

Clisson, another Italy



From the Middle Ages to the Italian dream

Following the aftermath of the French Revolution, the civil war of Western France called war of Vendée which devastated the city, Clisson hardly had time to recover and did it thanks to three great French artists and art lovers coming back from Italy : The Cacault brothers Pierre and François. (The former was a painter and the latter a collector and diplomat in Rome) , and François-Frédéric Lemot a sculptor who was awarded grand prix de Rome in 1790 by the French Academy of Arts. All of them were forced to flee Italy because of anti-republican Riots in Rome. This will lead them on the banks of the river Sèvre in a little city still dying after the painful war of Vendée called Clisson.

This exceptional site impressed them so much that the Cacault brothers opened here a museum gathering all their collections. Little by little, François-Frédéric Lemot will achieve their work making of Clisson a masterpiece painting creating his own Tivoli in la Garenne Lemot park. Thus, from that time onwards, Clisson curling up in the steep slopes of the Sèvre river has been having a touch from abroad. Beside the local granite and the rounded traditional towers could be seen the red tone of the tiles and bricks. From her Breton roots emerged an Italian softness and an air of Tuscany.

If you enter the historical centre of Clisson, you can still see the surrounding walls of the city which were formerly at the crossroads of three great provinces : Brittany, Anjou and Poitou. Further on you can contemplate the majestic and impressive remains of the Clisson castle , an eight century synthesis of the French military architecture .Wandering through the steep lanes of the city, we enter the very heart of that other Italy and its church embellished with a campanile and the warm red brick ornamented fronts of the houses . Once you have walked across two stone bridges under which are flowing the Sèvre and the Moine river, you reach the Garenne Lemot park. The villa Lemot terrace overhanging the river looks on to a view of the city which can't be obstructed.Clisson also makes you travel out and about in an enchanting landscape of castles and rivers. Further on , the roads lead you to the sweet smelling sugared vineyards of red and white grapes. Later on, the wine grower invites you to a wine tasting of Muscadets and gros plant in the relaxing atmosphere of the cellar where your senses are aroused..To end up your evening you will come back for a stroll in the lively streets of Clisson and its valley.

Heritage riches

The Italian dream

The Garenne Lemot park

(French listed Site)

Located between Clisson and Gétigné. It is a French listed site, the Garenne Lemot was born from an artist's dream in love with Italy : Napoleon's official sculptor François-Frédéric Lemot (1771-1827), came here invited by the Cacault brothers, delighted by the site. He was extremely captivated by the place. From his first stay onwards he projected then to make it his retirement estate and thus bought the garenne park for that purpose. This place was the old 13 hectares hunting reserve of the lords of Clisson. Lemot started transforming it from 1811, along with Crucy, a French architect who was impregnated with Italian references .



The main house "Villa Lemot", has got a neo classical architectural style surrounded by a romantic garden, it takes advantages of the steepy valley to overlook clisson thanks to its two mediterranean-like large shady terraces. Barthélemy, François-Frédéric Lemot's son ended up the last external works and the doing up of the inner gallery room.

The gardener's house is the masterpiece of the Italian rustic architecture, it is the very first italian edifice built in the estate. It became the major model for all the architects and local landlords who rebuilt Clisson after the war of Vendée. Actually, it was the residence of Lemot, the main house was hardly built when he died. The house is today the center of the CEPIA (Italian Heritage and architecture resources).

The lower part of the park is dotted with follies like **The Temple of Vesta**, the roman milestone evoking a roman way passing trough the park, the colum of Madrid, antique tomb and altar, Héloïse's grotto and engraved rocks.



We can see in the bed of the river goddess **Diana's baths** with the help of little islets

On the opposite bank : **The greek-like Temple dedicated to friendship, The Column of Henri IV** and the **Obelisk**.

As a former hunting reserve of the Lords of Clisson on its 13 ha range, the Garenne Lemot, holds a charming fauna and flora. Moreover, its naturally sculpted rocks inspired many poets : On one of them can be read « Its indestructible mass overworked time ». You will also appreciate the softness of the river Sevre flowing along this majestic park.

This Italian reference is not exclusive yet. Indeed , the site is also evocating Heloise, the philosopher J.J.Rousseau, the castle of Madrid built by François I^{er} and the medieval times for the ruins of the castle can be seen from each point of view of the park.

Permanent exhibition of the Garenne Lemot : « Clisson ou le retour d'Italie » in the gardener's house. Information : Open everyday from april to september. Closed on Monday the rest of the year. Free entrance. Guided visits on request for groups (33) 240 547 585 Fax :(33) 240 039 922 E-mail : garenne.lemot@cg44.fr , Internet site : www.culture.cg44.fr

The castle of Clisson (French listed Monument)



The Castle of Clisson was built during the XIIIth century upon a rocky height at a strategic point between Anjou and Poitou provinces. It stands for a synthetic work of military architecture. There can be studied the special characteristics of each period and the evolution of a defensive site concept.

It belonged among others to Oliver V of Clisson (1336-1407), great Constable of France. It belonged then to François II of Brittany (Father of Anne of Brittany) who modified its structure to reinforce it as a powerful stronghold and a princely residence.

The Castle has been assaulted many times. During the XVIth C religion war . and during the civil war of Western France in which it has been totally burnt.

In 1807, Frédéric Lemot purchased this monument and undertook a first restoration.

Information : Open every day except on Tuesday.

Guided visits on request for groups (33) 240 547 585

Guided visits in french every day except on Tuesday at 4 pm for individuals in july and august.. every Sunday at 4 pm the rest of the year.

The covered market

(French listed Monument)

Located in the very heart of the city it dates back from the XVth C.. Used as a withdrawal shelter during the war of Vendée, it avoided thus being burnt with the Fire of the city in september 1793. It has been perpetuating the lively tradition of the market for five centuries under the oak and chestnut framework



St James Church

(French inventory listed Monument)

It dates from the Xth or XIth C.. A benedictine priory at the beginning which became a resting place for the pilgrims on the road to St James in Spain.. In that very church the people of Clisson has written their « list of grievances » in 1789 .After the Revolution it became a pagan temple. It has been recently restored and embellished with a medieval garden beside. Since 2004 it has been used as a concert hall and exhibition gallery.



The church of Trinity

French inventory listed Monument)

It dates from the XIth C. Formerly a priory which benedictine nuns from Fontevraud transformed into a convent in the XVIIth C. From those periods remain XIth C romanic pillars a XIIth C towerbell and XVII th C counter Reformation style retable and archways.



The templars chapel

(French listed Monument)

Located in a borough apart, it dates from the end of the XIIth C. It was the main element of the templars commandary which owned also a manor, cultivated lands and a graveyard.

Information : Each year a printingworks workshop and an exhibition about paperpulp industry takes place from june to september. Guided animation in french on request for groups (33) 240 540 295



Valley bridge

(French listed Monument)

Dating from the Middle Ages it first had a drawing bridge replaced lateron by a wooden footbridge. The valley bridge was erected upon the river Sevre by Richard of Etampes (Ann of Brittany's Grandfather) in order to connect the boroughs of saint Anthony and Trinity to the old city of CLISSON. Its wooden parts have been replaced in the XIXth C. It has got six irregular arches and five massive piers with spurs.



Saint Anthony's bridge

(French listed Monument)

It was the main crossing point on the road from Nantes to Poitiers in the Middle Ages.

The river Moine flows underneath its XVth C Gothic arches and a unique pier with a spur.. It is located at the confluence of this river and the river Sevre.



The Garenne Valentin park



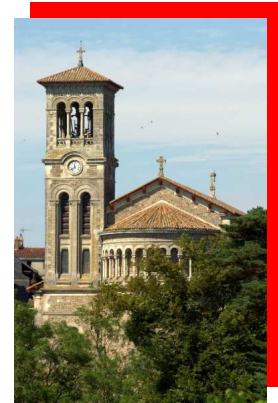
La Garenne Valentin park is set around the old benedictine convent of the Trinity church. This estate has been purchased in 1807 by Jacques-Charles Valentin, Frédéric Lemot's friend. The main building is erected in 1810-1811. The former tower bell of the convent still exists and has been transformed in 1812. The Neo classical front dates from 1811. The folly called « pavillon des Rochers » dates from 1819. All this estate formerly accomodated an

Art collection in an Italian gallery destroyed in 1902.

Our Lady church

Erected after a former Collegial burial church for the Lords of Clisson which had been destroyed during the war of Vendee. It has been rebuilt at the end of the XIXth C in a neo classical style inspired by the church of St John and St Paul in Rome. Inside can be seen a wonderful fresco painted by a native painter called Georges Lusseau.

imitating the Renaissance frescos



The Viaduct



The viaduct of Clisson is built with fifteen elegant arches and piers imitating from beneath Gothic nave. It dates from 1840 and crosses over the river Moine. It's on the road from Nantes to Poitiers and replaced Saint Anthony's bridge. On top of it can be seen the most astounding view of the city..

Remarkable open country industrial heritage.



Clisson valley is lying in a remarkable site where the rivers Sèvre Nantaise, Maine, Moine and Ognon are flowing. They flow down 30 meters into a granite plateau. In the bottom of steepy valleys, they become like torrents which hydraulic strength has been used for a long time by water mills and factories. Thus the level of the river Sevre falls down 15 mètres on a stretch of 7 kilomètres. Upon the rivers were built dams called « chaussée » (carriage way) Some of those were equipped with water mills at their extremities.

Mills

A few wind -mills now abandoned, have been registered and also 17 old water-mills along the river Sevre in our valley. They are the testimony of the development of the hydraulic power from the XIII C onwards.

Gervaux water mill

This old flour water mill is located on the river Sevre. It is still the only one in the région with a machinery able to work..

Guided visits in french on request for groups
(33) 240 540 295. free entrance on heritage days



Paper pulp drying house of le Liveau water mill (gorges)

This building is one of the exceptional monuments built according to the architecture developed in CLISSON . It's ideally situated on the GRP footpath going from clisson to Nantes.

