



PALAIS DU RHIN STRASBOURG

■ A former imperial palace inaugurated in 1889, the Palais du Rhin is the home of DRAC Grand Est (Regional Directorate of Cultural Affairs), a decentralised agency of the Ministry of Culture. The headquarters of the Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine (CCNR) are also located in the palace, as is the Cultural Heritage Inventory Department for the Grand Est region.

Under the authority of the Préfet of the Grand Est region, the DRAC is responsible for implementing the priorities identified by the ministry for all sectors: heritage, museums, archives, books and public reading services, music and dance, theatre and performances, scientific and technical culture, the visual arts, cinema and audiovisual art, and cultural democratisation policies (artistic education, city policy, culture/justice, culture/health as well as culture and disability). The Palais du Rhin belongs to the State and, like the Strasbourg Cathedral, falls under the responsibility of the DRAC. These two iconic monuments are maintained, protected, restored and cared for by a range of specialist teams: conservators, engineers, technicians and administrators.

On the European Heritage Days, coordinated at regional level by the DRAC, the Palais du Rhin opens its doors to visitors, who are guided round the building by people who work there.

■ HISTORICAL AND URBAN CONTEXT ■

Under the terms of the Treaty of Frankfurt of 1871, Alsace and the department of Moselle were annexed to the new German Empire.

The new rulers decided that Strasbourg should become both a showcase and a true regional capital, home to the political, military, administrative, religious and scientific institutions. To this end, a plan to extend the city was approved in 1880. Up until the outbreak of World War I, Strasbourg enjoyed a period of significant growth, which was responsible for part of the present look of the city.

A prestigious thoroughfare was built (*Place de la République, Avenue Victor-Schoelcher, Avenue de la Liberté and Place de l'Université*). This route became the site of grand residential buildings, the new premises of the university, the home of the regional administration, the local parliament and an imperial palace.

Building a palace like this was a highly symbolic gesture, as demonstrated by the interest shown by the Chancellor Otto von Bismarck (1815-1898), the laying of the first stone by Emperor Wilhelm I (1815-1888) and the inauguration by his grandson Wilhelm II (1859-1941).

Inspired by the Italian Renaissance and the baroque style, the architect Hermann Eggert designed a huge quadrilateral, with a portico leading to a magnificent central entrance topped with a squared dome.



The Director's office

■ THE PALAIS DU RHIN, A NATIONAL ESTATE ■

Because of its exceptional link with the history of the Nation, the palace and its grounds, including the park and the stables, figure on the first list of the 6 national estates announced officially by the Ministry of Culture in 2017.

Besides the Palais du Rhin this list includes the estates of Chambord and Pau, the Châteaueau d'Angers, the Louvre and the Tuileries, as well as the Elysée Palace.



The stables

■ TIMELINE ■

1883-1889 Construction of the palace by Herman Eggert. The first stone was laid on 22 March 1884, in honour of the birthday of Emperor Wilhelm I. The palace was inaugurated by Wilhelm II during the *Strasbourg Kaiserstagen*, from 20 to 23 August 1889.

1914-1918 The palace was in use as a military hospital.

1919 Under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, the headquarters of the CCNR was transferred from the Mannheim Palace to the imperial palace in Strasbourg, thereafter to be known as the Palais du Rhin.

1940-1944 The palace served as the headquarters of the Kommandatur until 23 November 1944, when General Leclerc established his command post there. On

25 September 1944, aerial bombing damaged the west wing.

1957 There were plans to demolish the building. Its eclectic architectural style had never been universally popular.

1962-1964 The parts damaged during the war were restored.

1968 The original structures of the ballroom were hidden during the work carried out to create an exhibition hall for the School of Architecture which occupied the palace at that time.

1993 Restoration work was carried out in the palace, during which the alterations to the ballroom were removed.

2009 The estate as a whole was officially classified as an historic monument (the initial decree dated from 1977).

2017 The palace was elevated to the status of a national estate. The Neustadt quarter was designated a UNESCO World Heritage site.



View from the loggia

■ THE ARCHITECTURE ■

The architectural design of the Palais du Rhin befits its status as the residence of the sovereign. It thus combines a highly symbolic statement with the provision of accommodation in accordance with the etiquette and customs of the day. Nevertheless, the project was limited by the fact that it would only occasionally be occupied by the Emperor, accompanied on such visits by a reduced court. It consists of the palace, bounded on three sides by a park, and a secondary building on a separate plot, to act as stables, carriage house and living quarters for the concierge.

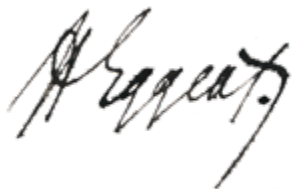
In keeping with tradition, the first floor is given over to representative functions and the Emperor's apartments. In the centre, at the front of the building, is the main audience room, off which are the apartments of the Emperor and Empress (audience room, reception room, private sitting room). The private rooms (bedrooms, dressing rooms, servants' quarters, etc.) are on the short

sides of the building. At the rear of the palace is the public reception area, with a suite of three adjoining rooms: the dining room, the ballroom (the only one remaining) and the assembly room. The ground floor incorporates a variety of functions. Facing the square are two apartments for use by the princes (one for a bachelor and the other for a couple), while the areas devoted to domestic affairs and the running of the palace are located to the rear and in the centre. The servants' working and living quarters are spread across the four floors.

Since 1919 the Palais du Rhin has undergone a number of transformations, most notably as a result of the change to a public service building and the damage suffered during World War II. It remains an outstanding example of late 19th century European palace architecture, with its concepts of symbolic representation, *art de vivre*, style and the technology used in the construction and equipment.

■ THE ARCHITECT HERMANN EGGERT ■

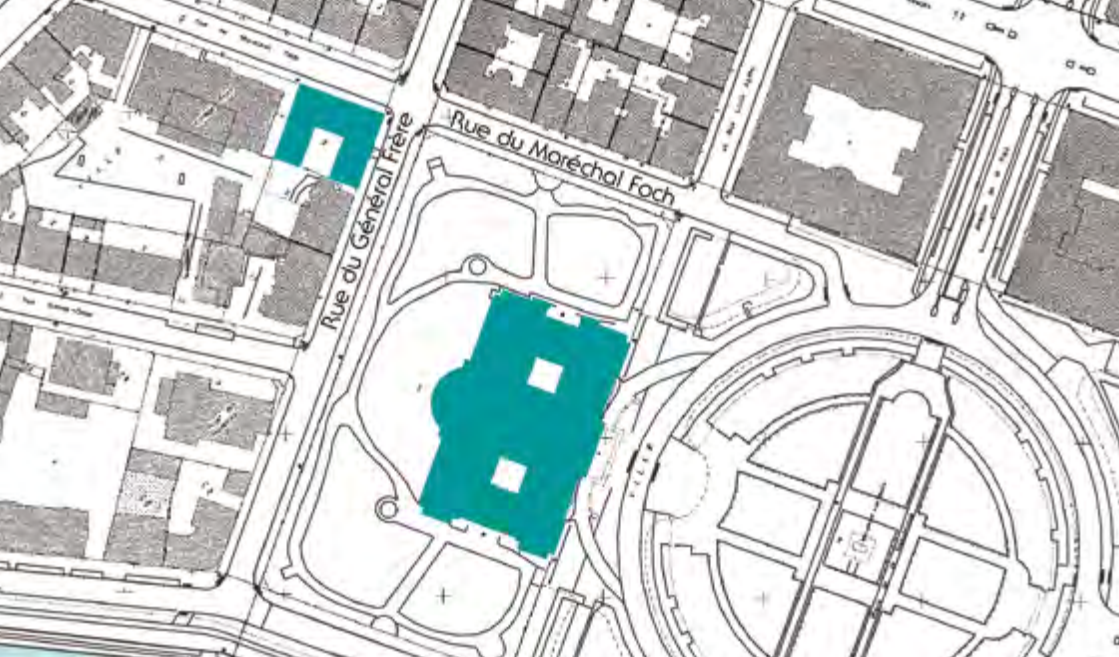
Trained at the Berlin Bauakademie, Hermann Eggert (1844-1920) held various posts in the architectural services of the German Empire (Berlin, Strasbourg). After becoming a government architect, in 1875 he was appointed architect to the University of Strasbourg. He designed public buildings for cities including Berlin, Frankfurt am Main and Hanover. In Strasbourg he designed the overall plans for the new university, as well as the plans for several buildings intended to house scientific institutes.



■ TECHNICAL INSTALLATIONS ■

A pulsed air heating system was incorporated into the imperial palace during its construction. Seven coal-fired furnaces installed on the ground floor heat the cold air, which is then directed into each of the rooms of the palace by means of ducts built into the walls.

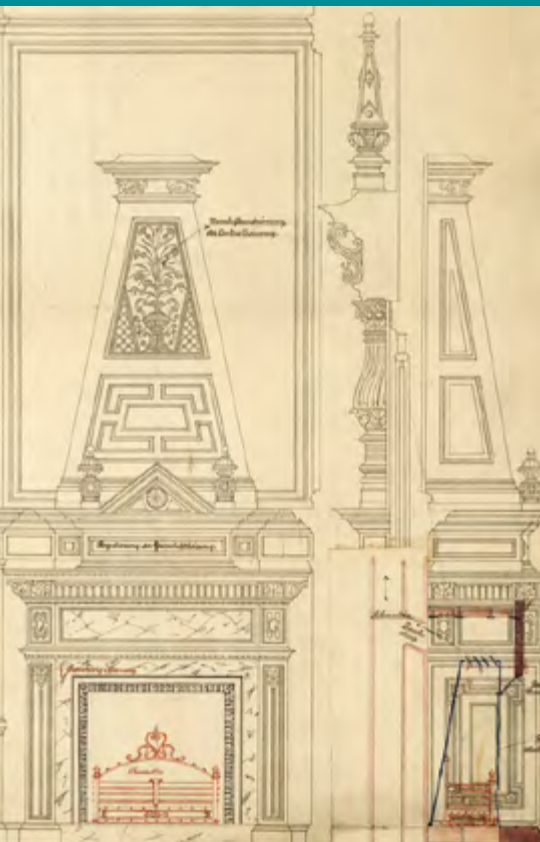
Control valves activate a system of metal dampers, allowing the temperature of each room to be regulated. In the Emperor's sitting room, this system is integrated into the furnishings.



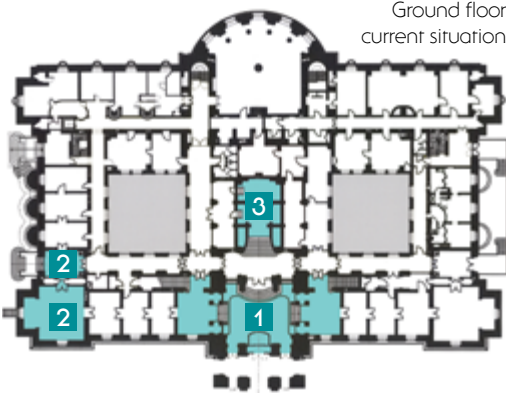
■ THE SYMBOLISM OF THE EXTERIOR DECORATION ■

All the facades and the upper sections are adorned with a wide variety of symbolic and ornamental decoration, of which only part has survived. It was intended to glorify the German Empire and the ruling Hohenzollern family.

The principal element is the sculptured decoration of the central portico, which symbolises the sovereignty of the Empire over Alsace and Lorraine.



■ GROUND FLOOR ■



1 Vestibule In the centre of the coffered ceiling of the entrance hall, the Imperial eagle and the motto of the Hohenzollerns – *Vom Fels zum Meer* (From the rock to the sea) - greet the visitor. On the sides of the main entrance hall are two raised vestibules, which lead to the ground floor apartments for the princes. **2** On the south side, the corner salon is now the office of the Regional Director of Cultural Affairs.

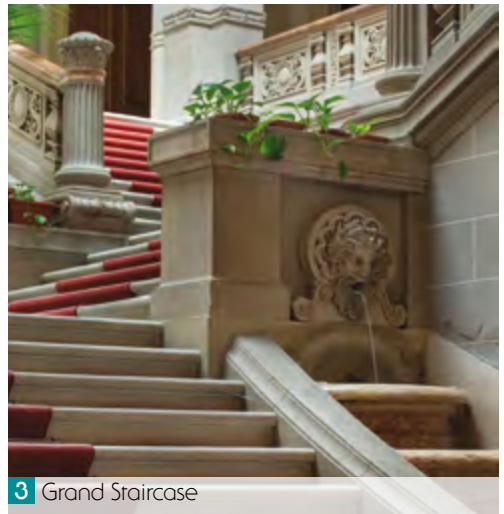


2 Detail of decor from the prince's apartments

■ 1ST FLOOR ■

4 Ballroom When the palace was built, a dining room led off the ballroom, to the left. This dining room was irreparably damaged during World War II. To the right was an assembly room, now partitioned and converted into offices. However, the painted decorations have been preserved above the false ceiling. The reception area occupied the whole of the wing which overlooks the park.

3 Grand Staircase Designed in the tradition of Italian palaces and German baroque castles, the staircase is at the heart of the building and consists of seven flights. Natural light comes from the covered glass roof and the large windows that overlook the two internal courtyards. The allegorical figures of Justice, Wisdom, Fortitude and Temperance are depicted on the panels of the arches overlooking the staircase, facing each other on the east and west sides. The Middle Ages and the Renaissance provided the inspiration for the decoration surrounding the windows of the stairwell. A medallion, held aloft by two gryphons, displays the coat of arms of Alsace whilst a marching medallion bears the coat of arms of Lorraine.



3 Grand Staircase

5 Emperor's Bedroom This modestly sized room is used as an office.

6 Emperor's Sitting Room This room is decorated in German Renaissance style, as illustrated by the consoles, with their carved heads of cherubs and bearded old men, and the use of inlaid panels adorned with eagles and helmets. The walls are covered in gold embossed wallpaper, with red highlights and a floral motif, which echoes

the decoration on the grille of the fireplace. The DRAC Grand Est holds its working meetings in this room.

7 Emperor's Reception Room The decoration on the ceiling of the reception room includes cameos, bas-reliefs, small portrait medallions and vases on an antique red background. The central motif is surrounded by Roman gods: Pluto, Juno, Mars, Jupiter, Diana and Mercury. A frieze of Prussian eagles on a gold background acts as a frame for the chariots inspired by Ancient Rome.

Today this room is used by the Dutch delegation of the CCNR.

8 Emperor's Anteroom The geometric coffered ceilings are a digest of decorative vocabulary. They are highlighted in vivid colours: green, red and gold. The small medallions on an antique red background are indicative of a meticulous love for detail. A frieze of medallions bearing imperial eagles is a tribute to the nature of the person for whom the apartment is intended.

Today this room is used by the Belgian and Swiss delegations of the CCNR.

9 Audience Room The design of the audience room incorporates a key notion of Renaissance architecture: a central space and a cupola. Its solemn nature is reinforced by the galleries supported on columns of red marble. The restoration work carried out in 1977 revealed the four paintings in the corner panels of a goddess of victory

4 Ballroom (1918)



6 Emperor's Sitting Room

greeting the still hidden portraits of Great Elector Friedrich Wilhelm, Kings Friedrich I and Friedrich II and the Emperor Wilhelm I. Each is accompanied by his motto, which can still be seen: *Suum cuique* (To each his own), *Olivia lauro potior* (Victory is worth more than glory), *Deus fortitude mea* (God is my strength), *Allweg guet Zolre* (Long live the Hohenzollerns).

10 Empress's Anteroom The decoration here is mainly concentrated in the coffered ceiling, with its flowers and birds, cartouches and cameo medallions painted on a light background. In this anteroom, as in the other rooms used by the Empress, the walls were lined with silk.

This room is used by the German delegation of the CCNR.

11 Empress's Reception Room

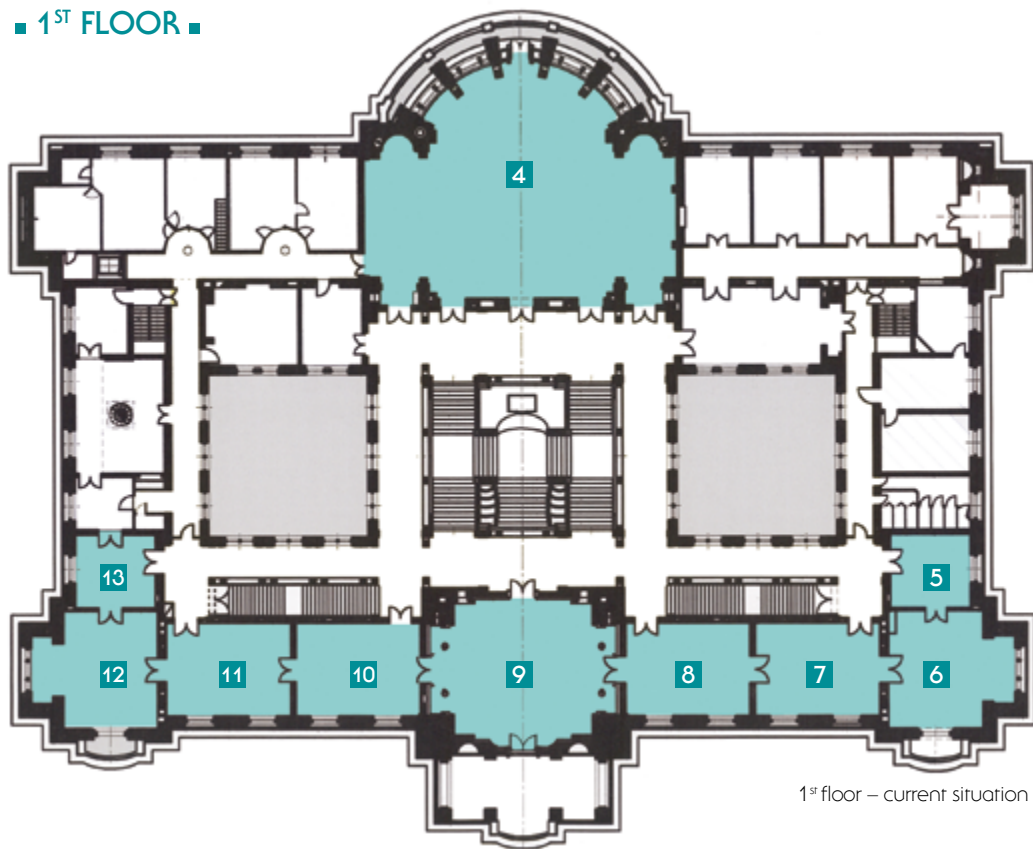
This room is used by the French delegation of the CCNR.

12 Empress's Sitting Room The rococo decor contrasts with the style of the rest of the palace. The putti perched atop the mirror over the fireplace are holding the monogram of Empress Augusta. The landscapes above the doors, together with most of the painted decoration in the palace, are attributed to Johann Matthäus Keuffel. The four corner medallions depict feminine virtues and occupations: maternal love and charity, embroidery and spinning.

This room is the office of the Secretary General of the CCNR.

The empress's bedroom **13** which adjoins this room, is decorated in the same style.

■ 1ST FLOOR ■



1st floor – current situation


**PREFET
 DE LA RÉGION
 GRAND EST**

*Liberté
 Égalité
 Fraternité*

Direction régionale
 des affaires culturelles

Ministère de la Culture
 DRAC Grand Est
 Palais du Rhin
 2 place de la République
 67082 Strasbourg cedex

www.culture.gouv.fr/Regions/Drac-Grand-Est

Authority responsible for this publication: Isabelle Chardonner, Regional Director of Cultural Affairs Grand Est ■ © Photos Claude Menninger ■ © Plans DRAC Grand Est, Denkmalarchiv ■ © Graphic design La rainette loquace ■ © Impression Print Europe ■ September 2025■