

Musée Cognacq-Jay

Paris Art Studies - Musée Cognacq-Jay

1839 – Birth of Ernest Cognacq son of goldsmith and clerk of the commercial tribunal of St Martin de Ré near Bordeaux.

1851 – At the death of his father the 12-year old Ernest works as shop assistant in several establishments in La Rochelle, Rochefort and Bordeaux.

1854 – At 15 Ernest leaves the provinces to try his luck in Paris where he works in the large store Au Louvre, and later at Aux Quatre Fils Aymon.

1856 – He finds work in 3rd important store La Nouvelle Héloïse, where he will meet his future wife, Marie-Louise Jaÿ (1838-1925).

1867 – Ernest opens his own store, Au petit Bénédicte in the rue de Turbigo (near Les Halles) in central Paris. This first venture does not work out and he is reduced to selling fabric under an umbrella on the sidewalk near the Pont Neuf next to an old water pump called the Samaritaine. This activity will gain him the nickname of « Napoléon du déballage ».

1870 – Ernest founds a new shop he will call La Samaritaine, above a café near the Pont Neuf opposite the large establishment À la Belle Jardinière (the current Conforama) inaugurated in 1867.

1871 – The shop grows in size and Ernest hires two employees.

1872 – He marries Marie-Louise Jaÿ, then working as top sales girl at Le Bon Marché department store on the Left Bank. Active and intelligent, she brought 20 000 francs of her savings to Ernest's business to which he added 5 000 francs of his own. The couple will remain childless.

1875 – Total sales at La Samaritaine reach 800 000 francs, 6 million by 1882, 50 million by 1898 and more than a billion in 1925.

1905 -10 - Ernest builds 4 new departments stores in the Art Nouveau style between the Pont Neuf and the rue de Rivoli. In 1900 he opens the first entertainment theme park in France, Magic City. Good natured, generous and an excellent organizer he is nicknamed « père Laborem » by his employees in reference to the motto of la Samaritaine « Per Laborem » (“for work”). Between 1900 and 1925, Ernest Cognacq and Marie-Louise Jaÿ also put together one of the greatest private collections in France of the art and furniture of the 18th century, initially intended to be shown in a new luxury shop inaugurated in 1917.

1916 – Creation of the charitable Cognacq-Jay Foundation which administrates orphanages, retirement homes and social housing.

1925 – Death of Marie-Louise Jaÿ.

1928 – On the year of Ernest’s death the collection is given as a gift to the city of Paris.

1929 – The collection is installed in a building on boulevard des Capucines next to the La Samaritaine de luxe.

1986 – The collection is transferred to the hôtel Donon in rue Elzévir in the Marais.

1990 – Official opening of the new museum. The La Samaritaine stores are bought by the group LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton.

2005 – The stores are shut officially because of security reasons.