

PRESS KIT

1821-2021: BICENTENARY OF THE DEATH OF NAPOLEON I, CULTURAL PROGRAMME

1 DOCUMENT - Published on 16 April 2021



Press kit - 1821-2021 : bicentenary of the death of Napoleon I
PDF-31.45 MB

DOWNLOAD

Fontainebleau a journey in the heart of history

Fontainebleau, which is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is the only palace in which every French sovereign from the 12th to the 19th century resided. A new, exclusive experience awaits visitors wishing to follow in their footsteps.

The Château de Fontainebleau is unparalleled in France. Its complex architecture and diverse settings bear witness to the different eras and the tastes of the various rulers who lived there. The journey in the heart of history includes strolling through the galleries, admiring the Renaissance frescoes and stuccoes, taking a walk through the king's or queen's row of apartments and entering the solemn Throne Room.

Every room has echoes of the memory of the rulers and their court. Following in the footsteps of François I, Henri IV, Louis XIII and Louis XV, Napoleon I wished to leave his own mark in Fontainebleau by restoring the château in the aftermath of the Revolution. His apartments and the museum dedicated to him are priceless testimonies of the imperial era. Fontainebleau simultaneously shows Renaissance masterpieces, Marie-Antoinette's refined interiors, Napoleon I's ceremonial apartment and the "comfortable" furnishings ordered by Napoleon III and Eugénie.

These monarchs were also aesthetes and they commissioned the greatest artists of their time to shape the palace to accommodate family life, court life and the exercise of power. The visits of the Sun King, the royal wedding of Louis XV and Napoleon I's iconic Farewell to the Guard on the Horseshoe Staircase are all brought back to life. One can also picture the balls in the era of Catherine de Medici, Marie-Antoinette's walks in the gardens designed by Le Nôtre, the fireworks displays on the Etang aux Carpes (Carp pond) and the water jousting on the Grand Canal.

Napoleon said that Fontainebleau was the "true home of kings". The palace, like no other, embodies both pleasure

re and power, intimacy and politics. Walking through the galleries and gardens, visitors can see eight hundred years of art and history unfold in front of them in one day.

2021: Fontainebleau commemorates the bicentenary of the death of Napoleon I

Napoleon I brought Fontainebleau back to life after the French Revolution. When visiting the palace, which he restored, furnished and inhabited, one could even say invested, we learn about the statesman, the warlord, the head of household and the promoter of the arts. Fontainebleau is a key stage in the Napoleonic epic, which is highlighted by the 2021 bicentenary.

On the eve of his coronation in 1804, Napoleon Bonaparte chose the Château de Fontainebleau as one of his residences. He ordered the renovation of the palace to accommodate Pope Pius VII who had come to crown him: the palace was refurbished in just nineteen days. He would continue restoring the jewel of the Crown's possessions until the end of his reign. By taking up residence in Fontainebleau, Napoleon, a former artillery lieutenant who had reached the pinnacle of power, wished to follow in the footsteps of the monarchs before him. He saw the huge mansion as a key place for establishing his legitimacy. He redesigned the gardens, luxuriously refurbished the Grands Appartements, and re-established the etiquette of monarchical life. The former King's bedroom was turned into the Throne Room, with imperial symbols and emblems of the monarchy now standing side by side. The Emperor's private life and that of his two wives is unveiled in the Petits Appartements on the ground floor. It was here that Josephine, who couldn't give him an heir, learned about the inevitable separation. After her, Marie-Louise, who was pregnant with the future king of Rome, would wander in them. We can also encounter the tireless worker in Fontainebleau. Napoleon I was constantly busy with the administration of the Empire. His office can still be seen in the Interior flat, not far from the Salon Rouge, where he would sign his abdication in April 1814, before bidding his famous farewell to the Guard at the foot of the Horseshoe Staircase.

Nowadays, the Château de Fontainebleau also houses a museum dedicated to Napoleon I. The Coronation sword and tunic, the Emperor's famous bicorne hat, his campaign furniture and the cradle of the King of Rome are among the most significant items on display. Room after room, members of his family, dignitaries and officers of the Empire are depicted in portraits, busts and objets d'art. These were the figures to whom Napoleon distributed the thrones or entrusted the administration of the kingdoms in Europe. Over 700 works, most of which were commissioned to serve the Emperor's political project, tell the dazzling Napoleonic epic.

As part of the bicentenary, the year 2021 will feature a number of highlights: living history performances, a temporary exhibition called "Un Palais pour l'Empereur. Napoléon Ier à Fontainebleau" ("A Palace for the Emperor. Napoleon I at Fontainebleau"), as well as educational visits in the visitor circuit and outdoors. There will be specific focus on a number of outstanding items which belonged to the Emperor. Finally, the Napoleon Museum will be unveiling a great number of recent, major and previously unseen acquisitions.

Napoleon's footprint in Fontainebleau

Nowadays, visitors of the Château de Fontainebleau can view the long rows of salons, the galleries, chapels and apartments, almost all of which are shown in their "last known historical state", that of the 1860s.

For obvious reasons, in order to remain consistent, "the home of the kings" - and of the two emperors - is mostly

y shown as it was at the fall of the Second Empire. It does not showcase the eras that followed, and notably the changes made during the Third Republic and President Sadi Carnot's many visits. As for the sovereigns' Grands Appartements, looking out over Diana's garden, and Napoleon I's Interior Apartment, which is an extension of the Grands Appartements, they have been restored to their First Empire configuration. This was thought out between the 1960s and the 1990s and the choice was made to convey the imperial saga which came to a tragic end with the Farewell scene at the foot of the Horseshoe Staircase. It is also the most documented historical state, with Lyons silks and large hangings which could be faithfully rewoven, as part of the planning act voted on the initiative of André Malraux.

The sovereign's grands appartements

On the first floor of the palace, the official apartments of the Ancien Régime retained the same function during the Empire, the public exercise of power. Marie-Antoinette's Grand Appartement was taken over by Josephine, followed by Marie-Louise. Most of the decorations dated from the end of the 1780s, so the neo-classical style was still up to date and, with a few adjustments to the furnishings, would be retained by the new sovereign wives. The King's Grand Appartement, with its decoration mainly dating from the reign of Louis XV, underwent some changes in the allocation of each of the rooms: the Grand Cabinet would become the Council Chamber and, in 1808, the King's bedroom would be converted into the Throne Room. Napoleon I would therefore be moving in Louis XVI's Interior Apartment, which was set out in the row of the new wing built in 1785-1786 on the reverse side of the François I gallery.

Napoleon I's interior apartment

The seven-room apartment, which communicated with the Council's cabinet, was made up of an antechamber, an aide-de-camp's common room, a bathroom, a passage to the bath-house, a private room (which has since been named the Abdication room), a study or small bedroom and the Emperor's bedroom. The neo-classical style chosen for Louis XVI was complemented by the decorative additions brought by architect Pierre Fontaine. Through internal passages, the apartment communicates with the Petits Appartements and the Emperor's offices, which are located on the ground floor.

The petits appartements (small apartments)

The Petits Appartements have been on the ground floor of the wing of the François I gallery since the reign of Louis XV, and they are located on the site of the former Appartement des Bains of François I, which was created in the 1530s. The gradual extension of the private offices of the Well-beloved (the nickname of Louis XV) led to the installation of two separate apartments for Napoleon and Josephine during the Empire.

They would finally extend into three parts of the building, opening onto Diana's garden and on the Fountain's courtyard. Under the Ancien Régime, the Petits Appartements were the sovereigns' actual living spaces. They would go there whenever the court ceremonial allowed them to do so, i.e. outside the daily time reserved for royal representation and the various ceremonies (the lever, the coucher...) which were dictated by etiquette. At Fontainebleau, these apartments were particularly significant as they were a formal delimitation of the private space

into which the sovereigns could withdraw, with the journey to Fontainebleau already representing a break from the royal ceremonial as it unfolded in Versailles. The Petits Appartements would fulfill the same function during the Empire, except that Napoleon I also set up the offices of his secretariat there.

The cour des adieux the cour des adieux (the farewell court)

Previously a poultry yard under François I, the Cour du Cheval-Blanc became the main entrance to the Château de Fontainebleau from the reign of Louis XV onwards. Napoleon began to carry out development works which had been planned as early as the 18th century. The desire to open the courtyard, which was to become a court of honour, onto the town led to the destruction of the Renaissance west wing in 1808. An urban project was also planning to create a monumental square served by a network of converging avenues. Only the gate, which was the work of architect Maximilien-Joseph Hurtault, locksmith Mignon and gilder Chaise, came to life in 1810. The famous Farewell to the Guard, staged at the foot of the Horseshoe Staircase on 20th April 1814, earned it its lasting name of "Cour des Adieux" (Farewell Court).

The "picturesque" garden, known as the english garden

Although he was not particularly fond of English gardens, Napoleon agreed to have a garden designed by his architect at the south end of the Louis XV wing, in keeping with the fashion of the time. The same Maximilien-Joseph Hurtault was therefore in charge of designing all the "petits jardins" ("small gardens"), including the one which replaced the famous Pine Garden of Francis I. The works and plantations were carried out between 1810 and 1812. The numerous tree species (Virginia cedars, spruces, maples, plane trees, Italian poplars, lime trees...) came from the nurseries of the Châteaux de Versailles, Saint-Cloud and the neighbouring Château de La Rocheville. As for the installations, apart from a few copies of ancient statues (the Borghese Gladiator, the Dying Gladiator, Telemachus sitting on the Island of Ogygia) and the digging of a river, the follies were never built.

The pond pavillon

The octagonal pavilion was built in 1662 by Louis Le Vau, dating back to the works on the Grand Parterre ordered by Louis XIV, and was restored and partially rebuilt by Napoleon in 1807 and 1810-1811. The interior decoration was executed by Simon-Frédéric Moench.

More information on the highlights of the 2021 program in the press kit or directly on the website in the « [program area](https://napoleon-en-seineetmarne.fr/fr/programme-bicentenaire) »(<https://napoleon-en-seineetmarne.fr/fr/programme-bicentenaire>).