

# THE DINING ROOM



*Mr de M[argonne] has some 25 year old Vouvray wine in his cellar, you cannot imagine what it is like ; how smooth and sweet it is, absolutely like Tokay wine.*

Honoré de Balzac, Letter to Madame Hanska, Saché, 5 June 1848.

## The Margonnes on their estate

Jean Margonne (1780-1858) and Anne Savary (1783-1841) lived in Rue du Musée<sup>1</sup> in Tours from their marriage in 1803 and were in the habit of coming to Saché on holiday for several months of the year from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. At that time, the estate belonged to their maternal grandmother, Perrine Poulet. Even before inheriting the estate in 1812, Jean Margonne ceaselessly purchased new properties, finally owning almost half the surface area of the municipality. His land, linked to farms and mills, was worked with significant diversity, including woods, orchards, vines, livestock breeding, wicker, cereals.

Honoré de Balzac was rarely the Margonnes' only guest at Saché: neighbours such as the Marquess of Biencourt, the owner of the Azay-Le-Rideau château, used to come for lunch or dinner, and sometimes, *old friends* of Jean Margonne stayed at the château at the same time as Balzac<sup>2</sup>.

### RICH OWNERS

Jean and Anne Margonne were born to families grown rich through the trade in cheesecloth<sup>3</sup>. They were able to consolidate their fortune by investing in property. In his *Mémoires*, Jacques Briau, estate manager from 1816 until 1823, testified to the wealth and character of his employers:

*Mr Margonne, one of the richest owners of land and property in the local area, was full of vile self-interest, he did not help the unfortunate and never gave anything to the poor [...] otherwise, he was a fair man and fulfilled his commitments meticulously [...] he was not communicative, speaking little, a keen observer ; he was always trying to guess what other people were thinking and never communicated his own thoughts [...].*

*Madame Margonne was very short and small-minded [...]. In order not to share his land, Mr Margonne had married his cousin, not out of love for her but out of convenience, not to say avarice, and this poor lady was never loved by her husband [...]*<sup>4</sup>.

### The Margonnes' hospitality according to Balzac

In his letters, Balzac frequently makes reference to dinners hosted by Jean Margonne, whether at Saché or in his private townhouse in Paris<sup>5</sup>. He also told Madame Hanska that coming to Saché saved him money: *I will save the costs of Paris, as that is always 80 fr. of expenditure, whereas going for a month to Saché, the journey costs 30 fr.*<sup>6</sup>

Nonetheless, Balzac sometimes repudiated Jean Margonne's hospitality: *I believe that I will go to Saché [...] but Mr de Marg[onne]'s arid hospitality is not very tempting. One always does badly when staying with misers.*<sup>7</sup> Balzac's rare mentions of Madame Margonne – *an intolerant and sanctimonious, hunchbacked woman, not very witty*<sup>8</sup> – show that, nonetheless, he preferred the company of her husband.

1. Now Rue Émile Zola.

2. Madame Donnadiou, the widow of a general from Grenoble, stayed at Château de Saché in June 1848 at the same time as Balzac.

3. Cheesecloth: light woollen cloth.

4. Jacques Briau-Bodin, *Mémoires*, private archives.

5. Residence purchased in 1822, Rue Verte, now Rue de Penthièvre in Paris.

6. Letter to Madame Hanska, Paris, 27 May 1848.

7. Letter to Madame Hanska, Passy, 16 July 1844.

8. Letter to Mme Hanska, Paris, late March 1833.

# DECOR AND FURNISHINGS



MUSÉE BALZAC

Château de Saché

The decor of the dining room was recreated in the early 1980s based on wallpaper panels of domino sheets found during renovations on the wall to the right of the earthenware stove. They resemble the wallpaper sold by the Zuber factory in Rixheim circa 1805-1810. The Pompeii themes composed of small columns and a trompe l'œil bas-relief are characteristic of the neo-classical decor fashionable during the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Honoré de Balzac was inspired by this ancient banqueting scene for his description of the wallpaper in the dining room of the Vauquer boarding school in *Le Père Goriot*, the novel he began at Saché in 1834:

*This room, with its fairly poor flooring, is wood-panelled up to window sill height. The rest of the walls are hung with glazed paper representing the main scenes from Telemachus, with coloured depictions of the classical characters. The panel between the cross-barred windows offers the boarders the tableau of the feast given to Ulysses' son by Calypso. For forty years, this painting has been the subject of jokes by the young boarders, who believe themselves superior to their position by making fun of the dinner to which poverty condemns them.*

When Paul Métadier created the museum in 1951, he chose to entirely refurnish the château's reception rooms with the aim of recreating the atmosphere of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century residence, an exact reconstruction of the interior Balzac had known being impossible. Continuing the work of the museum's founder and in partnership with Mobilier National (National Furniture Fund), the furniture today reinforces the Balzacian identity of the place. The furniture is typical of the interior of a Touraine manor house during the reign of Louis-Philippe. The magnificent Boulle style cabinet testifies to the Margonne family's possible access to Parisian luxury. Tours' antique shops are bursting with treasures whose like Balzac referred to in his letters to Madame Hanska. This recreation of a bygone atmosphere also reflects the interior of the fictional Château de Clochegourde, which Balzac located in the heart of the Indre Valley in his novel *The Lily of the Valley*. The *vieilles* ("old items") described by the novelist as being in the château's dining room here testify to the past luxuries enjoyed by the Count and Countess de Mortsau:

*This room, floored with white tiles made in Touraine, and wainscoted to the height of three feet, was hung with a varnished paper divided into wide panels by wreaths of flowers and fruit; the windows had cambric curtains trimmed with red, the buffets were old pieces by Boulle himself, and the woodwork of the chairs, which were covered by hand-made tapestry, was carved oak. The dinner, plentifully supplied, was not luxurious; family silver without uniformity, Dresden china which was not then in fashion, octagonal decanters, knives with agate handles, and lacquered trays beneath the wine-bottles, were the chief features of the table, but flowers adorned the porcelain vases and overhung the gilding of their fluted edges. I delighted in these quaint old things. I thought the Reveillon paper with its flowery garlands beautiful.*

Honoré de Balzac, *The Lily of the Valley*

## A. Sideboard

Inlaid natural wood, mid 19<sup>th</sup> c., BZ 1999.1.16.

## B. Stove, Eastern France

Earthenware, ca. 1830

## C. Planter console table

Sculpted rosewood, solid for the feet, veneer on the apron, built in oak with a metal tray, ca. 1840.

On loan from the Mobilier National, GME 13216.

*Dual purpose furniture that bears witness to this gradual invasion of flowers in the interiors of the 19<sup>th</sup> c. Made of sculpted rosewood. A planter is an essential component of every refined women's interior in The Human Comedy.* Pyramid shaped composition of artificial flowers evocative of the floral art of the 1840s and the novel *Honorine*, in which the heroine makes artificial flowers. By Oya Fleurs.

## D. Low cupboard with the figures of Aspasia and Socrates

Alphonse Jacob-Desmaltre, 1834, Oak, copper, tortoiseshell, Boulle style On loan from the Mobilier National, GMEC 165. *Delivered for Louis-Philippe at the Château des Tuileries (concert hall).*

## E. Louis XIV chairs with Aubusson tapestries

Sculpted natural wood, late 17<sup>th</sup> c., On loan from the Mobilier National, GMT 33 977 (E1) and GMT 33 978 (E2)

## F. Low cupboard

Walnut, late 18<sup>th</sup>c. / early 19<sup>th</sup> c. BZ 1999.1.23.

## G. Carpet

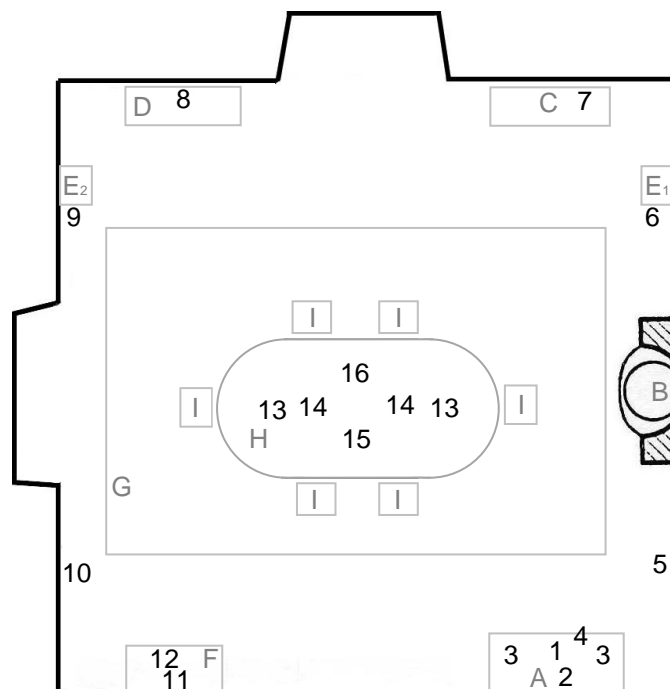
Morocco or Smyrna, 20<sup>th</sup> c. Geometric floral border. BZ 1999.1.31.

## H. Dining room table

Varnished mahogany, Louis-Philippe era, On loan from the Mobilier National, GME 8400.

## I. Chairs with ornamental apertures

Louis-Alexandre Bellangé, ca. 1830, Varnished mahogany. On loan from the Mobilier National, GMT 6035/1-5 and GMT 12868/2: *Under the reign of Louis-Philippe, chairs furnishing the Attic Library at the Château de Versailles.*



## 1. Skeleton clock

Ca. 1850. Copper, enamel and marble. Museum coll. at Hôtel Gouin, Tours, on loan from the Archaeological Society of Touraine, HG 946.002.0036.

## 2. Antoine Coysevox

By Jean Audran (engraver) By Hyacinthe Rigaud (painter) Print, 1811-1844. On loan from the Mobilier National, SN5.

## 3. Candlesticks

Gilded bronze, Restoration era. BZ.1999.1.52.1/2.

## 4. Soup tureen

Manufacture Creil et Montereau Earthenware, mid 19<sup>th</sup> century BZ.1999.1.38.

## 5. March of Troops

## 6. Outing of the King in the Bois de Vincennes

## 7. View of the Château de Vincennes from the Park Side

## 8. Château de Versailles

## 9. View of the Château de Versailles from the Orangery Side

By Van der Meulen Prints, reissued in the 20<sup>th</sup> century On loan from the Mobilier National, GMTC 1147, GMTC 1145, GMTC 1144, GMTC 1143 and GMTC 1142.

## 10. Sortie du Palais des Tuileries (Outing at the Palais des Tuileries)

[Coronation of Napoleon] By Eugène Isabey, print, 19<sup>th</sup> c., on loan from the Mobilier National, GMTB 103.

## 11. Noël Coypel

By Jean Audran (engraver) By Noël Coypel (painter) Print, 1811-1844. On loan from the Mobilier National, SN5.

## 12. Louis XVIII

Manufacture de Sèvres, Sèvres bisque, 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, On loan from the Mobilier National, GML 258.

## 13. Wine cisterns

Red and gold sheet metal, Louis XVI era, property of the Indre-et-Loire Departmental Council.

## 14. Oil lamps

Blue earthenware with a floral motif, 19<sup>th</sup> c., BZ 1999.1.33/1-2.

## 15. Dessert cutlery

Louis-Patient Cottat Vermeil, Louis-Philippe era. On loan from Jean Barnaud, BZD 2005.1.207. *This cutlery, engraved with the monogram "M", belonged to Jean and Anne Margonne. Their prestigious metal suggests the wealth of the owners of the Château de Saché.*

## 16. Dinner service

Fabrique Lebon-Halley, 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> c., museum coll. at Hôtel Gouin, Tours, on loan from the Archaeological Society of Touraine, HG 2004.052.0001. *The Fabrique Lebon-Halley was a Parisian manufacturer in activity from ca. 1811 to ca. 1822. This service recalls a common production style: gold leaves and forget-me-nots. A white and gold service is described by Balzac in Pierrette.*

Furnishing with the assistance of the Mobilier national.

