cabinets beautifully carved with secret compartments and drawers.

The portrait over the doorway depicts Louis XIII's wife, Anne d'Autriche. They were the parents of the future Louis XIV.

The Italian chest of drawers near the door is not of ebony (which it is meant to simulate) but of pearwood painted black with ivory inlaid.

The magnificent tapestries are replicas of original paintings by Lebrun to be found at Versailles. They depict scenes from the life of well-known land battles from the life of Alexander the Great (triumphant entering of the city of Babylon, for instance).

The Hunting Chamber

It was given this name because of its decor of 16th century Belgian tapestries representing various hunting scenes with wild boar, deer and even lions. The detailing is extraordinary. You will find all sorts of varieties of flowers and animals: wild ones such as leopards, unusual ones such as lama, and imaginary ones such as the unicorn.

The tapestries come from royal collections and were acquired by the Duchess de Brissac in 1854. They were hung in this room and have never left since.

The early 17th century wardrobe doors have an unusual curved form, and carry a unique diamond-cut motif.

The trousseau chest dates from 1644. The date is carved beneath the lock.

Again, a beautiful beamed ceiling delicately painted with flowers and leaves intertwined, accented with cherubs.

The Portrait Gallery

This gallery boasts many portraits of the Brissac family which numbers 13 dukes and 4 Field Marshals (the highest military position at the time). Hung around the room, various portraits will allow you to familiarize with members of the Brissac family throughout the centuries.

First of all, notice the portrait of the 11th Duke in WWI uniform. To his side, his father Roland de Cossé who died during the war against Prussia in 1871 and is perhaps better known for having married Jeanne Say (the Marquise who undertook extensive renovation of the castle in the 19th century). To his left is portrayed Mathilde Crussol d'Uzès (first wife of the 11th Duke) who died of tuberculosis in 1908 at the early age of 33.

Over the wardrobe, a large portrait of Charles I de Cossé who governed the Piedmont region of Italy during the reign of King Henry II.

And last but not least, at the opposite end of the gallery, is a very large portrait of the world famous Veuve Clicquot, one of the great names of French Champagne. This extraordinary strong-willed and talented lady became a widow early in her marriage. Well known for her business acumen and her determination, she decided then to take over the family business and to turn it into an international enterprise. And good on her! She made a name and a fortune!

At her feet, her great grand-daughter Anne de Mortemart. She became Duchess of Uzès thanks to her marriage. She was quite a horsewoman and participated in the hunt until the age of 86. She is also remembered for being the first woman to get her driving licence and later to get fined for speeding.

The Opera House or Theatre

Jeanne Say inherited the castle upon the death of her husband, the Marquis de Brissac. He was to become Duke but died during the War against Prussia in 1871.

Jeanne Say's portrait is on the back wall of the theatre. She came from a wealthy family which made its fortune producing refined sugar. The company is known today as **Beghin-Say**. She was a music enthusiast, a talented « coloratura » soprano and sang the works of Gounod, Massenet and Debussy.

When undertaking renovation of the castle, she decided to build her own opera house. The theatre was inaugurated in 1890 and each autumn a music festival was given. The Marquise used to invite musicians from the orchestras of Paris, singers and artists involved in the musical world. These annual festivals continued until 1914, at the outbreak of the 1st World War. Jeanne Say died in 1916 and the theatre was « forever » closed off.

It wasn't until 67 years later that a group of private citizens and artisans volunteered their time and expertise towards its restoration. After much hard work, it was reopened to the public in 1983.

Notice the magnificent fabric that repeats the « pochoir » (or stenciled pattern) that was originally painted on the walls. The theatre seats 170 and today is used for various cultural and musical events throughout the year.

Wine cellar and medieval kitchens

- **Why not awaken your senses with a wine-tasting session?**

Wine-growing has been a family tradition for more than 500 years. Our vaulted cellar boasts a selection of the estate's finest wines, whose taste evokes both the typical soil of this region and the natural richness of their grape-stock. A fully commented wine-tasting session will allow you to uncork the secrets of our reds and rosé.

- **Step into the old kitchens** and go back in time a few centuries. The amazing display of copperware, the traditional cooking utensils and equipment, the massive fireplace, the domestic well and the cobble-stone floor will give you a taste of what cooking was like in the older days.

The old kitchens are still used to this day for private receptions and seminars but perhaps more interestingly for the annual «Rillauds Fair», which is the village's way of celebrating its wine, heritage and its 16th century savoury speciality of potted pork.

- In keeping with the historical legacy of the place, **the château's old-style gift-shop** will offer you a large selection of local specialities, typical of the regional gastronomic «art de vivre»; exclusive gifts and local souvenirs.

Grounds and discoveries

- **Brissac's most unusual underground river is yet another sheer delight to the eye and quite a rarity.**

The 300 meters long construction dates back from the 18th century allowing for an alternative route to the river Aubance overflow. With the passing of time, the river progressively filled up with silt. It took five years of hard work to dig up the canal and restore it to its former glory. We highly recommend you walk the walk fantastic and share the unique experience to stroll down the underground passage where mystery and magic await you as well as an unforgettable chill.

- On your way down the forest path, you will come across **the Château's 19th century old stables.**

It was in 1883 that the building firm «Chappée du Mans» was contracted to build the Château's stables in the shape of a U, which was quite unusual at the time. They had to be large enough to accommodate the Duke's complete equipage which included horses, harnesses, carriages, stable-boys and coach drivers. Perhaps more surprising yet, it was specifically required that the building should be entirely wired up for electricity (in fact, way before the Château itself!), equipped with a special stove to allow for the preparation of hot mash for horses and that an infirmary should be open.

- **Last but not least, enjoy a walk around the estate to refresh both mind and body.** The estate provides you with a good variety of attractive and clearly signposted walks. You can stroll along the Aubance river, wander down the forest path, cross the Japanese-style bridge or continue along the fields at your leisure. There are plenty of reasons why you should follow your inspiration and your nose. Time allowing, walk up to the family mausoleum, a very unusual funeral monument of Greek inspiration dating back early 19th century where the view overlooking the property's vineyards and the river Aubance is undoubtedly the best.