

# THE DRAWING ROOM



*I'm making a party of these 2 days holiday at Saché, I intend to fleece you of 1fr.50 at backgammon and 100 chips at wisth (sic).*

Honoré de Balzac, Letter to Jean de Margonne, Passy, 9 June 1847.

*Balzac's stays at Saché were not only motivated by his search for a peaceful place in which to work. From the 1830s, Balzac suffered from heart and lung problems : henceforth, Château de Saché was also a place of convalescence.*

## Balzac at leisure

According to Balzac, Doctor Nacquart *ordered* him to regularly *take the native air* in order to recover from his overly intense activities in Paris. Balzac's stays at Saché were thus sometimes dotted with long walks in the local *hundred year old woods*, visits to local stately home owners or whist<sup>1</sup> and backgammon<sup>2</sup> games with Jean Margonne. Furthermore, in line with his habits when in Paris<sup>3</sup>, it seems that Balzac sometimes led soirées himself at Saché : according to a descendant of Jean Margonne, the writer was in the habit of reading his novels to his hosts following a demonstration of his oratory talents during an evening at the house of neighbours in Artannes<sup>4</sup>.

### ROMANTIC WALKS

In his correspondence with Madame Hanska, Balzac recounts several times his walks in the *beautiful woods* of Saché. In 1833, a hydraulic engineer sent a letter to Virgile Pertuis, Saché's estate manager. Not without irony, he evoked the *romantic* Balzac and his country house parties during which he sought inspiration :

*[...] I thought I would redress an oversight and ask you for news of the romantic : does he often go to dream in the moonlight, at the foot of the oaks and beeches of the forest or at the bottom of those sinister-looking ravines ? If you have not already done so, do him the service of showing him Madelaine's grotto, at the bottom of the château's waterfall ; he would be very happy with that : he would go there to meditate on human misery whilst watching the leaves fall from the trees on a misty October day, whilst you more cheerful grape-pickers fill up your barrels with that liquid thanks to which you, as I, will feel little antipathy [...].*

### Honoré de Balzac's main stays at Château de Saché

1825

late Sept./early October:  
one or two weeks.

1831

from early November  
to mid-December.

1832

from 8 June to 16 July.

1834

from late Sept. to mid-  
October.

1836

from 19 June to 4 July.

1837

from 15 to 26 August.

1848

from 3 June to 7 July.

1. Whist : card game of English origin, popular in Paris around 1830 (a predecessor of bridge).
2. Backgammon: dice game.
3. Contemporaries of Balzac, in particular Théophile Gautier and George Sand, reported that he would willingly narrate or read his work during soirées in Paris.
4. Amédée Salmon de Maison-Rouge, 'Souvenirs intimes de Balzac en Touraine', newsletter of the *Société Archéologique de Touraine*, vol. XII, 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 1899.

# DECOR AND FURNISHINGS

Requisitioned by the French government, which had taken refuge in the Tours region, Château de Saché housed the Office for Sports at the beginning of World War II before being occupied by the Germans in 1942. Despite the site's classification as a *Monument Historique (Historic Monument)* in December 1942, the château's decor and furnishings were not spared from looting and damage. The drawing room was given Historic Monument status in 1968. It has kept its theatrical decor, a stunning trompe-l'œil wallpaper akin to the 1805-1810 production of the Jacquemart et Bénard factory in Paris.

The furniture is largely from the Louis-Philippe period, recreating the ambience that reigned in this drawing room in the days when Honoré de Balzac came to stay at Saché. The backgammon table and game table evoke specifically masculine pursuits, while the sewing table, embroidery frame and daybed give the room an air of femininity. The world evoked is very much the same as that imagined by Balzac for the Château de Clochegourde's drawing room in *The Lily of the Valley*. In the novel, the backgammon table is central to a scene of rivalry between Félix de Vandenesse and Count de Mortsauf, while the embroidery frame and seat covers bear witness to the de Mortsauf's declining fortunes, with Henriette de Mortsauf keeping herself busy restitching the tapestry work on her old seats:

*The room in which the countess received us was panelled throughout and painted in two shades of gray. The mantelpiece was ornamented with a clock inserted in a block of mahogany and surmounted with a tazza, and two large vases of white porcelain with gold lines, which held bunches of Cape heather. A lamp was on a pier-table, and a backgammon board on legs before the fireplace. Two wide bands of cotton held back the white cambric curtains, which had no fringe. The furniture was covered with gray cotton bound with a green braid, and the tapestry on the countess's frame told why the upholstery was thus covered.*

Honoré de Balzac, *Le Lily of the Valley*



**MUSÉE BALZAC**  
Château de Saché

**M. Round Louis-Philippe table**  
Mahogany and marble, ca. 1830, BZ 1999.1.61.

**N. Restoration games table**  
Mahogany veneer, ca. 1830, BZ 1999.1.77.

**O. 1830s armchairs**  
Green velvet, ca. 1830, with slip covers (by the Mobilier National's decorative tapestry workshop), BZ 2011.1.1.1-2.

**P. Louis XV style sofa**  
Natural wood and petit point tapestry, second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c., with slip cover (by the Mobilier National's decorative tapestry workshop), BZ 1999.1.56.

**Q. Window seat**  
Sculpted oak and red velvet, mid 19<sup>th</sup> c., BZ 1999.1.48.

**R. Chandelier**  
Empire style, 20<sup>th</sup> c., On loan from the Mobilier National, GML 9951.

**S. Carpet**  
Wool, ca. 1830  
Attributed to the Manufacture d'Aubusson, On loan from the Mobilier National, GMT 17675.

**1. Ludwig van Beethoven**  
Albert Ernest Carrier-Belleuse, patinated terracotta, post-1863, BZ 1999.5.18.  
*Balzac was a great admirer of Beethoven, whom he referenced often in La Comédie humaine (The Human Comedy).*

**2. Place Maubert [Paris]**  
Étienne Jaurat, oil on canvas, late 18<sup>th</sup> c., BZ 1999.2.554.

**3. Pair of vases with gold thread**  
Sèvres porcelain, mid 19<sup>th</sup> c.  
On loan from the Mobilier National, GML 864/1 and 2.

**4. Oil lamps**  
Earthenware decorated with lions, original opaline globes, with golden dragons, mid 19<sup>th</sup> c., BZ 1999.1.69/1-2.

**5. Portico clock**  
by Charles [in Orléans], black marble and bronze, 1815-1825, BZ 1999.1.70.

**6. Hôtel du Roule [Paris]**  
Étienne Jaurat, oil on canvas, late 18<sup>th</sup> c., BZ 1999.2.555.

**7. Charles X**  
Manufacture de Sèvres, Sèvres bisque, 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, On loan from the Mobilier National, GMLC 264.

**8. Tea service**  
[East India Company] 18<sup>th</sup> c., Porcelain, museum coll. at Hôtel Gouin, Tours, on loan from the Archaeological Society of Touraine, HG 2004.053.0001.

**A. 1830s sofa**

Yellow velvet, ca. 1830, with slip cover (by the Mobilier National's decorative tapestry workshop), BZ 1999.1.43.

**B. Backgammon table, ca. 1780**

Ash, ebony and ivory magnifying glass, On loan from the Mobilier National, GME 17514.

**C. Restoration chairs**

Jean-Pierre Louis, elm and ash, ca. 1830, with a St. Andrew's Cross with a central rose, On loan from the Mobilier National, GMT 16351/1 to 4 and GMT 17306.  
*Chairs made during the Restoration for the Château de St-Cloud.*

**D. Console table**

Mahogany and black Saint Anne marble, Empire, early 19<sup>th</sup> c., BZ 1999.1.44.

**E. Restoration gondola chair**

Amaranth inlaid lemon tree, ca. 1830, on loan from the Mobilier National, GMT 11369.

**F. Empire embroidery loom**

Walnut, early 19<sup>th</sup> c., property of the Indre-et-Loire Departmental Council. *Loom from a château in the south of Brittany.*

**G. Restoration sewing box**

Mahogany, early 19<sup>th</sup> c., BZ 1999.1.77.

**H. 1830s sofa and armchairs**

Yellow velvet, ca. 1830, with slip covers (by the Mobilier National's decorative tapestry workshop), BZ 1999.1.57/1-3. *Furniture believed to have belonged to Jean Margonne.*

**I. Restoration gondola wing chair, chairs and armchairs**

Mahogany, ca. 1830, Pierre Marcion (wing chair and armchairs), Jean-Pierre Louis (chairs), marks from the Châteaux de St-Cloud and de Versailles. On loan from the Mobilier National, GMT 33071 (wing chair), GMT 33076 (armchair), GMT 33077 (armchair), GMT 33082 (chair) and GMT 33083 (chair).  
*Set was on display at Les Jardies in Sèvres during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, on the property acquired by Honoré de Balzac in 1838.*

**J. Chimney grate**

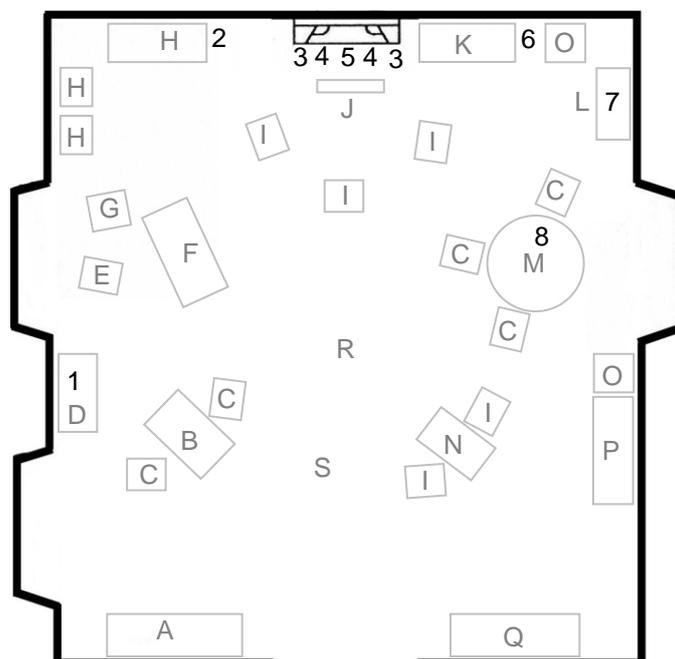
Elm or ash, Restoration era, on loan from the Mobilier National, GMT 10733.

**K. Daybed**

Mahogany, ca. 1830, on loan from the Mobilier National, GMT 3159.

**L. Roll top secretary desk**

Mahogany, 19<sup>th</sup> c., BZ 1999.1.125.



**Furnishing with the assistance of the Mobilier national.**

