

# Charleston Mercury

January 2023

The newspaper with a cosmopolitan attitude

## Le Carnet de France: Nancy

By Martine P. Dulles

In last month's *Charleston Mercury*, we wrote about the city of Nancy in the Grand Est of France, particularly the 18th century Place Stanislas, considered the most beautiful royal square of Europe. We looked at its history and its creation thankful to Stanislas Leszczyński (1677-1766), the exiled King of Poland (part of the Poland-Lithuanian Commonwealth at the time, including much of modern-day Ukraine) who became duke of Lorraine. The region and Duchy of Lorraine have a long history of changing borders, government and alliances.

Beyond the Place Stanislas, Nancy offers much more. On the northeastern corner of the Place Stanislas is "the golden gate" made by Jean Lamour, which frames the Amphitrite Fountain created by Barthélémy Guibal. Through this gate, one steps into the "Parc de la Pépinière", created in 1765 by Stanislas shortly after the construction of the Place. The word, "pépinière" means nursery in English, a reference to its grid-like layout of 16 different squares and the numerous trees planted to line the future roads of Lorraine. It is the "Central Park" of Nancy.

Today, tourists may admire the rosery and huge trees (in 2013, a purple beech tree was elected most beautiful tree of France), listen to music performed in the pavilion, see the children enjoying a puppet theatre show and looking at domestic animals such as peacocks and ducks. Different sculptures and ornate statues adorn the alleys, including one of the painter Claude Le Lorrain made by Auguste Rodin.

This is not the only green area of Nancy, which counts no less than 24 gardens and parks. Not far away from the Place Stanislas (next to the Muséum-Aquarium) is the Dominique Alexandre Gordon Garden that dates from 1758, a pedagogical garden where many varieties of plants were grown and studied for medicinal potential medical applications. It is home to one of the oldest ginkgo biloba trees of France.

Another important garden is in Eugène Corbin's property, now owned by the city. Eugène Corbin (1867-1952) was a very successful businessman and a great patron of the arts and artists. On display are the oak door of the Ateliers Gallé, a funerary monument and an aquarium pavilion all commissioned by Corbin. The plants and trees of the garden were a source of great inspiration for the artists in Nancy who Corbin promoted and whose works he collected; thus, the "École de Nancy" began as a significant new artistic movement in the world of decorative arts (better known as Art Nouveau), which lasted



IMAGE BY THE AUTHOR

Nancy's Amphitrite Golden Gate designed by Barthélémy Guibal.

from 1885 to 1914.

The city of Nancy has converted Corbin's house into the Musée de l'École de Nancy where you can admire numerous works of art from the movement. The designs were applied in architecture, furniture, decorative items, ironwork, jewelry, glass windows and more.

One of founders, Emile Gallé (1846-1904), was a prolific glass maker and a ceramist. His vases inspired by floral designs are extremely sought-after to this day.

Antonin Daum (1864-1930) was another master glass maker who developed new manufacturing processes. As mentioned in last month's article, the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nancy (Museum of Fine arts) presents a very interesting movie about the Daum glass-making history which exhibits many of their pieces.

Louis Majorelle (1859-1926), another co-founder of the École de Nancy, is known for his work in furniture and architecture. He had the Villa Majorelle (also known as Villa Jifka after his wife's first name) built entirely in Art Nouveau style between 1901 and 1902 following the plans of architect Henri Sauvage (1873-1932). The stained-glass windows were designed by Jacques Gruber (1870-1936) and specially treated so that the outside light could penetrate the rooms, which feature designs inspired by the flowers of the garden. In 2016, the villa was closed for many months of renovation and refurbishment and has since reopened. Only 64 persons are allowed inside at one time, so it is necessary to reserve ahead of time. Majorelle's son, Jacques (1886-1962), was also a painter and a gardener. He lived in Marrakesh, Morocco, where

he created the Jardin Majorelle that was purchased and used by the late designer Yves Saint Laurent and his partner Pierre Bergé; the color "Bleu Majorelle" from this property is internationally known.

Situated near the Nancy's railroad train station is the Brasserie Excelsior, also built in the Art Nouveau style. It was saved in the 1970s by Maurice Rheims, a well-known auctioneer specializing in the Art Nouveau. Visitors may admire the décor while enjoying a drink or a bite to eat.

Strolling through the streets of this part of the city — considered the "new" Nancy — tourists have the opportunity to admire countless other Art Nouveau buildings, doors and balconies.

Another part of town is the "Ville-Vieille" (old city), where the architecture dates from the 13th and 15th century. The Palais des Ducs de Lorraine is undergoing a major renovation and is not set to reopen before the end of 2029; when the project is complete, the museum will cover the history of Lorraine from prehistoric times to the present day.

In the meantime, next door stands the Church of Saint-François-des-Cordeliers, the oldest church in Nancy, built in 1482 by Duke René II of Lorraine for the Franciscan Cordelier monks, in a show of gratitude after his victory over the Burgundians (the moniker "Cordelier" refers to the simple rope used to tie their cassocks). He was buried there along with other dukes of Lorraine. The octagonal ducal chapel is topped by a magnificent polygonal dome.

With its narrow streets and many squares with cafés and restaurants

terraces, this neighborhood makes one think of Italy. It's no surprise: Stanislas visited Italy, where he was inspired by the architecture, town planning and conviviality and he applied these concepts to the development of Nancy.

Nancy also has the reputation of being one of the best gastronomic destinations in France. After all, who hasn't heard of "Quiche Lorraine"? Well, here hungry visitors may treat themselves to the "real" one — with or without cheese, depending on the family origins. The real "Pâté Lorrain," consisting of marinated veal and pork with herbs and cooked in a fine crust can be found in the best charcuteries and good restaurants.

The "macarons," which are now found in multiple versions all over the world, were created during the 18th century by the Nuns of the Visitation in Nancy. The original recipe, kept secret to this day, is named after the "Soeurs Macarons." These delicious macarons can be found at the "Maison des Soeurs Macarons." Its shape is round and filled with almond powder.

The other specialty is "La Bergamote de Nancy," a flat square bonbon filled with the essence from the citrus bergamia, a fruit that originates from southern Italy. "La Confiserie Lefèvre-Lemoine" near the train station is the oldest store selling candy, sweets and biscuits in Nancy and has belonged to the same family 1840.

The end of the summer is a season cherished by the Lorrains. It is the pick of the harvest of their local fruit: The "mirabelle." Special markets, public gatherings and ceremonies take place to honor this delicate fruit. It is also the base for the mirabelle eau-de-vie, an after-dinner alcohol (to be consumed in moderation, as the French government requires us to indicate).

When visiting a village or a town, one of the first stops is the "marché." It is the "heart" of the location. The sounds, colors, smells and displays reveal a great deal about the inhabitants. "Les Halles de Nancy," a covered market in the center of town, is one of the very best in France. The variety and the quality of the products (most of them local) are impressive.

Maybe you will visit Nancy during one of your next visits to France. In the meantime, "Le Carnet de France" wishes you the very best for 2024.

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