

## NAPOLÉON AND THE ISLE OF AIX

Colbert created the arsenal of Rochefort in 1666, it led the Isle of Aix into the center of the naval war which opposed France to England during nearly two centuries. The island was ideally situated at the entrance of the Charente estuary. It constituted a strategic military place for successive leaders. In 1801, Napoleon decided to display a garrison of 4000 men. On the occasion of an inspection in 1808, he ordered the construction of a house for the military commander in chief of the Isle of Aix and his family.

But the great impact of the Isle of Aix on History was due to Napoleon's second stay on the island. After the defeat at Waterloo, he decided to exile himself to America and travelled to Rochefort where two frigates, *La Saale* and *La Méduse*, would be waiting for him, (Géricault would immortalize the wreck of *La Méduse* in the famous painting *Le Radeau de la Méduse* a few years later). But the British blockaded the harbour in order to prevent him from leaving. He then landed on the isle of Aix and settled down in the military commander's house from July 12 to 15, before begging for the hospitality of England's Prince Regent.

When he boarded on HMS *Bellerophon*, during the night of July 15, 1815, Napoleon was far from imagining that the British were looking upon him as a prisoner. The British would not let him land on the British soil, fearing that he would file a *Habeas Corpus* petition and therefore call for the right of asylum. So he was transferred on board HMS *Northumberland* sailing to Saint Helena, a small island in the South Atlantic ocean, where he died on May 5, 1821.

## THE GOURGAUDS

Gaspard Gourgaud (1783-1852) took up a military career and became Napoleon's *aide-de-camp*. He supported him with unflinching loyalty. In 1815, after the defeat at Waterloo, he followed Napoleon as far as the Isle of Aix where he was chosen to hand over Napoleon's demand of political asylum to the Prince Regent. Then, he shared Napoleon's exile on St Helena until 1818, when he came back to Europe.

His great grandson, baron Napoleon Gourgaud (1881-1944) also known as "Napo", married Eva Gebhard (1876-1958), daughter of a New-York City multi-millionaire. They both led a sociable life, spending their time between Paris and the Isle of Aix. As a wise art collector, "Napo" refurbished their private home in the rue de Lille in Paris converting it in a temple of *avant-garde*. There, ancient and modern paintings were displayed (Picasso, Braque, Cezanne, Matisse, Seurat). He also often traveled away to Africa where he enjoyed big-game hunting.

In 1925, Gaspard Gourgaud, concerned by the neglected state of the house where the Emperor had stayed, decided to buy it and restore it. The musée Napoleon opened on September 16, 1928: the artifacts on display were composed of Napoleonic memorabilia, new acquisitions and large donations. The couple who had fallen under the spell of the island, would invite their many friends from the Tout-Paris to come over and discover their paradise on earth. They founded the African Museum in 1933, where stuffed animals, the Baron had brought back from Africa, were displayed, along with a large collection of ethnological objects. After Eva's death in 1959, both museums became state museums curated by the château de Malmaison.

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Musées nationaux de l'île d'Aix • Donation Gourgaud

VISITOR'S GUIDE



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MUSÉE NAPOLÉON

## GROUND FLOOR

## 1<sup>ST</sup> FLOOR

### 1 THE CLOCKS ROOM (Museum Entrance)

The Museum houses a collection of approximately forty clocks, the most important part of the collection is displayed in this room. They illustrate the Emperor's popularity both during the Empire and July Monarchy as well as the Second Empire. The clocks hands show 5h49 PM, the time of Napoleon's death on Saturday May 5, 1821 on Saint Helena.



### 2 THE DIRECTORY AND CONSULATE (Former Kitchen)

(Former Kitchen)

The works on display in this room represent the different episodes of Napoleon's dazzling military and political ascension. As a young Corsican General, he was appointed General in chief of the army of the Orient. He then led a military campaign and a scientific expedition in Egypt. When he came back to Paris, confident in the prestige he was surrounded by, he instigated the Coup d'Etat of the 18 Brumaire (November 9, 1799). The Constitution of year VIII established an authoritarian political regime led by three Consuls amongst whom Napoleon Bonaparte, who became First Consul for life, before being proclaimed Emperor.



### 3 THE EMPIRE AND THE IMPERIAL FAMILY (Former Engineers Office)

(Former Engineers Office)

Representations of Napoleon as Emperor and King of Italy and of different members of his family are gathered in this room.

In 1796, he married Marie-Josèphe-Rose Tascher de la Pagerie, and named her Josephine. She was the widow of Viscount Alexandre de Beauharnais, with whom she had two children: Eugene, future viceroy of Italy and Hortense who married one of Napoleon's brother, and became Queen of Holland and mother to the future Napoleon III.

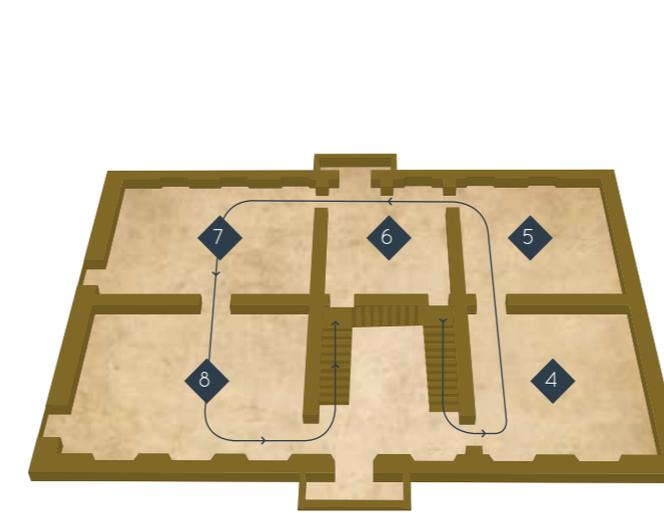
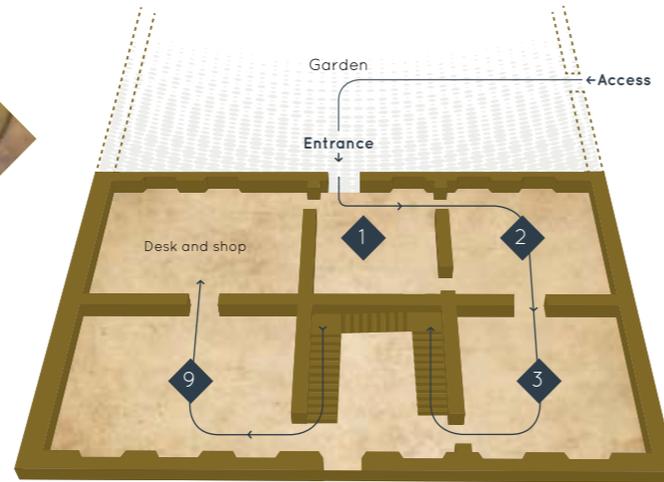
As Josephine couldn't give the Emperor an heir, she was forced to divorce in December 1809. Napoleon married again in 1810 with archduchess Marie-Louise of Austria, Marie-Antoinette's great-grand-niece. She gave birth to the King of Rome. Following the Emperor's abdication, the child went back to Vienna where he was given the title of Duke of Reichstadt. He died there in 1832, he was only 21 years old.



### 4 THE ISLE OF AIX AND NAPOLEON'S LAST STAY (Former bedroom 1)

(Former bedroom 1)

The maps on display show the strategic importance of the Isle of Aix, ideally situated to protect the Charente estuary and therefore the access to Rochefort. Many battles, including the one of 1809, opposed the British and the French in this harbor. Known as the *Combat des Brûlots* (The fire ships battle), during which the British fleet loaded with bombs destroyed one part of the French ships so as to set them on fire. This room also gathers artifacts which evoke the end of Napoleon's reign, along with traces of his last stay on the Isle of Aix.



#### ANCIEN REGIME

- August 15<sup>th</sup> 1769  
Napoleon's birth in Ajaccio

#### REVOLUTION

- July 14<sup>th</sup> 1789  
Taking of the Bastille

#### FIRST REPUBLIC

#### DIRECTORY

- March 9<sup>th</sup> 1796  
Napoleon and Josephine's wedding
- March 1796 - April 1797  
Campaign of Italy
- November 9<sup>th</sup> 1799  
Coup d'état of the 18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire

#### CONSULATE

- December 24<sup>th</sup> 1799  
Napoleon's nomination as First Consul
- August 3<sup>rd</sup> 1802  
Napoleon's nomination as Consul for life

#### 1<sup>ST</sup> EMPIRE

- May 13<sup>th</sup> 1804  
Proclamation of the 1<sup>st</sup> Empire
- December 2<sup>nd</sup> 1804  
Coronation of Napoleon at Notre Dame de Paris
- December 15<sup>th</sup> 1809  
Napoleon and Josephine's divorce
- April 2<sup>nd</sup> 1810  
Napoleon's wedding with archduchess Mary Louise of Austria
- March 20<sup>th</sup> 1811  
Birth of the King of Rome (Napoleon II)
- March 30<sup>th</sup> 1814  
Taking of Paris by the Allies. Napoleon is banished to the Isle of Elba

#### RESTORATION

- May 29<sup>th</sup> 1814  
Josephine's death

#### THE HUNDRED DAYS

- March 1<sup>st</sup> 1814  
Landing at Golfe-Juan and return to France
- March 20<sup>th</sup> 1815  
Napoleon's return to France and landing at Golfe-Juan
- June 18<sup>th</sup> 1815  
Defeat at Waterloo
- June 22<sup>nd</sup> 1815  
Napoleon's abdication
- June 29<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> 1815  
Napoleon's stay at Malmaison before leaving for Rochefort with the intention of sailing to the United-States
- July 8<sup>th</sup> 1815  
Sailing to the Isle of Aix
- July 15<sup>th</sup> 1815  
Surrender to the British and transportation on Saint Helena

- May 5<sup>th</sup> 1821  
Napoleon's death

#### JULY MONARCHY

- October 18<sup>th</sup> 1840  
Departure of Napoleon's mortal remains from Saint Helena on board *La Belle Poule*
- December 15<sup>th</sup> 1840  
Napoleon's reburial at the Invalides in Paris

#### II<sup>nd</sup> EMPIRE

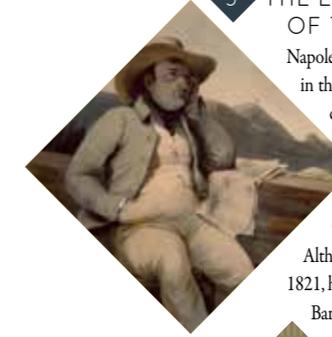
- December 2<sup>nd</sup> 1852  
Beginning of the second Empire
- 1862  
Opening of the Emperor's bedchamber to the public on the isle of Aix

#### III<sup>rd</sup> REPUBLIC

- 1926  
Purchase of the Emperor's house by Baron Napoleon Gourgaud
- September 16<sup>th</sup> 1928  
Opening of the Musée Napoléon
- 1933-1935  
Opening of the African Museum

### 5 THE EXILE ON SAINT HELENA AND THE RETURN OF THE ASHES (Former bedroom 2)

Napoleon landed on Saint Helena on October 17, 1815. The British accommodated him in the summer residence of the lieutenant governor of the island. It was situated in the coldest and windiest part of the island, Longwood. The right part of the room, gathers objects which are witnesses of this exile and of the last years Napoleon spent there, surrounded by a few faithful men. (Bertrand, Montholon, Las Cases, Gourgaud) caring for his garden and dictating his memories. The works displayed on the left part of the room, concern the Return of the Ashes. Although Napoleon had asked to be buried amongst the French people, when he died in 1821, he was buried on St Helena.



### 6 NAPOLEON'S BEDCHAMBER (Former bedroom of the Military Commander)

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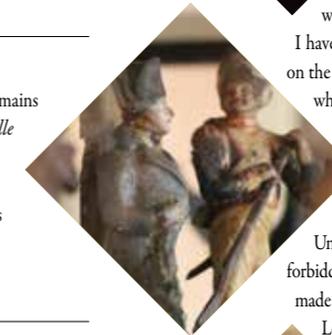
The bedroom where Napoleon spent his last days on the French soil has kept its original layout: an alcove, three exits, a balcony and his bed. He wrote his letter of surrender addressed to the Prince Regent, on July 13, 1815, in this room "Your Royal Highness. A victim to the factions which distract my country, and to the enmity of the greatest powers of Europe, I have terminated my political career, and I come, like Themistocles, to throw myself on the hospitality of the British people. I put myself under the protection of their laws; which I claim from your Royal Highness, as the most powerful, the most constant, and the most generous of my enemies."



### 7 8 NAPOLEONIC MEMORABILIA (Former bedroom 3 & 4)

(Former bedroom 3 & 4)

Under the Restoration, until 1830, the representation of Napoleon's face was forbidden. Seditious images spread, colored with melancholy from 1821, as allusion was made to Napoleon's captivity and to his tomb in St Helena. During the July Monarchy, Louis-Philippe, tried to attract the sympathy of former Bonapartists. Napoleon's effigy was displayed on a large number of utilitarian or decorative objects. During the second Empire, Napoleon's house was decorated with a commemorative pediment. The legend became official and more and more effigies of Napoleon could be found in the squares.



### 9 THE GOURGAUD ROOM (Former drawing-room)

(Former drawing-room)

The room opens on the portraits of General Baron Gourgaud and his wife, Françoise - Marthe Roederer (1783-1823). The other portraits represent Baron Napoleon Gourgaud, the first Baron Gourgaud's great-grandson along with his wife Eva Gebhard, the founders of the museum.

