

Hotels of the Marais

Paris Art Studies – The
Marais in the Renaissance

The Marais

is the Paris district defined today by the borders of the 3rd and 4th arrondissements on the right bank of the Seine. On the west it is bordered by the rue Beaubourg on the north and the east by the great boulevards (formerly site of the Charles V wall) and on the south by the river.

This swampy area (marais - marécages) was used for grazing until the 9th century and cultivated from the 12th. In 1240 the Templar knights built themselves a fortified priory outside the Philippe Auguste wall on the north side of the Marais (the Temple). This attracted many artisans and traders who were happy to escape municipal taxes and the city guild restrictions. In the following centuries many religious establishments were also founded in the district, the convents of the Blancs-Manteaux, of Sainte-Croix-de-la-Bretonnerie and the Carmes-Billettes as well as the priory of Sainte-Catherine-du-Val-des-Écoliers.

In the 13th century Charles d'Anjou, King of Naples and Sicily, brother of Saint Louis, built himself a residence on the site of the current rue du roi de Sicile and rue de Sevigné. In 1361 King Charles V built a royal residence, the hôtel Saint-Pol, on the south side of the rue Saint-Antoine, the major thoroughfare of the Marais.

From the end of the 15th century to the end of the 17th the district came to be favored by the nobility, the noblesse de robe (high magistrates and government officers) and wealthy Parisians, particularly after the building of Place Royale (des Vosges) by Henri IV in 1606-12. The departure of the court to Versailles (1682) signals the decline of the district, which in the next 200 years will be taken over chiefly by craftsmen and workers who will transform the old aristocratic hôtels into apartments and workshops.

Hôtel de Sens

11, rue de l'Ave Maria,
75004.

Built 1475-1516

Commissioned by Tristan de Salazar archbishop of Sens (Burgundy) as his Paris residence. Until the 17c Paris was a mere bishopric and under the jurisdiction of the archbishops of Sens.

The exterior turrets, the double entrance with large gate for animals and a smaller for pedestrians, the tympanum above the gate, the narrow windows, the roof gable and crowning dormer windows are all typically late medieval features. The house has a fortress like appearance. Its plan is irregular and was clearly adapted to its site.

The only decoration is the carving of the dormer windows featuring gothic tracery, angels and the coat of arms of the archbishops, which includes a cross and a bishop's hat.

The courtyard is fairly large with larger (mullioned) windows. The main entrance and spiral staircase were set in the corner tower, a survival of the medieval castle keep.

The garden was originally surrounded by a high wall. Two, more regular, rows of windows provide views of the garden, though the door to it remains small and easily defensible.

Queen Margot the spurned first wife of King Henri IV lived in the hotel briefly (1605-6) after the dissolution of her marriage. She had the fig tree (whose name survives in that of rue du Figuier) growing in front of the house cut down, for it hindered the progress of her carriage into the courtyard.

In 1961 the hotel became the Forney Library, the municipal art library.

Hôtel de Carnavalet

23, rue de Sévigné, 75003.

Built c. 1547-1549 by
Pierre Lescot. Sculpture by the studio of Jean Goujon.

Modified 1660-61 by
François Mansart.

Restored 1867-71 by
Parmentier and Laisné under the direction of Victor Baltard.

Transfer of historic
buildings to garden, 1872-80 by Félix Roguet.

Built for Jacques de Ligneris, President of the
Paris Parlement, highest court of the
Kingdom. The hotel was bought in 1572 by a Breton noblewoman, Mme de Kernevenoy, widow of an equerry
of Henri II. The Parisians soon corrupted her name to "Carnavalet".

The single central porte cochère (carriage gate) and the
regular rectangular plan of the courtyard with aligned and symmetrical windows
on two levels is typically Renaissance.

The kitchens and
stables were placed in the wings of the courtyard beneath the rounded arches
whose keystones are decorated with beautifully carved, leering satyr masques.

The upper floor of
the residential block features more carvings, four reliefs of the Seasons with
the astrological signs of the central month of each season placed above. The
dormer windows feature rounded, broken pediments with a central lion's head.
The staircases are now placed into the corners of the courtyard, one on each
side.

The 17c owner, the
tax collector (intendant) Claude

Boislève, commissioned the upper stories on the two wings from architect François Mansart. These were beautifully integrated into the original design with the addition of more relief carvings (the four Elements, Four classical Goddesses) and a crowning balustrade, extended onto the roof of the original residential block.

In 1677 the hotel was rented to Mme de Sevigné (the celebrated letter writer of the era of Louis XIV) who lived there until her death 19 years later.

In the 19c the hotel became the museum of the history of Paris, pioneering the preservation movement of historic Paris at the very period when much of the old city was being demolished to make way for Haussmann's new boulevards.

Hôtel de Lamoignon

24, rue Pavée, 75004.

Built 1585-1589 and 1611, attributed to Thibaut Métézeau.

Modified 1624-1640 by François Boullet and Jean Thiriot.

Restored and extended for the Historic Library of the City of Paris, 1940-1968 by J.P. Paquet.

Built for Diana of France, duchess of Angoulême, a legitimized daughter of King Henri II, brought up by the King's famous mistress Diane de Poitiers. The duchess had the house built after the death of her husband (François de Montmorency) at the age of 46 and lived there in a state of austere and virtuous widowhood until her death in 1619 at the then great age of 81, having lived under seven royal reigns. The hôtel was inherited by Charles de Valois (illegitimate son of Charles IX) and his wife Françoise de Nargonne who died at 90 in 1713, last survivor of the Valois family in the age of Louis XIV. In 1658 it was rented to Guillaume de Lamoignon, president of the Paris Parlement. Today the hotel is the historic library of the city of Paris.

The residential block features six colossal pilasters of the Corinthian order, a Michelangelesque feature, making here its first appearance

in Paris architecture. The corner blocks contain the staircases as at Carnavalet. They are topped by pediments with elaborate carvings featuring dogs, horns, crescents, stags and other emblems of Diana, goddess of the hunt. Outside on the corner of the rue des Francs Bourgeois is a surviving medieval-style feature, a square turret that served as observation post of the street for Charles de Valois.