



The castle of the Dukes of Brittany Nantes History Museum

The Château des ducs de Bretagne has been a witness to both the history of Nantes and of Brittany. It is an exceptional heritage site right in the city centre. The medieval fortress encloses the 15th century ducal residence, which was built for Francis II and his daughter Anne of Brittany. A major restoration programme that lasted a number of years has recently been completed by the City of Nantes. It has enabled the creation of the modern Nantes Museum of History, which has been labeled Musée de France.

AN ARCHITECTURAL TREASURE AND A MUSEUM

The impressive restoration of the Château first strikes the visitor upon entering the courtyard and seeing the sculpted façades of the former ducal palace. Once through the doors of the main residence (Grand Logis), there are plenty of opportunities to learn more in the 32 rooms of the Nantes Museum of History. The 15th century architecture dialogues beautifully with the 850 objects of its collection and multimedia installations, all in a decisively contemporary layout.

THE HISTORY MUSEUM: THE PORTRAIT OF A CITY

The history of the city is told in a tour divided into seven sequences. It tells the history of the castle and of ducal Brittany, the Loire estuary and urban development, the port of Nantes and its industrial history (shipbuilding, baked goods, canning, and more), World War II and the post-war reconstruction, social movements, and the city of today and tomorrow.

This portrait of the city covers every major event in European and world history, from the Edict of Nantes to the colonial period and slave trade, right through upheavals of the 20th century.

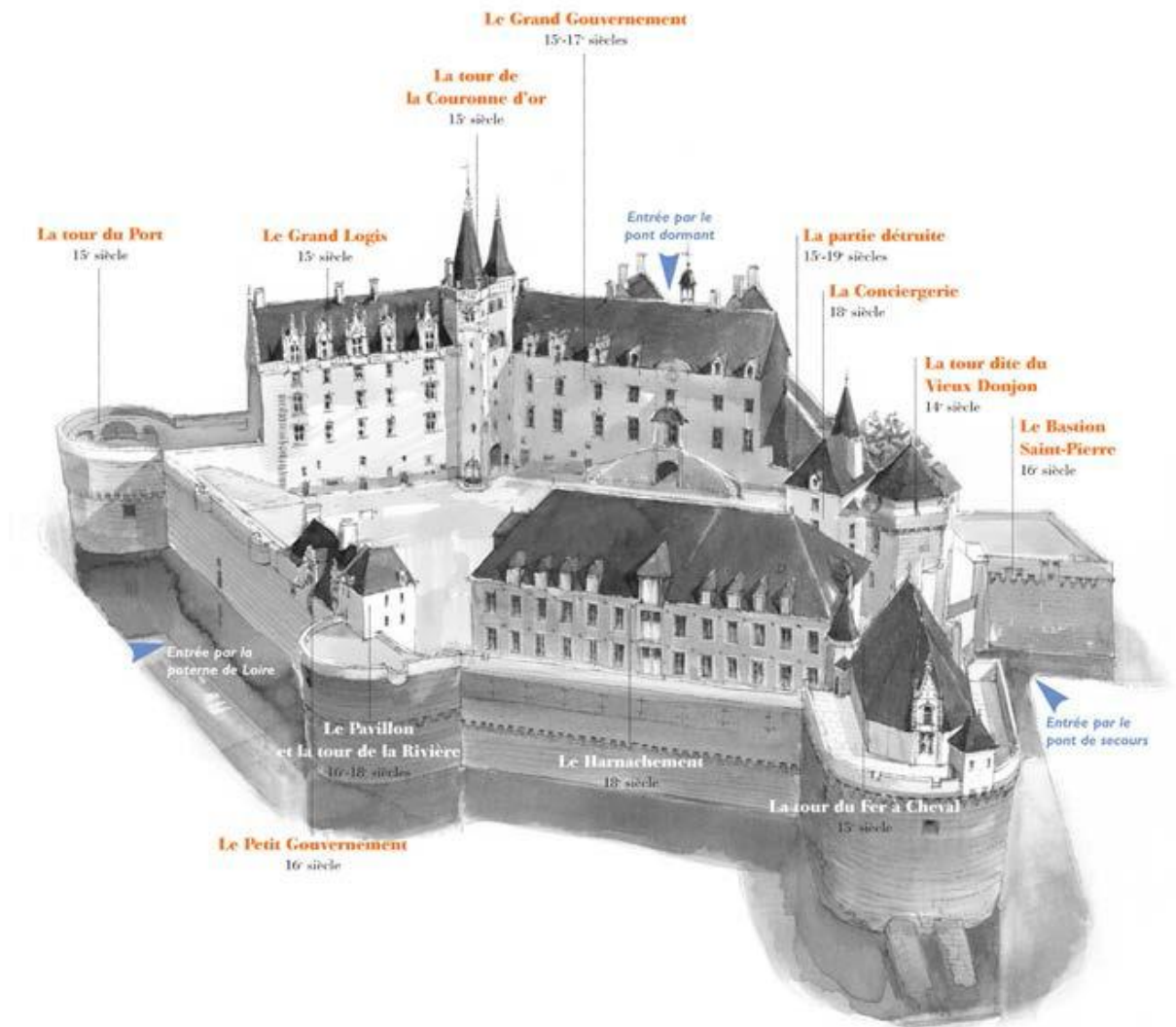
Finally, the way in which writers, poets, painters and filmmakers have portrayed Nantes is also examined, together with their many representations, all of which have served to build the city's unique identity.

A CASTLE IN THE CITY

Admission to the courtyard, the 500 metres of the sentry walk around the ramparts, and the moat gardens is free. A walk through these areas offers a range of different perspectives on the fortress, the interior buildings, and the city.

The castle is lit up at night, providing yet another vision of the building and its relationship to the city – especially with the videos projected onto its south façade.

1. A MONUMENT, AND A WITNESS TO THE HISTORY OF NANTES AND BRITTANY



FORTRESS AND PALACE

Set in the historic heart of Nantes, the Château des ducs de Bretagne is the city's most important historic building, along with the Cathedral St. Pierre.

When looking at it from the city, it is a fortress with 500 metres of curtain walls punctuated by seven towers, all linked by a sentry walkway. The inner courtyard reveals an elegant 15th century ducal residence made of tufa stone, in flamboyant gothic style and bearing the first traces of Renaissance inspiration, as well as other buildings dating back from the 16th and the 18th centuries. With their elegant white stone walls and sophisticated sculpted façades, they contrast strikingly with the rough textures of the exterior fortifications, made of granite blocks and separated by layers of schist.

HISTORY OF THE CASTLE

The first ducal castle was built in the 13th century on top of the (still visible) Gallo-Roman wall of the town, where the Namnetes settled. It was demolished in the 15th century to make way for the present building.

The current castle was the work of Francis II, the last Duke of an independent Brittany, who wanted to make the Château des ducs de Bretagne both a military fortress, which could act as a defence against the King, and the principal residence of the ducal court. Work was continued by Duchess Anne of Brittany, twice Queen of France through her marriages to Charles VIII and Louis XII. Her influence can be seen in the sculptural décor (dormer windows overlooking the main residence, as well as the coat of arms and loggias on the “Golden Crown” tower), marked by the first signs of the Italian Renaissance.

Following the integration of Brittany into France in 1532, during the 16th and 17th centuries, the Château des ducs de Bretagne became the residence of the kings of France when they visited Brittany, and later a military barracks, an arsenal, and a prison. For three centuries, it endured countless transformations and considerable damage: fortifications, a fire in 1670, construction of the Military Saddlery (Bâtiment du Harnachement) for storing artillery equipment, an explosion in 1800, and so on.

Listed as a historical monument in 1840, it was sold by the government to the City of Nantes in 1915 before also becoming, in 1924, a municipal museum. During World War II, the occupying German forces built a bunker there.

2.A MUSEUM OF URBAN HISTORY

The Nantes Museum of History is at the forefront of contemporary museum design. With its multimedia stations spread throughout the 32 rooms of this former 15th century residence, it showcases more than 850 objects from its vast collection. Beginning with its origins as the ducal capital through to the modern metropolis it is today, this “portrait of the city” covers a considerable range of European and world history, from the Edict of Nantes, to the colonial period and the slave trade, right through to the major upheavals of the 20th century.

«NANTES AND ITS HISTORY »

This is the concept chosen to orchestrate the dialogue between the castle and the objects in the museum. Its location in the historic heart of Nantes, its architecture and successive transformations, and finally its different collections, make the Château des ducs de Bretagne the ideal place to understand the city and its evolution.

THE NANTES MUSEUM OF HISTORY IN THE FORMER DUCAL RESIDENCE

The layout of the museum reveals the restoration work carried out on the castle interior. By discreetly blending in with the building’s volumes and taking into account its different spaces and potential visitor traffic, the museum has been able to highlight the castle’s unique character and complexity, as well as the transformations and damage it has undergone over the years. Specially designed lighting and signage reveal some remarkable features: shooting galler, gargoyles, coats of arms, stone window seats, fireplaces, windows, graffiti left by prisoners, and more.

CONTEMPORARY MUSEUM DESIGN

In the 15th and 16th centuries, kings and dukes carried their furniture and tapestries with them as they spent short periods in their residences. The fully restored rooms were bare and void of historical detail: the decision was made to create a contemporary museum that was discreet in terms of its impact on the architecture. The understated and innovative design by architect Jean-François Bodin, showcases the castle and the pieces from its collection at their best while integrating the multimedia installations.

BETWEEN A RIVER AND THE OCEAN

The museum's aim is to explain the city's history in terms of major events, geography, and socio-economics, but also through the artistic and literary representations which have helped to build the double identity of Nantes as a city belonging to Brittany, but also to the estuary.

The common thread running through the exhibition is the city's continuing relationship to water. As an estuary city, an oceanic city, an open city, a river port and an ocean port, Nantes' identity is marked by its position at the confluence of fresh and salt water, of the Loire River and the Atlantic Ocean. The museum provides the keys to discovering and understanding Nantes and its region, from the Gallo-Roman town of ancient times to the ambitious city it is today.

A WIDE VARIETY OF EXHIBITIONS

More than 850 objects, drawn from the museum's own collection*, are on display. They have been chosen for their significance and capacity to illustrate and explain different historical themes. The selection is extremely diverse: paintings, sculptures, relief maps, model ships, maps and plans, posters, engravings, photographs, films, tools, scientific instruments, furniture, *objets d'art*, archive documents, etc.

THE ROLE OF MULTIMEDIA

The multimedia installations were designed at the same time as the museum and its exhibition spaces. The choice to use these facilities reflects a commitment to tell the story of the city's history using not only objects from the collections, but contemporary media as well. The museum boasts 16 interactive terminals out of its 35 media stations, playing archives, sound sequences and videos, including two projections about Anne of Brittany and the history of the castle (see below), a 3D real-time reconstruction of Nantes in 1757 (Nantes in 3D, The Evolution of a City), a portrait in the form of a 180° immersive video project by video artist Pierrick Sorin.

This use of multimedia completes, enriches and brightens the museum experience. Alongside our other high standards for visitors – such as HD screens and projections, multilingualism, and the variety of different mediums – the use of multimedia makes the Nantes Museum of History cutting edge for its use of technology in exhibitions.

The film, *Anne de Bretagne*

Room 2

This animated movie mixes contemporary graphic design, as well as medieval and Renaissance documents.

The film's use of calligraphic style and drawn tableaux that appear to engrave themselves into the stone walls before being wiped away, set the dramatic tone for this historical and complex destiny. This makes it possible to integrate only the strongest elements of the space. The sound effects are adapted to the acoustics of the room.

A film about the history of the castle

Room 6

This film about the castle, its customs and its occupants is intended to act as a cultural mediator for the general public.

It presents the major phases of the castle's construction and the different patterns of occupancy throughout the centuries, as well as the major figures from its history.

A translation in French Sign Language has been added. The history of the castle has also been made more accessible for the visually impaired.

A 3D real-time reconstruction of Nantes in 1757

Room 17

This virtual tour of Nantes in 1757 won an award at Laval Virtual 2008 (one of the world's leading events for virtual reality) in the Architecture, Art & Culture Category

Visitors can stroll around the city's 11 neighbourhoods in 1757 (each of which are identified by a flag) and hang around as long as they like, while taking in the transformations of the urban landscape.

The creative team behind the film used an Ogre open source game engine to make it. Everything was perfectly documented. For the sake of accuracy, the exact locations of street lamps were taken from public work documents from the period.

This film, displayed on 7 x 23-inch screens, is located halfway into the itinerary, offering a chance to take a break and relax. An HD video compares the urban landscape with the buildings as they are today.

Pierrick Sorin's portrait of the city

Room 32

The last room is a space dedicated to contemporary creation. A portrait of the city was commissioned from an artist based on the museum collection. The call for projects required a semi-circular screen with 3 HD projectors, allowing for a 180° video projection.

A PORTRAIT OF THE CITY, OR VISITING THE MUSEUM IN SEVEN SEQUENCES

SEQUENCE 1

The Château, Nantes and Brittany up until the 17th century

From a fortress city closed up inside its rampart walls to the more open era of maritime trade, a 6-minute animated film features contemporary graphics along with medieval and Renaissance documents. It is projected onto a granite wall, bringing the emblematic figure of Anne of Brittany to life.

SEQUENCE 2

Nantes, daughter of the river and the ocean

Here, Nantes' status as a fluvial city with its Breton heritage is represented through a selection of objects, places and symbols.

The rooms named *Une ville sirène* («a mermaid city») and *Une ville ouverte* («an open city») illustrate Nantes as both a crossroads and a frontier. It also shows the manner in which painters, authors, poets and filmmakers have perceived it over time.

SEQUENCE 3

Slave-trading and «black gold» in the 18th century

The high point of colonial trade in Nantes was primarily based on the slave trade. This sequence covers a determining aspect of Nantes history by describing the economic mechanisms of France's most important slave trading port and its consequences on the city's development.

A thematic itinerary based on the slave trade and slavery

By exploring twelve rooms of the museum, the public learns what role Nantes played in the European slave trade and how slave-trade campaigns were organized, who the ship owners and the merchants responsible for this trade were, how the slaves were sold, and what their life was like on the plantations. To guide visitors, a specific logo is placed next to the objects, display cases, and multimedia tools related to this theme.

The Memorial to the Abolition of Slavery

Designed by artist Krzysztof Wodiczko and architect Julian Bonder, and inaugurated on March 25 2012, The Memorial to the Abolition of Slavery is located on the wharf where slave ships used to part for the New World. This commemorative monument pays tribute to the memory of all those who struggled, and who are still fighting against, all forms of slavery throughout the world. A 1.5 km walking tour composed of 11 information boards, symbolically links the Nantes Museum of History to the Memorial to the Abolition of Slavery.

SEQUENCE 4

Nantes in Revolution

In 1789, Nantes seemed to be at the peak of its prosperity, and the city had enthusiastically embraced the principles of the Revolution. But the slave trade created controversy. The idea of equality set forth in the Declaration of the Rights of Man was contested by Nantes' slave traders, who feared for their livelihood. In 1793, the War of Vendée opposed the Republicans who held Nantes and the Royalists who controlled the countryside. The Royalists did not succeed in taking the city.

SEQUENCE 5

A Colonial and Industrial Port (1815-1940)

Nantes' ship-owners began looking for new trade routes, but continued to engage in illegal slave-trading during the 19th century. Despite the difficulties in navigating the estuary and the creation of a port in Saint-Nazaire, the port of Nantes was still prosperous at the end of the 19th century. The period was marked by the development of major industries, including shipbuilding, canneries, biscuit factories and soap factories. From 1920 to 1930, major construction was undertaken to fill in several arms of the Loire.

SEQUENCE 6

A new city takes shape (1940-1990)

World War II in Nantes was marked by the execution of 48 hostages by the Germans on 22 October 1941. A tragic event in the city's history. Although Nantes was distinguished by its many Resistance members, there were also numerous collaborators. The city was heavily bombed, and on November 4th 1943, the city was declared a disaster zone. The reconstruction of the town and the port began in 1945. The post-war recovery restored the port to its former rank. A room named Une mémoire ouvrière ("working-class memory") is devoted to the social conflicts in Nantes from 1950 to the mid-1980s, where one can watch an archive film.

SEQUENCE 7

A great Atlantic city, today and tomorrow.

The last shipyards in Nantes closed in 1987. This was the end of the great industrial port. But new horizons opened up for the city which, together with Saint-Nazaire, had a population of 850,000. A new urban planning policy, diversified economic growth, the return of the tramway, as well as cultural and artistic renewal have given all Nantes a place on the European stage.

The last room of the museum is a space dedicated to contemporary artistic creation with a portrait of the city projected onto a semi-circular screen.



Restructuring of the contemporary rooms

Following the exhibition about the two World Wars and in between the two wars in Nantes and in Saint-Nazaire shown in 2013, the contemporary rooms of the museum will be restructured. Started in 2008, the exhibition was based, notably, on a collection of objects belonging to the inhabitants of Nantes. These collected items will then enrich the museum collections to bear witness to that period that has not been addressed a lot recently.

Implementation: spring 2016

A web portal: created and administered by the Musée d'histoire de Nantes. This portal gives a voice to other institutions and reference associations on the two world wars in Loire-Atlantique. www.scoop.it/t/histoire2guerres