

## Press release

### CHATEAU DU CLOS LUCE

#### Parc Leonardo da Vinci, Amboise

## Re-opening of Leonardo da Vinci's and Marguerite de Navarre's rooms

### *The spirit of the rooms*

A 7-month works project, involving 20 craft guilds, 2 historic rooms and 2 Renaissance galleries completely renovated, and a fierce desire to strive for excellence: that's the sum total of work on the first floor of the Château du Clos Lucé completed on 15<sup>th</sup> April, 2011. Under the direction of Arnaud



de Saint-Jouan, chief historic monuments architect, they have added a new page to the history of the house lived in by Leonardo da Vinci. A real dip in the fountain of youth, since this entirely self-financed architectural and historical reworking helps the original beauty of this 540-year-young lady to shine once again.

Restoration? “*Restitution, more like*”, explains François Saint Bris, president of Clos Lucé. “*The first restoration of Leonardo da Vinci's and Marguerite de Navarre's rooms took place in the 1970s. This time, it was about giving them back their original appearance.*” Master stonemasons, stone cutters, cabinet makers, carpenters, ceramicists, master glass workers, blacksmiths, stage designers, sales rooms and antiques experts therefore worked together to rediscover the spirit of these rooms, just as they were in the dazzling times of Leonardo da Vinci and the Renaissance.

### *A back-to-front puzzle*

In Leonardo and Marguerite de Navarre's adjacent rooms, which measure 40 and 50 m<sup>2</sup> respectively, a single maxim: find the "skin" of the stone, to enable a new "reading" of the walls. Translation: remove the claddings laid down over the centuries on all the surfaces. Walls, floors and ceiling were therefore systematically stripped of their plaster, roughcast, boards, mouldings, and casings. In Leonardo's former study, transformed into Marguerite de Navarre's room, the results are spectacular.

Here, the project brought to light the decorative brick and tufa stone structure, with "stretchers and headers", that date back to Clos Lucé's construction in 1471 – the château's trademark.

The painstaking detail of the restoration process had the disconcerting effect of a back-to-front puzzle. By taking apart a falsely uniform ensemble piece by piece, the original unity appeared. Dismantling floorboards and ceilings from the 19<sup>th</sup> century uncovered original beams and cobs, ochre and vermillion paints, and restored the room's original dimensions. In Marguerite de Navarre's room, two 1.5 ton oak beams were brought in to



replace two main beams. To support them, stone corbels were reshaped here and there by master masons. Cleared of the 19<sup>th</sup> century woodwork and panelling, each door had its original archway restored and its limestone embrasure. The solid oak doors with their characteristic 16<sup>th</sup> century "folded napkin" motifs and forged iron locks line the passageways. Elsewhere the stone, taken back to its natural state, revealed master mason's graffiti. So many treasures just waiting to be discovered.

In Leonardo's room, this patient dismantling revealed 16<sup>th</sup> century plaster over the dressed brickwork and stone in its original colour. The decision to keep it led to its restoration with hydrated lime, followed by a finish mixing lime and marble dust (a blend used since ancient times), then a lime wash before the final patina of water mixed with natural pigment (Sienna, burnt Sienna, natural umber, yellow ochre). On its surface, fragments of painted murals made up of scrolls and acanthus leaves that were revealed became the object of delicate restoration work. From the top to bottom of the walls, the rediscovered fragments of frieze and stylobate made their complete restoration around the room's entire perimeter possible.

The tufa stone chimney is decorated with the French coat of arms and the chain of the Order of St Michel, founded by Louis XI.

In the glass case, a portrait of Catherine of Alexandria painted by Bernardino Luini, one of Leonardo da Vinci's pupils, is once more on display to the public, as are 16<sup>th</sup> century bronze medals depicting François I and the battle of Marignan.

The Renaissance canopy bed with sculpted chimeras, cherubs and sea creatures sits opposite marvellous 16<sup>th</sup> century Italian cabinets with secret compartments, one of which is encrusted with ivory, ebony and mother of pearl. To one side is a wooden sculpted bench seat decorated with a salamander.

### *Coherence, comfort and furniture from the era*



In the two rooms, the floor is now covered in 11x11cm artisanal terracotta tiles from the Tuileries de la Bretèche, in the Loir-et-Cher. Those in Marguerite de Navarre's (1492-1549) room, whose proud motto was "I will follow nothing inferior", are distinguished by a single detail: the monogram of King François 1er's sister, Marguerite d'Angoulême,

surrounded by elegant flecks stamped in the terracotta at the point of its second firing. A motif provided by the leather binding of her personal copy of the *Heptaméron*, which is kept at the Bibliothèque Nationale (National Library), in which Clément Marot and Rabelais's patron wrote the first pages.

This symbolises the work of Arnaud de Saint-Jouan's team, this care taken to ensure artistic-historical consistency, to the point where the value of such an undertaking rests on details that are merely aesthetic. It's a step back into history that included the choice of furniture from the era. The choice of a bed from the first Renaissance acquired for Marguerite de Navarre's room now forms the counterpart to the well-known bed from Leonardo's room. The walls are enhanced by an historic 16<sup>th</sup> century Audenarde wool and silk tapestry with vivid colours, representing the Battle of Pavia (1525) and showing the capture of France's King François Ier and Marshall Jacques de la Palisse's death.

Another Flanders tapestry, in the style known as “feuille de chou” (cabbage leaf) or “feuille d’aristoloche” (vine leaf), dating from the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and early 16<sup>th</sup> century, shows different imaginary, fantastic, and fabulous hunting scenes.

The grisaille windowpanes embellished with silver yellow stain that adorn the mullion windows were created by the celebrated Ateliers Duchemin, master glassworkers workshop.

In the middle, four Antique-style stained glass panels with motifs from mid 16<sup>th</sup> century civil architecture showing Love, Jealousy, armour and a winged head.

In the first window, a portrait of Marguerite de Navarre, attributed to François Clouet, an assortment of day to day Renaissance objects: a leather jewel box, an enamel diptych representing a crucifixion, a pewter pitcher, and a 16<sup>th</sup> century Christ encrusted with mother of pearl and ivory that apparently belonged to Queen Mary Stuart.

The second window has an Albrecht Dürer portrait of Maximilian of Austria, Charles Quint’s grandfather, on a wood panel. There is also a ceramic plate by Bernard Palissy, rare 16<sup>th</sup> century pewter cups and examples of 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century Italian and French glass.

To ensure visitor comfort without compromising the restoration, underfloor heating has been installed. No unsightly radiators will therefore disrupt the rediscovered harmony. The entire electrical network, the alarm and CCTV systems were revised and renovated. A high definition Bose sound system installed in the rooms added the finishing touch.

### *The past rediscovered*

“Oh time, jealous past that consumes everything,” sighed Leonardo da Vinci... Since the 1980s, the programme to restore Clos Lucé to its original state has endeavoured to make a liar of the house’s illustrious inhabitant. Here, time has now given the château back everything it had stolen. After the facades (2005-2009) and the first floor, two further sections of work will follow. One (2012-2013) will concentrate on the stairwell and the ground floor corridor, which were extensively changed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The other (2013-2014) will return the 18<sup>th</sup> century salons to their original vocation: Leonardo’s studios, as they were between 1516 and 1519.

Since 1954, the date of the first restoration work undertaken by Hubert Saint Bris and his wife Agnès Saint Bris, then continued by their eldest son Jean Saint Bris, the intention was to rediscover an architectural coherence based on documented historical research. “*We have passed from a family restoration to a heritage restoration,*” affirms François Saint Bris. On the strength of this transition, the ambition to make Clos Lucé the legitimate focal point and the quintessence of Leonardo da Vinci and the Renaissance provides increasing evidence of a promise kept.

