



THE DINING ROOM

An area dedicated to meals

This room became a dining room in the mid 18th century. Until then, meals could be served in various castle rooms. The preference for intimacy and convenience that developed in the 1750s led to specialized uses for rooms. This was when the dining room came into being. The plasterwork ornaments date from this period. They represent what was in style in castles and private mansions in Paris and Provence at the time.

The style

Under Louis XV, refinement, fantasy and elegance were in style. Lines were curving and shapes were cut out. The Louis XV style is also known as “Rococo” because it recalled natural rocks and shells.

What story does this setting tell ?

The decoration consists of eight panels depicting the four seasons of the solar year in association with the four elements: earth, air, fire and water.

In the northeast corner : **spring and earth**
Spring is incarnated by flowers which have been cut and placed in a vase above a nest of baby birds being fed with food dropped into their beaks.

A gardening trophy composed of a watering can, a bobbin of cord, planting tools, fruits and vegetables symbolizes the earth.

In the northwest corner : **summer and air**
Summer is the time for harvesting. A sickle, a rake and a straw hat surround a sheaf of wheat. Cicadas and insects situate this scene in Provence.

Gusts from two zephyrs blow kites and birds. A musette de cour (ancestor of the bagpipe) fills with air. Behind it, soap bubbles escape from bits of straw.

On the west wall : **fall and water**
Harvested grapes overflow from a wicker basket.
Water sprays from a fountain under which fish and water birds swim. The scene is topped by two tridents (symbols of Poseidon) and framed by corals and reeds.

On the east wall : **winter and fire**
Flames surround a salamander, an animal that resists fire, according to legend. Two torches and twisted pitchforks (symbol of Hades, god of the underworld) crown the decoration.
Winter is symbolized by a leafless tree in a frosted pot. Tools for cutting wood (a mallet and a cognée, a type of axe) are placed on the wings of a bat (motif used in the rococo era).



North wall representing air (E. Georges).



West wall representing, left to right, fall and water (E. Georges).



Creation of the decorations

Plaster was applied by hand, from top to bottom, following a drawing traced directly onto the wall with charcoal, sanguine or a pointed stylus. The work required precision and know-how since shapes and reliefs had to be made before the plaster dried. Once the plaster hardened, the motif was finished using tools like gouges, hooks or scrapers.

The outstanding plasticity of plaster enabled making inexpensive creations that were difficult to obtain in other materials. The setting alternates plaster decorations (on the walls) and stone (cooling tables, pilasters and side table). Since weather conditions in Provence are mild, it was not necessary to cover the walls with wood paneling; unpainted plasterwork rooms were perfectly appropriate and were known as “cool rooms”.

Further information :

The gypsum used for plaster is calcium sulfate dihydrate, a sedimentary evaporate rock. After dehydration by heating, the gypsum is reduced to plaster.

Plaster workers were known as gypiers in French, and their apprenticeship lasted several years. A plasterers guild was attested in Avignon in the 15th century.

The art of good living and good food

The joys of eating are evoked in the decoration. The sideboard jambs are decorated with ribbons and beverage containers: bottles, goblets, ewers, keg (left), glasses, teapot, coffee grinder, sugar bowl and cups (right). Exotic beverages like tea, coffee and chocolate were gaining popularity at the time. On either side of the windows in front, two cooling tables decorated with aquatic animals were used to keep beverages at the proper temperature.

Around the windows, there are two sculpted ribbons attached to musical instruments. Pastoral music or chamber music could accompany lunch or supper.



To learn more about the restoration of the plaster decorations, see Terminal 6 located in this room.

Table setting

In the 18th century, the arts of the table evolved in different ways, with matching dishes, utensils and individual napkins. However, there were no glasses on the table because servants filled glasses and served beverages when guests requested them. Next, glasses were put in the cooling tables filled with water and ice that were found on the sideboard. Wine was preferred very cool and was the main beverage.



Jambs representing beverage containers.