

Paris' Hidden Gem: The Jacquemart-Andre Museum

Paris museums are not all about crowds and famous paintings. You can love the Louvre and leave it too and savor instead, one of the small, more accessible museums that impart a particularly Paris flavor like the private Musee Jacquemart-Andre at 158 Boulevard Hausmann in the fashionable 8th.

The Jacquemart-Andre is a highly personal place, a grand town house (fairly plain on the street but wonderfully sumptuous within) built in the 1870's and filled with art chosen by the discerning eyes of a married couple, Edouard Andre and his society painter wife, Nolie Jacquemart who traveled the world to select treasures for their home. From the moment that you set foot in the colonnaded entrance you will feel a part of their very rich world. It feels somewhat like the wonderful Frick Collection in New York City, terribly grand, terribly private and because it is smaller than museums that are built to house huge collections, it's more accessible too.

Wandering through the gilded and imposing rooms you will enjoy both the fine art, and the ambience in equal measure. This is not a collection that a curator has selected to make a point about a given period or style. It's an art collection presented from a completely personal point of view and it gives visitors a chance to view the art as the collectors themselves saw it, and although the collection is very good and quite large it still doesn't overwhelm.

The museum houses a solid representation of 18th century French paintings, furniture, decorative arts and Beauvais tapestries, along with Dutch and Flemish paintings. The marble Jardin d'Hiver or Winter Garden room with its elegant double staircase leads you upstairs where you feel that you have entered the owners' private domain of smaller rooms filled with a collection of Italian treasures. In these more intimate quarters you'll find one of the museum's most famous paintings, St. George and the Dragon by Paolo Uccello (c. 1439-40), which spins a vividly fanciful science fiction tale of a fair maiden being saved by a knight on white horse who is spearing a huge green dragon.

The effect of a visit to the Jacquemart-Andre is that the visitor can imagine being transported to a wonderfully rich grandmother's house, for the moment at least; entering that uniquely Parisian world that Proust would have known. Interestingly, Proust's family in fact lived in an apartment at Number 45 rue de Courcelles just around the corner.

The Jacquemart Andre also presents special exhibits and events. From March 14 to August 26 2007 there will be a display of 100 Chinese masks from the 16th to 18th centuries intended for use in religious exorcisms. On a lighter note, there is the annual Easter Egg hunt for children on Easter Sunday. Linger on after your visit and opt for lunch or tea in the elegant former dining room under a ceiling fresco painted by Tiepolo. Don't you wish every home had one? Open every day from 10 - 5. Make a visit, come away feeling a little more French.

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About the Author

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