

ASNIERES-SUR-SEINE

# LE CHÂTEAU

THE CASTLE OF ASNIERES-SUR-SEINE

*English version - Free*

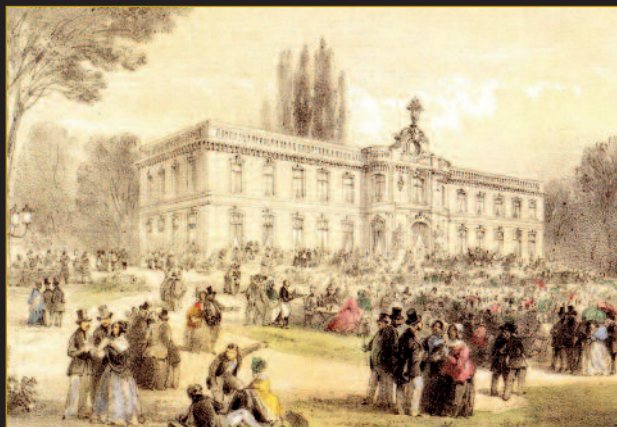


[www.asnieres-sur-seine.fr](http://www.asnieres-sur-seine.fr)

*This document was created with the help of the association  
"les amis du Château et du vieil Asnières"*



# THE CASTLE OF ASNIERES-SUR-SEINE



**Constr. date:** 1750-1752

**Current measurement:** 40 m long, 12 m wide

**Surface in the 18th century:** 15 ha from the Seine on the south, the church and the village of Asnières on the north.

**Architect:** Jacques Hardouin-Mansart de Sagonne

**Leading decorator:** Nicolas Pineau

**Characteristic features:** Rococo style (architecture and decoration)

**Description:** L-shaped layout originally, French gardens, view on the Seine River.

- 1697** Abbot Lemoyne bought a large estate in Asnières. He built a new mansion there and went by the name of "Lord of Asnières".
- 1719** The estate became a residence of pleasure and is bought by Marie-Madeleine de la Vieuville, countess de Parabère and mistress of Regent Philippe d'Orléans. She acquired the adjoining fields and carried out some improvements of the interior decoration and the gardens.
- 1750** Marc-René de Voyer de Paulmy d'Argenson, marquis d'Argenson and General Manager of the Royal Stud Farms decides to set up a horse warehouse near Versailles. Until 1762, he buys several properties in Asnières, including the "Seigneurie d'Asnières" in order to possess a surface vast enough to build a residence and stud farms.
- 1750-1752** Jacques Hardouin-Mansart de Sagonne builds the castle of Asnières in the Louis XV style. It is decorated in the Rococo (rocaille in French) style by the greatest artists of the era. The castle is surrounded by a large French garden that stretches out to the Seine River.
- 1769** The marquis fall into disgrace and is partially ruined. He is forced to sell the castle and its outbuildings. He settles in Paris, in the family hôtel particulier of the Chancellerie d'Orléans.
- 1800-1812** The west wing is destroyed.
- 1848** Several owners succeed one another. The castle became a restaurant and the setting of the festivities and big parties that Offenbach mentions in "La vie parisienne".
- 1897-1913** The castle is occupied by the Ozanam school.
- 1913-1975** The Institution pour jeunes filles (girl's institution) Sainte-Agnès replaces the Ozanam school in the castle.
- 1976** The city of Asnières-sur-Seine buys the castle in order to restore it.

# THE RESTORATION WORKS



*After the repair works to strengthen the structure of the building worn out by a century of school occupation, the restoration of the castle started to deal with the decorations. That required calling upon several restoration techniques according to the remaining elements, and the models and designs available.*

## **HISTORY OF THE RESTORATIONS:**

**1976:** the city of Asnières-sur-Seine purchases the castle

**1994:** the roofing is renovated

**2005-2006:** 1<sup>st</sup> stage of the restoration of the interior decoration: the Grand Salon, the Gallery, the marquis' room and the façade

**2007-2009:** 2<sup>nd</sup> stage of the restoration of the interior decoration: the dining room, the antechamber, the Grand Staircase and the basement

Incoming restoration: the first floor: the antechamber of the marchioness

## **Reconstructions from the remaining sections**

*The rear vault of the Grand Salon's openings, as well as its cornice, regained their original gilt. So did the cornices of the Marquis' room and the dining room.*

## **Putting back the original elements**

*The Rococo paneling of the gallery was stored in the warehouse of an antiquary before being bought back to its original location in 1996. The color has been restored thanks to the original marks.*

## **Casting from the original pieces**

*The groups of statues of the façade of the castle were rebuilt from cast taken on the original pieces currently in the United States. The busts at the first floor are castings from the original busts that are now at the Castle of Versailles.*

## **The trompe l'œil from a model**

*The mantelpiece and the three glass frames of the gallery are reminiscent in trompe l'œil in the wood panels from the drawings of Nicolas Pineau kept at the Hermitage Museum of Saint Petersburg. The stove and the consoles of the dining room are also in trompe l'œil, as well as the paneling of the Marquis' room, inspired by a picture from a 1913 book. The artificial marble of the dining room uses a style of decoration widespread during the period of construction of the castle and was there in the 18th century.*

## **Did you know?**

**The code of ethics of restoration dictates the use of marks that indicates the pre-renovation state. You can thus find the elements in their original states across the renovated parts of the castle. These elements helped to recreate the lost elements.**

# ARCHITECTURE OF THE CASTLE



## GUILLAUME II COUSTOU (1716-1777)

Guillaume II Coustou was the son of the famous sculptor of the Horses of Marly and comes from a line of major sculptors. Winner of the Prix de Rome in 1735, he went on to become the Sculptor of the King. He sculpted the Mausoleum of the Dauphin of King Louis XV in the cathedral of Sens.

## Did you know?

Both groups of statues in the ground floor are cast copies executed from the original pieces that are currently in the United States (Newport, Rhode Island), on the façade of The Elms estate, built between 1899 and 1901, and which name is inspired from another estate of the d'Argenson family, the Ormes castle in the Vienne region of France. The molds were carried out by Michel Bourbon, who also carried out the molds of the Horses of Marly.



**Constr. date:** 1750-1752

**Measurements:** 40 m long, 12 m wide

**Architect:** Jacques Hardouin-Mansart de Sagonne

**Sculptor:** Guillaume II Coustou

**Characteristic Feature:** Rococo style

**Description:** two-level façade with central avant-corps

The castle had originally an L-shaped layout with the main façade on the courtyard and one façade facing the gardens. The latter is the only façade still present nowadays. Each of them was punctuated by a semicircular central avant-corps. The elevation has two floors featuring openings with semicircular arches in the ground floor and with depressed arches in the first floor, both ornate with mascarons depicting mythological figures.

The ground floor of the avant-corps is decorated with two groups of statues from Guillaume II Coustou portraying Apollo wearing a laurel wreath and Venus giving arrows to Cupid. The first floor is decorated with busts placed between by Corinthian pilasters. Between two trophies of arms reminiscent of the military feats of the marquis is a medallion depicting King Louis XV. The curve lines (windows, avant-corps...) and the understated decorations of the façade are defining the Castle of Asnières as characteristically belonging to the final period of the Rococo style.

# THE MARQUIS

## MARC-RENÉ DE VOYER DE PAULMY D'ARGENSON



**MARC-RENÉ DE VOYER D'ARGENSON**  
(1722-1782)

**Position:** General Manager of the national stud farms Governor of the castle of Vincennes Military commander of Saintonge, Poitou, Aunis

**Grandfather:** Marc-René de Voyer d'Argenson, 1st marquis d'Argenson (1652-1721)

**Father:** Marc-Pierre de Voyer de Paulmy, count d'Argenson (1696-1764)

**Wife:** Joséphine Marie Constance de Mailly d'Haucourt (1734-1783), wedding in 1747

**Children:** three including Marc-René de Voyer de Paulmy d'Argenson (1771-1842)

### **The National Stud Farms**

The national stud farms were established as State administration in 1665 under Colbert and Louis XIV. They are tasked with keeping the royal stallions across all the territory under the care of stallion guards. Haras du Pin, the first national stud farm, was built in 1715. The Marquis wished to set up a stud farm near Versailles when he built the stables of Asnières. Later, the farm allowed him to introduce the English horses and crossbreed them with French breeds.

Marc-René de Voyer de Paulmy d'Argenson was born from one renowned family of the French aristocracy. His grandfather was Keeper of the Seals and President of the Finances Council under the French Regency. His father was Minister of War under Louis XV.

The marquis opted quickly for a soldiering career, stood out during the Battle of Fontenoy (1745) during the Austrian Succession War. In 1752, he was appointed as Manager of the Royal Stud Farms, General Lieutenant of the King's armies and governor of the castle of Vincennes.

He settled in Asnières in 1750 and built his castle as well as the Entrepôt Général des Haras (general warehouse of the stud farms), but had to get back to campaign.

His rich collection of various artworks was exhibited in his residence. In 1757, Madame de Pompadour, the King's mistress, organized the fall into disgrace of Marc-René's father Marc-Pierre de Voyer d'Argenson. The son fell with his father. He then left the castle to seek refuge at the Hôtel de la Chancellerie d'Orléans in Paris.

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The molds were carried out by Michel Bourbon, who also carried out the molds of the Horses of Marly.

## THE DINING ROOM



### THE LAYOUT OF THE ROOMS OF THE CASTLE IN THE 18TH CENTURY

*The antechamber followed the hallway - nowadays lost - and gave access to several main rooms: the great staircase leading to the apartments of the marchioness, the Grand Salon or the Gallery. It was a waiting room for visitors sorted out according to their ranks and the purpose of their visit.*

**Constr. date:** 1750-1760

**Measurements:** 8.10 m long,  
6.50 m wide

**Decorator:** Dominique Pineau

**Characteristic features:** Classical style

**Description:** room decorated with Corinthian pilasters, gilded frieze, and marble.

### Did you know?

There are some doubts lingering regarding the designer of this room because of its classical style, closer to the style under Louis XVI. The decoration might have been designed by Dominique Pineau, son of Nicolas Pineau – the latter designed most of the decoration of the castle. The son worked often with his father, with a style more influenced by classicism than by his father's Rococo. Charles de Wailly, decorator of the hotel particulier (mansion) of the marquis d'Argenson in Paris was also amongst those considered as possible designer of this room.

*Also called “second antechamber serving as dining room”, the dining room was alternatively fitted with gaming table or with eating table, according to the use of the room. Its decoration is made of brown marble Corinthian pilasters with gild capital and base topped by a gild frieze decorated with cupids. This decoration is nowadays completed by painted panels in trompe l’oeil reminiscent of the lost consoles and stoves. The piers in artificial marbles are using the same style of the original decoration of the room.*

*The room and its content, with their geometric shapes and an inspiration from the Antiquity and the Renaissance, serve as a classical counterpoint of the Rococo (rocaille) decoration of the rest of the castle.*

# THE BASEMENT



## THE "SEIGNEURIE" OF ASNIÈRES

In 1697, Abbot Lemoyne bought a large estate comprising several farming and wine growing properties in Asnières. He then ordered the construction of a new residence made up of two corps de logis. In 1719, the house was owned by Madame de Parabère, who converted it in a small residence of pleasure with terraces at the garden side and made several important improvements. It then had several successive owners before its purchase by the Marquis d'Argenson in 1750. He orders the destruction of a large part of the mansion, but leaves the basements untouched.

## Did you know?

There is a metal bar between the central pillar and the right pillar. It reminds of a rod with hooks in which foodstuffs such as hams, meats, and dry vegetables were probably hung.

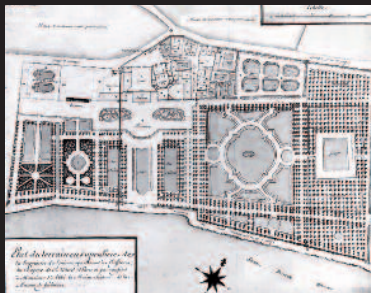
**Constr. date:** 18th Century  
**Measurements:** 6.20 m wide,  
 13m long,  
 2.70 m high

**Characteristic features:** built on the basement of the Seigneurie of Asnières

**Description:** rectangular rooms with groin vaults and two corridors

The thick-walled basement is made of a rectangular room at the center of which stand two large square pillars. The basement features groined arches built on the central pillars as well as on pillars embedded in the walls. Near the central pillar, a plate can be seen in the ground, leading to the well that served as water supply of the castle. Ventilation and lighting come from cellar windows. Two corridors are leaving the basement to the staircase and to an oblong room who used to lead to the gardens. Candlesticks were once placed inside the niches of the corridor leading to the staircase to light up the stairs. Vaults can be found on both sides of a gallery in order to let the air circulate and prevent capillary motion. It is said that a large part of the basement dates back from the "Seigneurie" of

Asnières, a construction that predates the Castle and which partial destruction was ordered by the Marquis de Voyer d'Argenson.



# THE MARQUIS' ROOM



## LOUIS XV (1710-1774)

King Louis XV was the great-grandson of Louis XIV. His rule followed the Régence (regency) of Philippe d'Orléans (1715-1723). He inherited an absolute monarchy from his predecessor, and tried to reach peace during the first period of his rule before being drawn into wars that led to the people's disenchantment towards him.

The Louis XV style, also known as rococo (or rocaille in France), became popular from 1730 to 1760 and was illustrated by a feeling of lightness thanks to the use of curvy lines and vegetable patterns.

## Did you know?

Two inventories made in 1760 and 1776 because of the Marquis' financial problems allow us to discover the furniture and decoration found in the castle at these periods. According to these, the room has a "niche with a couchette decorated with gold-plated sculptures, a sleeping equipment with a girthed bottom, a hair-mattress, two fustian-covered mattresses, a down-bed, two bolsters, a pillow, a silk blanket, a cotton quilt".

**Constr. date:** 1750-1752

**Measurements:** 5.4 m long, 3.8 m wide

**Decorator:** Nicolas Pineau

**Characteristic features:** paneling decoration waiting to be restored, lower ceiling because of its location above an entresol.

**Description:** features an alcove, a powder room and a bathroom.

The Marquis' room is a smaller room that connects with a gallery featuring a door so inconspicuous that it was called "the secret door". The room was originally made of a main room with a bed, and a small powder room preceded by a wardrobe and a bathroom.

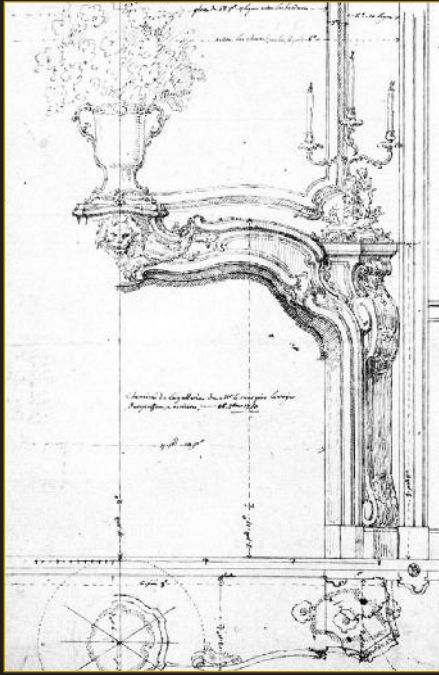
The room was furnished with a Polish bed (covered with curtains), two bergères and four chairs. It was heated with a white marble fireplace. This furniture provided the quality of comfort usually found in a castle accommodation under Louis XV.

The walls of the room was covered by understated and light paneling, which was sold in early 19th century and bought back by the municipality in 2006.

A small stair located behind a hidden door connected the Marquis' room to his study, just above the entresol.



# THE GALLERY



## NICOLAS PINEAU (1684-1754):

Sculptor and ornamentalist, Pineau was amongst the great decoration creators of the 18th century. He was the master of the Rococo style, and his work can be found in several Parisian hotel particuliers. The Asnières gallery is a testimony to his virtuosity.

Major works:

1716-26: Peterhof (Saint Petersburg)

1732: Hôtel de Matignon - Paris

1735: Hôtel de Varengeville - Paris

## Did you know?

The paneling was removed in 1897. In 1996, they were purchased back from a Parisian antiquary who owned them for more than a century, and were put back to where they belong. The original color has been recreated from the original elements that are found in the shutters.

**Constr. date:** 1750-1752

**Measurements:** 13.20 m long, 4.9 m wide

**Decorator:** Nicolas Pineau

**Characteristic features:** Rococo style, Louis XV

**Description:** ceremonial room facing the gardens, where the Marquis' collection is exhibited

The gallery used to display a collection of paintings from 16th and 17th century Flemish and Italian master painters (Rubens, Van Dyck, Brueghel, Le Lorrain ...) that belonged to the Marquis. An extensive collection of china, antique marble pieces and bronzes, as well as furniture with Boulle marquetry were also in display, making the gallery a real cabinet d'amateur enriched with various kind of artworks. The Rococo (also known as rocaïlle, the fashionable style under Louis XV) decoration of the mantelpiece and the paneling, with its flower festoons, was executed by Nicolas Pineau. The two consoles in carved oak with openwork frames decorated with branches and leaves are of a similar style. The wooden floor has the pattern of Versailles panel parquet. This room exemplifies the artistic taste found in the 18th Century French aristocracy and which led to the creation of large artworks collections. Hence, the gallery becomes a ceremonial place, where the collected paintings are displayed, thus emphasizing their owner's status as "Patron of Arts and Luxury". The curve lines (windows, avant-corps...) and the understated decorations of the façade are defining the Castle of Asnières as characteristically belonging to the final period of the Rococo style.

# THE GRAND STAIRCASE



## JACQUES HARDOUIN-MANSART DE SAGONNE (1711-1778)

Grandson of Jules Hardouin-Mansart, First Architect and Superintendent of works of King Louis XIV and builder of Versailles. Jacques Hardouin-Mansart de Sagonne became Architect of the King in 1742. He designed several buildings in the Rococo style and regularly called upon the best decorators of his time, including Nicolas Pineau. The castle of Asnières along with the stud farm called "Entrepôt general des Haras" is one of his masterworks.

### Masterworks:

1738: Hôtel de Marsilly with Nicolas Pineau (18 rue du Cherche-Midi)

1742-1754: Saint-Louis cathedral of Versailles

1753: Project for the Louis XV square (currently Concorde square)

**Constr. date:** 1750-1752

**Measurements:** 7.4 m long, 3.8 m large

**Architect:** Jacques Hardouin-Mansart de Sagonne

**Characteristic features:** main staircase of the castle

**Description:** flights of stairs with hairpin turns with landings

*The Grand Staircase is located behind the dining room. It used to be directly accessed from the hallway of the castle and led to the basement and the apartments of the marchioness at the first floor. The flights of stairs have hairpin turns with two small intermediary landings. The rail in wrought iron is identical to the one existing when the castle was built by Jacques Hardouin-Mansart de Sagonne. The stairwell is semicircular at the first floor whereas it is rectangular at the ground floor. The reason is probably the destruction of the north wing of the castle that affected the interior parts.*

*There is a second staircase behind the gallery, connecting the ground floor and the first floor rooms and giving access to all the levels, including the entresol, contrary to the Grand Staircase.*

## Did you know?

Two chimeras used as console and seemingly supporting the upper landing, very naïve in style, stand within a decoration of plaster palms. These disparate decorative elements were probably brought here during the 19th century restorations. These pastiches are actually hiding iron consoles compensating the inclination of the staircase.

# THE GRAND SALON OR OVAL ROOM



## JEAN-BAPTISTE MARIE PIERRE (1714-1789)

Pierre was a painter, an engraver and a drawer. He specialized both in large spiritual, historical or mythological artworks and in small rural or burlesque paintings typical of the Rococo art, the major style under Louis XV. Pierre was the First Painter of the King in 1770, succeeding to Boucher, and then became Director of the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture in 1778.

Masterworks:

1752: drawings for the decoration of the Palais-Royal (Paris)

1752-1757: two domes for the Saint-Roch Church (Paris)

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**Constr. date:** 1750-1752

**Measurements:** 7.4 m wide, 11.10 m long, 5.15 m height (total surface 81m<sup>2</sup>)

**Decorators:** Nicolas Pineau, Jean-Baptiste Pierre, François Lafon

**Characteristic features:** 18th century Rococo decoration, 19th century wall paintings

**Description:** Oval room with two niches on the north side and two openings looking onto the gardens on the south side.

The Grand Salon (great lounge), also known as the Oval Room, was the castle's drawing room. The Grand Salon looks onto the French gardens that used to offer a view towards the Seine River.

The room originally had a Rococo decoration of carved and gilt woodworks and a marble mantelpiece decorated with gilt bronzes. The whole set is currently at Cliveden House, in Taplow near London. The walls were decorated with paneling and gilt consoles, as well as mirrors in the niches. They were topped by a gilt cornice decorated with children hunting and fishing and with six *camaïeüs* from Jean-Baptiste Pierre. Two overdoors, also from Pierre, depicted Leda and Io. The only pieces remaining today are the rear-vault of the openings and the undulating

cornice, as well as the Versailles panel parquet reworked in the 19th century.

# MAP PLAN

