

Maurice Fenaille: a providential patron

Maurice Fenaille (1855-1937)

A pioneer in the petroleum and lighting industry, then in automobiles and aviation, Maurice Fenaille was also a great art lover, scholar and collector. His passion was expressed through his patronage of French museums and commissions of numerous contemporary artists such as Auguste Rodin or Jules Chéret, the famous poster designer. He amassed a huge collection of art during his life, in particular 17th and 18th century tapestries. His research on this subject resulted in a five-volume reference work: *General inventory of tapestries made by the Gobelins Manufactory from their origins to the present day, 1600-1900*.

Rescuing Montal

When Maurice Fenaille acquired the château, the courtyard façades had been stripped of their ornaments: the dormer roofs, friezes and statues had been sold by the previous owner in 1881. Thanks to his historical knowledge, his wealth and his contacts Fenaille was quickly able to implement a masterly rescue plan. The rare items that he was not able to purchase were copied by one of Rodin's best pupils, Émile Matrucho. The restored Château de Montal was then used as a setting to exhibit his collection of tapestries.

* Explanations overleaf.

Glossary

Brocatelle: a silk and cotton fabric, woven into embossed motifs, used for furnishings from the 17th century onwards.

First French Renaissance: in architecture, a period when a new art of building began, from the late 15th century to the end of the reign of François I (1547).

Gunport: a gun hole for cannons and firearms.

Heraldic insignia: motifs on a coat of arms.

Italian Wars: a series of conflicts provoked by the Kings of France during the 16th century to conquer the Kingdom of Naples and the Duchy of Milan.

Putti: plural of *putto*. Representations of naked children in decorative arts.

Regency: decorative style in vogue between 1715-1723.

Practical information

Guided tour of the furnished rooms.
Ground floor accessible to the mobility impaired.

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Château de Montal

The early Renaissance in Quercy

Jeanne de Balsac, Lady of Montal

In 1519, Jeanne de Balsac, wife of Amaury de Montal, Lord of La Roquebrou, began a significant building programme on the site of an old medieval manor house. Widowed in 1510, Jeanne de Balsac lost her eldest son during the Italian Wars*. She never finished her project. Only two of the four planned wings were completed by 1534. The interior courtyard would have been enclosed by portico galleries.

A Renaissance masterpiece

The Château de Montal is one of the key examples of early Renaissance* architecture in Quercy. Its architectural design demonstrates a new way of living and building, introduced by the French nobility in the early 16th century.

Although the North and West façades still resemble a fortress, their austerity is in contrast to the sculpted ornamentation of the courtyard façades and its staircase.



The château, stripped of its decoration in the late 19th century, was purchased in 1908 by Maurice Fenaille, a rich industrialist, who donated it to the State five years later. It is a Renaissance masterpiece, wonderfully restored and furnished, which later played a major role in housing the Musée du Louvre collections during the Second World War.

* Explanations overleaf.



The courtyard façades

The organisation of the façade, with the vertical superimposition of the windows and dormers, and the two friezes separating the floors, forms a grid pattern typical of the First French Renaissance*. The sculpted decorations follow a pattern that was undoubtedly designed by Jeanne de Balsac.

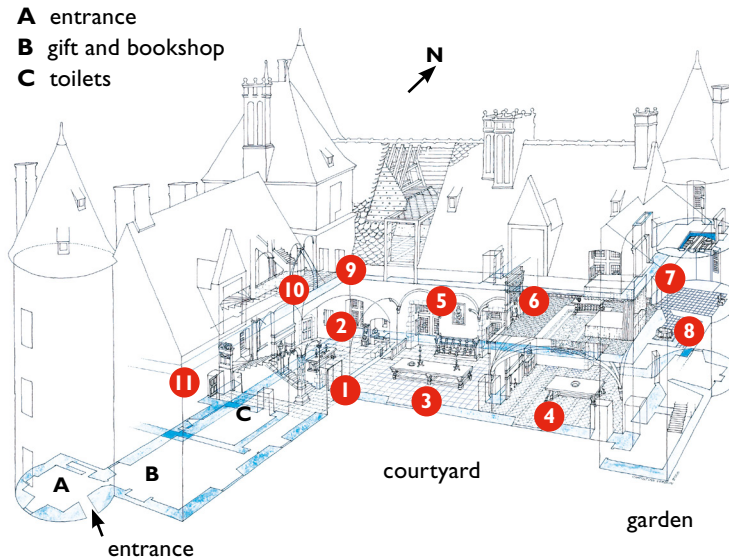
The series of seven busts in high relief represent, from left to right: Her husband Amaury de Montal, Jeanne herself, their eldest son Robert, their younger son Dordet, Robert de Balsac and Antoinette de Castelnau, Jeanne's parents, and finally one of Jeanne's cousins, Dordet de Béduer. Most of these relatives had died by the time their busts were made. Two statues placed in the niches represent allegories of Strength and Prudence.

The wide band sculpted in light relief mixes mythological or symbolic figures, fantastical characters and animals, with Jeanne's initials and those of her two sons, accompanied by heraldry and mottoes in Latin.

The frieze under the roof displays a series of shells, alternating with the "I" of Jeanne, a repetitive motif very common in the early 16th century. The iconography of the roof dormers is devoted to the expression of Jeanne's pain on the death of her son Robert: an evocation of despair, renunciation and separation.

The interior

I The staircase, in its design and rich decoration, highlights the role of prestige and lineage within the building. Geometric and heraldic motifs are succeeded by *putti**, candelabra, facing birds, dolphins and medallions with antique profiles, typical of the Renaissance. Jeanne de Balsac confirms her presence as sole mistress of the château, through her portrait on the second flight of steps, her heraldic insignia* and her initials.



The original plan, identical for each floor, has not undergone any changes. There are three apartments, each with a bedroom with a wardrobe and a privy in a tower, and two large reception rooms in the North-West wing.

- 2 The kitchen** was built in the 17th century. The slope of the tiles allowed the water to disperse.
- 3 The large hall on the ground floor**, with its very low ribbed vaulting, could have been used as a communal room, as indicated by its size and décor. The finely sculpted fireplace displays the coat of arms of Jeanne de Balsac, her husband, their eldest son and Nine, one of her daughters.
- 4 The ground floor bedroom** retains its original terracotta tiling. Two gunports*, placed in the wardrobe of the corner tower, show that defensive structures were still necessary at the time of construction.
- 5 The great hall** is the first floor reception room. The mantelpiece on the fireplace is decorated with a statue of a deer, a motif very common in interior décor in the late Middle Ages.

6 The master bedroom contains a Regency* salon installed by Maurice Fenaille.

The abutments of the fireplace bear the initials of Jeanne de Balsac and its mantelpiece is decorated with Dutch polychrome gilded leather from the 17th century. To the right of the bed, the door leading into the courtyard indicates the passageway to the wing planned in the initial project.

7 The master wardrobe retains its 16th century coffered ceiling, stripped of its original colours.

8 The privy is now a modern bathroom.

9 The Fenaille room is in the corner apartment. Here you can see one of the tapestries from the story of *Gombault et Macée*, from a Bruges workshop.

10 Nine's bedroom contains a four-poster bed installed by Maurice Fenaille. The fireplace was moved off-centre in the 16th century, as the bed was originally next to it.

11 In the bedroom of the third apartment, the walls are also hung with delicate brocatelle*.

The garden

Characteristic of Renaissance gardens, it is formed of four beds in a labyrinth of box hedges, around a central well.

It was created following an ancient pattern by Pierre Prunet, Chief Architect of Historical Monuments, in the 1970s.

* Explanations overleaf.