

Town and region of art and history
Coëvrons-Mayenne



Architecture is fixed music.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832)

discover the

Centre of
Interpretation of
Architecture and
Patrimony

The Centre of Interpretation of Architecture and Patrimony at the Château of Sainte-Suzanne.

Newly restored after three years of work, the Château of Sainte-Suzanne is an excellent example of early 17th century civil architecture. In 2009, it became the home of the Centre of Interpretation of Architecture and Patrimony (CIAP).

A Château typical of the early 17th century

In 1608 Guillaume Fouquet de la Varenne, new lord of Sainte-Suzanne, began building a château within the walls of the fortress. Its construction stretched over at least five years, as testified by the date "1613" engraved on one of the high windows of the edifice. Yet the toothed stones visible on the left gable attest to an unfinished, and more ambitious, original project. Built against a medieval tower, the château's architecture expresses both the legacy of the Renaissance (mullioned windows, pediments above the dormer windows) and a tendency to classicism (severity of the decoration, vertical alignment of the windows). The interior staircase separates each floor in two areas: on the left, the "great room" for receptions; on the right are "bedrooms containing wardrobes and cabinets". The spacious apartments retain the major element of interior decoration: the French chimney typical of the 17th and 18th centuries, in which the relief of the stone piers recalls the sculpted work of the facade.

What is the CIAP?

It is a window into the many facets of the Land of Art and History Coëvrons-Mayenne and beyond, to the department of La Mayenne itself. The CIAP is not only a permanent exhibition. It also offers visitors access to documentation areas and to databases on patrimony. Temporary exhibitions are regularly set up to focus on certain aspects of the territory. Finally, to animate this new cultural facility, it is a place of meetings and discussions, with programs designed for schoolchildren (educational workshops) and all visitors.

An ambitious project ...

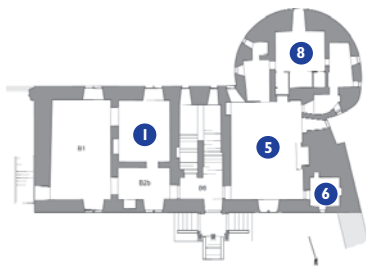
The opening of the CIAP is the result of the convergence of two projects. In 2005, the territory Coëvrons-Mayenne was labelled Land of Art and History. In its agreement with the Ministry of Culture, it was committed to establishing a centre for the interpretation of its patrimony. At that time, the Conseil Général de la Mayenne, owner of the castle since 1998, was already considering a similar development project for the site. Located in the heart of the Coëvrons-Mayenne, rich in history, the Château of Sainte-Suzanne can therefore claim to have combined these two initiatives, expanding its

presentation of patrimony to encompass the entire department of La Mayenne.

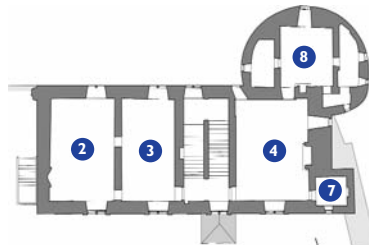
... to serve all visitors

Far from being restricted to an audience of experts, the CIAP intends to be open and accessible to all audiences. The interior has been designed to facilitate the movement of handicapped persons. Lack of appropriate access by the original door caused an elevator and footbridges to be installed in an extension attached to the château. The use of wood and a contemporary design enable visitors to clearly distinguish between the two periods of construction. Similarly, the plan has sought to take into account the needs of a diverse public: sight-limited and blind persons (presentations to hear and touch), children (interactive games), foreign visitors (texts are translated into English) ...

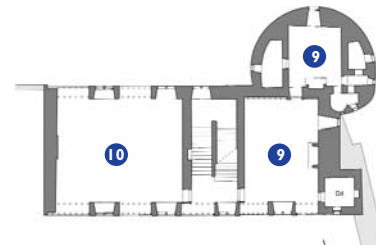
Ground floor.



First floor.



Second floor.



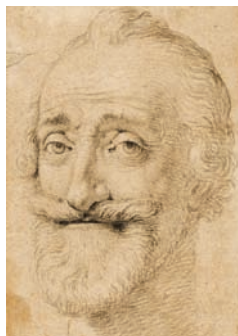
The site of Sainte-Suzanne

The emblematic site of Sainte-Suzanne reveals many other aspects. Near the reception area, a room presents its varied characteristics. A visit to the Musée de l'Auditoire in the town will help you learn yet more about the history of the "Pearl of Maine."

A virtual tour

Now you can get a bird's eye view of the site and its surroundings through an interactive multimedia device that allows you to select the town's major historical locations on a panoramic photograph. If you are curious about the topography of the area, seek out the Plain of Evron or the Coëvrons Hills. With respect to history, learn that the Erve dolmen, at 6000 years, is the oldest monument in the department, and that the hill the fortress stands on has actually been occupied since the Iron Age (600 BC). Select the icon "le village de la Rivière"! You will understand why Sainte-Suzanne was, during the Revolution and the Empire, an important centre of paper production for playing cards in the west of France.

“The Pearl of Maine”



Henri IVth, old (Musée national du château de Pau © RMN.)



Marguerite de Valois by François Clouet (Bibliothèque nationale de France © Bibliothèque nationale de France)



Guillaume Fouquet de la Varenne (Detail, attributed to Franz Pourbus the young)

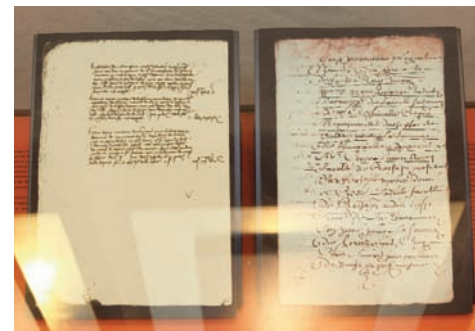
Prestigious owners

Two illustrious late 16th century owners preceded Fouquet de la Varenne as lord of the domain of Sainte-Suzanne. Three 17th century style portraits present these characters. The French King Henri IVth, head of the family of Alençon through his grandmother Françoise d'Alençon, inherited the land and fortress of Sainte-Suzanne. With it he acquired the title of Baron de Sainte-Suzanne. To settle his debts, he sold the barony of Sainte-Suzanne to Marguerite de Valois, better known today as Queen Margot. She soon sold it to Guillaume Fouquet de la Varenne, the Comptroller General of the Post, Marquis de la Flèche, Governor of Anjou and one of Henri IVth's closest advisers. If consulting ancient texts or exploring armorial descriptions tempts you, facsimile Archives evoking the history of Sainte-Suzanne as well as the arms of the site's various owners are at your disposition.

Multimedia post showing Sainte-Suzanne and its surroundings.



Fac-simile of archives about the story of Sainte-Suzanne



300 000 years of history in la Mayenne tell you ...

The first floor rooms are devoted to the presentation of La Mayenne's rich and diverse historical patrimony. It covers a panorama of scenery and architecture from prehistory to the present day.

Interactive animations and playful devices

Interactive and audiovisual ②

Multimedia terminals, projections of images on the walls, interactive videos, animated models: a wide range of presentation methods, from texts to the most modern technologies, allow visitors an active, entertaining and independent tour. An animated map which traces the evolution of La Mayenne's territory can spark the imagination. Further on, a library of resources reveals the natural materials used by humans to live and shape local history: reindeer hide, flint, clay, tufa limestone ...

Prehistory ③

Prehistory is traditionally divided into three periods. The Paleolithic (4 MY-5800 B.C.), a time of extreme cold, is represented in La Mayenne by the Caves of Saulges. In this natural shelter, a series of wall paintings executed 27,000 years ago include representations of horses and mammoths. A video explores the lives of men at this time of hunting and gathering. The Neolithic Revolution is characterized by the establishment of the first farmers, the discovery of pottery and the birth of funerary architecture. Because of its location, La Mayenne was under a dual influence: Armorica (modern Brittany) is reflected in the plan of some megalithic monuments, while certain types of ceramics hail from the Parisian Basin. Finally, the presence in Western Europe of copper, bronze and iron heralds the Age of Metals (2300-50 B.C.). The development of the area is linked to the first known settlements, called oppida, of which the sites of Moulay and Entrammes are fine examples.

Antiquity : the emblematic site of Jublains ③

After the conquest of Gaul by Caesar, a Gallo-Roman culture developed, a synthesis of local traditions and Latin influence. The Jublains site is the most ancient urban grouping in western France. Its fortress, huge theatre, sanctuary, spa and geometrical urban design are still preserved. Founded at the beginning of our era by the Romans on the site of an ancient Gallic sanctuary, the city of Jublains became the capital city of the Diablantes tribe and was called "Noviodunum". Victim of low population density and certain policy choices, the city declined at the end of the Roman Empire. Visual restitution projected on the walls illustrates the original elevation of the Jublains fortress, long an enigmatic monument.

The Middle Ages : the patrimony expands ③ ④

The first centuries of the Middle Ages were dominated by a general decline that is primarily expressed in the territory of La Mayenne by a diminution in the population and an increase in lands left fallow. The re-discovery of stone architecture in the 8th century (Saint-Pierre de Saulges) and the adoption of more legible inscriptions (Bazouges) illustrate the following period of renewal known as the Carolingian

Renaissance. The Carolingian palace of Mayenne, whose vestiges on three levels are rare for a monument of this age, marks the transfer of political power from Jublains to Mayenne, a centre closer to the roads. In the 11th century, a mesh of towns and cities grew up around castles and religious buildings (abbey, parish church). The architectural evolution of these monuments is illustrated through detailed models of the Basilica of Evron and the castles of Lassay and Sainte-Suzanne, complete with lighting system and audio commentary. Medieval religious art in La Mayenne is beautifully represented by murals.

A summary of the story of the Mayenne.





Desk and photo devoted to the Gallo-roman Antiquity at Jublains

The Modern era : openness to the world 4

This period was shaped in two ways. From an artistic point of view, La Mayenne became receptive to the Renaissance early in the 16th century. From the Château Neuf of Laval (early 16th century) to La Roche-Pichemer Château at Saint-Ouen-des-Vallons (late 16th century), the new artistic tendency is less decorative and more architectural. Sympathetic to the Reformation, in the early 17th century La Mayenne created a veritable 'Laval school' "of altarpiece design. The incidence of marble quarries, the proximity of Loire tufa and the presence of famous architects explain the wide distribution of this style. The channelling of the Mayenne River under François Ist and the creation of straight royal roads in the 18th century promoted economic openness. International trade in linen, illustrated by the model of a typical weaver's house, and a strong metallurgical activity in the La Mayenne countryside combined to designate the territory as both industrial and agricultural.

The Contemporary period : the time of modernity 4

Born as an administrative entity in 1790, the department experienced profound changes in the course of the 19th century. Traditional industries (metal, linen) declined while agriculture was modernized through the process of liming, which increased soil productivity. The section drawing of a lime kiln explains how limestone can be transformed into a natural fertilizer. The development of strategic roads in the early 19th century, followed by the definitive channelling of the river and the arrival of the Paris-Rennes railway gradually brought the department out of isolation. As in Laval, cities began to favour trade interests and sanitation concerns. In the second half of the century, architecture underwent much reconstruction and repair.

Multimedia post about Prehistory.



The importance of the Catholic religion is affirmed by the restructuring of many churches, while castles multiplied thanks to the economic success of family industries. Most of these constructions borrow their design from the rich catalogue of past styles. As for the buildings of today, they are tomorrow's patrimony, distinguished by their use of new materials that allow great freedom of form. An interactive kiosk presents many examples.



Model of the Sainte-Suzanne and Lassay castles.

Natural history ...

Initially applied only to historic monuments, the concept of patrimony has been expanded to include the natural domain. One of the rooms of the château is devoted to the presentation of La Mayenne's diverse species and natural environments.

The landscape ⁵

Three models present the natural identity of the department of Mayenne (natural habitats, geology and hydrography). The Mayenne River, structuring axis of the territory, flows through the department from north to south. Over time it has eroded the rock, sometimes creating steep-banked valleys. In the north, the rugged landscape is dominated by the summit of the Armorican Massif (Mont des Avaloirs, 417 meters high). To the south, the terrain is more level, undulating through meadows and wheat fields. The strong imprint on the Mayenne landscape of the bocage, farmland bordered by trees and hedgerows, reflects the work of man. With its embankments and ditches, the rustic hedge is a key element of the countryside. It shelters livestock, produces timber and provides food and refuge for wildlife.

Rich and protected areas ⁵

Remarkable natural environments flourish in this agricultural land. The Coëvrons grasslands contain many ponds where animals drink and which shelter all of the five species of newts found in the plains of France. This biodiversity is one of the particularities of our department. Another example of remarkable Armorican fauna and flora can be found on the limestone plateau, or causses, of Saulges. A fine nesting population of stone-curlews lives there, while on sunny slopes grow boxwood and rare mushrooms (geasters, witch hearts, milk caps). The largest population of hibernating bats in La Mayenne can be found in the cavities. The classification of the Erve Valley (330 hectares spread over 5 municipalities) as a Natura 2000 zone confirms the site's biological significance (8 habitats of European importance) and the desire to contribute to its protection and enhancement.

Flora and fauna ⁵

Do you wish to know more about La Mayenne's remarkable wildlife? On the ground floor you will discover an inventory of 223 identified and illustrated vertebrates. Are you able to recognize 24 species of fish and 34 species of migratory birds? Don't worry: desks equipped with interactive games help the whole family learn while having a good time. Can you distinguish the presence of animals by deciphering traces left in the mud? Imitate the song of the cuckoo by referring to a musical score? It's your turn! The region's vegetation is also described through a calendar of flowers and a tactile exploration of trees. The Black Alder, recognizable along the river by its conical shape, or the characteristic leaves of the English Oak will hold no more secrets for you ...

The cabinet of curiosities ⁶

This small room recreates the atmosphere of the place where scholars and aristocrats exhibited objects collected with a certain taste for the eccentric. These unusual items were placed in large pieces of furniture called "cabinets". The CIAP cabinet of curiosities contains many examples of seeds, plants and nests. To study them, just open the drawers!



An animal wall.



Tables dedicated to landscape unities, to the hydrographic network and to the geological history of the department.

Cabinet of curiosities drawers conserving plants and insects.



Other patrimony

Protected or not, patrimony, in the broadest sense, is part of the memory of a society and confers a true identity on its territory.

Highlighting traditions

The patrimony of the land ⁷

Still often described as "minor patrimony", it is composed of all remains which are not officially protected as Historic Monuments. Vestiges of the everyday life of past centuries, these traces recall activities or trades which have often disappeared. Chapels, fountains, wells, crosses, mills, shrines, bridges and bread ovens are frequently restored by municipalities or local associations. A photographic presentation of this diverse patrimony is arranged by theme.

An intangible legacy ⁷

Patrimony is also the living memory of our elders. Sound archives of interviews, songs and stories in the local dialect or "patois" evoke the life of a once predominantly rural population

Mayenne and the horse ⁵

Pegasus, the winged horse, is the logo of the department of La Mayenne. Justifiably so: horses seem to thrive in this territory. Three horses raised in La Mayenne have won the Prix d'Amerique, a world championship of harness racing. The department has over a thousand farms and eleven racetracks, three of which (Laval, Meslay-du-Maine, Craon) can accommodate national competitions. The age and economic dimension of this sector make the horse an integral part of La Mayenne's patrimony. A film presents the Vaiges stud farm, which specializes in the production of the French trotter.

And also...

The CIAP is intended as a place for research and documentation on the patrimony of La Mayenne. Two consultation rooms have been created to satisfy the curiosity of visitors or to assist students in their work ⁸. A database on La Mayenne's patrimony is available for consultation on computers. Temporary exhibitions are regularly presented on the second floor of the château ⁹. They are an opportunity to renew public interest in a specific aspect of the territory. More broadly, the CIAP is a place for meetings and activities. Educational workshops for children, visits and lectures ¹⁰ for adults, theme evenings, concerts and projections allow a wide audience to discover or revisit our patrimony throughout the year.



Photo-columns about the country heritage.



Lecture room welcoming a temporary exhibition about the patrimony of the canton of Sainte-Suzanne.



Panel about the horse coats and film about the Vaiges stud farm..

Temporary exhibitions room





Discover the story of **Coëvrons-Mayenne**, a region of art and history ...
... in the company of a guide-lecturer authorised by the ministry of culture.

The guide will welcome you. He knows all about Coëvrons-Mayenne and will give you the vital elements required to understand the scale of a landscape, the story of the region in its different areas. The guide is there for your benefit, feel free to ask any questions you may have.

The heritage mediation service

runs the region of art and history Coëvrons-Mayenne. It organises events throughout the year for individuals and groups (adults and school children) .

If you are with a group

Coëvrons-Mayenne offers visits throughout the year subject to reservation.

Coëvrons-Mayenne is part of the **national network** of towns and regions of art and history

The architecture and heritage division of the ministry of culture and communication attributes the name of “towns and regions of art and history” to local communities which promote their heritage. It guarantees the skills of guide-lecturers and promoters of heritage and the quality of their activities. From ancient remains to 21st century architecture, the towns and regions present their heritage in all its diversity. A network of 137 towns and regions is currently in existence throughout France.

Nearby sites,

Laval, Le Mans, Angers, Vitré, Fougères, Nantes, Guérande, Fontenay-le-Comte and Saumur have been granted the name “town of art and history”; the Perche Sarthois et the Vallée du Loir have been granted the name “region of art and history”.

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