

## 📖 Topic Page: [Palace of Versailles](#)

Definition: **Versailles Palace** from *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*



The baroque palace and parterre of Versailles, France (built 1661–87). The palace was built for Louis XIV (on the site of a hunting lodge) to a design by the architect Louis Le Vau, with later enlargements and alterations by Hardouin-Mansart. It became the residence of the French kings from 1678 to 1769.

(Image © Corel)

### articles

Le Vau, Louis

Versailles

Louis XIV

France

Hardouin-Mansart, Jules



Image from: [France, Palace of Versailles, Detail of allegory of Seine river by Le Brun and forged by Keller brothers in Bridgeman Images: DeAgostini Library](#)

### Summary Article: **Palace of Versailles**

From *Key Buildings from Prehistory to the Present*

Louis XIV of France (1638–1715), known as the Sun King, is Europe's most potent emblem of absolute monarchy. He came to the throne at the age of four, on the death of his father, but took up the reins of power at 15, when he was crowned. His mother had been a Hapsburg princess, born in Spain but known as Anne of Austria, and in 1660 Louis married one of her relatives, Maria Theresa of Spain. He went on to outlive his expected heirs, so it was his great-grandson who succeeded him as Louis XV.

The old feudal order, which had seen the king of France brokering power between dukes who were sometimes richer and more powerful than he was, had already been supplanted by something closer to a modern nation-state.

The French nobility opposed this reduction in their powers, however, and between 1648 and 1653 there was a rumbling of dissent called La Fronde, which was quashed – but which signalled the kind of problem that the Palace of Versailles was designed to defuse.

The noble families had *hôtels particuliers* (their own palaces) in Paris as well as the landed estates that produced their wealth. To maintain influence when the court moved to Versailles, they had to rent apartments in the palace. They were required to be in residence for part of each year and, while there, to act deferentially towards the king. On their estates they might be lords, but at Versailles they were the king's servants.

A hunting lodge once belonging to Louis XIII had been vastly extended to create the Palace of Versailles. Court ritual even penetrated the elegant gardens that spread out as far as the eye could see. There were broad avenues and planes of water, populated with statuary and animated by fountains, all bearing witness to the king's magnificence and his position at the centre of the things.

Inside the palace, the state rooms included the Galerie des Glaces (Hall of Mirrors), which ran the whole length of the garden façade of the central block. Now that large mirrors are relatively commonplace, it is difficult to imagine the astonishing impact this room made when it was unveiled. The epitome of glamour and opulence, it was used for celebrations and the reception of ambassadors, and each day the king walked through it on his way to chapel, hearing requests from courtiers as he went.

Extraordinary rituals were associated with the king's bedchamber, where the most trusted courtiers (who sometimes paid for the privilege) would put the king to bed and ensure that, wherever he had actually slept, he was in the same bed in the morning to be woken for the ceremonial *levée*. In addition to his 'private apartment', which included this rather public bedchamber, there was a 'small apartment' where Louis could be genuinely offstage, with his own books and collections of medals and curiosities. It included a billiards room, Louis's wardrobe and his wig room.

The sophistication and sumptuousness of the buildings' appearance – gilded decoration, silver furniture that was melted down to help pay for battles – and the courtliness of the ritual was undermined by the indignities meted out to the nobility by the complete lack of sanitation. Standards were different in those days but, even so, Versailles's provision fell below what might have been expected. This cannot have been an oversight. Versailles operated as a political machine par excellence, and such an expedient reminded everyone that they were not at home and, while in the palace, were not in charge of even the most basic aspects of their life.

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Palace of Versailles. (2013). In A. Ballantyne, *Key buildings from prehistory to the present: plans, sections and elevations*. London, UK: Laurence King. Retrieved from [https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/palace\\_of\\_versailles](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/palace_of_versailles)

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## Harvard

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"Palace of Versailles." *Key Buildings from Prehistory to the Present*, Andrew Ballantyne, Laurence King, 1st edition, 2013. *Credo Reference*, [https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/palace\\_of\\_versailles](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/palace_of_versailles). Accessed 21 Oct. 2019.