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SECRET STRASBOURG



JONGLEZ PUBLISHING

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'LE SON' AND 'LA LUMIÈRE'

BAS-RELIEFS

⑨

Copy of bas-reliefs from New York Rockefeller Center

16, rue du 22 Novembre

Tram A, D – Homme de Fer stop – Grand'Rue stop

On the façade of an otherwise unassuming building at 16, rue du 22 Novembre, two striking bas-reliefs catch the eye.

'Le Son' (Sound) is represented by a naked man, crouching as if emerging from the celestial vault, with one hand cupped to his mouth to amplify a cry that seems to escape in concentric circles, reminiscent of sound waves. His other hand is placed near his ear, as if perceiving invisible vibrations. The 'Le Son' bas-relief almost suggests a biblical scene – the first human producing the first sound, the very source of the creation of the world.

The bas-relief to the right, 'La Lumière' (Light), depicts a naked woman with flowing, serrated hair, moving among the clouds. Facing a stylised light source – a symbol of progress and modernity emerging from the clouds – she forms a counterpart to the male figure.



'Le Son' and 'La Lumière' are both carved in a pure Art Deco style (artist unknown), set above the windows of a former shop once named Tiffany, after the famous New York jeweller on Fifth Avenue.

These works are copies of originals made in 1935 by American sculptor Lee Lawrie for the Rockefeller Center in New York. Old photographs show no trace of these copies before 1942.

Could this be an allegory of the creation of the world through an Art Deco version of Adam and Eve? It would not be surprising.

The bas-relief entitled 'Wisdom', above the main entrance to the Rockefeller Center and flanked by 'Sound' on the left and 'Light' on the right, is itself inspired by a biblical passage (Isaiah 33:6), which states: 'Wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times.'

The depiction of 'Wisdom', a bearded old man dissipating the clouds of ignorance and bearing a striking resemblance to God, is directly inspired by William Blake's vision of Jehovah.



‘LA MARSEILLAISE’ MONUMENT ④

The French national anthem was composed in Strasbourg

Banque de France

3, place Broglie

Local town hall, at the corner of Rue de la Comédie and Place Broglie

Rue de la Mésange

126, Grand'Rue



Despite its name, ‘La Marseillaise’ was composed in Strasbourg. Two sites on Place Broglie honour this fact: a commemorative plaque and a monumental statue.

The plaque on the Banque de France indicates that it was here that Claude Joseph Rouget de Lisle (1760–1836), a captain of engineers stationed in Strasbourg, first performed the anthem during a reception on 26 April 1792.

The event was hosted at the mansion of Philippe-Frédéric de Dietrich (1748–1793), the city’s then-mayor.

The ‘La Marseillaise’ monument, next to the town hall, shows two soldiers holding the French flag, beneath the inscription ‘Allons enfants de la Patrie’ (‘Arise, children of the Fatherland’).

Created in 1922 by Alfred Marzloff (1867–1936), the statue was destroyed by the Nazis in 1940 and reconstructed in 1980 using a 1919 plaster model preserved by the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art.

The two medallions showing Rouget de Lisle and Baron de Dietrich were salvaged from the monument’s original base and now appear on the Banque de France façade.

‘War Song for the Army of the Rhine’

Originally titled ‘War Song for the Army of the Rhine’, ‘La Marseillaise’ was written in support of French troops, following France’s declaration of war against the King of Hungary and Bohemia on 20 April 1792.

According to tradition, Rouget de Lisle composed the anthem in a single night at his home on Rue de la Mésange – or possibly at 126 Grand’Rue – at Baron de Dietrich’s request.

Blending popular musical motifs of the day, the song quickly gained popularity.

It was taken up by volunteers from Marseille, who marched to Paris to participate in the Fête de la Fédération.

Their association with the song led it to be known as ‘La Marseillaise’, which was adopted as the official national anthem

CLOISTER OF SAINT-PIERRE-LE-JEUNE PROTESTANT CHURCH

⑦

A little gem often ignored in the heart of the city

Église Saint-Pierre-le-Jeune
Place Saint-Pierre-le-Jeune
Daily 12pm–6pm
Tram C – Broglie stop

Curiously, and despite the notice boards on the left side of the nave, many visitors to the beautiful Saint-Pierre-le-Jeune Protestant church fail to explore its magnificent cloister.

Built in 1050 and restored by Carl Schäfer in the late 19th century, it is not only the oldest cloister north of the Alps, but also one of the rare medieval cloisters preserved in Alsace. Its Romanesque galleries, partly destroyed in the 18th century, were later rebuilt in various styles: one in Gothic, the others in Baroque.

Organised around a square garden planted with trees and flower beds, the cloister's décor is further enriched by murals repainted around the year 2000.

The cloister once belonged to the Chapter of Saint-Pierre-le-Jeune, a community of regular priests who used it for prayer and reflection. Several funerary slabs on the ground recall that it also served as their burial place.

The church itself was divided between Catholics and Protestants after the Reformation, before becoming fully Protestant in 1893.



STAINED-GLASS WINDOW OF ONE HUNDRED FACES

(23)

A spectacular contemporary stained-glass window

Chapel of St Catherine

Strasbourg Cathedral

Monday to Saturday: 8.30am–11.15am & 12.45pm–5.45pm

Sunday and public holidays 2pm–5.15pm



In the heart of the cathedral, tucked away in the Chapel of St Catherine, is a striking contemporary work often overlooked by visitors: the 'stained-glass window of one hundred faces'. Inaugurated in 2015 to mark the cathedral's millennium, it fills two windows that were previously bare.

On the right-hand side, in an enigmatic manner, the face of Christ in blessing (his left hand resting on the windowsill) rises almost the full height of the window (8.7 metres).

Inspired by Hans Memling's 'Christ Giving His Blessing' (1481), preserved at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, the face has a distinctive feature: it is composed of over a hundred photographs of Strasbourg residents, from a wide variety of origins, generations, and backgrounds, assembled in mosaic form.

The left-hand window (9 metres high) shows, alongside Christ's right hand raised in blessing, a composite landscape made from photographs of nature.

This evokes the words attributed to St Catherine of Alexandria: 'Contemplate nature, and you will see God there.'

The ensemble is realised through an innovative technique of glass photography, combining digital printing, traditional painting on glass, and lead framing.

The work is the fruit of a collaboration between photographer Véronique Ellena and master glassmaker Pierre-Alain Parot. While rooted in the great tradition of religious stained glass, it offers a strikingly new visual conception.

The mosaic Christ reflects the multiplicity of humanity, overturning the classic iconography: rather than a single idealised face, here Christ embodies a living, contemporary plurality.

The stained glass thus reminds us that the Church is inhabited by the men and women of today, with Christ becoming a mirror of the human community.



GREEN MAN FROM THE BUILDING AT 1, RUE SELLÉNIK

*Reminder of the importance of nature and the
existence of “the spirit of the forest”*

1, rue Sellénick
Viewing from outside only

②



© Stefanrevollo

At the corner of Rue Sellénick and Avenue des Vosges stand two Art Nouveau buildings, Nos. 1 and 3, rue Sellénick, designed between 1902 and 1904 by architects Franz Lükte and Heinrich Backes at the request of Bertha Wund and her husband Johann Moeller, advisor to the court of auditors.

Lükte himself took up residence in one of the apartments once the work was completed.

In 1905, Bertha Wund established the parent company of the tobacco business she managed on the ground floor of No. 3.

At the entrance to No. 1, note the wrought iron with plant-like motifs, overhanging the finely carved head of a man whose hair and beard cascade like foliage, spreading outwards along the top of the doorway.

This striking figure, a splendid example of a ‘green man’ (see following double-page spread), recalls the role of nature in Art Nouveau decoration (see p. 222).

Also at No. 1, the gable of the building features a graceful floral frieze.

A careful observer will notice that savings were made on materials: while the lower façades are built in ashlar stone, the upper floors are in plaster made to imitate it.



© Michel Mius

EFFIGIES OF EMPEROR WILHELM II

A nod to the new emperor of Reichsland Elsaß-Lothringen

*Gates of the garden of the Palais du Rhin
Palais du Rhin*

2, place de la République

The palace is open during the European Heritage Days.

The gates and railings are permanently visible from the outside



⑤

If one looks closely at the gates of the garden next to the Palais du Rhin, the wrought iron arabesques reveal an intriguing figure with a prominent moustache: this is the profile of Emperor Wilhelm II (1859–1941).

According to the Treaty of Frankfurt of 1871, Alsace and Moselle were annexed to the new German Empire. Strasbourg became the capital of Reichsland Elsaß-Lothringen.

When Emperor Wilhelm I of Hohenzollern (1797–1888) visited Strasbourg for the first time in 1877, he stayed at the Palais Klinglin (the present-day Hôtel du Préfet). Displeased with the residence, he ordered the construction of a new palace.

Built between 1883 and 1889 on the Kaiserplatz ('Emperor's Square,' now Place de la République), the palace was designed by Berlin architect Hermann Eggert (1844–1920). Its imposing architecture was meant to evoke imperial grandeur and embody 'the German spirit and the genius of its art,' as its creator put it.

This vast quadrilateral, spread across three levels, was adorned in a style combining the Italian (particularly Florentine) Renaissance and German Baroque.

At its centre stands a large audience chamber topped with a dome and fronted by a 'balcony of acclamations.' The emperor's private apartments, along with those of the empress, occupied the wings. The palace also contained formal reception halls, a grand function room, and a glazed courtyard. Outside were gardens and stables.

It was conceived as an imperial residence fit to host foreign dignitaries and impress them with German power and ceremony.

The reception areas could accommodate 700 to 900 guests. No detail was overlooked: the profile of Wilhelm II – Wilhelm I's grandson – was even incorporated into the gates of the palace. It was Wilhelm II who officially inaugurated the building in August 1889.



© Studio of Thomas Heinrich Voigt

LEAKTEL BUILDING

FAÇADE

*Subtle marriage between neo-Renaissance
and Art Nouveau*

14, rue Charles Grad
Viewing from outside only

11

Built between 1905 and 1906 for Martin Nebutel, senior manager of the Post Office, the imposing building at 14, rue Charles Grad was designed by architect Aloys Walter and completed by contractor Rudolf Stecher.

At first glance, its ashlar façade reflects a neo-Renaissance style, yet the abundant Art Nouveau decoration gives it particular distinction.

On the second-floor oriel, a striking male head emerges from foliage, adding an elegant and poetic touch above a graceful semi-circular window.

Above the first-floor windows are three remarkable sculpted reliefs: to the left, a woman's head in pure Art Nouveau style; to the right, an elderly man holding his beard in his hands alongside a chain; and a woman with a lyre.

Each figure is framed by finely carved trees, while delicately rendered vines extend above them (note, in particular, the veins visible on the old man's hands).

The entrance, deliberately set to the left, still bears the date '1905'.

On the fourth floor, a curious frieze of pretzels and flowers can be seen. On the ground floor, above the central windows, a cherub holds a heraldic crest with no inscription.

Renovated in 2013, the building is now divided into private apartments.



HÔTEL BRION FAÇADE

19

One of the most beautiful Art Nouveau achievements in Strasbourg

22, rue Sleidan

Viewing from outside only



A few steps from the botanical garden stands Hôtel Brion, one of Strasbourg's most beautiful examples of Art Nouveau architecture.

Its elegant ashlar façade features a magnificent portal with delicately curved lines and a wrought-iron fence reminiscent of dragonfly wings – a motif, like the peacock and butterfly (see p. 233), symbolising transformation and evolution.

Above the entrance, note the stained-glass window in the shape of a heart, a form repeated at the base of the door.

The house was built between 1904 and 1905 by architect Auguste Brion (1861–1940) for his own use, but in 1908 it was bought by Carl Wirtz, who later added a winter garden.

As a result, Brion – who owned the property for only three years – never actually lived there.

In 1929 Wirtz converted the residence into a boarding house under the name Hôtel Marguerite, accommodating travellers and merchants until he abruptly ended the venture.

The building was listed in the Inventaire Supplémentaire des Monuments Historiques in 1975 for its façade, roof and spectacular entrance gate.

Today Hôtel Brion is privately owned and can only be admired from the street.



‘DÉTOUR’ SCULPTURE

③

A discreet yet effective work

Parc de Pourtalès - 161, rue Mélanie

Bus C1, C15 – Robertsau Lamproie stop then about 20 min walk

The spectacular ‘Détour’ sculpture (2005) by Jimmie Durham, in Strasbourg’s Parc de Pourtalès, often goes unnoticed. Yet this fascinating artwork questions our relationship with nature and human intervention. Durham, an American artist of Cherokee origin, is known for his critical take on society and culture. His militant yet poetic work balances humour with protest.

‘Détour’ consists of an imposing block of rough granite, extracted from a local quarry. This massive, oval-shaped stone evokes millennia of slow, irresistible natural processes. Wrapping awkwardly around it is an orange pipe, the kind typically used in urban infrastructure. Instead of following a natural curve, the pipe forms an angular, rigid path over the stone. It seems to simultaneously enclose the rock and yield to its presence – like

a snake emerging from the ground before diving back underground. The contrast highlights the tension between nature and human intervention. The pipe, with its absurd right angles, symbolises the desire to control and regulate the environment. The stone, by contrast, represents resistance to such constraints. This opposition is common in art, but Durham tackles it here in a direct, confrontational way.

The piece also echoes Native American traditions. The curved shape of the pipe recalls the tumulus of the Great Serpent Mound, an ancient Native American earthwork in Ohio (USA), where culture and nature intertwine.

Encased by this intrusive structure, the granite boulder becomes a symbol of struggle and resilience, like the Cherokee tomahawk.

Beyond its reflection on the clash between nature and culture, ‘Détour’ also criticises consumer society. It highlights human excess and reminds us of the humility we should have in the face of natural forces. This message echoes in other works by Durham – notably his famous performance in which he stoned a refrigerator, mocking our attachment to material possessions.



GUILLAUME BOUVIER, VÉRONIQUE HERBRETEAU
AND ISABELLE KAPP



SECRET

STRASBOURG

The profile of the German Emperor Wilhelm II on the gates of the Palais du Rhin, Goethe's graffiti at the base of the cathedral spire, and the memory of the lean-tos and the prostitutes who sold their charms in the cathedral's sanctuary, the remains of a Roman tower hidden under a supermarket, a nature reserve concealed in the heart of an industrial area, a reminder of the dog baths, an exceptional Humanist library, and one of the oldest pharmacies in Europe ...

Far from the usual crowds and clichés, Strasbourg abounds in hidden treasures which it only reveals to those locals and visitors who venture off the beaten track.

An indispensable guide for those who thought they knew Strasbourg well, or for those who want to discover the other side of the city.

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