



VAUX LE VICOMTE A VISIONARY'S AUDACITY



PRESS PACK

FACT OR FICTION?

Correcting a few misperceptions about Vaux le Vicomte.

► Louis XIV decided to have Fouquet imprisoned at the party on 17 August 1661.

FICTION. The young monarch had decided to condemn Fouquet two months earlier. By acting thus, Louis XIV wanted to mark the beginning of his reign with a strong show of authority. This decision was mainly influenced by Colbert, who worked with the superintendent, was jealous of his success and sought to conceal his own wrongdoings.

► The Superintendent had built up his entire fortune "by helping himself from the State's coffers."

FICTION. Historians now agree that he was able to take advantage of the complexities of the financial system of the day and a conciliatory code of conduct to amass a considerable fortune. He mainly owed his fortune to his marriage, investments and various offices. Yet Vaux le Vicomte was not the creation of a vain spirit, but of a sincere lover of the arts.

► In 1661, Le Nôtre, Le Vau and Le Brun were obscure celebrities.

FICTION. The three artists already enjoyed a solid reputation. Le Nôtre was "Principal Gardener of the King at the Tuileries", Le Vau had already designed several Parisian mansions and Le Brun had received many commissions. Nicolas Fouquet's genius lay in bringing them together for a major project for the first time. Thanks to him, they were finally free to express all their talents.

► The estate was built in just 5 years.

FICTION. Twenty years passed between the first land acquisitions in 1641 and the château's "inaugural" celebration on 17 August 1661. By 1653, we know that a large part of the gardens had also been created. This fallacy was entirely fabricated by Fouquet's enemies, to spread the idea that the Superintendent had invested unlimited amounts in the construction project.

Aerial view of the domain,
photo by A.
Chicurel /
L. Lourdel

THE DOMAIN IN FIGURES

500

In hectares, the total surface area
of the domain in 2013.



“It was a place that I saw as my main office , where I wanted to leave a few reminders of the status which I once enjoyed.”

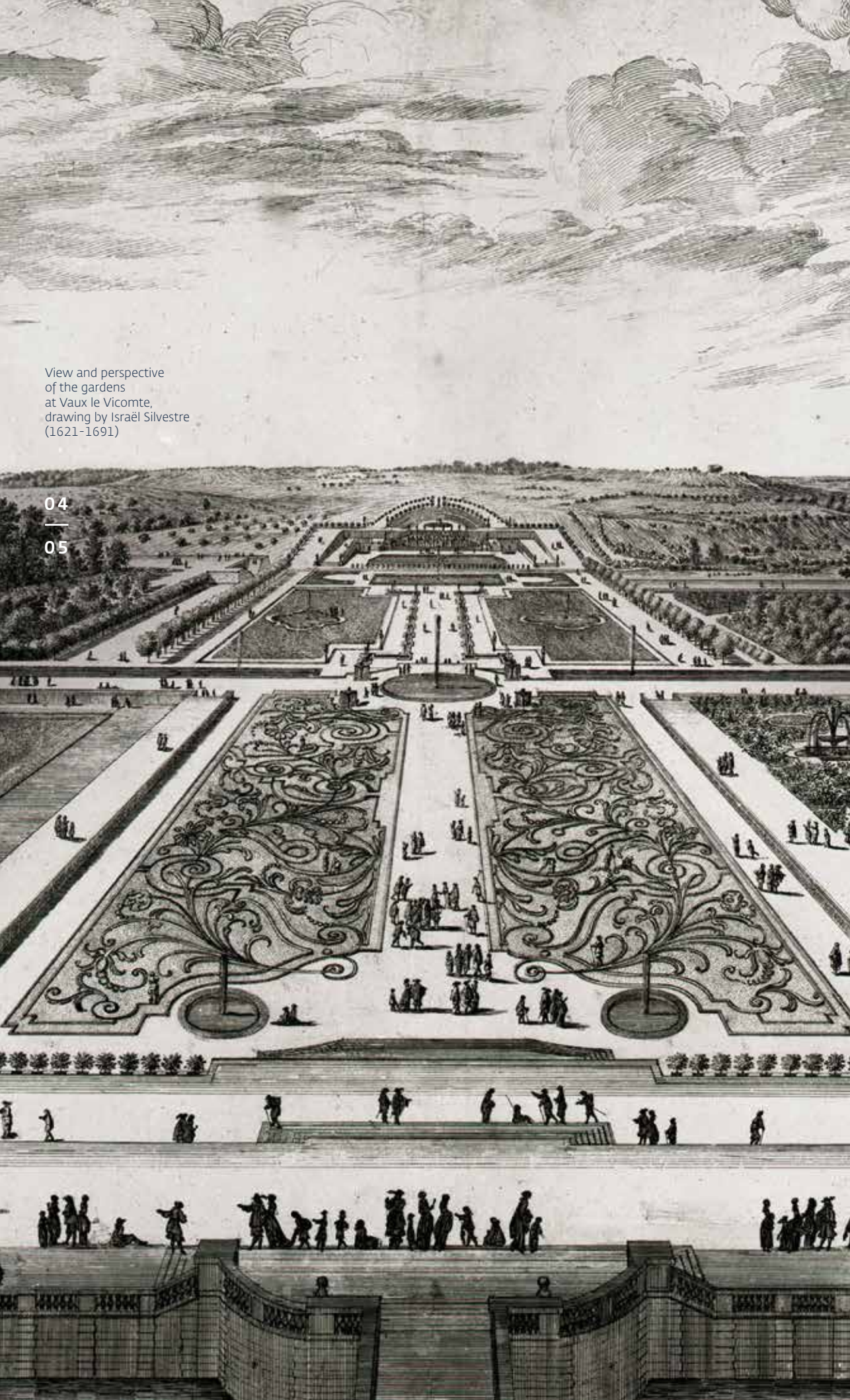
FOREWORD

Nicolas Fouquet, formerly Superintendent of the kingdom's finances, wrote these lines in the prison that he would never leave. A masterpiece, Vaux le Vicomte, the faithful friendship of the poet La Fontaine and a famous political trial have ensured that this extraordinary man remains alive in the nation's memory.

The Château de Vaux, and the immense garden which was the first revelation of Le Nôtre's talent, have remained intact through wars and revolutions, despite the changes in taste that have marked three centuries of history. This exceptional legacy has been preserved by people of all ranks and positions, united through the generations by a shared passion for Vaux le Vicomte: owners, architects, masons, gardeners, sculptors, painters and carpenters. It is proof of the spell cast by Vaux le Vicomte, where a new artistic civilisation was born.

May this domain, preserved in its original condition, be as rewarding to you as it was to all those who spent a few hours or many years here: the pleasure of human art.

Patrice de Vogüé



View and perspective
of the gardens
at Vaux le Vicomte,
drawing by Israël Silvestre
(1621-1691)

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« IL ME FIT VOIR EN SONGE
UN PALAIS MAGNIFIQUE,
DES GROTTES, DES CANAUX,
UN SUPERBE PORTIQUE,
DES LIEUX QUE POUR
LEUR BEAUTÉ,
J'AURAIS PU CROIRE
ENCHANTÉS,
SI VAUX N'ÉTAIT POINT
AU MONDE. »

Jean de La Fontaine, *Le Songe de Vaux*

VAUX LE VICOMTE, A VISIONARY'S AUDACITY

The domain of Vaux le Vicomte is the fruit of a creative and passionate mind, that of Nicolas Fouquet. To build his home, he enlisted the services of three of the greatest artists of the Grand Siècle: the architect Louis Le Vau, the gardener André Le Nôtre and the painter and decorator Charles Le Brun. Here, they united their genius to build a model whose majesty and balance inspired the whole of Europe for over a century.

Vaux le Vicomte is the work of Nicolas Fouquet, who chose the site, artists and craftspeople. From the first land acquisitions in 1641, it took twenty years to construct this 17th century masterpiece. To give the project its full scope, five hundred hectares were cleared by demolishing the former château, as well as the village of Vaux and two adjacent hamlets. The Superintendent of Finances was also a master of the "art de vivre": Vaux le Vicomte is dazzling proof of this and had to be the meeting point for the best talents and minds to be found in France. A great patron, Fouquet provided pensions to men of letters and science.

La Fontaine, Molière, Corneille and Charles Perrault were foremost among his protégés. The first wrote *Le Songe de Vaux*, a work in verse exalting the place and its master, while the second was commissioned to write *Les Fâcheux* for the final celebration on 17 August 1661. Thanks to his brother Louis installed in Italy, Fouquet also acquired many works of art including three paintings by Veronese and several works of Nicolas Poussin. Paintings, sculptures, tapestries, exceptional furniture: all the objects present inside Vaux le Vicomte in 1661 contributed to making this château a bastion of art in France and a source of inspiration for generations of builders.



GREATNESS AND MISFORTUNE OF NICOLAS FOUQUET

Scion of a line of parliamentarians, Nicolas Fouquet enjoyed a rapid social ascent thanks to his intelligence, audacity and loyalty to the royal family. He owed his success to a gallant and generous character. Like the squirrel, his family's emblem, he lived up to his motto "Quo non ascendet" (What heights will he not scale?), and rose to be appointed Superintendent of Finances in 1653.

He had the difficult mission of replenishing the State's offers and restoring its credibility among creditors. Although on the latter's death in March 1661, Fouquet should logically have succeeded him as Prime Minister, Louis XIV, then aged 23, decided suddenly to do away with this government function and rule alone. Jean-Baptiste Colbert, scheming and jealous of Fouquet's success, took the opportunity to discredit him towards the King, accusing him of having embezzled millions (in reality stolen by Mazarin). Despite the warnings of his friends, Fouquet suspected nothing of the plot being hatched against him.

On 17 August 1661, Fouquet organised a lavish reception for the King, including walks, a banquet, theatre and fireworks. In recounting this event, Voltaire said famously: *"On 17 August, at 6 o'clock in the evening, Fouquet was king of France; at 2 o'clock in the morning, he was nothing."*

That night, manipulated by Colbert and wanting to mark the start of his reign with a strong show of authority, the young monarch had already decided to throw his Superintendent in prison.

Fouquet was arrested in Nantes three weeks later by d'Artagnan, captain of the musketeers, and was brought before a special court. The "trial of the century" got bogged down but ended up to his advantage: the judges voted for his banishment, enabling him to remain free but outside the kingdom. The Head of State then intervened, overturned the judges' sentence and decreed life imprisonment. Fouquet was locked up in Pignerol, where he died on 23 March 1680.

Fouquet's spirit of genius gave birth to Vaux le Vicomte where, for the love of beauty, luxury and the arts, he put so much into the place.

Portrait de Nicolas Fouquet, drawing by Maurin (19th century) based on Robert Nanteuil. Shown with his coat of arms and the family emblem, a squirrel.



THE GARDEN OF VAUX LE VICOMTE. SCIENCE, ART AND PLEASURE.

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Vaux le Vicomte boasts the original French formal garden. This creation is notable for its theatrical majesty, the formal perfection of its patterns and its mastery of perspective, which would later be copied all over Europe.

Thanks to Nicolas Fouquet, André Le Nôtre was able to apply the latest technical and artistic developments of his day in the field of gardening, for the first time on such a large scale.

At Vaux le Vicomte, he collaborated with the architect Louis Le Vau and the painter and decorator Charles Le Brun. Together, the three artists benefited from Fouquet's absolute faith in them, and were given a bare landscape to work with. This absence of natural constraints enabled them to freely express their "fraternal genius" (P. de Nolhac). This blank canvas also enabled the perfect symbiosis between the various scenic elements. As soon as you lay eyes on it, Vaux le Vicomte makes a big impression, thanks to its sense of cohesion and unity. The broderie parterres, ponds, fountains and statuary, along with all the plants and buildings, are a unique achievement whose harmony and well-judged proportions charm the visitor from the very first glance.

In the rectilinear structure of the gardens, their perfect balance and the interplay of false symmetries, we see the metaphysical ideal of the gardener, who bends nature to suit his purpose. Drawing on new developments in science and taking a modern outlook, Le Nôtre designed a work that is both rigorous and varied. He displays a subtle taste for the unexpected, making liberal use of surprise effects. Trompe l'œil dimensions, optical illusions and other revelations are dotted throughout the gardens, ensuring the walker never experiences a dull moment.

Another distinguishing feature is the way the site reveals itself to the visitor like a kingdom of water: ponds, jets and canals line the visitor's path and delight the senses.

Perhaps Le Nôtre wanted this artistic creation to become a public space for walkers, where strollers could lose track of time in a pleasant, peaceful setting. The artist surely knew better than anyone else that the purpose of such a space is to bring peace and inspire respect, as well as demonstrate a certain idea of elegance.

Box broderies at the Garden of Vaux le Vicomte, designed by Achille Duchêne
Photo A. Chassaigne



THE GARDEN IN FIGURES

33

In hectares, the surface area of the French formal gardens designed by André Le Nôtre.

26

The number of ponds in the gardens in 1661. 10 are in working order and the other 16 are among the restoration projects which the Vogüé family is keen to undertake.

«MY ADVICE IS
TO LOSE
TRACK OF TIME
IN THIS
GARDEN»

Patrick Borgeot, Head Gardener of the domain



A WORD FROM THE GARDENER

Patrick Borgeot, as Head Gardener at Vaux le Vicomte, what is it about Le Nôtre that continues to surprise and fascinate you on a daily basis?

«I spend a lot of time in the gardens of Vaux and even after several years, I still admire the artistry of the landscaping carried out 350 years ago. Take the perspective, for example: many times, the walker believes they have a complete overview of the gardens. They think they can see the whole thing at once and then suddenly, surprise! The garden offers up a previously unseen aspect. My advice is to lose track of time in these gardens! You'll understand that everything there is unpredictable. Depending on the point of view and angle you choose, you'll see a new landscape every time. Le Nôtre made sure that the walker never knows what's coming next. So it's an endless process of discovery, and it's a source of motivation in my daily work.»

In your opinion, what can these gardens teach us? What's original about them for a contemporary visitor?

«When you observe these gardens, you realise the values that inspired them may conflict with our own: they appear anachronistic to us. Imagine a garden designed just to look beautiful, with no question of usefulness! No ambition other than to celebrate the power of Fouquet and humankind's mastery of nature: that would be almost unheard of nowadays! What's more, these gardens take a long time to explore! Unreasonable, isn't it? Yet if the walker accepts these rules, if

they agree to take a peaceful stroll in the gardens, to observe, to turn around, to take a walk, then they will gradually fall under the spell of the unique atmosphere of Vaux le Vicomte.»

Could you offer some advice for creating a French-style garden at home?

To create a French Formal Garden at home, a lot of space is needed, but it is possible to recreate its fundamental principles on a small plot. First you have to decide from which point you will be viewing the garden then you have to play with the heights of the garden's different elements. The rule you have to respect is to not overload. Le Nôtre did not place two statues per square meter!

In order to enlarge all the elements as you move away from the main point, to have an accelerated perspective, you set two statues relatively high at the very beginning and then you subtly reduce the width of the path and the size of the flowerbed.

You can also make a flowerbed of box trees. Begin by making a draft of the embroidery pattern, on which you will trace a grid pattern. Apply this pattern on your flowerbed. All you have to do now is reproduce the pattern, square by square. It takes a long time, but it's child's play.»

THE GARDEN IN FIGURES

8

The number of gardeners employed at Vaux le Vicomte in 2013..



The monumental framework under the ovoid dome of the château
Photo by Vaux le Vicomte

THE ARCHITECTURAL WORK OF LE VAU

The architect Louis Le Vau (see p.25) was already enjoying widespread recognition when Fouquet called on his services in 1653. As Principal Architect of the King, he had already erected many Parisian mansions including the Hôtel Lambert. Considered the greatest ambassador of the Italian style in France, Le Vau also drew inspiration from antiquity. These various sources would enable him to create a powerful new style of his own, starting with le Vicomte; a style that would lay the foundation of French architecture for the century and a half to come.

VAUX LE VICOMTE TAKES CENTER STAGE

Majestically laid out along an axis four kilometres long, the stately home of Vaux le Vicomte surges forth, creating a series of planes like a theatre set. It stands behind huge railings, an innovation for that period, at the centre of a *mise en scène* where the gaze is drawn in by the walls of the outbuildings that line the forecourt. Without creating an obstacle, the château gives a glimpse of the gardens stretching out on either side of its façade, following the natural slope of the land, arranged into vast terraces.

Everywhere, the great axis reigns at the centre of the composition, which is cleverly balanced without always being symmetrical. Creating a sense of transparency, the axis passes through the château via the entrance hall and *Grand Salon*, providing a glimpse from the road of the statue of Hercules at rest, two kilometres to the south.

A NEW LAYOUT

Although he had already experimented with this layout, it was at Vaux le Vicomte that the architect would break away from the rigid principles of home

design that had prevailed until then. Before, buildings were constructed as simple structures, made up of rooms with two façades, one overlooking the courtyard and one overlooking the gardens. This layout made it necessary to arrange the rooms in an immutable row, limiting privacy. The ground floor was dedicated to utility rooms, and the first floor or piano nobile was used for ceremonial purposes.

However, in the early 1650s, Le Vau introduced a brand new concept: instead of placing the rooms on top of each other, he placed them next to each other, doubling the building's thickness, which of course led to other changes, too.

To start with, a French-style roof (that is, a high, straight roof) was out of the question, because the size of the framework made it impossible. He therefore chose to use a hipped roof, which the architect routinely introduced into his projects. In his opinion, the ovoid dome was one of the most significant technical and aesthetic feats of the Château de Vaux le Vicomte.

The corner pavilions nonetheless retain their high roofs, although this feature was "outdated", like the moats and drawbridges, elements that were once purely defensive but here sit alongside terraces, wide bays and gardens adorned with abundant fountains.

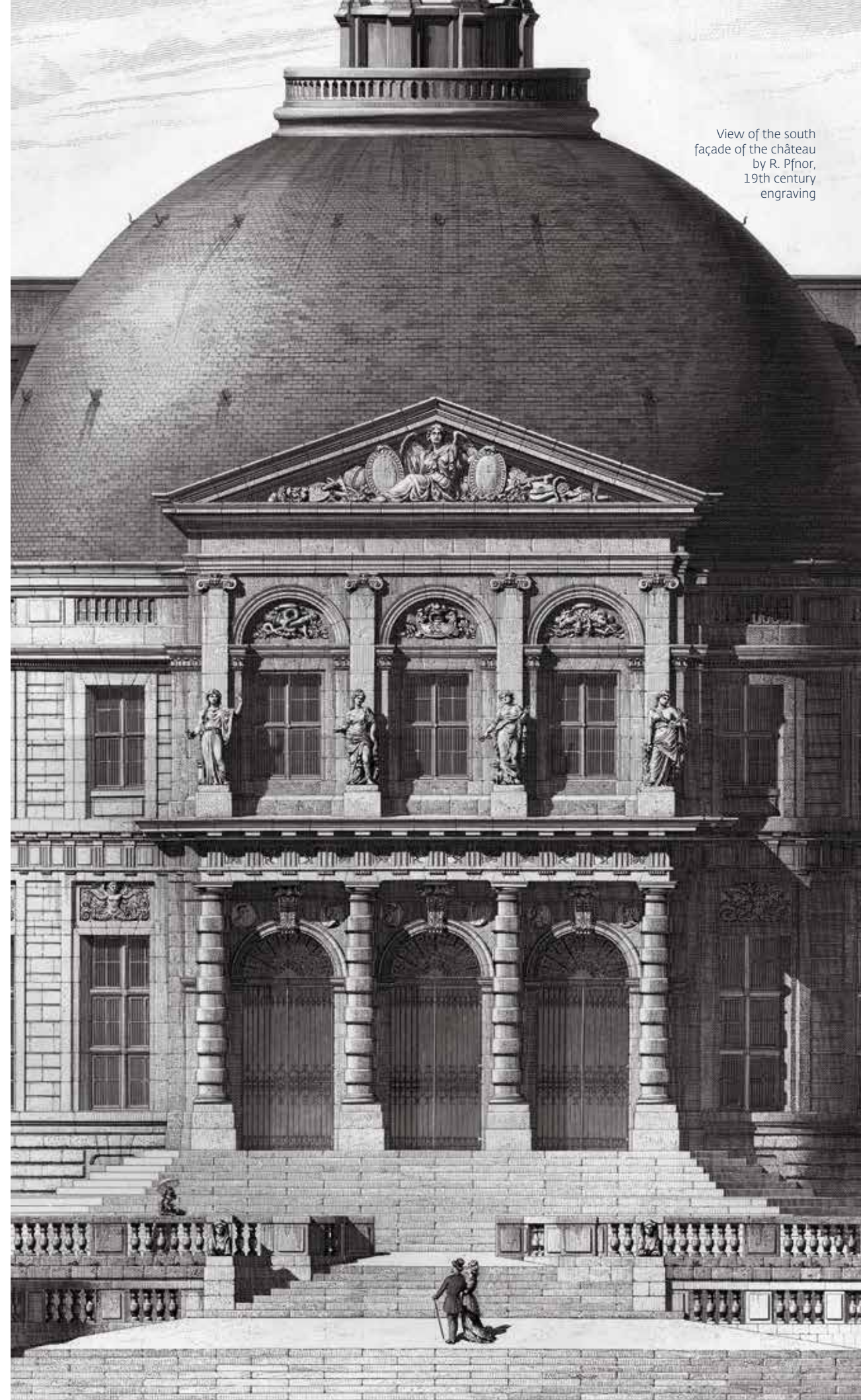
This new juxtaposition would also offer greater freedom in room layout. On the ground floor, the Salon d'Hercule acted as an antechamber with two apartments in staggered rows. Upstairs, four separate apartments branched out from a central corridor, thus enjoying a previously unheard of level of privacy. This layout would be copied in mansions the world over. The ground floor thus became the ceremonial floor and the first floor became more intimate, containing the private apartments.

Cyril Bordier, French State-registered architect (DPLG) and heritage architect, Extract from *Connaissance des arts*, special edition, 196

THE CHÂTEAU IN FIGURES

2

In hectares, the surface area of the slate roof over the château and its outbuildings



View of the south
façade of the château
by R. Pfnor,
19th century
engraving

THE DECORATIONS, AN EXPRESSION OF LE BRUN'S GENIUS

Many of the decorations at Vaux le Vicomte are the work of Charles Le Brun, a famous 17th century painter and decorator. These decorations sum up all the artistic trends of the first half of the Grand Siècle. They also mark the triumph of painting in the decoration of French stately homes.

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The decorative scheme in the *Grand Salon* is entirely the work of Le Brun.

The decoration of its cupola was sadly not undertaken due to lack of time. An initial sketch and several drawings of details signed by the artist tell us that he intended to depict the Palace of the Sun. The personifications of the Zodiac signs, seasons and months, a giant snake biting its tail (evoking the cyclical nature of time) and the Fouquet's family emblem, the squirrel, at the centre, were all meant to feature in this monumental fresco. Although it never got past the project stage, this decoration is a vitally important part of French art history. It could have become the most ambitious creation ever attempted in French stately home decoration. Its completion is one of the great restoration projects planned by its owners.

The references to mythology and allegorical figures are characteristic of the 17th century and feature prominently at Vaux le Vicomte.

For example, the *Salon des Muses* boasts a grand ceiling with eight muses occupying its corners, while a ninth one, Clio the Muse of History, appears in the central picture. The ceiling represents the triumph of Loyalty, a reference to Fouquet's stance during the Fronde.

Also of interest, the games cabinet is adorned with more frivolous depictions which give the room the elegant, refined tone that is typical of Vaux le Vicomte: colour panels of grotesques appear alongside the Fouquet family's heraldic squirrel, frolicking among branches, various animals and putti, while on the ceiling, the voluptuous allegory of Sleep casts poppies around.

As well as the subtle main decorations, there are many works of art inside the château. Tapestries, paintings, engravings, sculptures and furniture adorn the rooms and turn a simple stroll into a **complete immersion into the heady atmosphere of the Grand Siècle.**

La beauté coupant les ailes de l'amour afin qu'il ne s'envole pas
(Allegorical portrait of Marie-Madeleine de Castille, Madame Fouquet), Charles Le Brun's studios





WORKS OF ART KEPT AT VAUX LE VICOMTE

Nicolas Fouquet was one of the greatest patrons and collectors of his time. After his fall from grace, most of his assets were seized or sold. In 1875, the Sommier family and their descendants decided to redecorate the interiors. Four busts and two marble-topped tables were all that remained. Today, the decorations, mostly acquisitions by the Sommier and Vogüé families and the Friends of Vaux le Vicomte Association (see p.33), have been redesigned with a single aim in mind: to reintroduce the public to the style of the Grand Siècle.

The tapestries are a perfect illustration of Vaux le Vicomte as it was in 1661: a collection of art objects and a unique skills centre. A spinning workshop run by Le Brun had previously been founded in Maincy. A little-known fact: the Manufacture des Gobelins was actually created by incorporating the skills and workers of Maincy into the existing tapestry factory.

Today, the *Chambre de Fouquet* contains six tapestries of *Les Mois* Lucas. The west wing of the first floor contains a tapestry based on the work of Simon Vouet, illustrating the story

of Renaud and Armide. In the *Grande Chambre Carrée*, the story of Diane is illustrated by five tapestries based on drawings by Toussaint Dubreuil. The *Salon des Muses* and *Salon d'Hercule* contain seven tapestries that are part of the *Aminte et Sylvie* wall hanging. The seventh was recently acquired by the Friends of Vaux le Vicomte Association. The domain hopes to soon be able to complete this wall hanging, which is made up of a total of eight tapestries.

Nicolas Fouquet's painting collection was also very famous. The most beautiful pieces graced royal collections

and now appear in French museums. Several reproductions of these paintings by Veronese, Poussin, Sustris and Vincidor are displayed in the *Antichambre du Surintendant*. In the *Antichambre d'Hercule*, the exhibits include *Agar chassée par Abraham* by Lazzaro Baldi and *Cincinnatus* by Nicolas Colombel. In the *Antichambre du Roi*, Houasse's *Portrait équestre de Louis XIV* is on display. It once served as an official portrait of the ruler. Last but not least, on the first floor, one of the most important works is to be found in the *Chambre de Fouquet*: *L'Adoration des Bergers* painted by Francesco Bassano.

The busts and allegorical sculptures help to enliven the rooms in the château. The *Grande Chambre Carrée* is dominated by a Berninesque bust of Louis XIV along with a beautiful cast iron bust of Cardinal Richelieu based on a model by Warin. In the *Salon des Muses* is a white marble replica of Anguier's *Neptune*, one of the Superintendent's favourite sculptures. The most interesting sculptures are in the *Salon d'Hercule*, including a bronze of Louis XIV on horseback by Girardon. This was used as a model for the statue that towered over Place Vendôme until the French Revolution. On the marble-topped tables are two 17th century bronzes based on works by Jean Bologne: Hercules taming the bull Achelous and Hercules defeating the centaur Nessus.

Outside, there is a group designed by Le Brun and sculpted by Anguier above the north door, depicting Apollo and Rhea. On the south façade there are seven monumental sculptures, a statue of *Renommée* on the slate cupola by Thibaut Poissant and, above the arcades of the *Salon*, four statues by Anguier including *La Force* and *La Vigilance*.



Bust of Cardinal Richelieu, bronze with patina based on a model by Jean Warin



Marble bust of a Roman emperor



Marble bust of Cardinal Mazarin



Marble bust of Louis XIV in the style of Bernini



Portrait équestre de Louis XIV, by René-Antoine Houasse

FRATERNAL GENIUS

ANDRÉ LE NÔTRE (1613-1700)

Born and died in Paris

He was France's most famous landscape architect, a son and grandson of gardeners, Principal Gardener of the King at the Tuileries and then Controller-General of the Royal Buildings in 1657. Vaux le Vicomte was the model on which he would base his stylistic codes. After this first masterpiece, the commissions came rushing in. The Duke of Orleans, Prince of Condé and Colbert hired him in turn to modernise the gardens around their châteaux: Sceaux, Chantilly, St-Cloud, Meudon and many more, as far afield as Greenwich in England and Charlottenburg in Germany. His most famous commission was for Louis XIV, for the gardens and park at the Château de Versailles, which the King appointed Le Nôtre to design and execute in accordance with his own wishes. The geometric and formal structure of Vaux le Vicomte's overall design was typical of his work: the long perspectives, use of planes, water features and optical illusions created an imposing Grand Siècle setting.

His spontaneous, playful character and courtship skills earned him the nickname of "bonhomme Le Nôtre" ("Gentleman Le Nôtre") among his contemporaries, yet he was also a very learned man. A sincere friend of the King, he died at the age of 87. Apart from a few letters and short memoirs, Le Nôtre left nothing in writing. The plan for the garden of Vaux le Vicomte, of which the original is kept at the Institut de France and one copy remains at the château, is one of the few remaining documents attributed to him.



CHARLES LE BRUN (1619-1690)

Born and died in Paris

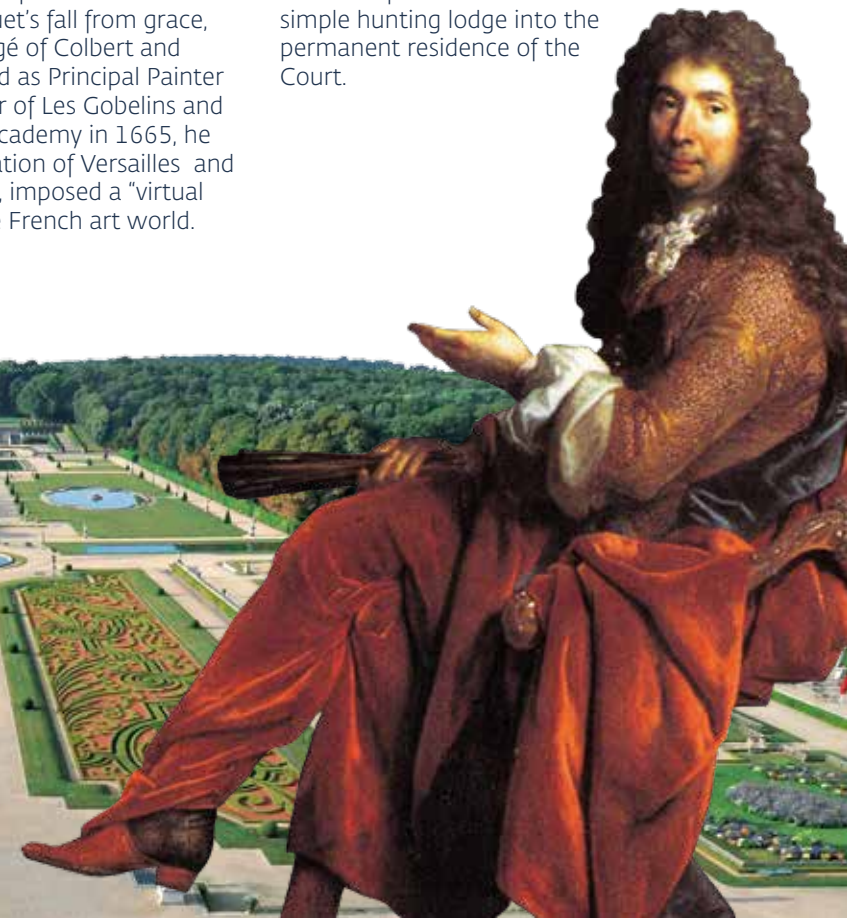
A childhood friend of Le Nôtre since the days when they studied architecture and painting together in Simon Vouet's studios at the Louvre, Le Brun later studied in Rome in the company of Poussin. Upon returning to Paris, he carried on painting at the easel but also began decorating large spaces like the Hôtel Lambert. Fouquet called on him to oversee the decoration of Vaux le Vicomte. He designed furniture and statues, ran the tapestry factory founded by the Superintendent in Maincy, and enlisted the help of his students and apprentices to paint the château decorations, keeping the most important subjects for himself. He did not have time to paint the cupola of the *Salon*, the "Palais du Soleil", a work of art on a scale never seen before in French art history. After Fouquet's fall from grace, he became a protégé of Colbert and Louis XIV. Appointed as Principal Painter of the King, Director of Les Gobelins and Chancellor of the Academy in 1665, he oversaw the decoration of Versailles and until Colbert's death, imposed a "virtual dictatorship" on the French art world.

LOUIS LE VAU (1612-1670)

Born and died in Paris

Born to a family of architects and entrepreneurs, Le Vau was the leading "town planner" of Ile Saint-Louis in Paris, which was once thought to be a flood risk. After erecting various mansions in the capital, including the Hôtel Lambert, he built the châteaux of Saint-Sépulcre, Le Raincy and Sucy-en-Brie (which are no longer standing), and modified the Château de Meudon. Vaux le Vicomte and the Institut are two of his masterpieces which stood the test of time. Working for Nicolas Fouquet in collaboration with the landscape architect André Le Nôtre, he created the most perfect harmony of architecture and gardens the world has ever seen.

Later in Versailles, he designed the broad outlines of the conversion that turned a simple hunting lodge into the permanent residence of the Court.



FAMOUS FIGURES OF VAUX LE VICOMTE

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VATEL

*Born in Paris in 1631
and died in Chantilly in 1671*

François Vatel, real name Fritz Karl Watel, was a French pastry chef, caterer, steward and majordomo of Swiss origin. Serving Fouquet then Prince Louis II of Bourbon-Condé, he organised the lavish party on 17 August 1661. A “workaholic” who would do anything to carry out his orders, Vatel took his own life at the age of 40, on the morning of a party given by the Grand Condé in the King’s honour, where his fish delivery unfortunately arrived a few hours late. Although by all accounts the party was splendid, he had declared earlier to his friend Gourville: “Sir, I shall not survive this affront, I have honour and a reputation to lose!”



JEAN DE LA FONTAINE

*Born in 1621 in Château-Thierry and died
in 1695 in Paris*

A great French poet born in Château-Thierry, he was first a protégé of Fouquet then, due to a lack of generosity by Louis XIV, who did not care for him, of the dowager duchess of Orleans, Madame de La Sablière and Monsieur and Madame d’Hervart.

“The most faithful of all faithful friends” of Fouquet, he published in his homage *L’Élégie aux Nymphes de Vaux* a courageous plea in favour of the friend who helped him achieve success in his career in poetry.

His *Contes en vers* and *Fables*, published from 1668 to 1694, helped make him famous. These writings, based on a razor-sharp observation of life, nearly all end with a piece of wise, sensible advice: these morals were so popular that they have since become proverbs. A sensualist who loved innocent pastoral scenes, a fickle man who celebrated loyalty, a sycophant but also a sincere friend, his life was the mirror image of his work, where art met nature.



MOLIERE

Born and died in Paris (1622-1673)

Jean-Baptiste POQUELIN, aka MOLIERE, a French playwright born in Paris, was the son of an upholsterer and future valet of the King; he studied with the Jesuits at Clermont College before turning to the theatre. With a family of actors, the Bédjarts, he created the Illustre-Théâtre (1643), which was not a great success. For the next fifteen years (1643-1658), he led a travelling theatre troupe. He performed *L’Ecole des Maris* at Vaux le Vicomte in 1661, then a comedy-ballet written for the party on 17 August, *Les Fâcheux*. A protégé of Fouquet and then the royal family, he entertained the Court and the Parisian public with many plays in verse and prose. His masterpieces are his plays, where he makes use of archetypes to attack a spiritual or social vice.

His main comedies are *Les Précieuses Ridicules* (1659), *L’Ecole des maris* (1661), *L’Ecole des femmes* (1662), *Dom Juan*, *l’Amour Médecin* (1665), *Le Misanthrope*, *Le Médecin malgré lui* (1666), *l’Avaro* (1668), *Le Tartuffe* (1669), *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* (1670), *Les Fourberies de Scapin* (1671) and *Les Femmes Savantes* (1672).



HERCULE

The son of Zeus, Heracles was a Greek demigod, the absolute myth of the strength and power, known as Hercules by the Romans. His twelve tasks are commemorated in a muscular lexicon and many depictions in the form of paintings (Dürer, Cranach, Rubens, Gustave Moreau...) and other visual arts, including many statues such as those sculpted by Jean Bologne, Antonio Canova and Pierre Puget. Hercules was a favourite subject of the great Marseillais sculptor. In 1660, he produced a statue of Hercules defeating the Hydra of Lerna, which was damaged during the Revolution, and a resting Hercules which can now be seen in the Louvre. The monumental Hercules commissioned for the gardens of Vaux le Vicomte was “identifiable by his pose resembling that of the Farnese Hercules”, a statue discovered in 1546 in the ruins of the thermal baths at Caracalla, and was added to the Farnese collection in Rome. Written documents lead us to believe that Puget produced a draft for a copy at Vaux, before Fouquet’s fall from grace: the current Hercules is also a 19th-century copy, placed on its pedestal during the time of Alfred Sommier. At the time, young girls were advised to avoid looking at it from the front, due to its troubling virility. Standing at the end of the garden perspective, this Hercules appears on the engravings by Israël Silvestre, but its head leans to the other side.



Portrait du
Maréchal de
Villars, painted
in the manner of
Hyacinthe Rigaud
in 1704

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► HISTORY OF THE OWNERS

TWO CENTURIES OF LIFE AT VAUX-LE VICOMTE FROM NICOLAS FOUQUET TO ALFRED SOMMIER

After Nicolas Fouquet was arrested, Vaux le Vicomte was put under lock and key. Most of the assets were seized by the King, even the Superintendent's orange trees. The rest was auctioned. Abandoned by its creditors, the château was finally returned to Madame Fouquet, who left it to her son, the Count of Vaux. When he died in 1705, his mother decided to sell the domain to the Marshal of Villars.

The domain was then renamed Vaux-Villars and enjoyed a golden age in the early 18th century. The Marshal, a "braggart full of heart" in the words of Voltaire, known by all the great leaders of Europe for his military prowess, redeveloped the domain, modernised the interiors, and displayed paintings and trophies of war there. He also welcomed distinguished guests such as King Louis XV and his wife. He died in Turin at the age of 81, in 1734, just after leading an army of 70 000 men to conquer the Milanese duchy! His son Honoré-Armand de Villars, who cared little about preserving his father's achievements, showed little interest in Vaux le Vicomte and, shortly after selling the lead from the pipes and motifs from some of the fountains, decided to sell the domain to César-Gabriel de Choiseul-Praslin.

The Duke of Praslin, Minister of Foreign Affairs, diplomat, academician and cousin of the famous Marquis of Choiseul, was keen to maintain the château and its interiors, increasingly neglecting the gardens, which required too much investment. His descendants would preserve the domain for six generations before gradually abandoning it around the middle of the 19th century.

In 1875, Alfred Sommier, an industrialist and great art lover, bought Vaux le Vicomte at an auction and set about reviving it. He began an extensive restoration of the château, its interiors and the gardens.

VAUX LE VICOMTE A FAMILY COMMITMENT SINCE 1875

At an auction in 1875, Alfred Sommier, forefather of the current owners, successfully bid on the château and gardens at Vaux le Vicomte. He undertook to carry out the colossal task of developing and restoring the domain, which had great need of it.

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For nearly 30 years, the domain lay abandoned: in 1875, the interiors were empty, the buildings in poor condition and the gardens overgrown. With the help of the architects Hippolyte Destailleur and Elie Lainé, Alfred Sommier and later his son Edme helped to revive Vaux le Vicomte.

In 1968, Patrice de Vogüé, Edme's great-nephew, decided to open the domain to the public. He put all his efforts into restoring the style of the 17th century, yet did not hesitate to dispense with works that were important but anachronistic. His wife Cristina created the souvenir shop, which is now considered by many as one of the finest gift shops in any château. Alongside this, she also increased sales of related products and opened the L'Ecureuil restaurant. In 1983, the couple founded the Friends of Vaux le Vicomte Association, which was recognised as an association of public interest in 2004 (See p.33).

In 2012, Jean-Charles and Alexandre de Vogüé followed in their father's footsteps and took over the running of

the domain, determined to increase its influence on the French and international cultural scene. They thus became the fifth generation of their family to manage the domain.

After spending their childhood at the château, then both serving in the Chasseurs Alpains regiment, the two brothers have pursued different and unusual careers for the last twenty years: Jean-Charles, who has a BTS (advanced vocational diploma) in agriculture and was a sales executive at Nike, joined the team at the château in 2001 as Sales Director. Alexandre, a graduate of the Institut Supérieur de Gestion, preferred to scale other heights by working as a mountain guide for 15 years, before joining his brother in the role of Director of Communication and Patronage.

The two brothers have ambitious restoration plans for Vaux le Vicomte, for which they hope to recruit new patrons soon. To this end, all their actions are driven by the desire to honour the original passion, audacity and inspiration of the creators of Vaux le Vicomte.

A GREAT
INDUSTRIALIST
AND ART
LOVER,
ALFRED
SOMMIER
"REVIVED"
VAUX LE
VICOMTE



Alfred Sommier,
owner of the
château
from 1875 to 1908.

Aerial view of the
domain
Photo by A.
Chicurel / L.
Lourdel.



PATRONAGE: WORKING TOGETHER TO PRESERVE THE MASTERPIECE

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The domain of Vaux le Vicomte is the largest private property in France to be listed as a historic monument. Jean-Charles and Alexandre de Vogüé, the two co-managers, pursue a mission of public interest: preserving this unique place and sharing it with present and future generations.

With an annual budget of 9 million euros, the institution that is the Château de Vaux le Vicomte now shares its passion for history with 300 000 visitors every year, bringing the Grand Siècle back to life before their very eyes. Public admission to the site and a varied programme of cultural events are the essential pillars of this process.

Today, individuals and businesses work with the domain's co-managers, to help preserve this masterpiece and its position in France and the world. The development programme, estimated to cost 13 million euros over the next ten years, is arranged into four main areas:

- Preserving the garden (for example: planting new trees to restore a major row of trees)
- Restoring the château (for example: reinstating the transparency of the Château's three north and south arcades so visitors can see the garden's horizon line from the entrance gate, despite the thickness of the building)
- Restoring or acquiring works of art (for example: restoring the 24 statues on display in the garden)
- Improving access and education (for example: making the site more accessible to people with reduced mobility)

THE DOMAIN IN FIGURES

1 300 000

In euros, the annual cost of projects to restore the château and garden.

INDIVIDUALS

The Friends of Vaux le Vicomte Association

Founded in 1983, and recognised as an association of public interest in 2004, the Friends of Vaux le Vicomte Association now has 2500 members, and unites all those who wish to contribute to the preservation and promotion of the domain. Every member becomes a patron of the site and benefits from special advantages (tickets, special events etc.)



The American Friends of the Château of Vaux le Vicomte

Administered by the Fondation Roi Baudouin US, recognised as an association of public interest by the tax authorities in the United States, the "American Friends of the Château of Vaux le Vicomte" fund now enables us to receive tax deductible donations from American donors (www.kbfus.org)



Orans statue in bronze from the late 19th century, replica of an antique.

For more information on patronage, please contact:

Laetitia de Chabot
Head of Development and Patronage
Tel : +33 (0)7 87 06 88 07
l.dechabot@vaux-le-vicomte.com

VAUX LE VICOMTE IN DATES

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1661

On 17 August, a splendid party is thrown at Vaux le Vicomte in honour of the King. His whole Court is invited. The revelry includes a banquet prepared by Vatel and served to the sound of 24 violins, a performance of Molière's play *Les Fâcheux* at the *Théâtre d'eau*, a walk in the gardens and a firework display in celebration of Le Vau's work. The Court is dazzled, but the King can barely hide his anger.



1875

Alfred Sommier, a great industrialist and art lover acquires Vaux le Vicomte at an auction. The architects Gabriel Hippolyte Destailleur and Elie Iainé are put in charge of restoring the chateau and garden, which are in a state of disrepair.



1983

Patrice and Cristina de Vogüé, along with 23 faithful supporters of the domain, found the Friends of Vaux le Vicomte Association. Recognised as being of public interest in 2004, the Association now has over 2500 members.

1705-1875

The domain becomes the property of the Marshal of Villars then, from 1764, the Dukes of Choiseul-Praslin.

1641

Nicolas Fouquet acquires the domain of Vaux le Vicomte.

1653

Nicolas Fouquet is appointed Superintendent of Finances.



1968

Patrice de Vogüé opens the domain to the public. Since then, major works have been carried out in order to restore the 17th century style, the Superintendent's decorations and the glory of Le Nôtre's garden.

2012

Alexandre and Jean-Charles de Vogüé take over at Vaux le Vicomte, maintaining the spirit that guided their forefathers in the preservation of this French 17th century masterpiece.

TOMORROW

Thanks to the determination of the co-managers and all the teams at Vaux le Vicomte, as well as the patrons and partners, businesses and individuals, the institution aims to welcome over 400 000 visitors a year by 2020.

EVENTS 2014

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► **Sunday, February 2**
VAUX LE VICOMTE RACE,
2ND EDITION

The second edition of the *Foulées de Vaux le Vicomte* will be held on Sunday, 2 February: a unique race in the heart of the French Formal Garden of Vaux le Vicomte.



► **Sunday, March 9**
OPENING DAY

This year, the opening of the season means the opening of the landscape, thanks to the restoration of the transparency of the *château*. Until 9 November, the domain will be open every day from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and until 11 p.m. during the candle lit evenings.



► **Sunday, April 20 and Monday, April 21**
VAUX LE VICOMTE CELEBRATES
EASTER

A large egg hunt is organized in the gardens. With the support of Leonidas, more than 50 000 eggs (or 3 tons of chocolate!) will be spread into the secret places of the gardens.



► **Sunday, May 25**
10TH EDITION OF
THE JOURNÉE GRAND SIÈCLE
(GRAND CENTURY DAY)

A day not to be missed for lovers of period costumes and the heady atmosphere of the 17th century. Revelers will enjoy a day of picnics on the Château's vast lawns, advice on costume design, and a competition in which the guests' 17th century-inspired costumes will be judged for elegance and historical accuracy. Costume hire at the chateau.



► **Every Saturday Evening**
from May to October
CANDLELIT EVENINGS

Vaux le Vicomte can be visited under the glow of 2,000 lit candles. Thousands of flickering flames make for a romantic and magical visit. Gold and silver fireworks illuminate the vast gardens under the night sky. To accompany this festival of light, classical music is played, evoking a night of festivities that dates back to 1661...



► **Saturday, June 21**
DINER FOR THE MUSES

A soirée, open to the public, will be organized in the gardens of Vaux le Vicomte illuminated by 2000 candles, in order to raise funds for the Association of Friends of Vaux le Vicomte. On the menu: a gourmet dinner and elegant decorations inspired by the gardens of André Le Nôtre. There will be prizes for the most elegant tables.

► **November 8-11**
PALACE OF CHOCOLATE

Awaken your senses and admire the skills of great chocolate makers as Chateau Vaux le Vicomte devotes three days to

celebrating chocolate! Savor the exquisite creations of France's top chocolatiers, and discover the secrets of cocoa.

► **December and January 2014**
CHRISTMAS

Come discover the wonderland of Christmas at the palace of Vaux le Vicomte! This magical setting will include a carousel, dream-like decorations, a magnificent Christmas tree in the Grand Salon and hundreds of candles in the knot gardens.



PRACTICAL INFORMATION, 2014

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Opening Times and Dates of the Estate

► EVERY DAY

From March 9 to November 11, 2014
From 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

► **SATURDAY EVENING** (Candlelit visits)
From May 3 to October 4, 2014
Until midnight

► DECEMBER AND JANUARY

on the following days:

November 29 and 30, December 6, 7,
13, 14 and from December 20th 2014 to
January 4th 2015. (except December 25
and January 1)

From 10:30 a.m. to 6 p.m.



Admission Prices*

Full Access Price: €19,50 per person
(access to the dome included) or €16,50
(without dome access)

Reduced Price: €13,50 (children aged 6
to 16, students, adults over 65)

Family Price: €54 (2 adults + 2 children)
Gardens Only: €8

Member of the "Friends of Vaux le
Vicomte" Association: Free

Free for children under 6

Candlelit Evenings: Full Price: €19,50 /
Reduced Price: €17,50

Audio-guide: €3

Access to the Dome: €3

Guided Visit of the Chateau: €5 (Saturday
and Sunday, 2 and 4 p.m., by reservation)

Guided Walks of the Garden: €5 (Every
Sunday in July and August, at 10:30 a.m.
and 2 p.m. (by reservation)

Private Guided Tour: €250 for the
Château or the garden (duration 1h30) /
€400 for the château + the garden or the
Château + the carriage museum

*Prices may vary at special events.



How to get There

► BY TRAIN

From PARIS: Gare de Lyon to Melun –
direct trains every 30 min. Duration: 25
min.

► BY CAR

55kms from Paris: 1 hour
Take the A4 or A6 motorway, then
follow signs to Troyes via the motorway
A5. The nearest motorway exit to the
Château is Exit No.15 signposted to Saint
Germain Laxis.

► DIRECT SHUTTLE FROM PARIS BY COACH

From the center of Paris: 2 rue des
Pyramides – Paris 1st Arrdt. (With
Cityrama-Parisvision).

Non-guided visits to both Chateaux of
Vaux le Vicomte and Fontainebleau in
a day with return transfer. Departure at

9:15 a.m. and return around 6:15 p.m.
*EVERY DAY from March 30 to October
31 2014, EXCEPT ON TUESDAYS.*

► BY HELICOPTER

HeliFrance provides one-way and
roundtrip service to Vaux le Vicomte
from Bourget Airport or Paris-Issy
Les Moulineaux Heliport (both are 15
minutes from the center of Paris).
Costs vary depending on the helicopter
model chosen. The landing fee at Vaux le
Vicomte is €500.

For Kids Only

Kids are always welcome at Château
de Vaux le Vicomte. Daily costume
rentals make it possible for them to be
transported back to the 17th century and
to relive a day in the King's court. Plus,
Sundays offer costumed kids a guided
visit with a comedian.

Costume rental cost: €4 per child
between 4-12 years of age.



Services

► Shop/Bookshop

Open every day during the season from
11 a.m. to 6 p.m. and from 11 a.m. to
midnight on Saturdays for the Candlelit
Evenings.

Meals at Vaux le Vicomte

Vaux le Vicomte is equipped with two
restaurants for when you need a quick
snack or wish to enjoy a hearty meal,
whether it is at lunch-time or in the
evening.

► Restaurant *L'Ecureuil*

This family cafeteria is located in one of
the wings of the Château's outbuildings,
just to the right as you leave the ticket
desks. Here you can rest and have
something to eat during your trip.

*Open every day during the season from
10 a.m. to 6 p.m., and until 10.30 p.m. on
Candlelight Evenings*



► Restaurant *Les Charmilles*

Les Charmilles is a restaurant situated
in the elegant paved area known as
the *Terrasse de Diane*, just opposite the
Château and overlooking the garden.
Only open during the Château's Candlelit
evenings; an opportunity to enjoy refined
cuisine in the restaurant on the finest
terrace in France, which also serves light
snacks during the day.

"Into this enterprise [Vaux le Vicomte], Le Nôtre would pour his soul, he would produce a work that was at once the epitome of his craft and a masterpiece, the ultimate expression of French-style Garden."

Erik ORSENNA, famous French politician and novelist, elected at the Académie Française.

"If one garden actually characterizes the work of André Le Nôtre, it is Vaux le Vicomte. An extraordinary garden, which is the grammar of the French formal garden."

Alain BARATON, Chief-Gardener of Versailles.

"It's more beautiful than Versailles!"

Princess Elizabeth, visiting Vaux in 1948.

"Vaux le Vicomte gives us the feeling of forever."

I.M. PEI, architect of the Grand Louvre.



Information and visuals available on request
vaux-le-vicomte.com

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