

Château de Prangins. MUSÉE NATIONAL SUISSE. SCHWEIZERISCHES NATIONALMUSEUM. MUSEO NAZIONALE SVIZZERO. MUSEUM NAZIONALE SVIZZERO.



CHEFS-D'ŒUVRE DES COLLECTIONS

Permanent exhibition – Décors. Masterpieces from the collections

Inaugurated in Zurich in 1898, the Swiss National Museum – known at the time as the Schweizerisches Landesmuseum – comes into being 50 years after the creation of the Federal State. The new institution collects and exhibits on the basis of a political strategy to define the identity of Switzerland and create a sense of national belonging. From the moment of its opening, the museum adopts a distinctive approach by presenting 15 historical interiors intended to illustrate the spirit of the nation.

Since then, the institution has continued to add to its collections furniture ensembles, decorative elements and interiors that are representative of Switzerland, its history and its different cultures. Some of the most significant acquisitions of the last 15 years have come from French-speaking Switzerland, and are now presented in *Décors. Masterpieces from the collections*. The exhibition looks at various aspects of the history of interiors: the taste for luxury and the social practices of the elite in the Age of Enlightenment, the production of mass-produced furniture for the bourgeoisie in the 19th century, the reluctance to embrace industrialisation, and the fight for hygiene in the 20th century to improve housing for the underprivileged. The exhibition is divided into seven stages and as many rooms.

I. SHOWROOM OF SWISS DESIGN

From the refined to the very simple, expensive or cheap, the diverse objects in this room illustrate the vitality and diversity of Swiss furniture design, from the 18th century to the present day. In this showroom, an “authentically Swiss” escabelle chair, avant-garde creations from the 1930s and a futuristic lamp by the architect Mario Botta come face to face to highlight the contrasts of technique, material and style.

This furniture reveals a country in which manufacturers perpetuate trends imported from abroad or, conversely, seek to express an identity of their own, sometimes setting themselves apart with innovations that are internationally successful. Pride of place goes to some iconic objects of 20th-century Swiss design, many with ties to French-speaking Switzerland.

Château de Prangins.

II. A THEATRE IN THE CHÂTEAU

Dating from 1777, the theatre sets at Château d'Hauteville are an exceptionally rare ensemble of European importance. However, they also bear witness to a pastime that is very popular among the elites at the time: putting on their own private theatre at home. The first step is to choose a play and divide the roles up among friends and family. The performance then takes place before an audience of acquaintances.

Private theatre is highly popular throughout Europe between 1750 and 1850. It is well documented in French-speaking Switzerland, especially at the châteaux of Hauteville and Prangins. Some wealthy families commission painters to create sets for them, which can be easily dismantled and stored away after the performance. They are often painted in trompe-l'œil, thus creating a stage set within the stage set.

III. LUXURY ON A FARM

The *Metamorphoses* decor is an icon in the history of wallpaper. The precision of the draughtsmanship, the quality of the printing, the number of colours and the highly sophisticated installation reveal it to be the work of one of the great Paris manufactories in the late 18th century.

Remarkably, this wallpaper comes not from a palace but from a farmhouse in the Bernese Jura. A wine merchant named Charles-François Robert and his wife Eléonore, née Humbert-Droz, treat themselves to this sumptuous decor for their wedding in around 1795. They install it in their parlour, on the first floor of their farm at La Cibourg, not far from La Chaux-de-Fonds. The eventful history of this wallpaper is told in the cartoon strip by Fanny Vaucher.

IV. INVESTIGATING INTERIORS

Between 1900 and 1930, the criminologist Rodolphe Archibald Reiss and his colleagues from the police forensics department in Vaud take thousands of photographs as part of their investigations. Among them are views of interiors that provide a snapshot of private dwellings occupied by people of varied social standing. From a cramped loft to a luxurious apartment, they reveal the furniture and decoration used in the canton of Vaud, as well as the changes in lighting and heating during those years. The photographs taken during police investigations are thus an unexpectedly fertile source of information on the living conditions of the poorest, from which very few images and objects are otherwise preserved. This collection is held by the University of Lausanne and the Vaud Cantonal Archives.

Château de Prangins.

V. A MIDDLE-CLASS LIVING ROOM

In the 19th century, furniture from Yverdon fills the living rooms of many middle-class homes in French-speaking Switzerland. It is also exported and exhibited outside the country. First produced in the workshop of Jean-Pierre-Moïse Guichard, in Yverdon, it is unique in terms of the machines and techniques used to make it. At a time when hand-crafting is gradually giving way to manufacture, Jean-Pierre-Moïse Guichard develops a process which allows him to produce ornaments that are normally moulded or carved, but in series, using fine embossed veneer. This enables him to supply his customers with richly decorated furniture at a lower cost. Founded in 1822, the business enjoys its heyday in the middle of the century, but closes down in 1904, following the death of Guichard's nephew and business partner Edouard Wanner.

VI. A MODEL OFFICE

This room, with its boiseries, sconces and painting, was used as an office and was designed as a coherent ensemble. It is notable for its monumentality and the richness of its forms, which exemplify the revival in the applied arts from 1910 onwards. The architect Alphonse Laverrière designed it for the First National Exhibition of Applied Art held in Lausanne in 1922.

This event aims to provide a complete picture of Swiss production in the field of applied arts, in order to stimulate the development of a national industry and raise awareness of "good taste" among the population at large. Under the auspices of the Confederation, it is organised by L'Œuvre and the Schweizerischer Werkbund, two sister associations founded in 1913 to promote collaboration between art and industry.

VII. DOCUMENTING THE NATION

To this day, the museum continues to collect interiors and furniture. Why does it do this, and what criteria does it apply? What are the challenges the museum's staff face in conserving these unique and often monumental objects? This film sets out to provide some answers.