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## Nancy, a Jewel in the East of France

By Martine Dulles

This month, *Le Carnet de France* travels to the East of France. This region, called “Le Grand Est” starts with corks exploding, as in the Champagne-Ardennes (its main city is Reims), and goes to Alsace (Strasbourg) via Lorraine with two major cities: Metz and Nancy.

This article is the first of a two-part piece about Nancy, a city that enjoys the reputation as one of the nicest and most interesting cities in France. This is thanks in large part to the exiled King of Poland Stanislas Leszczynski (1677-1766), who arrived in Nancy in 1737 and became the Duke of Lorraine.

Nancy and the Duchy of Lorraine were granted to him until his death by King Louis XV (1710-1774) — conveniently, also the son-in-law of the French king. Stanislas had two daughters: The first one, Anne, died at the age of 18, but the younger one, Marie (1703-1768), married Louis XV in 1725. Stanislas was more than very well-read — he was also known for his sense of caring for generosity towards others. He traveled to Italy, where he was enthralled by the art and architecture.

In 1751, he hired one of Nancy’s favorite sons, Emmanuel Héré (1705-1763), as his leading architect. Together they designed, planned and created the center of the city as we admire it today almost 300 years later. The main square, which measures 100 by 125 meters, was designed and named the Place Royale in honor of King Louis XV. In the middle stood a statue of the king, which was destroyed during the French Revolution (1789-1792). In 1831, it was replaced with a statue of Stanislas and the Place is now known as the Place Stanislas. It was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage in 1983.

The construction of the Place took only four years thanks to hundreds of gifted builders and artisans. Three sides of the



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

The Place Stanislas in the middle of beautiful Nancy.

square are pavilions, each the same height, which are joined at the corners by gilded iron gates — Nancy is also known as the “city with golden gates.”

On the South side is “l’Hôtel de Ville” (City Hall); the east side features the Grand Hôtel de la Reine (built in 1769) and the Opera House; the west side contains the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nancy (Museum of Fine Arts) and a café and on the north side boasts two lower pavilions (the Daum store and another café).

The buildings all present facades in French classical style, but the decorative elements are Baroque. The magnificent gates were made by local gifted ironmonger Jean Lamour and are exceptional, with delicate and lacework designs showing emblems and flowers such as the fleur de lys — the royal flower by excellence.

More work by Jean Lamour can be seen in other sites of the city; among them, the staircase of the City Hall and its surroundings. Each of the gates on the two north corners of the Place incorporates a fountain, one depicting Amphitrite, the other showing Neptune. Both fountains were designed by Barthélémy Guibal.

The Grand Hôtel de la Reine,

the “Pavilion Alliot” named after Stanislas’ intendant, is the place to stay. Guests may enjoy the whole square from the comfort of its breakfast room.

The building that has served as the Opera house since 1919 was initially named Pavillon des Fermes (farms), where citizens went to pay their taxes. After this, it was repurposed as a home of the clergy until 1905, the year of the separation of the church and state in France.

Originally there was a theater on the opposite side of the Place, unfortunately damaged during a fire in 1906. The site was then used for the medical school and today it houses the opulent Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nancy, created in 1793. An extension was built in 1935 by Emile André, of the École de Nancy (more later), followed by another extension in 1996 by Laurent Beaudouin.

On the lower ground floor, visitors may view the remains of the city fortifications dating from the 15th to the 17th centuries. There is always a very interesting film about the Daum Glassworks Collection, founded by Jean Daum at the end of the 19th century that is not to be missed. The Museum owns an incredible collection of Daum pieces (more on Daum later).

The Museum’s collections are comprised of nearly 1750 paintings, not all of which are available for public viewing. Among those displayed are Italian works by Caravaggio (*The Annunciation*) and Tintoretto (*Grieving Christ*); Flemish works by Peter Paul Rubens (*Transfiguration*); and French works by Claude Le Lorrain (*Pastoral Landscape*), Eugène Delacroix (*Battle of Nancy*) and Edouard Manet (*Autumn*).

In the main hall, a special space is dedicated to local artist Jean Prouvé (1901-1984), an architect and designer. According to the museum, “[h]is influence is still pertinent for today’s architects and designers.” Many of his pieces of furniture and architectural designs are displayed.

Back on the Place, between the two north side lower buildings, you can see an imposing arch: The Triumphal Arch. Beyond this arch is a long tree-lined avenue surrounded by elegant mansions. It leads to another square called the Place de la Carrière, which used to be the place to present horse training and tournaments (hence its name). At the end of the avenue is another building dating from the 18th century, l’Hôtel de Craon, designed by Emmanuel Héré and his assistant, Richard Mique and built for Stanislas’ intendant. The ground floor boasts a long row of columns. Today, this Palais du Gouvernement is used as the Court House.

So far, we’ve only gone through the Place Stanislas. There is much more to discover in Nancy: L’Ecole de Nancy, l’Art Nouveau, La Maison Majorelle, L’Eglise des Cordeliers, the gardens and much more for the next article.

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