

RenEU



RenEU
NEW RENAISSANCE
IN EUROPE

On the trail of Francis I

Renaissance in the Loire Valley

Promoted by:



Co-funded by:



RENAISSANCE IN THE LOIRE VALLEY

INTRODUCTION

The flow of the Loire River is a natural connection between the sites scattered along its banks and with the countries and cultures whose products have arrived on its currents throughout the centuries. According to UNESCO the changing, living “cultural landscape” of the Loire Valley, a World Heritage-listed site since 2000, illustrates “to an exceptional degree the ideals of the Renaissance... on western European thought and design”.

The Loire Valley became the centre of the kingdom of France during the Hundred Years’ War between France and England. Between 1430 and 1530 the court resided in Chinon, Tours then Amboise and Blois, which resulted in many societal and artistic changes in the region. The wars for the Duchy of Naples waged by kings Charles VIII, Louis XII and Francis I hardly brought long-term military success, but they did bring the Italian Renaissance to France. Real change was initiated by Francis I, who was a young and ambitious king. His reign (1515-1547) marked the beginning of the modern era and demonstrated the stabilisation of State institutions. While the king was grappling with the Italian principalities and his enemies, the Emperor Charles V and King Henry VIII of England, the Loire Valley experienced peace. As a hunting enthusiast, the king appreciated the region’s game-rich forests and increased his residences there. His Chambord château is the embodiment of a dream, a true monumental “folly”. Nonsuch Palace, commissioned by Henry VIII, openly drew inspiration from Chambord.

Thanks to the king, the Loire Valley became a haven for humanism and new artistic ideas. He was passionate about art and architecture, which were transformed during his reign, incorporating the principles of the Italian Renaissance. In his cosmopolitan court, the king would invite Flemish artists as well as the great Italian masters (Jean Clouet, Leonardo da Vinci, Domenico da Cortona, Sebastiano Serlio, Francesco Primaticcio, Rosso Fiorentino, etc.). The transformation of the countryside around the châteaux was also the result of the Italian influence (Pacello da Mercogliano).

The towns, which benefited from the court’s presence, then became drivers of change. Tours saw a number of wealthy bourgeois families rise to power, such as the Beaune-Semblançays, the Bohiers, the Briçonnetts, etc. The business of these “gentlemen of finance” enriched the Loire Valley with the finest buildings of the early Renaissance in France. Chenonceau, Azay-le-Rideau, Villandry and hundreds of others gravitated around the royal residences like moths to a flame. The construction of collegiate churches also showed that the ambition of the aristocracy throughout the country was to found their dynastic sanctuaries in the Touraine region in particular.

The sites on this route guide visitors along the Loire, following the evolution of the French Renaissance from its very beginnings to its apogee. Public figures as well as the towns, châteaux and sacred monuments all illustrate a distinctive stage in this period of openness to new universal ideas.

LIST OF SITES

1. Amboise, town
2. Château Gaillard, Amboise
3. Tours, town
4. Royal Château of Amboise
5. Royal Château of Blois
6. Château de Chenonceau
7. Château de Nitray, Athée-sur-Cher
8. Château d'Azay-le-Rideau
9. Château de Chambord
10. St. Anne's Collegiate Church, château, Ussé
11. St. John the Baptist Collegiate Church, Montrésor
12. Jehan de Seigné Chapel, Bléré
13. Town hall, Beaugency
14. Château de Villesavin, Tour-en-Sologne
15. Château de l'Islette, Cheillé – Azay-le-Rideau
16. Loches, town
17. Château de Villandry
18. Château de La Côte, Reugny
19. Sainte-Chapelle, Champigny-sur-Veude
20. Royal Abbey of Fontevraud, the Grand Moutier and the Chapter House
21. Le Rivau, stables of the château, Lémeré

1. AMBOISE, TOWN

A town on the left bank of the Loire, between Tours and Blois, the Amboise site has been inhabited since prehistoric times. Established at the foot of a natural promontory, the market town developed through the presence of the river.

A royal town from 1434, Amboise developed throughout construction of the château, which was in the hands of the crown. Italian artists arrived, creating their first works in the Loire Valley. However, its growth was not as significant as that of Tours. The king's financiers and officers improved their home towns and their own châteaux, but Amboise was not the birthplace of the upper class. In the 15th and 16th centuries economic growth meant the fortifications could be reinforced and new horizons loomed. Developments also included the widening of streets, and the refurbishment and construction of public, private and church buildings.

Many half-timbered houses (Rue Victor Hugo, Rue de la Concorde and Rue Entrepont) show a resemblance to the late Gothic tradition. Hôtels particuliers (detached private houses) are distinguishable by their height, the use of fine and durable materials, and a visible resemblance to the local château. With a gable or side wall giving onto the street, they feature sculptured cornices, pilaster-framed windows, and their façades have a certain order to them. This is the case for the Hôtel Morin (now the town hall), and the Hôtel Joyeuse. Some researchers attribute the latter to the Italian architect Fra Giocondo and its garden to Pacello da Mercogliano. The churches St. Denis's and Notre-Dame-en-Grève, now known as St. Florentin's, were also refurbished. In the surrounding countryside, manors were already being built in the "Italian style", including Clos Lucé in brick and Château Gaillard in limestone.

In the 1530s, when Francis I moved to Ile-de-France with his court, the town still received royal visits, but the grand era was over.

Theme: Nation/State and cosmopolitanism, identity – diversity

Over the centuries, the town has seen many sovereigns come and go, both French and foreign. It was the backdrop for two major conflicts in this period between Catholics and Huguenots: the Affair of the Placards in 1534 and the Amboise conspiracy in 1560. These events give it an important place in the history of France.

At the same time, Amboise's image is inseparable from that of the Loire Valley. Its location at the foot of the château, its architecture with timber framing alternating timber and brick, or limestone with slate roofs, as well as its moderate size, make it both typical and unique. This architectural ensemble is representative of the periods experienced there and the Loire

Timber-framed house (40, place Michel Debrée), Amboise,
© Imola Gebauer



identity. The original medieval plot was preserved throughout urban development, but the outlying areas were graced with the construction of major monuments like the Clos Lucé and the Château Gaillard. Hoping to distinguish themselves, wealthy local bourgeois responded with the Hôtel Morin and the Hôtel Joyeuse. The town's heritage reflects many influences, the most significant of which was undoubtedly the Italian Renaissance.



The Royal Château of Amboise and the town
© Imola Gebauer

The Royal Château of Amboise and the town
© Imola Gebauer



2. CHÂTEAU GAILLARD, AMBOISE

South-east of the town centre in the foothills, not far from the Clos-Lucé, lay a sunny field sheltered from the wind. Charles VIII acquired it in the late 15th century to establish an orchard and vegetable garden. Around 1498 he had a house built in which he set up his “architect of gardens” from Italy, Pacello da Mercogliano. The Château Gaillard, whose name originates from a gentleman in the Middle Ages, was also known as “Hôtel Champêtre”, champêtre meaning rustic or country-style. Mercogliano landscaped the grounds into terraces and used it as a plant nursery for the royal garden in Amboise. According to popular belief, the first orange trees in France grew in this garden.

King Louis XII, also an admirer of Italian art, gave the house and estate to Mercogliano in 1505. Mercogliano then sold it in 1510 to René de Savoie, also known as “Le Bâtard” (the bastard) and brother of Louise de Savoie (mother of Francis I). The new owner extended the building to the west, but he died in Pavia in 1525, leaving the château to his descendants. In 1559 the estate was owned by Cardinal Charles of Lorraine, an influential figure, who extended and enhanced it further. The château then experienced a brief apogee, before changing hands many times.

This three-level building, built of rubble stone and limestone, is the earliest example of the Renaissance style in Amboise. It was built with a rectangular layout on a terrace close to the hillside. The façade is in a chequer pattern formed by two moulded cordons and a rich cornice, and the bays between windows and dormers. The windows are framed with Doric pilasters, and the door lintels are decorated with plant motifs. Alongside René de Savoie’s coat of arms, numerous royal emblems illustrate its owners’ allegiances to different kings. Inside, a monumental fireplace with a Renaissance frieze has been preserved.

The château’s chapel is “hidden” into the hillside, beneath a terrace. Inside, the pilasters bear the coat of arms of René de Savoie and his wife. A shrine stands out from the wall, probably the work of an Italian artist. Its foliage, birds, and other motifs are reminiscent of the style of the Della Robbia family. A marble plaque confirms that the chapel was consecrated in 1515.

Château Gaillard, Amboise, dormer window
© Imola Gebauer



Themes: innovation – stagnation, transforming the landscape

Order, regularity and harmony: these values appeared for the first time in Amboise and the Loire Valley, throughout their architecture. The idea of harmony between buildings and nature quickly won France over, where rulers and aristocrats dreamed of being Renaissance princes.

One of the most important outcomes of the Italian Wars was transalpine art, which arrived in the Loire Valley directly, in the wake of the kings. The discovery of Italian villas and gardens caused a real revolution. Inspired by Mercogliano, the owners of Bury, Villesavin, Villandry and Chenonceau were among the first to redesign their gardens in the Italian style. Others, like the owners of Azay-le-Rideau and Chenonceau developed a newfound close relationship with water. The renewal of garden art had a direct effect on lifestyles and quality of life in general. Order and harmony in garden art were the foundation of the birth of what would become known as “The Châteaux of the Loire”.



Château Gaillard, Amboise, the gate of the garden
© Imola Gebauer

Château Gaillard, Amboise
© Imola Gebauer



3. TOURS, TOWN

Tours, royal capital from the middle of the 15th century, experienced a major period of development between 1450 and 1525. River transport on the Loire provided merchants with thriving international business. Relations with Italy increased trade, and alongside spices and exotic fabrics, works of art started to appear in the Touraine region. Like their Italian counterparts, wealthy merchants developed financial services, and came to finance the Royal Court. Some were attracted by power, fighting alongside their kings in Italy, and were rewarded with titles.

The most powerful families in the Touraine, who had either merchant or sometimes legal backgrounds, were the Bohiers, the Beaune-Semblançais, the Berthelots, the Briçonnets and the Babou-Bourdaisières. Their business bound them to the town, where they built their houses. They became powerful, often performing the duties of mayor and contributing to the “modernisation” or enhancement of the town. Jacques de Beaune-Semblançay and Thomas Bohier, for example, funded sanitation projects. Some buildings from this period are still standing.

La Psalette cloisters, Tours
© Imola Gebauer



The Hôtel Gouin (before 1510; 25, rue du Commerce), the house of Jean Juste, an Italian sculptor (17, rue Paul-Louis Courier), the Hôtel de Babou-de la Bourdaisiaire (circa 1520; 8, place Foire-le-Roi), and that of Beaune-Semblançay (circa 1515; place de Beaune-Semblançay), with its chapel and Renaissance fountain (1511; one of the first public drinking fountains in the town) are all examples of Italianate trends in art styles of the great aristocracy. The cloisters of the Basilica of St. Martin (1508-1519), like many religious buildings in Tours were the work of locals Bastien and Martin Francis, and feature bas-reliefs with human figure and plant motifs. The staircase of the La Psalette cloisters (before 1524) appears to mimic that of Blois, built during the reign of Francis I. St. Symphorien's church portal (1526-1531) the balcony of the Archbishop's palace (1522) and the Cathedral towers (north, from 1507; south, 1534-1546) show the same artistic trends.

Themes: migration of people and ideas – vs. residence, centre and periphery

Throughout the reigns of successive kings, many courtiers, diplomats and artists from north and south came to Tours. Trade in goods and artistic exchanges led to the town's transformation. During the first decades of the 16th century, this artistic hub experienced a turning point between Franco-Flemish and Italianate traditions, i.e. the end of the medieval period and beginning of the modern era. The previously mentioned families from Tours modelled themselves on wealthy Italian families and actively contributed to this turning point. Powerful prominent citizens had a town house and a château in the countryside. The situation was comparable to that of Italian villas and towns. But while in Italy the villa was an expression of a certain quality of life and a desire to be close to nature, in France the château remained a symbol of feudal power for a long time. The town's position was particularly unique because it was both a business centre and the periphery of royal power. Tours was thus both the catalyst for a change in lifestyles, while reaping the benefits of this development.

Hôtel Gouin, Tours
© Imola Gebauer



4. ROYAL CHÂTEAU OF AMBOISE

The imposing château overlooking the town of Amboise is situated at the western end of a promontory on the left bank of the Loire. It has been inhabited since Neolithic times and was fortified during the Middle Ages. Charles VII, the first king to reside in the Loire Valley, recovered it in retribution for a plot against him, and moved there with his court. The château then became a royal residence.

During the 1490s Charles VIII stayed there regularly. He had apartments built with openwork façades, as well as some halls and two towers called “Minimes” and “Hurtault”. Each tower contained a vaulted spiral ramp to provide easier access on horseback. St. Hubert’s Chapel, built directly into the ramparts, is a masterpiece in the late Gothic style. The terraced gardens of Italian inspiration overlook the Loire. Charles VIII was the first of the kings fighting wars in Italy to conquer Naples, which became his legacy. In 1499 he returned to France with artists and architects, such as Domenico da Cortona and Pacello da Mercogliano. Mercogliano, the “architect of gardens”, was one of the first in the king’s court to produce works in the spirit of the Renaissance.

Louis XII moved to the Château of Blois, but continued to expand and enhance his château in Amboise. He sent Louise de Savoie to live there with her children, Margaret and Francis of Angoulême, the future King Francis I. Francis was quite attached to the château of his childhood and continued the construction work started by his predecessor. The architectural style of the building perpendicular to the Loire is Gothic, but the harmony of the bays and the order of the pilasters herald the arrival of the Renaissance. Leonardo da Vinci, an artist much favoured by the king, died in Amboise in 1519 and was buried in St. Hubert’s Chapel.

In the 1530s the court began to spend more time in Paris, and the château was no longer really used as a royal residence. In the 19th century most of the structures were dismantled. The quarter that remains today gives us an idea of its former magnitude.



The Royal Château of Amboise, the salamander : emblem of Francis I

© L. de Serres

The Royal Château of Amboise

© L. de Serres



Themes: nation / state and cosmopolitanism, migration of people and ideas – vs. residence

The Château d'Amboise strongly marked the history of France in the 16th century. The royal presence confirmed that the region was part of the kingdom, which had been devastated during the Hundred Years' War between the French and the English. Through this presence, the Loire Valley became the epicentre of the kingdom. The château also witnessed the grand welcome given to Charles V in 1539, the details of which have been revealed in the writings of various historians of the time.

The Château d'Amboise then experienced spectacular growth, becoming one of the first homes to integrate Italy's artistic influences. A haven for the new style, the château received many artists as guests, the most famous of whom was Leonardo da Vinci. He organised parties there and presented his mechanical inventions. Similarly, Amboise also became a meeting place for alternative ideas. In the religious history of France, the Affair of the Placards in 1534 led to a change in policy from being tolerant towards the Reformation to being more repressive. This affair is considered to foreshadow the wars of religion in France.



The Royal Château of Amboise, the St. Hubert Chapel
© Imola Gebauer

The Royal Château of Amboise
© Imola Gebauer



5. ROYAL CHÂTEAU OF BLOIS

The Royal Château of Blois stands on a rocky promontory on the right bank of the Loire. The medieval château gradually disappeared with subsequent construction work, with the exception of the Tour de Foix and the Hall of Estates (13th century). In 1498 Louis XII moved there with his court. At the dawn of the 16th century he had a new wing built, which was partly inspired by the newly discovered Italian Renaissance. In 1508 St. Calais's Chapel and the Charles d'Orléans wing were added. Between 1499 and 1510 Pacello da Mercogliano designed large gardens with three tiers of terracing, which extended to the west and were connected to the building by a bridge.

In 1515, the year of his accession to the throne, the new King Francis I initiated the construction of a wing on the north side of the courtyard. This was his first architectural undertaking. Construction probably continued until 1519, when work on Chambord began. This wing was one of the earliest constructions of the French Renaissance, combining Gothic and Italian Renaissance styles. It combines the horizontal focus of Italian buildings with the vertical focus of the French. The polygonal external staircase tower accentuates the asymmetry of the façade, but its openings gave it a new function, allowing the king and his courtiers to appear before visitors. It is decorated with gargoyles, statues in niches and Antiquity-inspired ornamentations, supplemented by the royal emblem of the crowned salamander and the initials of the royal couple. The façade of the Loggias, to the north on the town side, was inspired by those of the Vatican Palace by Bramante, being divided by a series of recessed windows along two floors. It is possible that the Italian architect Domenico da Cortona (known as the Boccador) was involved in its construction.

In the 17th century, Gaston d'Orléans had part of the Francis I wing demolished and had François Mansart build a wing on the west side of the courtyard. The current appearance of the château shows evidence of the restorations of Jacques-Félix Duban (1845-1848), a leading French architect who worked in the conservation and restoration of monuments.



The Royal Château of Blois, Francis I wing, the polygonal staircase
© Laurent Masillon



The Royal Château of Blois, Francis I wing, the royal apartments
© D. Lépiessier

Themes: identity – diversity, innovation and stagnation

With so many different eras involved in its composition, the Royal Château of Blois shows great diversity. The constructions of each historical period vary in their use of technology and materials (wood – stone – brick – marble), but all together they form a unique site, revealing a panorama of architecture spanning several centuries.

Blois was also an innovative place, like a sort of laboratory for the French Renaissance where artistic innovations were tested. Italianate elements were timidly applied in the very medieval context of the Louis XII wing, and an extensive garden was established there in expression of a new concept. Later innovative structures appeared on the two façades of the Francis I wing. Blois is a site that embodies the dynamism of kings who, despite their defeats on the Italian battlefields, achieved a great victory in introducing the Renaissance. It brought the two countries (and others) together through a shared vision.

The Royal Château of Blois, the Francis I wing with the polygonal staircase
© Mission Val de Loire / Francis Vautier



6. CHÂTEAU DE CHENONCEAU

Built “on the water”, this extraordinary château has been jealously coveted by many throughout its history. Its medieval ancestor, a mill originally, stood on the banks of the Cher, a tributary of the Loire. After many years of legal proceedings it was acquired by Thomas Bohier and his wife Catherine Briçonnet. The new owner, from a merchant family in Issoire, experienced an astounding accession to the titles of Baron, Général des Finances de Normandie (person in charge of Normandy’s finances) and French ambassador in Rome.

Renovation work was initiated, supervised by Catherine Briçonnet, who also came from a large family. The existing building was demolished with the exception of the “Marques Tower”. A new building was built between 1515 and 1522 on the piers of the mill in the riverbed of the Cher. It has a regular, square layout flanked by watchtowers, with polygonal annexes for the chapel and library. Its high roof is pierced by conical turrets and rows of dormers and chimneys. The symmetry of the façades, horizontal mouldings and pilaster framing reflect the use of Italian models. In the interior, the search for order is embodied in the central corridor. The internal straight flight staircase is covered with a coffered vault, but the use of a spiral instead of landings links it to the medieval tradition. Even the Marques Tower received Italian-inspired framing.

In 1527, as part of an investigation into the finances of Jacques de Beaune-Semblançay, a relative, Bohier – who died in 1524 in Italy – was nevertheless accused of embezzlement. His heirs were forced to sell the estate to the Crown to pay their father’s debts. Construction work on the wing over the Cher continued, supervised by Diane de Poitiers and later by Catherine de’ Medici. Philibert De l’Orme’s design was carried out between 1556 and 1576. The two women continued to expand the terraced gardens. The château experienced a great period of splendour.

Themes: migration of people and ideas – vs. residence, transforming the landscape

Chenonceau, under construction in the year of Francis I’s accession to the throne, probably reflects Thomas Bohier’s personal preference for the Italian Renaissance style. In the service of two successive kings, Bohier had many opportunities to visit Italy during military campaigns or as a diplomat. He was not just a builder, but also a patron and sponsor of artwork. He was among the first in the kings’ entourage to try to



Château de Chenonceau
© Laurent Masillon

Château de Chenonceau, chimney with the royal emblems of the salamander and the ermine
© Imola Gebauer



integrate ideas encountered in his travels. Chenonceau challenged the traditional relationship between château and nature. Water no longer served to protect, but rather increased the aesthetics of the site and gave the building a remarkable lightness, seeming to float on the surface. On the right bank of the Cher a large flowerbed and fountain, and later several terraces and a maze featuring caryatids were added. The gardens designed as an extension of the château came close to the ideal of Italian villas. They were also an expression of the power of their owner.



Château de Chenonceau, the labyrinth
© Marc Jauneaud



Château de Chenonceau and its gardens
© Marc Jauneaud



Château de Chenonceau
© Marc Jauneaud

7. CHÂTEAU DE NITRAY, ATHÉE-SUR-CHER

The impressive Château de Nitray overlooks the Cher Valley to the east of Tours, near Chenonceau. The buildings date back to the 15th and 16th centuries, but the site shows evidence of an earlier château. In the early 16th century the lord was Aimery Lopin, who was from a family of lawyers in Tours, Maître des Requêtes (master of requests) to the queen mother Louise de Savoie, and mayor of Tours from 1516 to 1517. The château was acquired through marriage in 1531 by Jean Binet, a lawyer related to the powerful Briçonnet family and mayor of Tours from 1543 to 1544. The site is structured around a main courtyard, with a main building (16th century), two outbuildings with an impressive framework and dormers (15th century), a dovecote (16th century) and a monumental gate (15th century). The gate consists of two round towers with candle-snuffer roofs, one of which houses a chapel. One of the outbuildings features a huge fireplace, on which you can just make out traces of a fresco depicting a hunt. Built during the reign of Francis I in 1516-1517, then refurbished between 1540 and 1550, the main building spans three floors in a rectangular layout. It is covered by a high roof punctuated by dormers, with fractable gables at each end. The main façade faces the valley and, due to the differences in level, the ground floor is accessible via an external staircase. The façades are chequered with horizontal string courses and bays, but the order is not regular. Fine pilasters frame the mullioned windows. The dormers on the two façades are different. On the park side they have large shells, and on the courtyard side they are decorated with wreaths and the coats of arms of the Aimery and Binet families. The staircase towers extend beyond the roof line and accentuate the façades. In the interior, the framing is richly sculptured with ornamentation featuring human figures. Several fireplaces have been preserved, including the one in the great hall, which features the emblems of Francis I and his wife. Some researchers believe the famous architect Philibert Delorme was involved in the 1540s and 1550s. The site is surrounded by grounds currently in the English style and vineyards, which have been famous since the Renaissance.



Château de Nitray, dormer facing the courtyard
© Imola Gebauer



Château de Nitray, dormer windows facing the courtyard
© Imola Gebauer

Themes: centre and periphery

Like his fellow members of the new nobility, Aimery Lopin had a fiefdom, which had the value of a social class. Thanks to his château he was able to gravitate around both the town and the royal residences. But he does not seem to have been concerned about the visible signs of power. By its sheer mass and direct contact with nature, the Château de Nitray reflects a different mentality. The architect totally abandoned (almost) all defensive elements, instead offering a light, harmonious building. Sufficient for expressing the rank of the person who commissioned it, but modern and pleasant, as no doubt requested.

For the Binets, the challenges were doubled with the royal acquisition of the large neighbouring château, Chenonceau. The presence of this new neighbour served to impose the model chosen by his predecessor even further. He then entered into philosophical and humanist debate, arriving at a single new ideal: to live in harmony with Nature.

Château de Nitray, the façade facing the courtyard
© Imola Gebauer



8. CHÂTEAU D'AZAY-LE-RIDEAU

The Château d'Azay-le-Rideau is a symbol of the ambition of the “nouveau riche”. As the son of a bourgeois merchant, Gilles Berthelot inherited an old château not far from the royal residences. Maître at the *Chambre des comptes* (chamber of accounts), treasurer of France and Mayor of Tours, he decided to build a home worthy of his rank. He demolished the old building, but retained one tower. Between 1518 and 1523 he had a magnificent new building constructed, reflecting his importance and wealth. As he was frequently absent, it was his wife, Philippe Lesbahy, who primarily supervised the work. The location is unique: an island in the Indre River, which reflects the building's graceful silhouette.

The two wings of the château you can see today stand at right angles, but plans for a third can be detected, which would have brought symmetry to the whole. They have corner turrets, a high roof and a semi-open corridor reminiscent of the battlements of medieval castles. The long wing is accentuated by the internal staircase with its open, richly sculptured windows, and features large triangular pediments. The façades of the château are modulated with horizontal moulding and pilasters framing the windows. The roof is pierced with fine, elegant dormers. In the interior, the straight flight staircase is decorated with sculptured coffers. The rooms feature monumental fireplaces, also decorated with floral and geometric motifs and the emblems of Francis I. The fine sculptured elements belong to the style of the early French Renaissance.

In 1527, the consequences of the trial against the Superintendent of Finances, Jacques de Beaune-Semblançay, affected many of the king's financiers. To avoid the worst, Gilles Berthelot left his unfinished château and fled to Metz, an independent town at the time. His property was confiscated, and he died in exile in 1529. In 1535 the Château d'Azay-le-Rideau was given to Antoine Raffin, Francis I's bodyguard, as a reward for his service at the Battle of Pavia.



Château d'Azay-le-Rideau
© Imola Gebauer



Château d'Azay-le-Rideau,
the façade with the staircase
© Laurent Massillon

**Themes: innovation and stagnation,
identity – diversity**

This gem of French architecture reconciles the elements of a medieval fortified castle with elements and decorations typical of the Italian-inspired Renaissance. One of the major innovations of this era was the internal straight flight staircase, which replaced medieval staircase towers. Another novelty is the château's location. Defensive moats were replaced by the water feature, which was designed for recreational boating and enhanced the building. Thus a union, as yet not experienced in France, was created between château and nature.

However, despite the rise of the nouveau riche, the influence of seniority and the old nobility remained strong. The presence of a medieval tower near the new building was intended to conceal the lack of old titles. But Gilles Berthelot, one of the nouveau riche, was also anxious to align himself with the new artistic style of the Royal Court, carrying out his construction work at the same time as that of Chambord. Neither did he fail to highlight his allegiance to the king by extensively using his emblems as well as those of the queen. In this way he became a member of the king's inner circle, a privilege that ended in 1527.



Château d'Azay-le-Rideau, interior of the staircase
© CMN / Philippe Berthé



Château d'Azay-le-Rideau
© CMN

9. CHÂTEAU DE CHAMBORD

The Château de Chambord, built between 1519 and 1527 in Sologne, was one of the boldest projects of the young King Francis I. It stands on the banks of the Cosson River, at the centre of a network of canals, on game- and moisture-rich land. The château's architect remains unknown, but researchers believe Leonardo da Vinci was involved in the design. Several Italian specialists, including the hydraulic engineer Pietro Caccia and probably the architect Dominique da Cortona were involved in its construction.

With its central layout built around a square keep flanked by four round towers and its regular proportions, it is clearly inspired by Italian villas, but it also followed medieval traditions. On the façades, including the corner towers of the keep and the enclosure, order is reflected in criss-crossing patterns, with the floors divided horizontally and vertically by mouldings and pilasters. Its roof (after 1537) bristled with turrets and chimneys with polychrome geometric elements is reminiscent of French fortified castles in the late Gothic style with Italianate motifs. It is characterised by its finesse and virtuosity.

The interior of the keep is structured around the double helix staircase, the centrepiece of a theatrical *mise en scène* of life in the château. We have Leonardo da Vinci to thank for its design. The surrounding common areas are covered by three-centred barrel vaults with sculptured coffers. The presence of salamanders and the Royal Cypher highlights the power of Francis I. The king's apartments occupy the south wing of the enclosure, and in one of its towers his vaulted study is also decorated with coffers. The chapel on the opposite side was initiated in France by Sebastiano Serlio and constructed towards the end of the king's reign. Its architecture features Antiquity-inspired twin columns. In 1547, at the time of Francis I's death, the chapel wing and lower wings remained unfinished. Surrounded by a huge forest, the château was an ideal place for hunting and for parties. On 18 December 1539 Francis I invited the Emperor Charles V to stay there, as well as many ambassadors, who were all most impressed by what they saw. To his contemporaries, and even today, the site embodied a kind of utopian city.



Chambord Castle, skylights and chimneys of the roof
© Mission Val de Loire

Themes: reason and imagination, innovation and stagnation

This hunting castle, a true royal “folly”, combined an expression of military power with Renaissance elegance. This combination created a vision based on the principles of reason, while freeing the imagination, an “Ideal City” where the king could invite his friends on an equal basis. At the centre of the building the open double helix staircase was a real innovation, the architectural feat of a genius. Probably that of Leonardo da Vinci. In terms of layout, a new order was established using a “module”, the staircase tower, found in all elements of the château with its proportions either multiplied or divided. This order contrasts sharply with the tumultuous appearance of the towers and chimneys. The king had also planned to redirect a branch of the Loire with a full water network around the building, but the work was never undertaken. However, thanks to the proximity of the existing canals, the vision of a fortified castle became that of a house in harmony with its surroundings.



Château de Chambord, dormer window and chimney
© Domaine national de Chambord

Château de Chambord
© CRT Centre Val de Loire



10. ST. ANNE'S COLLEGIATE CHURCH, CHÂTEAU, USSÉ

The Château d'Ussé was built between Tours and Chinon on a hillside overlooking the Indre River. At its core medieval ruins can be found, as well as wings reconstructed during the 15th and the late 16th centuries. The site was significantly modified in the 19th century.

In 1521 in his will the Lord of Ussé, Jacques d'Espinay, former chamberlain of Charles VIII, Louis XII and butler to Anne of Brittany, arranged for a collegiate church to be built near his château. On his death he wanted to be buried there with his wife. Their son Charles d'Espinay initiated construction work within the confines of the château in 1522. It was their grandson, René, who would found a chapter of six canons in 1538, furnish the interior and have the building consecrated in 1539.

The collegiate church was part of a series of such foundations, which were fashionable around 1520. It was built to a simple design: a single nave with a polygonal apse. On the south side the sacristy and on the north side a stately chapel completed the whole. Its façade follows the model established by the collegiate church of Thouars. It is dominated by a large Gothic-style central arch, which increases the monumental effect and accentuates the vertical focus of the building. It is in the details that the new style can be discerned. The portal is framed by superposed pilasters, columns and candelabras, and features Italianate style motifs: in place of the traditional medallions with Antiquity-inspired profiles, the busts of Christ's apostles can be found, as well as an arched pediment decorated with a large shell. The work is of exceptional quality.

In the interior, the fine ribbing of Gothic vaults rests on capitals with motifs of foliage, cornucopias of abundance and putti. Between the nave and the choir, a wooden rood screen is used to demarcate areas for canons and lords. Its abundant ornamentation, like that of the stalls (after 1538) and some of the stained-glass windows, was designed with Italian inspiration. The sacristy door and tabernacle door received architectural framing richly decorated in the new "Antiquity-inspired" style. The sacristy door echoes the central motif of the main entrance. The marble baptismal font is from the same era.



St. Anne's Collegiate church, Ussé, West façade
© Imola Gebauer



St. Anne's Collegiate church, Ussé
© Imola Gebauer

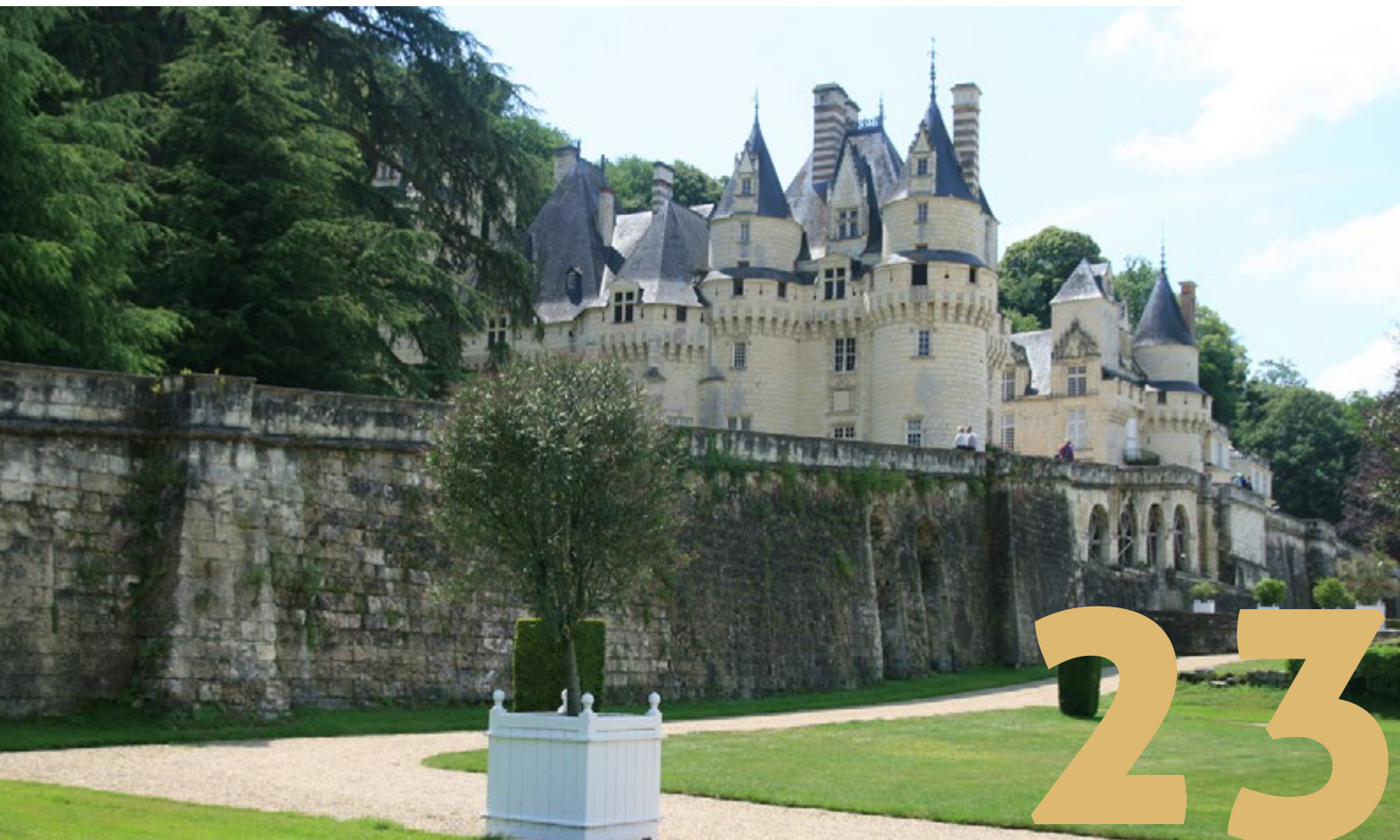
Themes: innovation and stagnation

The Collegiate Church of Ussé was the result of a religious patronage and at the same time an act of devotion and show of prestige. The nobility of the Renaissance in France and Europe retained strong ties with religion. Major European sovereigns had titles such as “Most Catholic Majesty” (e.g. Charles V), “Most Christian Majesty” (e.g. Francis I) or “Defender of the Faith” (e.g. Henry VIII until his excommunication). Nevertheless, the church building was gradually transformed. The “hybridisation” of Gothic and Renaissance elements, and the Christianisation of Antiquity-inspired motifs reveal this development. In addition, the Reformation obliged the Catholic Church to renew itself, a movement that culminated in the Council of Trent (1545-1563). In this turbulent atmosphere, the family mausoleum was a thoughtful response. The project, with the power games and intentions that led to its conception, attempted to kill two birds with one stone, preserving the founders’ memories for future generations and saving their souls for eternity.

Château d’Ussé
© Imola Gebauer



St. Anne's Collegiate church, Ussé, detail of the central arch of the West façade
© Imola Gebauer



11. ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST COLLEGIATE CHURCH, MONTRÉSOR

Montrésor was the stronghold of Imbert de Bastarnay's family. He was adviser to several French kings and governor to Francis, Dauphin of France and son of Francis I. At the end of the 15th century he had the apartments of his fortified castle rebuilt on a rocky promontory overlooking the Indrois River. The building was converted in the 19th century. In 1522, Bastarnay founded a collegiate church not far from his château. Establishing a pious foundation became fashionable in the Loire Valley. It involved building a church and providing for a small group of priests, the college of canons who would spend their lives praying for, amongst other things, the salvation of the founder and his family. This collegiate church was built between 1522 and 1532. It was completed after Bastarnay's death in 1523. Its architecture remains medieval. Its walls are pierced with triple lancet windows, and it is surrounded by buttresses and crowned with a high roof. However, the portals and façades are abundantly decorated with early Renaissance elements: columns, narrative bas-reliefs and sculptures. The main façade is dominated by the motif of a large, high archway that encompasses the main entrance and a window, a typical element of churches around Tours at the time. Below the roof line, a string course extends around the entire building, juxtaposing busts of biblical characters with those of Antiquity and royal emblems.

Features of the interior include private chapels that open onto the choir and corridors leading to them inside the walls. They are covered with coffered vaults. Both stalls are decorated with medallions and Antiquity-inspired busts. Many stained-glass windows also date back to the 16th century. At the entrance, recumbent effigies of the founder, his wife and their son can be found. The three white marble figures lie on a black slab, the plinth surrounded by weeping figures in niches. The group used to be in the choir, but after being vandalised in the French Revolution it was moved and restored.



St. John the Baptist Collegiate Church, Montrésor, the West façade
© Imola Gebauer

Themes: identity and diversity, innovation and stagnation

In founding a collegiate church, Imbert de Bastarnay made a pious, charitable gesture, the deeply medieval gesture of a lord. Montrésor marked the centre of his fiefdom, a place of identity. He wanted to leave a memorable mark and rest there in peace forever. In the early 16th century, many “dynastic” collegiate churches from the Touraine region expressed the noble desire of possessing a family burial ground near the king, even when the majority of their possessions lay elsewhere. At the time, contemporaries of Bastarnay in Italy and elsewhere in Europe rushed to do the same. While his project may have been traditional, it was in the details that he ventured to innovate. Much of its style and the models used can be attributed to the Renaissance. Biblical figures and heroes from Antiquity are universal themes, which were also valid for a nobleman at that the time. His project was thus innovative as well.

St. John the Baptist Collegiate Church, Montrésor, stained-glass windows with the scene of the Crucifixion
© Imola Gebauer



St. John the Baptist Collegiate Church, Montrésor, the effigies of the founder, Imbert de Bastarnay and his family
© Imola Gebauer



12. JEHAN DE SEIGNE CHAPEL, BLÉRÉ

The small town of Bléré lies on the left bank of the Cher River, east of Tours. The funeral chapel today adorns a public square, built on the site of an old cemetery. This lonely little building is a rare example of its kind, built in the early Renaissance style of the Touraine region.

Guillaume de Seigne was lord of Bois pateau and Bois-Ramé, Governor of Montrichard, as well as Treasurer and Receveur général (receiver general) for the Royal Artillery between 1518 and 1526. In 1515, Guillaume de Seigne took part in the victorious Battle of Marignano in 1520 and was responsible for the manufacture and transport of tents and pavilions for the Field of the Cloth of Gold. His funeral chapel was built around 1526. While it is likely that he himself initiated its construction, it is certain that it was his son, Jehan, who completed it.

The appearance of the chapel as a whole is striking. What sets it apart is its cubic shape with a square layout, the addition of a polygonal apse, and an octagonal dome on top of a base. It used to be crowned by a lantern. The powerful classical entablature still has some elements of a railing and gargoyles. The treatment of its three façades is a reference to triumphal arches: the corners are accentuated by protruding buttresses, each spanned by a wide arch appearing in the wall. The entrance opens into a three-centred vault with columns, topped by an architrave decorated with rinceaux and military objects, and a curved pediment. The side façades and the three segments of the apse wall feature windows combining the two styles. The vaulted interior of the chapel remains late Gothic, with capitals and Renaissance niches. Today there is no trace of a tomb or the original furnishings.

The ornamental style, consisting of a diamond-shaped pattern, candelabra motifs and volutes, typically belongs to the early Renaissance. The military objects (i.e. cannons and flaming cannonballs) are a reference to the career of the deceased. The finesse of the motifs would suggest the involvement of an Italian artist.



Jehan de Seigné Chapel, Bléré
© Imola Gebauer



Jehan de Seigné Chapel, Bléré,
decorated entablature with canons
and flaming cannonballs
© Imola Gebauer

Themes: innovation and stagnation, harmony and conflict

A remarkable monument with its “Antiquity-inspired” architecture, the chapel differs greatly from his contemporaries. Firstly it is not attached to a church, and Gothic architecture has almost completely been abandoned. This independence allowed even more innovative ideas to be considered. The search for perfect shapes was a significant concern for Renaissance followers. Cubes and spheres were considered to be able to express perfection. Domes then symbolised infinity. French echoes of the dome crowning Florence’s Cathedral were rare at the time. Although the two small domes of the cathedral of Tours are reminiscent of it, they are not as curved as Bléré’s. To these references must be added the allusion to the triumphal arch, the ultimate recognition for a soldier in Antiquity. War and the search for perfection thus coexisted peacefully in the world of this man touched by the Renaissance. In devising this chapel, he not only demonstrated his refined taste, but also his audacity.



Jehan de Seigné Chapel, Bléré, interior
© Imola Gebauer



Jehan de Seigné Chapel, Bléré
© Imola Gebauer

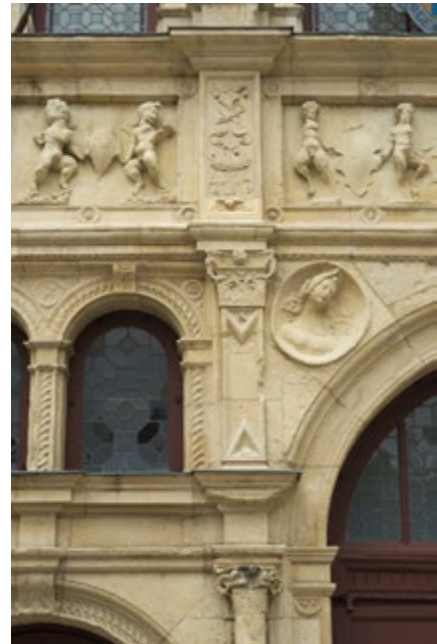
13. TOWN HALL, BEAUGENCY

Beaugency town hall is a rare gem of 16th century French public architecture. Authorisation for the project was given in 1526, but the details of its construction remain a mystery. The work may have been carried out between 1526 and 1533.

The main façade is symmetrical and consists of two floors. On the ground floor, two arched openings appear either side of a lower central entrance topped by twin windows. The entrance and windows are framed by pilasters, while the spandrels feature medallions with three-quarter busts. The first floor opens out through three mullioned windows, divided by pilasters. A string course runs between the floors, with scenes depicting putti holding heraldic shields, and a salamander. These shields once bore the coat of arms of the town, the Orléans-Longueville family and those of the Dunois, the town's ruling family. The salamander is a reference to Francis I, the reigning king. The cornice with its shell motif is very impressive. The rest of the surface is dotted with fleurs-de-lis. Above the cornice two protruding turrets frame the roof with a balustrade in between. Inside, an assembly room occupies the first floor.

The decorative elements establish a parallel between this building and the first buildings of the Renaissance in the Loire Valley, especially Bury and the Francis I wing at Blois. Reputed for its finesse, the building was among the first to be classified as a historical monument in 1840. When the building was restored in the 1890s, despite not appearing in any documentation, the turrets and balustrades were “reconstructed” according to 1840s drawings by Léon Vaudoyer, who worked with Félix Duban on the restoration of the Royal Château of Blois.

Large public buildings from this period often feature sculptures in niches and are dotted with fleurs-de-lis. Beaugency could not afford such a major undertaking. Fleurs-de-lis are very much present, and there is a string course with putti holding heraldic shields, but the sculptures were replaced by medallion busts.



Town hall, Beaugency, detail of the façade
© Imola Gebauer



Town hall, Beaugency, the royal emblem of the salamander on the façade
© Imola Gebauer

Themes: Nation/State – cosmopolitanism, identity – diversity:

Beaugency town hall is not particularly impressive in size. Its dimensions are closer to those of rather modest northern town halls. However, its abundant decoration gives it a special importance among the buildings of Beaugency. While it is not known who built it, this would have been someone close to the large Loire Valley architectural companies who was familiar with the most recent trends in the area. Inspiration for the cornice can be found at the Château de Blois. It would appear then that the town was its model. The search for order and harmony are expressed through symmetry, and the criss-crossing patterns are reminiscent of Bury, a grandiose château near Blois.

Beaugency town hall is unique in the Loire Valley. It demonstrates self-esteem, respect for the common good and ideas that show that the Renaissance period was truly the dawn of modern society.



Town hall, Beaugency, detail of a turret
© Imola Gebauer



Town hall, Beaugency, the cornice
© Imola Gebauer

Town hall, Beaugency
© Imola Gebauer

14. CHÂTEAU DE VILLESAVIN, [TOUR-EN-SOLOGNE]

Villesavin is situated in a hunting forest not far from Blois, just a few kilometres from Chambord. The estate was acquired by Jean Le Breton, President of the Blois *Chambre des comptes* (chamber of accounts) and Finance Secretary to King Francis I. He was with the king throughout his imprisonment following the defeat at the Battle of Pavia in 1525. But before these misfortunes, as *Contrôleur des finances* (financial comptroller) Le Breton supervised construction of the Château de Chambord, and other major projects of the early Renaissance. On his return to France in 1527 he began building his own château, which continued until 1537. The building's layout was innovative. It consists of three single-storey horseshoe wings arranged around a rectangular courtyard. The site is dominated by the attic storey, which is excessively high in proportion to the rest of the building and divided into independent entities. The dormers are framed by pilasters and volutes, many of which bear the salamander, the royal emblem of Francis I.

The opposing wings culminate in rectangular corner pavilions. The centres of the two façades are accentuated by stairwells crowned with lanterns. The sculptures of Diana, Goddess of the hunt, and a bust of Francis I pay tribute to the king and the main pastime for the region's châteaux. The organisation of the interior does not reflect the same harmony as the exterior; the internal spiral staircase however must have been inspired by Chambord. A 17th century historian made mention of the stained-glass windows illustrated with scenes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The left pavilion conceals a chapel, which is covered in oil murals in the style of the Second School of Fontainebleau, dating back to the late 16th century. They depict the Passion of the Christ.

In the centre of the courtyard there is an exceptional marble fountain of Italian origin. It is decorated with lion masks, dolphins and chimeras. An "Italian style" parterre garden once surrounded the building.



Château de Villesavin, dormer window

© Imola Gebauer



Château de Villesavin

© Imola Gebauer

30

Themes: centre and periphery, innovation and stagnation

Villesavin, the château modestly “hidden” in Chambord’s shadow, serves to illustrate the contrast between centre and periphery. The person who commissioned it, a senior official of the court, watched and waited for decades before moving on the project. It was a bold project because he wanted it to be as close as possible to his king’s dream château where Francis I invited his friends and political partners, and to the forest where he hunted regularly.

During his years of service, Jean Le Breton observed the new style, and then he built a true French style villa. He replaced the round towers by more innovative corner pavilions, which had just started to become “fashionable” in Ile-de-France, especially in Écouen. He imported these innovations into the Loire Valley, also reproducing them in Villandry, his other château. He abandoned all defensive elements for a more modern harmony and added access to the gardens and surrounding forest. This proximity to nature and simple, orderly symmetry gave Villesavin a distinctive style in comparison with contemporary châteaux.



Château de Villesavin, painted interior of the chapel
© Imola Gebauer



Château de Villesavin, main courtyard © Imola Gebauer

15. CHÂTEAU DE L'ISLETTE, CHEILLÉ - AZAY-LE-RIDEAU

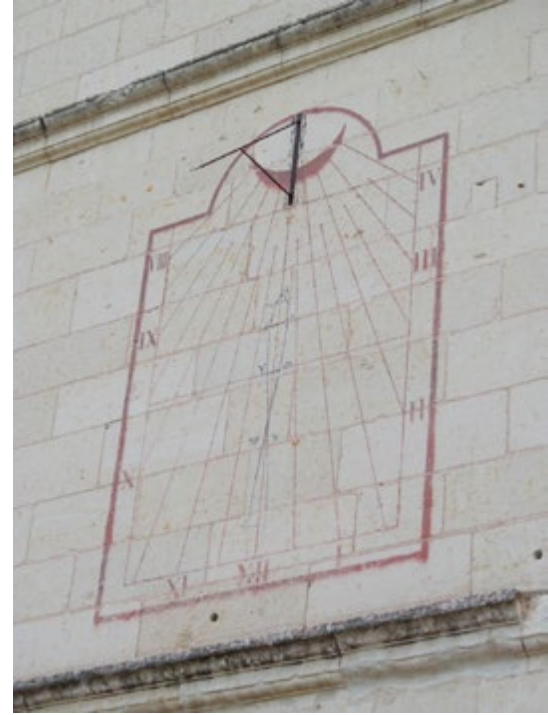
The Château de l'Islette lies two kilometres west of Azay-le-Rideau, on the left bank of the Indre River. The Maillés, a high-profile family in the Touraine region since the 11th century, ruled over other châteaux such as Luynes, Plessis, Tours and Brézé. They acquired the Islette fiefdom in the 14th century. The first manor house was built around 1450 and expanded between 1520 and 1530 by René de Maillé. Following his death, the work continued under the direction of Charles de Maillé, Knight of the Order of St. Michael, and again during the 17th century.

The idea of a square layout set out around a courtyard and reinforced with corner towers was never carried out. The building consists of a main wing and a short wing set at right angles to the west. The short wing is the only part of the 15th century manor house still standing, its brickwork alternated with quoin-style chains of limestone blocks. The main wing stands three floors high and the façade is flanked by two massive round towers. This section and the towers feature horizontal cordons and are pierced with mullioned windows. While the symmetry may not be perfect, overall the search for order and harmony is evident. The main entrance is skewed towards the east: between the slits of an old drawbridge you can see the sculptured coat of arms of the Barjot de Roncée family, owners in the 17th century. Formerly there was a moat around the château. Some historians believe Azay-le-Rideau labourers were involved in the Islette project.

The château as we know it today has seen significant changes. In the 19th century the upper part of the building was demolished or altered, the dormers becoming battlements, the high roofs of the corner towers now candle-snuffer roofs, not to mention the moat.

The interior however retained its original organisation. The eastern corner tower houses the chapel, and access to the upper floors is via two spiral staircases. The sculptured and painted décor dates from the 17th and 18th centuries. Only the painted décor of the fireplace in the great hall dates back to the late 16th century.

In the mid-19th century Islette became a boarding house. The famous couple of sculptors Rodin and Camille Claudel, stayed and worked there in the 1890s.



Château de L'Islette, the sundial
© Imola Gebauer



Château de L'Islette, sculpted door decoration
© Imola Gebauer

Theme: innovation and stagnation

The Islette and Azay-le-Rideau châteaux form a “family”. Not that of their owners, but another family, based on the same design principles. However, while Azay-le-Rideau is the embodiment of the finesse of the early Renaissance in the Loire Valley, Islette remains solid and traditional. They have in common their general layout, defensive elements, the number of floors and even the search for harmony. However, the dissimilarity of their proportions and the abundance or on the contrary the virtual absence of decorative elements reflect different ideals.

The Maillés belonged to the old nobility and remained true to the values associated with their rank, also remaining hesitant towards the new style. Gilles Berthelot d’Azay was a “nouveau riche” who wanted to become a member of the Court, and he hastened to follow the new style. These two approaches can be seen in other almost contemporary châteaux. However with its elements bringing order to the façade and some framing motifs, Islette is part of the dawn of the Renaissance.



Château de L'Islette, the water mill
© Imola Gebauer

Château de L'Islette
© Imola Gebauer



16. LOCHES, TOWN

During the Hundred Years' War, the town alternated between in the hands of the French (Capets) and the English (Plantagenets), and experienced many sieges. Surrounded by massive fortifications, the royal town stands on a rocky outcrop overlooking the Indre River. Its two ends are marked by the ancient keep and the royal apartments, an occasional residence for the kings of France Charles VIII, Louis XII and Francis I. The reign of the Valois brought peace and a prosperous period, allowing the town to develop. The Maison du Centaure (house of the centaur; 10, rue du Château) and its bas-reliefs with human figure motifs is from the early Renaissance, while the Chancellery (1551; 8, rue du Château) is closer to the late Renaissance of Philibert de l'Orme. The town hall with its straight flight staircase tower was built between 1535 and 1543, after written permission was received from Francis I. Saint-Antoine Tower (1527-1540 and 1575) is a late reference to the towers of the cathedral in Tours.

Outside the town towards the east stands the manor house of Louis Prévost of Sansac. Originally from Cognac like his king, a Knight of St. Michael and close friend of Francis I, he was imprisoned with the king following the Battle of Pavia in 1525. He built his home in 1529, and placed an earthenware bust of the king over his door as a symbol of his allegiance. This bust has been attributed to the Florentine workshop of the Della Robbias. Its façade, typical of the early Renaissance, is accentuated by the tower staircase, a reference to the one at Azay-le-Rideau. A captive of Louis XII during the second Italian War, the Duke of Milan Ludovico Sforza, a former patron of Leonardo da Vinci, was imprisoned from 1500 until his death in 1508 in the keep prison.

On 12 December 1539 the town was the scene of a significant diplomatic event: the meeting of Francis I and Emperor Charles V. The town was adorned with temporary decorations bearing the salamander and the two-headed eagle, the sovereigns' emblems. The Emperor spent the night in Sansac manor before heading to other châteaux of the Loire Valley, including Chambord



Town hall, Loches
© Imola Gebauer



The Sansac manor, Loches
© Ville de Loches

Themes: Nation/State - cosmopolitanism, harmony and conflict

Loches lay at the crossroads of important issues between identity and belonging, harmony and conflict. Royal legacies and the personal ambitions of sovereigns have long determined the town's history, hindering its development. During the reign of the Valois, allegiances to the French crown stabilised and construction projects reflected receptiveness to the new style of which Francis I was so fond. This allegiance was again highlighted on the occasion of Charles V's visit to the town. The meeting between these two belligerent sovereigns was a moment of peace, even if this would only be temporary. A Renaissance celebration and entertainment replaced war. But the imprisonment of another great figure, the Duke of Milan, was a bitter victory. A great patron and Renaissance follower, he nevertheless conformed to royal ambition. So while the conflict left the town an outstanding military legacy, the Renaissance allowed it to expand, develop and make its mark on the surrounding countryside.

The Cité Royale, Loches
© Imola Gebauer



Town hall, Loches, dormer window
© Imola Gebauer



17. CHÂTEAU DE VILLANDRY

Jean le Breton's château is one of the latest of the Loire's Renaissance châteaux. It was built after the royal court returned to Ile-de-France. Its owner, President of the Blois Chambre des comptes (chamber of accounts), former French ambassador in Rome and Finance Secretary to Francis I, acquired it in 1532. Le Breton, who also owned the Château de Villesavin next to Chambord, oversaw many construction projects of the early French Renaissance in the Loire Valley.

As soon as he became owner, he demolished the old building except for one tower and kept the moat. Aside from these components, the medieval style was completely abandoned. He had a series of three wings built at right angles, structured around a paved quadrangle. It is likely that a fourth wing originally closed the courtyard. The symmetrical layout, open walkways on the ground floor and criss-crossing patterns of the façades were inspired by Italian models. However, the order on the façades shows some irregularities. The decoration of the dormers with candelabra ornamentation and volutes is resolutely Renaissance. They resemble those of Azay-le-Rideau and Chambord. However, the façades as we know them today are the result of reconstruction work, which removed any remnants of 18th century alterations.

The château is surrounded by an extensive garden with flowerbeds in tiered terraces. The ornamental garden features trimmed shrubbery organised by shape. The vegetable garden is arranged in geometric patterns, and the Jardin des Simples contains medicinal herbs (simples in medieval French). Streams, waterfalls, fountains and mazes were typical features in gardens at the time. The majority of the components are a symbolic message originating from Antiquity, often Christianised during the Renaissance.

The original gardens also underwent alterations in the 18th century. In the early 20th century the château's new owner, Joachim Carvallo, and his wife recreated the original organisation of terraces and parterre gardens using engravings and drawings from the period.



Château de Villandry and its gardens
© Jean-Baptiste Leroux



Château de Villandry, the room of Francis I.
© David Darrault

Themes: innovation and stagnation, transformation of the landscape

Villandry, one of the Loire Valley's late châteaux, did retain some medieval elements. The embattled tower and moat were no longer needed at the time. The function of the tower, incorporated into the new building, was to give the impression of its owner's seniority. The building, tall and imposing, accentuates this effect with its roof and dormers by creating a vertical focus. However, Villandry also used innovative square pavilions instead of corner towers. This trend, from Ile-de-France, also foreshadowed classical architecture. Despite its "château-like" appearance, Villandry is more like an Italian "villa" with direct access to the gardens. This proximity is rare, and the size for a garden of this type is unparalleled in the region. One of its models was probably Bury, which is no longer standing, but whose design reflected the same principles. The use of essential components of the "Renaissance garden" reveal extensive knowledge of the style.



Château de Villandry
© Imola Gebauer

Château de Villandry and its gardens
© Marc Jauneaud



18. CHÂTEAU DE LA CÔTE, REUGNY

The commune of Reugny is located north-east of Tours, on the banks of the Brenne River. The Château de La Côte, formerly “La Couste”, both meaning hill, stands on the hillside overlooking this river. In the 1490s this modest manor house belonged to the La Rue family, officers from the Touraine region. Jean de La Rue was a gentleman of the King’s Chamber under Charles VIII. His son, Marc, brother-in-law to Jean Le Breton lord of Villandry and Villesavin, became Treasurer under King Francis I, then Maître des requêtes (master of requests) in the Chambre des comptes (chamber of accounts), Mayor of Tours in 1535 and finally Royal Secretary, serving until 1548. Mention was made of him as one of the nobles imprisoned with the king after the defeat against imperial troops at the Battle of Pavia in 1525.

The estate is mentioned in documents from 1480, but the building must have been altered between 1530 and 1535 by Marc de La Rue. This small limestone castle consists of two main buildings set at right angles. A round tower stands on the corner, while the wings culminate in more solid, rectangular towers. The two-storey complex is crowned by a high roof pierced by elegant dormers. Ornamentation around the windows and two small “Italian-style” shrines adorn the main façade. This façade reflects the search for order and symmetry, which were highly valued at a time when the Renaissance was captivating France. The only decorative element of the façade facing the gardens is a dormer. Little effort was made to harmonise it. In the interior, a spiral staircase, painted beams and sculptures demonstrate the quality of the site.

The complex is completed by a dovecote, a small vaulted oratory and a chapel built up against the hillside. The chapel was built around 1560 and was decorated with a stained-glass window of the Crucifixion, dating back to the 16th century. The restoration work managed to retain the original style of the building quite well. The owner had the grounds above the château landscaped into a terraced garden.



Château de La Côte, Reugny, the chapel
© Imola Gebauer



Château de La Côte and its terraced gardens, Reugny
© Imola Gebauer

Themes: centre – periphery, transformation of the landscape

Marc de La Rue was undoubtedly a modest lord, yet close to court and its courtiers. Like many of his contemporaries, owning a country estate confirmed his status as a feudal lord, or seigneur. In fact building his small stronghold near Tours, the town of kings, was a declaration that he was a member of the aristocracy. Alongside his duties working for the Crown he also dedicated time to the town as mayor. It was also a testament to his taste and receptiveness in accepting the new style. The transformation of the hillsides around the château into terraces was not only a Renaissance undertaking, but one that was particularly innovative, as this sort of adaptation to the environmental situation was rare in the Loire Valley. The access to the gardens, in addition to being “fashionable” at the time, may have resulted from the connection between the owner and Jean Le Breton, who commissioned the gardens of Villandry



Château de La Côte, Reugny, dormer window
© Imola Gebauer

Château de La Côte, Reugny
© Laurianne Keil-Pays Loire Touraine



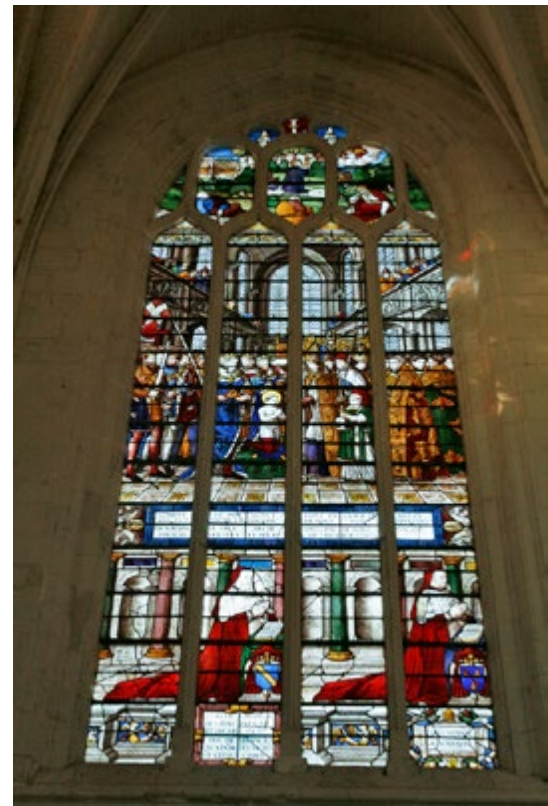
19. SAINTE-CHAPELLE, CHAMPIGNY-SUR-VEUDE

The old château, its outbuildings and chapel were born according to the wishes of Louis I, Duke of Bourbon. Construction began following his return from a military campaign in Italy alongside King Charles VIII. The only parts remaining from the château razed by Cardinal Richelieu are the outbuildings and the “Jupiter pavilion”, which were converted into living quarters in the 19th century.

Founding a collegiate church (1498) near a château was a traditional gesture for feudal lords. Yet the Bourbons were the descendants of St. Louis, the founder of the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris. This building was designed to house the relics of the Passion of Christ, which the canonised king had acquired in Jerusalem. His heirs founded several “Saintes-Chapelles” (meaning holy chapels) in France, placing a fragment of these precious objects in each. Founding Champigny was thus one of the most prestigious construction projects in the Loire Valley.

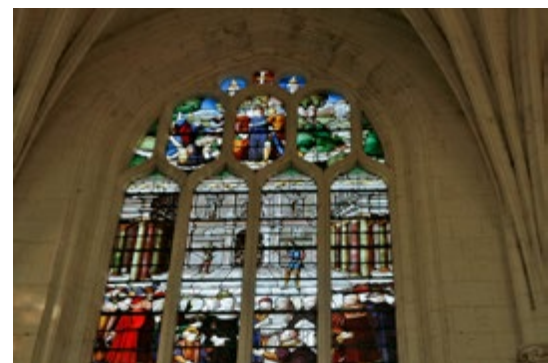
The architecture of the chapel, a true shrine, is in the late Gothic style with a Latin cross layout and the addition of extensions. The apse is surrounded by the sacristy, chapter house and private chapels. These chapels are accessible via exterior vaulted corridors, a special feature. The main entrance is preceded by a porch reminiscent of a triumphal arch. The interior is supported by a system of columns and pilasters, where the walls disappear between tall glass windows. These stained-glass windows, constructed in the 1540s, have been attributed to the Pinaigrier family, master glaziers from the Touraine. The three registers of representations depict (from bottom to top) famous members of the Bourbon-Montpensier family, the life of St. Louis and the Passion of the Christ. The numerous niches bear witness to a once rich sculptured décor, now gone. The nave was once divided by a wooden rood screen with stalls arranged in a U-shape.

Construction of the building began around 1520, to be consecrated in 1543 and the monumental porch added between 1549 and 1558. The tombs of the founders and many family members have since been demolished; elements of the remaining funerary monuments date back to the 17th century.



Sainte-Chapelle, Champigny-sur-Veude, stained-glass window with the scene of the coronation of Saint Louis in the centre

© Imola Gebauer



Sainte-Chapelle, Champigny-sur-Veude, stained-glass window with the scene of the education of Saint Louis

© Imola Gebauer

Themes: migration of people and ideas – vs. residence

St. Louis is one of France's patron saints. The abundance of references used by his descendants demonstrates their very complex relationship, very close to the monarchy. In founding such a construction, its sponsor wanted to affirm the importance and rank of the Bourbon family. The sculptured ornamentation and stained-glass windows reflect rich symbolism, establishing a parallel between the holy ancestor and Christ, while highlighting the role of the Bourbons in the country's history. It is evident that it was modelled on a building such as Paris's Sainte-Chapelle. However the décor adorning this building testifies to its part in the Renaissance movement. The central focus of the stained-glass windows and the complexity of the decorative elements attest to a thorough knowledge of Italianate architecture. The porch, with its direct references to Italian models, is a rare example of late Renaissance architecture in the Touraine. The architecture and painted elements of the Sainte-Chapelle, and of the Jupiter pavilion, are thus an example of civil and religious architecture bringing together elements of both early and late Renaissance in the Loire Valley.



Sainte-Chapelle, Champigny-sur-Veude
© Imola Gebauer



Sainte-Chapelle, Champigny-sur-Veude, tomb of Henri de Bourbon
© Imola Gebauer



The château, Champigny-sur-Veude
© Imola Gebauer

20. ROYAL ABBEY OF FONTEVRAUD, THE GRAND MOÛTIER AND THE CHAPTER HOUSE

Founded around 1100 by Robert d'Arbrissel, the monastic complex as it appears today is the result of a number of construction projects. Its 12th century Plantagenet style church was also a royal burial ground for the Plantagenet family. It extends to the south with two cloisters, a hospital and numerous outbuildings. The abbey is also famous for its late 12th century kitchens, with extraordinary fireplaces. It accommodated two thousand guests over the lifetime of its founder.

As a royal monastery, it won fame through its abbesses who were from the high nobility or royal descent, thus benefiting from their generous dowries. During the 16th century, under the direction of members of the Bourbon family, it experienced a golden age as an intellectual and spiritual centre. Renée de Bourbon, Francis I's aunt, had many of the monastery buildings rebuilt. The twin windows of the cloister's southern walkway (1519-1520) present the elegant movements of the early Renaissance. Louise de Bourbon, the king's cousin, was abbess from 1534 and oversaw the construction of the chapter house. Some sources claim that the king may have provided funding for this. The portal and mullioned windows opening out onto the cloister are abundantly ornamented. Their construction dates back to 1541-1543, and their style is similar to the late Renaissance. They are characterised by a multitude of depictions of biblical scenes as well as legendary, imaginary and pagan ones. Ornamentation with plant motifs, masks and emblems (including the salamander) cover the surfaces in a style close to Mannerism. However, the archivolted portal retained a medieval structure. The frescoes decorating the lunettes in the vaulted chapter house date back to 1563 and depict the Passion of the Christ. Figures of kneeling abbesses can be seen in each painting. The other wings of the cloister were rebuilt in the 2nd half of the 16th century and also belong to the late Renaissance. In the south-east corner of the same cloister a monumental staircase with a vaulted coffered ceiling leads to the dormitory.



Royal Abbey of Fontevraud, dormer window of the East wing
© Imola Gebauer



Royal Abbey of Fontevraud, the cloister, the gallery of the East wing with the portal of the chapter house
© Imola Gebauer

Themes: reason and imagination, Nation/State – cosmopolitanism

Fontevraud was a monastery with strong connections to power. Power and allegiance to the king is represented using strong symbols like the tombs of the Plantagenets, or the salamanders of Francis I. The monastery housed royal remains, was run by royal figures, and provided accommodation for royal and aristocratic youths. For many centuries the decision to live in a monastery was not a matter of personal vocation, but rather made for political or practical reasons. Fontevraud was as withdrawn from the world as it was fully part of it.

A “dream” city, true to the rules of St. Benedict, Fontevraud also embodied the vision of a new religious order. It was a mixed monastery where a smaller community of monks lived separately from the nuns’ community, under the direction of an Abbess General. Fontevraud, a large monastic complex where all activities relating to the church were carried out, was like the symbolic image of a “heavenly Jerusalem”.



Royal Abbey of Fontevraud, the cloister, the vaulted chapter house
© Imola Gebauer



Royal Abbey of Fontevraud, the cloister, South wing
© Imola Gebauer



Royal Abbey of Fontevraud, the abbey church
© Imola Gebauer

21. LE RIVAU, STABLES OF THE CHÂTEAU, LÉMERÉ

The Château du Rivau is located south-east of Chinon, near the Veude Valley. The 13th century building was fortified by Captain Pierre de Beauvau in the mid-15th century, but the complex underwent alterations during the 18th and 19th centuries. Its original 17th century garden stretches out before it. In the outer courtyard stand the monumental 16th century stables.

These limestone stables were built before 1550 by Gabriel de Beauvau, lord of the château, Knight of the Order of St. Michael and Squire of the Royal Stables. Located in a vast outer courtyard, they are made up of two branches set at right angles, one of which was never finished. They were reinforced on the outside by a large corner tower, which is no longer standing. The third matching branch, which would have completed the axis of symmetry to create a U-shape, was never built. The unknown architect would have drawn inspiration from the stables of Champigny-sur-Veude (altered) and the works of Philibert de l'Orme. This innovative design was intended to be used as the main entrance to the château, as was the case around 1530 at Fontainebleau and Villers-Cotterêts, whose stables are no longer standing.

The façades are characterised by white string courses and openings on two floors, framed by large blocks of limestone with bossage. Aside from the general layout, the cannon-shaped gargoyles below the roof line and the staircase tower suspended in the corner, supported by a semicircular wall-mounted cavetto vault, reflect inspiration from Philibert de l'Orme. The interior is accessed through a door in each wing and is made up of two large rooms with three-centred vaults and a smaller tack room. The rooms are decorated with equestrian-themed stone courses and strapwork cartouches. They could accommodate around thirty of Francis I's horses and allowed mares and stallions to be separated. The horses were tied to the inside of the blind wall, along which ran a feeding trough. The windows were glazed, a great luxury, but useful for controlling ventilation. The roof space was used to store grain.



Château du Rivau, the royal stables, interior, carved leather motif
© Imola Gebauer



Château du Rivau, the royal stables, bossed window and door frames
© Imola Gebauer

Theme: innovation – stagnation

Historically, stables were established inside the château compound to protect the horses. They were built of wood and were not prominent, remaining invisible amongst the other outbuildings. The Renaissance brought great changes to equestrian architecture as it did elsewhere. Permanent buildings made of stone or brick appeared and gradually became more ornate, decorated with bas-reliefs, sculptures and frescoes. Leonardo da Vinci designed stables for the Château de Romorantin, which would never be built. But while horses may be popular, their housing in France remains unappreciated.

The Rivau stables is a major building and stands out by its design, which gives it an important role in the château complex. Its owner, distanced from the royal capital – the court having moved to Ile-de-France around 1530 – went to great lengths to come up with a new space and create something innovative and impressive. These late Renaissance stables mean the arrival of significant change: the search for symmetry, order and especially a new hierarchy in the architectural complex that is the château.



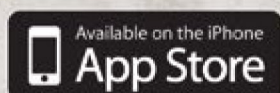
Château du Rivau, the royal stables
© Imola Gebauer

Château du Rivau, the royal stables
© Imola Gebauer



The itinerary of “On the trail of Francis I. Renaissance in the Loire Valley”, like other proposed under the Project RenEU, is available to be enjoyed with the help of an app that can guide you in the various places of interest. The App is free and available for Android, iOS and Windows Phone. Simply download the App izi.TRAVEL from your store and search RenEU. The contents are available in English and the local language.

Download the free app izi.TRAVEL



The contents of the itinerary of “On the trail of Francis I. Renaissance in the Loire Valley” and the itineraries of the other places in Europe that are part of the Project RenEU are available on the website

<http://www.reneu.eu/>