

“L'hôtel du ministre”

At 37 Quai d'Orsay, named after an 18th-century Provost of the Merchants of Paris, stands the façade of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Started in 1844 and completed around 1855, it forms a homogeneous and representative example of the decorative arts of the Second Empire.

At the request of the Foreign Minister, François Guizot, the building's design was entrusted to the architect Lacornée who had been responsible for that of the Palais d'Orsay, now demolished. The first stone was laid on 29 November 1845 in the presence of Guizot, Lacornée and Dumon, Minister of Public Works.



The royal bathrooms

The bathrooms, known as the “King’s” and the “Queen’s” bathroom, were created in 1938 for the visit to France of the King of England George VI and Queen Elisabeth. The building of these bathrooms was part of a programme for extensive renovation and modernisation of the Quai d'Orsay. The buildings, dating back to the time of Louis-Philippe, had fallen into a state of disrepair and needed to be renovated inside and outside. Work started in March 1938 for about five months, mobilising a large team headed by Pierre Bruneau, Chief Architect of Civilian Buildings and National Palaces. A thousand workers and thirty-seven companies were involved in this highly demanding assignment with a stringent deadline. The bold creation of the bathrooms is today the only remaining example of the decorative arts of the time. The bathrooms were decorated by the mosaicist and glass artist Auguste Labouret, who asked the highly modernist

architect-decorator Jacques Adnet to design the furniture. The Sain Workshops were commissioned to design the woodwork. The simple yet luxurious excellence of this masterpiece of interior design, of which there are few examples in Paris, demonstrated a commitment to giving pride of place to the use of glass and mirrors in decoration, as shown by the Venetian mosaics, engraved and sanded glass slabs, and bathroom mirrors. The choice of colours further reflects how perfect and brilliant this artwork is: the use of gold and silver borrows from mythology the symbolic of colours that illustrates abstractly the traditional theme of the confrontation between the sun and moon, and Apollo and Diana. Restoring the King's bathroom in 2003 and the Queen's bathroom in 2004 made it possible to revive the glamour of an architecture that recalls transatlantic luxury worthy of featuring in an anthology of the decorative arts of the 1930s.



The external decoration was entrusted to sculptors most of whom had already been involved in building or restoring churches (Notre-Dame de Paris, Saint-Vincent de Paul, etc.) and non-religious buildings (châteaux de Blois, de Saint-Cloud, etc.). Briefly held up by the 1848 revolution, building was resumed at the instigation of Emperor Napoleon III. Once the shell had been completed in 1853, some of the most renowned artists of the time - including Séchan, Nolau and Rubé, Molknecht, Lavigne, Liénard, Hippolyte Adam and the Huber brothers - were called on for the internal decoration. Indeed, a mansion destined to receive foreign sovereigns and diplomats had to welcome them with all the splendour due to their rank.

These premises have housed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs ever since the mid-19th-century. It is due to this stability of almost a century and a half that the name “Quai d'Orsay” is often used to designate France's Foreign Ministry.

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The Quai d'Orsay French Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs



MINISTÈRE
DES
AFFAIRES ÉTRANGÈRES
ET EUROPÉENNES

Welcome to the French Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs.

The Quai d'Orsay, also known in French as the “Hôtel du ministre des Affaires étrangères”, which you are now entering, was designed to meet the demands of France's external policy: it was not only to enable diplomats to work in better conditions, but also to offer a springboard for France's cultural outreach, for its arts and traditions, and to host our friends and partners. The history of the Quai d'Orsay building therefore intertwines with that of the affairs of the world and of French foreign policy. The Quai d'Orsay is a place of memory and a source of inspiration for all those serving our country, its interests, and its values throughout Europe and the world.

Enjoy your visit of the Quai d'Orsay!

Bernard Kouchner
Minister of Foreign and European Affairs

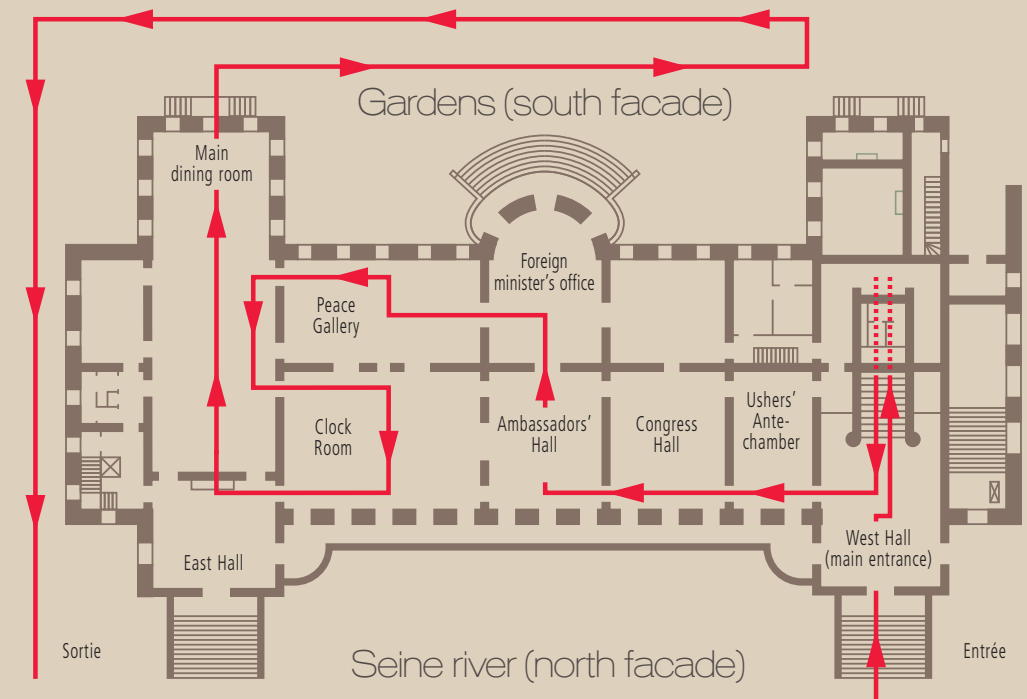
The north facade

As the Quai d'Orsay building was to face on to the river, the architect decided to break with established practice and ensure a pleasant view over the Seine from the great reception rooms, by placing the entrances at the side, with the main one on the right. In fact, although the left-hand one can be used as an exit, its main purpose is to establish the symmetry of the façade. The façade itself has two architectural orders one above the other: the Doric order at ground-floor level and the Ionic order at first and second floor level. The wooden bas-reliefs on the tympana of the entrance doors are by Hubert Lavigne. They depict the spirits of war and peace bearing an imperial crown. The statues in the niches are by Triqueti and represent the four continents. Commissioned at the time of the building's construction, they were not installed until 1870. Over the first floor windows are marble medallions depicting the coats of arms of the various powers. A balustrade in the Italian style crowns the edifice.



The ground floor

Since the Quai d'Orsay was built, the layout of the ground floor has hardly changed. The design by the architect Lacomée was to include the Foreign Minister's office, waiting rooms, the secretariat and dispatch office, three great rooms that served as reception rooms, and a dining room. Given their size, the ground-floor rooms were well suited to host receptions and many formal or festive events took place there. Under the Second Empire, they provided the setting for lavish receptions and concerts. Apart from these events, they served to receive delegations attending international conferences like the 1856 Congress of Paris and the 1919 Peace Conference. The Clock Room was also the setting of Robert Schuman's declaration on Europe in 1950 and the signing of the ECSC Treaty the following year, as the first stage of European construction.



The first floor

Reserved originally for the foreign minister's private use, the first floor served from the beginning of the 20th century as a residence for the official guests of France. For a long time, sovereigns, heads of State and prime ministers on official visit to Paris were accommodated on the first-floor, where stayed crowned heads of Britain and Persia, emirs from Arabia and Western political leaders. Whenever a distinguished visitor stayed at the Quai d'Orsay, the décor of his apartments was adapted to his personality. The Quai d'Orsay has not seen significant change since it was built, apart from maintenance and restoration work and the construction of bathrooms in 1938 for the visit of the British sovereigns. Since the Hôtel de Marigny was converted into a residence for the official guests of France, the first floor of the Quai d'Orsay comprises reception rooms, private apartments and offices.

