

History of the Brunet Villa

Once upon a time...



musée des
Avelines

SAINT-CLOUD

The museum of Avelines is a museum of art and history of Saint-Cloud, which was opened in 1988 in an old villa which belonged to Daniel Brunet (1882-1943), who was known in the business world as Alfred Daniel-Brunet, an industrialist who made a fortune in the pharmaceutical field. Built in the 30s, this house is a reminder of the past of the Saint-Cloud resort, a town which is close to Paris, but also located in the countryside, where people liked to recharge their batteries.

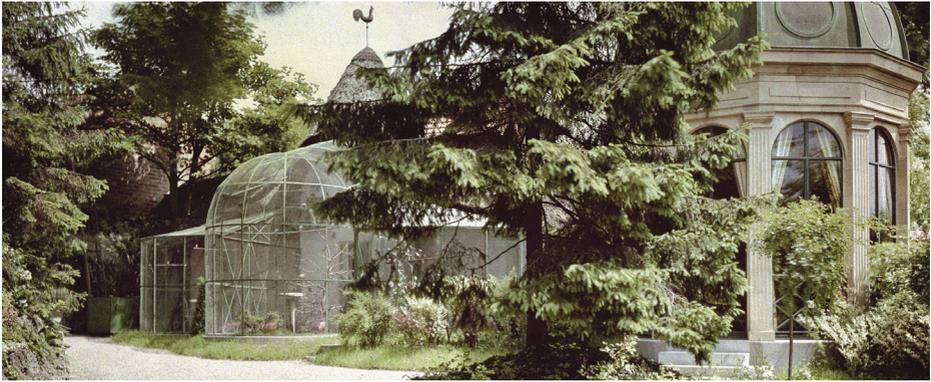


Daniel Brunet

Daniel Brunet made his fortune by founding a business of chemical and biological products - first in Paris and then in Boulogne-Billancourt, offering, in particular, the sale of sea water ampoules to compensate for micronutrient deficiencies. The success of his laboratory allowed Daniel Brunet to use his fortune to acquire works of art, mainly from the Napoleonic era.

In 1935, Brunet decided to build a house in Saint-Cloud to store his collections, some of which came from the Château de Grand Vaux in Savigny-sur-Orge. He bought a plot of 10,368 m² between the Boulevard de la République and Gounod Street, and turned to architect Louis Mouro for the construction of a large villa.

Daniel Brunet and his dog - Personal collection of Mr. Varenne-Caillard, descendant of Suzanne Brunet © Laure Albin Guillot.



The aviary and kiosk, in the 30s.

The house of Madame & Monsieur Brunet

Brunet House atrium - Personal collection of Mr. Yvergne-Cailhard, descendant of S. Brunet, circa 1973.



This immaculate white house, called « the little white house », borrows its Doric columns supporting the atrium, from Greco-Roman antiquity. This space is the heart of the house and makes it special. Everything is well organised, but without any respect for symmetry. The house, hidden from view by many shady trees, benefits from a large park where one can also find a swimming pool with its temple of love, a kiosk, and an aviary (exterior facades were renovated in 2016). Animals, such as geese, storks, fawns or wild pigs, roam freely, and a rose garden completes this surprising scenery.



The pool and its temple of love, in the 30s.



Geese in the Brunet Garden.



The rose garden.



The rotunda represents the 1930s works of Henry Caro-Delvaillle.

The atrium, the main entrance to the house, is characterised by excessiveness and is obviously intended to impress the guests. The dome, which is more than 12 metres in height, opens to the light, overlooking a fountain where we find a bronze Dancing Faun statue - a copy of that at the house of the Faun of Pompeii. Facing the entrance, it welcomes visitors. This fountain itself is placed at the centre of a mosaic representing the twelve signs of the zodiac, as well as the word « Xaïpe », meaning « welcome » in Greek. Finally, pilasters of black stucco veined with white invite the visitor to look up to the dome. This atrium is inspired by the villa Kerylos in Beaulieu-sur-Mer where the pharmacist, invited by Théodore Reinach, went at the end of the nineteenth century.

It also reminds the black background of the province of Siena ripples.

To complete the decor of this monumental entrance, Brunet fills the entire space between the pilasters with nine panels painted on pasteboard by the artist Henry Caro-Delvaillle (1876-1928), which represented dance scenes inspired by antiquity. Two of these works were found on the art market and were acquired by the museum in 2017.

Some photographs bear witness to the beauty of the garden and the splendour of the house, where Daniel Brunet and his wife, Suzanne, used to live. One can appreciate a taste of the aesthetics from the time of the Directory and the First Empire, and its sensitivity for art, sculptures and paintings filling the spaces in abundance.

Daniel Brunet died in 1943 in a car accident, leaving his wife alone in the big house; and she lived there until 1978, when she decided to sell it because it had become too difficult for her to maintain the property. The mayor of Saint-Cloud at that time, Jean-Pierre Fourcade, was personally alerted by the Clodoaldian doctor Maurice Dervillé, who, during his frequent visits to Madame Brunet's bedside, realised that this magnificent villa and its gardens were likely to be sold to developers and simply cease to exist. Using its right of pre-emption and wishing to protect the property and its park from real estate developers, the town bought them in 1979. But the abandoned house deteriorated over the years.



Screenshots of *Tout feu, tout flammes* (All fired up), a film by JP Rappeneau, 1981 - Copyright: © 1981 Philippe Dussart/ECC / FRJ / Filmedis

The villa in the movies

In 1981, the movie makers looking for a cinematographic location, target this house, and a first film here is shot : All fired up by Jean-Paul Rappeneau, with Isabelle Adjani, Lauren Hutton and Yves Montand. In this movie, the house is a casino on the shores of Lake Geneva.



G.Chaplin, the 1st floor of the Brunet house - G. Lazure Pictures and Images; in the centre of the rotunda of the Brunet house - Photography of Love on the Ground, a film by Jacques Rivette, 1983 - © Moune Jamet, a French film photographer, *The Beautiful Prisoner*, a film by A. Robbe-Grillet, 1983 - © C. Robbe-Grillet. Source: -Alain Robbe-Grillet toronto / IMEC Images.

The villa, particularly recognisable by its majestic rotunda, was also the setting for Alain Robbe-Grillet's *La Belle Captive* (*The Beautiful Prisoner*), starring Cyrielle Clair and Daniel Mesgüich, shot in 1983. The same year, it was Jacques Rivette who decided to shoot his film *L'Amour par terre* (*Love on the Ground*) with Jane Birkin and André Dussolier, here.

With each new film, the house changes its face, and the decorators rethink its parts by changing their functions and environment. As a result, the house was considerably damaged, as decorators were not required to restore it at the end of the filming.

In 1986, the town decided to install a museum dedicated to local history in the Brunet villa and entrusted the renovation of the building to architect François Hacq.



The rotunda in 2008, after the 1988 modifications made by the architect F. Hacq.

A museum since 1988

The museum required the rethinking of the entire building in order to rehabilitate it and, above all, to make it a welcoming place for the town's collections. The architect changed the entrance, placing it at the south end, in order to convert the rotunda into a separate room. He whitewashed the salmon pink columns, restored the mosaic floor, and condemned the fountain. He also moved the bay windows to remove the balcony, creating a passage through which visitors could still walk. He had also restored the dining room, which today is called « Voizard » room, in the spirit of the Brunet period. Its beautiful inlaid parquet floor, as well as the ceiling mouldings, are original, while the wall paintings are inspired by the old decorations.

Two other restoration phases complete the building's history. The first one, in 2008, rethought the museography of the place in a dynamic and colourful spirit. The permanent collections, previously installed only upstairs, are now also deployed on the ground floor.



Voizard room in 2008.

The second phase of the work, in the following year, was aimed at restoring the museum's rotunda with the help of original photographs and research. The columns have now regained their black marble stucco veined with white, the basin of the fountain and its *Dancing Faun* have taken their original place. As for the staircase, it has regained its original colour and its ripples inspired by Greco-Roman antiquity. In 2010, this restoration was awarded Heritage Ribbons.



Research for the rehabilitation of the rotunda in 2009.



View of the rotunda in 2011 - © G. Plagnol / town of Saint-Cloud.



Replica of Faun in resin - © G. Plagnol / town of Saint-Cloud.

Thus, the villa from its private ownership was transferred to public hands. The ambition of the museum of Avelines, which currently represents the museum of art and history of Saint-Cloud, is to turn this enchanting place into the « House Museum », in order to preserve the charm of the old building. The restaurant - tea room, in the heart of the rotunda, brings a final gourmet touch to this journey through time and history.



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Cover: the so-called room Volzard 30s - 4th floor - Living room 30s
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