

History of Chateau Villette

L'histoire, la beauté, l'hospitalité



The luxury rental property, Chateau Villette, possesses a pedigree and history to rival any of the many movies in which it has been featured, including its starring role in the best-selling book, cultural phenomenon, and movie *The Da Vinci Code*, released May 19, 2006.

Le Creation du Chateau Villette

Designated as one of the most significant historical chateaux in France, Villette was designed by Francois Mansart (1598-1666) for the Count of Aufflay, Jean Dyell II, who served as Louis XIV's ambassador to Italy. Upon completion of the design, the construction was led by Jules Hardouin-Mansart (1646-1708), a lead architect for King Louis XIV and the nephew of Francois Mansart. Jules designed the Petit Trianon, the Queen's Staircase and the internationally-famous Hall of Mirrors. This pedigree, in combination with the elegance, beauty and classical design of Chateau de Villette, earned it the designation, "Le Petit Versailles."

Chateau Villette is home to a 185-acre garden – also with design heritage rooted in Versailles. Andre Le Notre, the landscape designer who created the Versailles gardens, is the genius behind Chateau Villette's outdoor retreat. The garden features a formal composition, and showcases two rectangular lakes filled with swans, ducks, birds and fish. In the middle of the lake is a spectacular cascade and fountain, reminiscent of the one at Louis XIV's Chateau Marly. The fountain's central point is a bronze sculpture of Neptune from Saint Ouen. The private garden offers its guests numerous outdoor activities, including horseback-riding, jogging, biking, hunting, pool and tennis.

L'histoire de propriétaires

17th Century: Chateau Villette was constructed for the Count of Auffy (Jean Dyell II) and family.

18th – 19th Century: In the 18th Century, the Grouchy family became owner of the chateau through marriage. Their four children were very prominent at the time. Son Emmanuel de Grouchy (1766-1847) was the top Marshal General for Napoleon and was blamed for Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo. Upon Napoleon's return from exile and subsequent leadership of the Empire, Grouchy was exiled to Philadelphia. He sold Villette in 1818.

Living in Villette, Emmanuel's sister Marquise Marie-Louise-Sophie de Grouchy (1764-1822) was an extraordinary and well educated beauty. Sophie's salon was the meeting place of the brilliant talents of the era. Sophie engaged in a scandalous secret relationship with Marquis La Fayette. This affair was credited for his departure to America, where he became confidant of George Washington and was instrumental in the American Revolution. When Sophie married Marquis de Condorcet in 1786 at the chapel of Villette, La Fayette attended as witness.

Condorcet was head of the Academy of Science for France, an expert of encyclopedia and physics, and talented in philosophy, economy, politics, gardens and literature. He and Sophie entertained the leading minds of the day, including Voltaire, Rousseau and Count de Saint Simon.

It is reported that Thomas Jefferson helped with the writing of the French constitution and had visited Chateau Villette with La Fayette. Condorcet was arrested in 1794 during the French Revolution. To avoid the guillotine Condorcet killed himself in prison with poison given to him by his brother-in-law, noted French physician Pierre-Jean-Georges Cabanis. Sophie thought he had escaped to Switzerland and only learned of his death many months later. She died in 1822.

20th Century: After the Revolution, Villette fell in disrepair. It was occupied by Germans during WW I and II. The German delegation stayed at Villette during the signing of the Treaty of Versailles that ended WW I. The chapel roof was bombed in 1944 and was restored. After the Second World War, the Baron and Baroness Robert Gerard purchased Villette. They restored the garden and the chateau throughout their ownership. When the Baron died in 1998 at age 100, the chateau was for sale, and several well-known prospective buyers inspected the property, including Michael Jackson and Bernard Arnault.

La Propriétaire

Today: international entrepreneur and fine arts connoisseur Olivia Hsu Decker purchased the property in 1999 and completed the updating and restoration of the property. Ms. Decker owns two real estate brokerages focusing exclusively on the luxury home market: Decker Bullock and Olivia Hsu Decker, Inc. She is known as one of the leading luxury properties specialists in the United States, working with an international who's who of artists, actors, wealthy and famous individuals. Ms. Decker was born in Shanghai, China. She lived in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan, and immigrated to San Francisco in 1975. Miss Decker is the leading luxury real estate specialist in United States. After achieved national top agent status at the Merrill Lynch Realty's Fine Homes Division for 8 years, she started her own company Decker Bullock Real Estate Services in 1990 when she completed an International Real Estate Study at University of Oxford, England.

Olivia has been featured in over 50 publications including The Wall Street Journal, USA Today, San Francisco Chronicle and Examiner, Success Magazine, San Francisco Business Times, Nob Hill Gazette and many others.

About Chateau Villette & Sister Property Chateau de Grimaldi

Chateau Villette and Chateau de Grimaldi are both luxury rental properties offered by French Vacation, under the ownership of international entrepreneur and luxury homes specialist Olivia Hsu Decker, partner and co-founder of Decker Bullock (www.deckerbullock.com and www.sanfranciscofinehomes.com), one of North America's leading agencies for exclusive, multi-million dollar residential properties. With ideal locations outside of Paris and in the Provence region, the two luxury estates provide guests with the ultimate in vacation, wedding and special event experiences. The Chateaux offer a myriad of cultural, gourmet, historical and nature activities, as well as special packages in celebration of Chateau de Villette's featured role in the blockbuster movie, *The Da Vinci Code*. For more information, call +1 (415) 435.1600, email villette@frenchvacation.com or visit: www.thedavincicodeChateau.com.