Guide to the Museum Colette

Saint-Sauveur en Puisaye (89)
A theatrical Entrance

A museum conceived as a work of art set out according to an inventive and subtle plan.

On the floor one can discover Colette’s main addresses overlooked by a Puisaye sky.

On each side, photos of the house where she was born (in this village) and her last Parisian home by the Palais-Royal

« Give me fresh new pastel pencils, colours that are not named yet, give me sparkling powders and a fairy like brush and … No, but that won’t be enough as there aren’t any words, or pens, or colours to depict the sky from my native village, overlooking a violet slate roof bordered with scarlet moss, the sky that radiated over my childhood »

Colette
(From Paysages et Portraits, 1958, posthumous book)

The museum has been set up thanks to:

Mr Foulques de Jouvenel (Colette’s great grand nephew), Mr Bertrand de Jouvenel (son of Colette’s second husband) and his children Anne and Hugues de Jouvenel.

GMF Insurance for the sponsorship

Museum design: Hélène Mugot, artist

Door decorated with an ornamental plant.

Titles of Colette’s books engraved in golden letters on the stairs that lead up to the top of the castle.
Colette and Missy – Colette at the cabaret
After her separation from Willy Colette throws herself into music-hall. She acts in 'Pan' at the Théâtre Marigny (Paris), in 'An Egyptian dream' (Rêve d’Egypte) at the Moulin Rouge (Paris) and tours in the 30s with the actor and agent Charles Baret (1880 – 1965).

Life with Henry de Jouvenel
1910: Colette and Willy divorce. It is the beginning of a career as a journalist for Parisian broadsheet « Matin »
1912: death of Sido (Colette’s mother) in Châtillon-Coligny.
Marriage to Henry de Jouvenel, chief editor of « Matin ».
1920: awarded the medal of Chevalier de la Légion d’Honneur (first rank in the Legion of Honor prizes)
1923: Colette and Henry de Jouvenel separate.

Life with Maurice Goudeket
1928: promoted to Officer of the Legion of Honor.
1936: promoted to Commander of the Legion of Honor.

From her 60th birthday to her death
1945: unanimously accepted at the Goncourt Académy, the exclusive French literary circle.
1949: elected president of the Académie Goncourt.
1953: awarded the prize of the Ville de Paris. Promoted to the title of Grand Officier de la Légion d’Honneur the highest rank awarded by the Legion of Honor and presented the prize of the National Institute of Arts and Letters by the US Ambassador.
In 1910 Colette started to collect glass paperweights, she called them her «still gardens» or «multi coloured tour de force». Whilst contemplating one of her rock crystals that sat next to her paper-weights she compared it to tamed water logs in which she did not see «future» but «ponds and water springs from her native land».

Colette covered one of the wall panels with these little glass cases filled with butterflies whose intense blue and pure red wings shone in the sunlight.

Furniture and objects donated to the museum.

Glass cases:
Letters from Sido to Colette or «Sido as a writer in the making» Pen case that belonged to Colette. The virgin book, aborted work from the capitaine (Colette’s father).

The glass cabinet

Colette’s living room from the Palais-Royal

1) Colette by Vertès
2) and 3) Landscapes, gouache, anonymous
4) Miniature, anonymous
5) Bunch of flowers, enamel by Jean Tétreau, 1947
6) Rose by Marie Wonder
7) Landscape by A. Töpffer
8) Fleurs by Louise Heniels, 1948
9) and 10) Still lives by Luc-Albert Moreau
11) Colette by Emile Charmy, 1921
12) Carpet, school of Wissa Wassef, Cairo, Egypt
13) Colette by Ferdinand Humbert
14) Beggars in Spain by Gustave.
Bedroom at the Palais-Royal

Listen to Colette’s deep, harsh voice revealing secrets of her dark and mischievous side, this fiercely private room.

Exhibitions of the Colette studies Centre (Centre d’études Colette) run by the local council for Cultural Affairs in the Yonne County. It curates and handles archives of the Musée Colette and la Société des amis de Colette (Colette’s Friends Society).

Each year a new exhibition sheds some light on aspects of Colette’s life and work.

Documentation from the studies Centre is available upon request. Please write to:

Conseil Général de l’Yonne
Direction des affaires culturelles, Centre d’études Colette
10, rue de St-Georges 89000 PERRIGNY
Telephone : +33 3 86 72 85 28. Email : centre.colette@cg89.fr

Do not forget to visit the permanent exhibition of painter and poet Fernand-Rolland (1920 – 2004).

The Nam Room

A famous animal painter who illustrated two of Colette’s books: « Dialogues de bête » (Creatures great and small) 1912 and « Chats » (The Cat) 1935.

Temporary exhibition

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Towards the end of the nineteen sixties Colette’s only daughter, Colette de Jouvenel, undertook the task of creating a museum in memory of her mother. However, neither the house where she was born, nor her flat in the Palais-Royal in Paris are available. She had the idea of establishing the museum in the castle of Saint Sauveur which Colette mentioned in her work but never stayed in. Unfortunately, Colette de Jouvenel died prematurely in 1981, but her descendants took over and donated her collection to the town of Saint Sauveur on the condition that a museum and a study centre were created.

Colette de Jouvenel’s wishes were respected, the museum finally opened in 1995. It is in honour of her memory, and thanks to her untiring efforts to give Colette’s work the place she deserved, that this museum exists.

In this room visitors can see a documentary on Colette’s life (45 minutes). Documentary in French, no subtitles.

Film shown at
• 10.30 am
• 11.30 am
• 12.30 pm
• 1.30 pm
• 2.30 pm
• 3.30 pm
• 4.30 pm

A coloured mosaic made of 1500 fake books... To discover Colette’s work and listen to different extracts read out from one of a selection of 52 books.

The artist’s immense eyes look at us from the top of the stairs, appearing and disappearing in a slow metamorphosis from the innocent child to the cynical old lady, without forgetting the sad and artificially provoking gaze of the young woman but also that of the wise older woman.

(Hélène Mugot)
To spend a little more time with Colette and her books…

The Castle and the Tower of Saint-Sauveur

Colette mentions the castle of Saint Sauveur in her work, but never stayed in it.

The remains of the medieval castle disappeared during the XVIth century. Parts of the foundations probably still exist under the yard of the Vinée (where wine was once stored), or of the “Pâtis” or “Pâté” (a courtyard where animals used to graze). Today’s south wall stands on an old wall rebuilt during the XVIIth century.

The pavilion dates back to the beginning of the XVIth century, the staircase from the XVIIIth or the Restoration period. The entrance to the museum has been, made on the park side of the castle.

The “Sarrasine” tower or “Césarine” tower is a dungeon with an unusual egg-shaped plan dated from the XIth century. The top part was probably added during the XIIIth or the XIVth century.

You can have a drink in what used to be the castle kitchen. “As for coffee, we had to have it somewhere near the gare d’Auteuil (close to the Bois de Boulogne in Paris). It had to be very dark, without much taste, but very hot and syrupy because of all the sugar we put in it.” (Colette, Chambre d’hôtel-Hotel room).

Opening times
From 1st April to 31st October:
10 am to 6 pm (except Tuesdays)

Tickets
Please call or write for details.

Visits
Visits are without guides.
Allow an hour and a half to see the museum
The museum is accessible to wheelchairs
Toby dogs (Small dogs, so loved by Colette) are accepted but must be kept on the leads.