



English translation of the exhibition

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# *Architecture au jardin*

en Val de Loire



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2017

# *Architecture in the garden in the Loire Valley*

An exhibition realised by the service Patrimoine et Inventaire, Région Centre-Val de Loire



Park of château de Chenonceau  
(Indre-et-Loire)

The « garden of France »: this expression, at first referring to the Touraine, quickly designated the whole Loire valley too. The fertile land and the river as a communication axis allowed the implantation of castles and noble houses all along the Loire. During the Renaissance, the royal power becoming stronger, the castles and their surroundings reflected the wealth of their owners. The garden, as a setting, became a demonstration of majesty. From the decoration to the outbuildings, architecture was everywhere.

More or less evident through the ages, the human footprint has always been present in the creation of the gardens. The owners and the landscape architects took advantage of nature to build gardens first dedicated to food, then to pleasure, to botanical collections or to the education of the stroller. The decor, whether aquatic, vegetal, architectural or sculpted, has always enlivened these places of domesticated nature. The present-day artists and gardeners are now taking over from all these visionaries to renew and imagine new architectures in the garden.

## **From regular to irregular: a history of design and decor**

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View of the «Music garden» from  
the dungeon, château de  
Villandry (Indre-et-Loire)

The closed medieval garden, with its regular framework, built our notion of garden. The abbeys largely spread this model. The garden was then filled with symbols that exceeded its alimentary function: it already presented many ornamental elements like squares, central fountain, trellises. The development of the monarchy at the 15th century brought political stability. The fence became decorative, the new architecture of the castles and the direct accesses to the garden changed its scale.

However gardens were still designed around the regular medieval squares, which were merely amplified. The French formal garden developed throughout the 17th and 18th centuries and gave an idea of might and rigor: the central alley split the garden whereas canals and fountains organised the space and highlighted the ornamentation. Today many castles of the Loire valley have restored or restore their garden in this style.

New forms only appeared at the end of the 18th century with the English landscape garden. Straight walks disappeared in favour of winding paths, landscapers promoted a trend towards « nature » and irregularity. The decor remained a major element of the garden but took place in a wider perspective the landscape and the surrounding nature.

## Inhabiting the garden

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Follie of the Bishopric gardens,  
Blois (Loir-et-Cher)

In the Renaissance the walls of the garden became less present but the vegetal architecture still preserved the stroller's intimacy. Under the influence of Italy, pergolas covered with climbing plants, closets of greenery, mazes, grottos and secret gardens echoed the architecture of the palace and celebrated the alliance between mankind and nature. As an outdoor museum, the garden was decorated with statues inspired by antiquity according to a learned iconographic program.

The formal garden showed the human know-how displaying parterres and embroideries perfectly cut. The straight alleys, the groves and the fountains gave a theatrical look but still offered a refuge to those who wanted to isolate themselves under the gaze of statues or in the shadow of topiaries.

In the 18th century, the passion for the Anglo-Chinese garden and the beginning of the English landscape garden covered the parks with follies, small replicas of historical or exotic buildings. Pagodas, Roman or Greek temples, pyramids or ruins were symbolic places where one could retire to meditate or entertain oneself in society.

The landscape garden, imported from England at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, abandoned the artificial way plants were displayed previously and the complex symbols to give the feeling of a natural composition inspired by the Roman landscapes of Nicolas Poussin and Claude Lorrain. But if the human hold seemed to fade, it was only an illusion. Statues were still present but they were mostly allegories of peace and victory, or tributes to great men from the present or the past.

At the same time, the public park where all the social classes met, was a place for recreation where the stress of the week was forgotten watching the different offered shows, from the menagerie to the bandstand. The rustic style, imitating rocks and wood with cement or reinforced concrete, recently invented, was very popular and the French craftsmen were very skilful to make "faux-bois".



## From the pleasant to the useful

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Wind turbine at château de Mazères, Azay-le-Rideau (Indre-et-Loire)

Water is everywhere in the garden. Contrary to the vegetal, it is flexible and fluid. It had a use for adornment and irrigation. From the Renaissance to the baroque period, water could be spectacular thanks to the fountains, artificial waterfalls and water jets that impressed the loiterers. But it could also seem calm in the basin of water of the French formal garden, as a reflect of the well-ordered parterres. Far from those impressive settings, the landscape garden preferred the creek, the lake or the spring, guided by the human hand rather than contrived.

Even apparently natural, the garden needs to be tended and some buildings were assigned to this purpose. Tanks and wind turbines to pump the water helped to irrigate. Orangeries and greenhouses protected from the winter non hardy plants, like citrus trees, introduced in France during the Renaissance, or exotic plants brought back from distant trips and very fashionable at the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Usually oriented toward the south and fitted with large windows, they were dedicated to the preservation of the greenery.

Often consigned in a remote place, some buildings recalled the alimentary role of the garden: icehouses deeply dug in the ground, where ice was kept year round, or fruits kilns, protecting the production of the orchard.



## More about the Loire Valley Heritage...

The service Patrimoine et Inventaire of the Région Centre-Val de Loire is a tool of knowledge and territory development. It has for mission to inventory, study and make known the architectural and movable heritage presenting a cultural, historical or scientific interest.

### Website:

<https://inventaire-patrimoine.centre-valdeloire.fr>

### Databases:

<https://patrimoine.centre-valdeloire.fr>

[www.pop.culture.gouv.fr](http://www.pop.culture.gouv.fr)

