

FÉNIS CASTLE

HISTORY



Fénis castle dominates a portion of territory which, since the 12th century, had been under the jurisdiction of the lords of Challant, viscounts of Aosta.

The choice of a site lacking in natural defence prerogatives, contrary to the strategic criteria which determined how the older castle of the Aosta Valley were situated, was perhaps justified by the pre-existence

of settlements in this area since Roman times.

The castle is the synthesis of various successive building campaigns, from the late 12th century up to the 15th century. The first explicit mention of the castle dates back to 1242, when it was enfeoffed to Gotofredo of Challant and its brothers.

The most important structural works of transformation took place in the 14th century, under the lordship of Aimone of Challant, the result of which gave the castle its present appearance. The period of greatest splendour at the castle coincided with that of the Challants' maximum financial and political success.

Aimone's son Bonifacio I, who held high-ranking military and diplomatic positions at the court of Savoy, promoted a new building campaign to adapt the austere stronghold to the requirements of courtly lifestyle. During this campaign the courtyard and the chapel were adorned with superb frescoed decorations.

During the second quarter of the century, the son Bonifacio II commissioned to Giacomino of Ivrea to do the pictorial decoration on the east wall of the courtyard.

Since then, the castle did not undergo any further significant alterations, save for those caused by the progressive decline of the Challant family from the second half of the 15th century.

At the beginning of the 18th century the castle was in a state of abandon. In 1716 Count Georges-François, the last heir to Fénis, was obliged to sell the castle, which passed then through the hands of various proprietors and was turned into a farmhouse.

In the second half of the 19th century the architect Alfredo d'Andrade, a leading exponent of the Piedmontese cultural movement of neo-Gothic tendency, became interested in this monument and made a survey of its architectural and decorative details. In 1895 he bought the castle and, having restored its more deteriorated parts, in 1906 he donated it to the State.



The neo-Gothic revival, promoted in the thirties by the Minister De Vecchi, also affected Fénis castle which became the object of rather heavy-handed restoration work between 1936 and 1942 aimed at accentuating its medieval appearance. These works, directed by the architect Mesturino, included the arbitrary integration of the double line of curtain walls making it almost impossible to recognize the original structures.

The pieces of furniture in the castle are not original but purchased during the 20th century from antiquarians. Of all the furniture acquired, only a small part is actually from the Aosta Valley. In 2001 the furniture was

collocated in different rooms by following significant grouping criteria like the typology, the period and the origin of each piece.

THE DEFENSIVE APPARATUS

The castle appears as a stronghold, so designed to underline its defensive aptitude and the prestige of the Challant family.

It is surrounded by a double concentric line of curtain walls with watchtowers which are inter-connected by a battlemented parapet for the garrison rounds.

The present entrance and the external walls date from the 1930s; the original entrance, probably on the west side and protected by the keep, led into the first ward.

The approach to the residential block of the castle is therefore rather like a labyrinth, organised strategically, compartment by compartment, under the constant control of the towers.

THE RESIDENTIAL EDIFICE

The central residential block of the castle is in the shape of an irregular pentagon, with round towers on the corners and square towers at the centre of the longer sides; the tower on the east side is equipped with a portcullis to defend the passage into the inner courtyard.

The basement contained the cellars; the ground floor was assigned to the various services of the castle: the large entrance hall (*grande salle basse*) was occupied by the guard; other rooms were used as stockroom, whereas the kitchen is identifiable by the colossal fireplace.

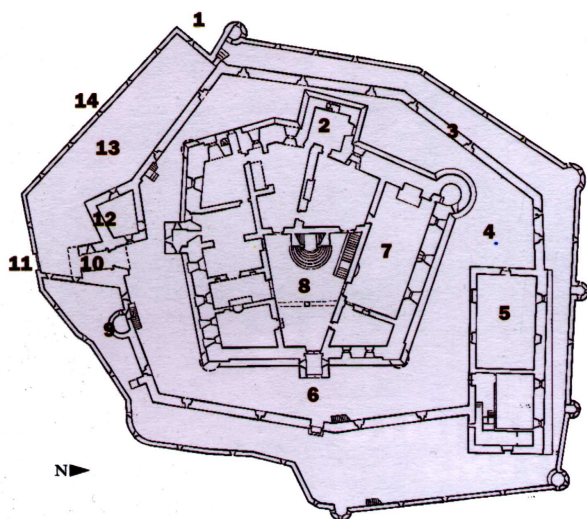
The lord of the manor's residence was on the first floor together with the main rooms of state, the great hall containing the frescoed chapel.

The servant's quarters, the guest-rooms and the granary were on the second floor.

THE FRESCOES

There is a representation of *St. George freeing the princess* on the wall of the stairway in the courtyard; along the walls of the "loggiato" there's a series of *Saggi* (wise men) bearing a scroll with a *motto* in old French. The cycle continues in the chapel with the *Crucifixion* which formed the background of the altar and *Our Lady of Mercy* sheltering some members of the Challant family under the mantle; above these and along the side walls there are full-length figures of the *apostles* and various *saints*.

The achievements of such an imposing cycle must have involved a number of artists; Bonifacio of Challant chose a workshop which adhered to the international Gothic style. The model of inspiration was that of Giacomo Jaquerio the principal artist at the court of Savoy during the reign of Amedeo VIII.



- 1 - Original entrance
- 2 - keep
- 3 - Inner walls
- 4 - Inner ward
- 5 - stables
- 6 - entrance to the residential block
- 7 - entrance hall
- 8 - inner courtyard
- 9 - dovecote tower
- 10 - barbican at the entrance
- 11 - present entrance
- 12 - archaic tower
- 13 - outer ward
- 14 - outer walls

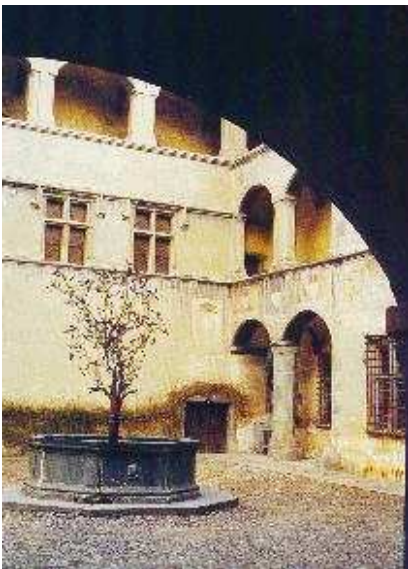
CASTLE OF ISSOGNE



Formerly owned by the bishops of Aosta before restoration work was commissioned by Ibleto of Challant around 1400, the castle of Issogne took on its definitive appearance between the years 1490 and 1510 when George of Challant, Protonotary Apostolic and Prior of St Orso, restored it and converted it into a sumptuous residence for his cousin Marguerite de la Chambre and her son Philibert. Issogne is no longer a medieval castle but rather a Renaissance residence without any external signs of ostentation, its corner towers being only

slightly higher than the roof of the building.

Inside, the entrance and portico are adorned with frescos in the lunettes of the arches, representing scenes of everyday life - the tailor's shop, the apothecary's shop, the baker and butcher's shop, the guardroom, the fruit and vegetable market, the cheesemonger and pork-butcher can all be distinguished.



In the centre of the courtyard, the façades of which are entirely decorated with the nuptial coats of arms of the Challant family, is the famous wrought-iron pomegranate fountain.

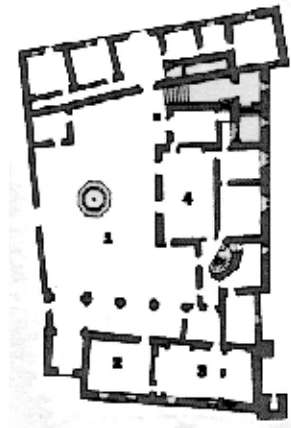
The castle has about 50 rooms. Open to visitors on the ground floor is the dining-room, where the only means of communication with the kitchen is an opening made for plates under the hood. The kitchen comprises three large fireplaces and is divided in two by a double vault, one part reserved for the nobility and the other for the servants. In the baron's hall, apart from its beautiful stone fireplace with hood bearing the Challant coat of arms between a lion and a griffin, also to be admired are the paintings on the wooden ceiling beams and the frescos on the walls depicting landscapes, hunting scenes and Paris' decision.

On the first floor is the chapel with its finely decorated pointed vaults, frescoed walls and Gothic style altar of engraved, gilded wood adorned with a Flemish school triptych. Wooden railings separate the area reserved for the nobility from that of the servants. The Countess's bedroom with adjoining oratory adorned with paintings and Count René's bedroom are also on this floor.

On the second floor is the room of the King of France with coffered ceiling and fireplace bearing the royal coat of arms with background of gilded lilies and the motto "Vive le Roi". Also on this floor is a room known as the room of the Knights of St Maurice, with its beautiful coffered ceiling on which the cross of this order has been painted.

The castle passed from the hands of the Challant family to the Madruzzo family and back again to the Challant family after a legal battle for succession which lasted more than a century. Various other changes of ownership then followed before the castle was bought in 1872 by the painter Vittorio Avondo, who restored it and donated it to the State in 1907. Today the castle belongs to the Regional Authorities.

THE GROUND FLOOR



The courtyard. The Pomegranate fountain stands in the centre. The walls feature a monumental composition of the House of Challant's principal coats-of-arms (*Miroir*). The frescoed lunettes in the arcade are a remarkably realistic representation of daily life in the village. Numerous graffiti can be detected on the frescoes; these date from the 15th to the 19th-century. The benches belong to the original furniture of the castle.

THE DINING HALL. Vittorio Avondo dedicated particular attention to the furnishing of this large hall with magnificent tableware, cutlery and glassware, which he ordered to be copied from late-Gothic originals.

3- **THE KITCHEN.** The kitchen is divided into two distinct areas by a wooden railing and the cooking procedures are similar to the Middle-age one

4- **THE HALL OF JUSTICE.** This is the main reception area of the castle. The splendid pictorial decoration simulates a continuous open gallery supported on

crystal, alabaster and marble pillars, alternated by sumptuous leather wall-hangings. A variety of landscapes, animated by hunting figures and scenes of court or peasant life, forms the background. On one wall, there is a representation of the *Judgment of Parid*; Giorgio of Challant's coat-of-arms is depicted on the chimney-breast. The stalls are in "flamboyant" Gothic-style.

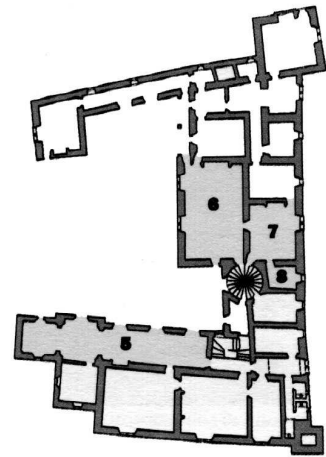
THE FIRST FLOOR

5- **THE CHAPEL.** It has five arched-spans and the presbytery is delimited by a wooden railing. The frescoes and the doors of the polyptych are attributed to the same "maestro" who worked on the lunettes in the arcade (identified as "maître Colin"). The altar with doors, is the original 16th-century one that Vittorio Avondo recuperated in Verrès.

6- **THE ARMOURY.** This was called the "salle de Savoie" in the 1565 inventory. Shown here is what remains of Vittorio Avondo's collection of antique weapons.

7- **MARGHERITA DE LA CHAMBRE'S ROOM.** The name alludes to the recurring coat-of-arms (now partly erased) in the upper frieze along the walls. The Bed is a copy of the one in the "King of France" Salon.

8- **MARGHERITA DE LA CHAMBRE'S ORATORY.** This little room has frescoes of the *Assumption of the Virgin* and the *Martyrdom of the Saints Catherine and Margherite*.



SECOND FLOOR

9- **GIORGIO OF CHALLANT'S ROOM.** The crosses of St. Maurice decorate the coffered-ceilings. The Giorgio of Challant coat-of-arms, supported on each side by the heraldic lion and the gryphon, decorates the chimney-breast.

10- **GIORGIO OF CHALLANT'S ORATORY.** The frescoes represent scenes of the *Crucifixion* and the *Deposition in the Holy Sepulchre* and the *Pietà*

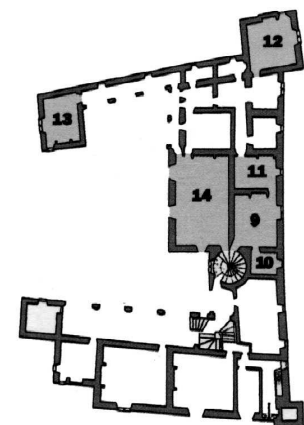
11- **GIORGIO OF CHALLANT'S STUDY.** This is a small passage-room with a coffered-ceiling

12- **THE TOWER ROOM.** This room has an exceptional view on the valley, which lends to the tradition that it was used for signal-making.

13- **THE YOUNG COUNTESS' ROOM.**

14- **THE "KING OF FRANCE" SALON.** Remarkable for its decoration and furnishings, this hall takes its name from the coat-of-arms with the three carved lilies of the French crown that decorates the recesses of the coffered-ceiling and the chimney-breast.

On the way out, a beautiful stone spiral-staircase (*vivet*) connects the central structure to the east wing of the castle. This is an architectural masterpiece.



VERRES CASTLE

HISTORY



Ibleto of Challant's castle

The military and strategic prerogatives of the site chosen for this stronghold were ideal; built on the top of a precipitous crag overlooking the mountain torrent Evançon, it dominates the village of Verrès and controls both the entrance to the Challant-Ayas valley and the main regional road.

The feudal jurisdiction of the territory was granted in 1372 to Ibleto di Challant, Governor and Capt. General of Piedmont, in the service of the dukes of Savoy for over 40 years. The castle was entirely rebuilt thanks to this great military leader. He wanted to achieve a castle of totally innovative conception – one that would reflect his power and prestige – and so the Verrès stronghold became the first example of a castle to be built in one compact block,



thus anticipating the Renaissance model.

“Vive Introd et Madame de Challant!”

This massive mono-block structure, each wall of which measures around 30 meters in length, is crowned by a rather compact line of corbels which sustains the battlement (now roofed).

Above a door which leads from the great staircase to the first floor, an inscription in Gothic black-letter, dated 1390, bears witness to the building campaign ordered by Ibleto of Challant.

Ibleto died in 1409 and was succeeded by his son Francesco, who died in 1442 without a male heir. In vain, his daughters Caterina and Margherita strove to maintain the noble title which, following to a lawsuit, was granted to Giacomo of Challant-Aymavilles in 1456.

Tradition holds that on the feast of the Holy Trinity in the year 1449, in order to gain the favour of the local population, Caterina, together with her husband Pierre d'Introd, descended from the castle to the public square in Verrès, where she joined in the dancing with the young villagers, amidst a rejoicing crowd; this episode is re-enacted in the pageantry of the historical carnival held annually in Verrès.

Renato of Challant's fortress



In 1536 Renato of Challant had the military apparatus renewed, thus adapting the manor to the use of the latest firearms. The enceinte was built at this time and fortified with battlements, spurred buttresses and with militarized polygonal turrets suitable for the use of cannons and muskets: a gatehouse and a drawbridge were built to fortify the entrance and loopholes were opened in the external walls.

New cross windows, in addition to the existing Gothic-style stone mullions with one or two lights, and new Moresque-style arched doors (of evident Spanish influence) were put in and the interior of the castle was enhanced with new furniture. When Renato of Challant died in 1565 without a male

heir, the castle was incorporated into the Savoy estate.

In 1661, Duke Carlo Emanuele II ordered the weaponry of the castle to be dismantled and transferred to the fortress of Bard – situated in a central, strategic position for the defence of the Aosta Valley.

The 19TH-CENTURY RESTORATION

The Challant regained the possession of the stronghold in 1696 and maintained it up to the extinction of their lineage at the 19th century.

At that time, the castle had been abandoned for almost two centuries: the roof, already partly caved in, had been completely demolished in order to avoid the payment of rates with the result that the upper floors, exposed to the elements – were invaded by weeds and rubble. The owners that followed in the course of the 19th century did nothing about the dilapidated state of the building which seemed destined to be demolished.

As in the case of the castle at Issogne and Fénis, Verrès castle was saved thanks to a group of Piedmontese intellectuals who shared a passion for the Middle Ages, and in particular thanks to the architect Alfredo d'Andrate, who had the more urgently needed repair work carried out so as to avoid ulterior and irreversible damage.

In 1894 he finally succeeded in purchasing the castle on behalf of the State and then proceeded with its restoration which was concluded in 1920.

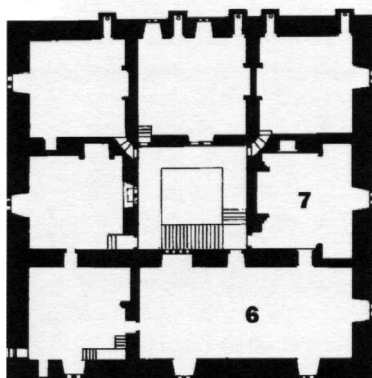
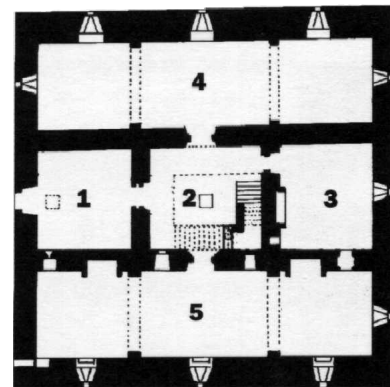
TOUR OF THE CASTLE

Having passed through the gatehouse in the fortified walls, or on horseback over the adjacent drawbridge, one encounters the guardhouse, situated in front of the entrance to the castle proper.

The front door of the castle leads into a passage hall (1), formerly defended by a machicolation concealed in the vault and a second doorway, one-time protected by a portcullis, leads into the central square courtyard (2)

A monumental stone staircase, mounted on rampant arches, leads to the upper floors. The geometric symmetry of its architecture and the simplicity of its decorative details in dressed green and white stone are in keeping with the military character of the edifice and also denote the excellent quality of its masonry.

On the **ground floor**, two large symmetrical halls extend from front to back on the east and west sides of the castle and there is a kitchen in between on the south side (3). The hall on the east side (4) probably used originally to store artillery, has a barrel vault, whereas the more attractive Armoury Hall to the west (5) with a pointed vault has two monumental fireplaces with ornamental posts; the duplication of the wall structure and other indications that emerged in the course of recent restoration work bear witness to the over-lapping of various building campaigns.



The rooms on the **first floor**, reserved for the lords of the manor, are lit by elegant two-mullioned stone windows in 14th-century style which are larger than those on the other floors. The vast dining-room (6) is connected to the main kitchen by way of a service-hatch (7).

The multi-span stone vault in this kitchen, rebuilt in the time of Renato of Challant, is the only original ceiling left in the castle. Of the three large fireplaces, the enormous one on the north side is richly decorated with mouldings and pillaring. From the service quarters on the second floor (closed to the public), a wooden stairway leads up to the floor on the level of the battlements.

SARRE CASTLE



The origins and the 18th century reconstruction

Set on a promontory overlooking the Dora Baltea river, Sarre Castle dominates the road leading to the upper part of Aosta Valley. The original part of the castle was probably built in the 12th century, whereas the first written records documenting its existence date from the early 13th century. The property passed then through different owners and in 1708 the castle was bought by Jean François Ferrod who commissioned the complete reconstruction, leaving only the tower intact. The historian J.B. De Tillier, who had had the opportunity to observe the edifice before its reconstruction, reported that the building works were quite substantial.

The royal castle



It was his passion for ibex-hunting that convinced Vittorio Emanuele II of Savoy (1820-1878) to buy the castle in 1869 to use as a comfortable alpine retreat in Aosta Valley. The Royal castle of Sarre, thus included in His Majesty's Private Estate, became the headquarters for his hunting expeditions in Cogne, Rhêmes and Valsavarenche valleys.

In order to accommodate the first king of Italy worthily, a campaign of works was carried which included the raising of the tower level and the building of new stables. The interiors were completely restored and modernised.

The Curator of the Royal Palace in Milan was called upon specially to look after the fitting-out of the rooms, for which he provided by transferring furnishings

from other royal residences.



Vittorio Emanuele's successor, Umberto I (1844-1900) also chose to use this alpine castle for hunting purposes.

In the last years of his reign, Umberto I dedicated particular attention to Sarre castle, where he promoted further interior renovations. Noteworthy among the works carried out on that occasion are the decorative series in the great halls featuring ibex and chamois trophies.

The 20th century

Works of maintenance on the residence during the first two decades of the 20th century are reported in the records, although during that period the new sovereigns, Vittorio Emanuele III (1869-1947) and Elena of Montenegro (1873-1952) showed little interest in the property.

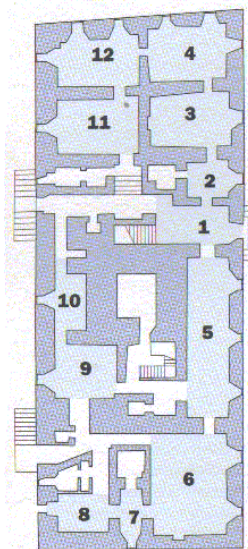
From the mid-1930s, there was renewed vibrancy in the atmosphere at the castle when Maria José (1906-2001), wife of the Crown Prince, chose it as her summer-holiday residence. The Princess, an enthusiastic climber, had a special fondness for the Aosta Valley.

In 1946, following the institutional referendum that sanctioned the victory of the Republic, Umberto II took his leave of Italy with the title of Count of Sarre. After the Second World War, Sarre castle remained the property of the Savoy family until when, in 1972, it was acquired by the "Società Moriana". Fitted-out with miscellaneous furnishing from other residences belonging to the Savoy family, the castle was opened to the public as a museum of dynastic memories.

In 1989, the Regional Government of the Aosta Valley purchased the castle.

A detailed consultation of the archives in Turin, Rome and Milan made it possible to recover the appearance and functional role of the castle in the period following its purchase by the Royal House

and to identify its transformations. The discovery of two inventories of furniture, dated 1875 and 1890, facilitated the arrangement of the original furnishings (those still preserved) in each room. In default of any precise records regarding the works of art, these were arranged in the various rooms in historical-cultural and thematic order. Whilst touring the castle, visitors can admire furniture, paintings, sculptures, prints, precious objects, curiosities and magnificently decorated interiors that bear witness to fragments of the private lives of its illustrious owners.



Ground floor:

1- entrance hall	7 - hunting hall: management
2- ticket office	8 - hunting hall: techniques
3- wardrobe	9 - the galatieri hall
4- reading room	10 - castles hall
5- reception gallery	11 - cabinets des gravures
6- hunting hall: territory	12 - cabinets des gravures

According to the castle records, the ground floor contained the dining room, the apartment of the Prince of Naples and the castle-custodian's

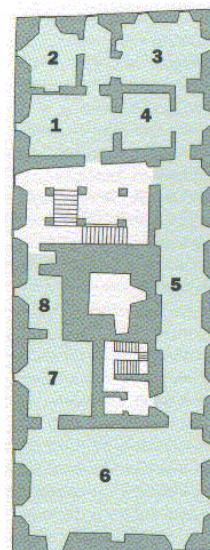
quarters, whereas the kitchens, larder and cellars were in the basement. Portraits and sculptures representing members of the House of Savoy from Emanuele Filiberto Duke of Savoy to King Vittorio Emanuele II are displayed in the Reception Gallery.

The halls given over to the theme of hunting illustrate the relative methods and techniques used between 17th and 19th centuries, with particular reference to the royal hunting expeditions in the Alps.

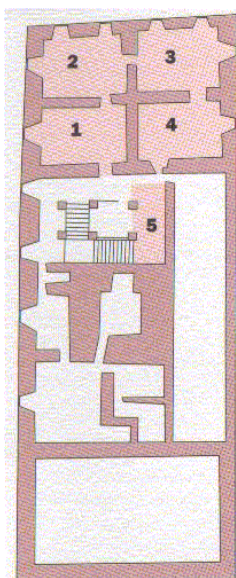
First floor:

The halls in the “*Appartamento Reale*” re-evoked the size of the living spaces in the castle during the time of Umberto I, as documented by the 1890 inventory. Save for some exceptions, the interiors are arranged with the original furniture (that still preserved); the fabrics are reproductions based on original samples preserved at the State Archives in Turin.

1- royal hall
2- king's antechamber and bedroom
3- queen's bedroom
4- antechamber and boudoir
5- gallery
6- trophy hall
7- first lieutenant's quarters
8- bedroom



The decorative work in the Gallery and in the Trophy Hall, carried out after the death of the sovereign, attest Umberto I's desire to increase the monumental value of the residence.



1- Vittorio Emanuele III and Elena of Montenegro
2- Umberto and Maria José of Belgium
3- Umberto and Maria José's children
4- fourth hall
5- hall of mementoes

Second floor:

Used as bedrooms, these halls were given to guests of consequence, whereas the servants' room was adjacent to the stairway. The layout is now arranged in a chronological order related to the various members of the House of Savoy who resided in the castle during the 20th century.

The chapel

In the chapel, the liturgical accessories and the prie-dieus upholstered in velvet are those documented in the 1890 inventory as are the priests' vestments. It was probably at that time that the original altarpiece was substituted with the present one, which features some saints around the Virgin Mary.

SAVOY CASTLE



It was thanks to Margherita of Savoy, spouse of Umberto I and Queen of Italy that Gressoney became one important holiday resort. From 1889 to 1925, Margherita of Savoy, spouse of Umberto I and Queen of Italy the Queen returned to Gressoney during the summer. For her, walking and mountain excursions were an enjoyable diversion from the rigid protocol of court. During her holidays in Gressoney, the Queen liked to wear the local costume which, following her example, developed in style to that still worn to this day.

Queen Margherita's castle stands at the foot of Colle della Ranzola, in the locality called « Belvedere » which commands a view of the whole valley as far as the Lyskamm glacier. In August 1899 the castle's foundation stone was laid. The architect Emilio Stramucci planned a castle in a medieval style. Enclosed in the rich greenery of the park that surrounds it, the aspect of the building is that of a turreted manor-house, with the

added elegance of numerous windows and a semi-circular veranda, overlooking the valley.

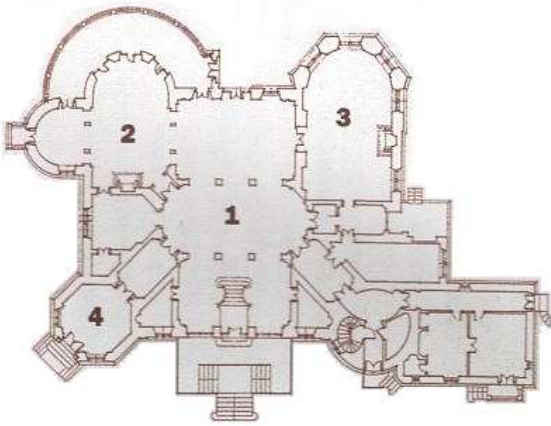
The young artist Carlo Cussetti did the pictorial ornamentation of the castle. The Medieval-style panelled ceilings, wall-panelling and furnishing are the work of the carver Michele Dellera.

A little *décauville* connected the castle to the kitchens, situated in a nearby building.

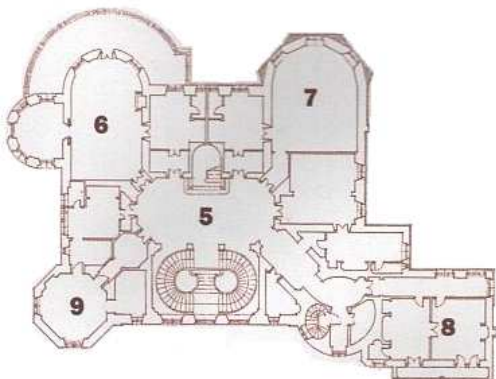
Since 1981, the castle belongs to the Autonomous Region of Aosta Valley. In the lower area of the park, a rock garden has been created with a vast collection of botanical plants that represent the flora of the Alps.

THE APARTMENTS

The castle is three-storied: the day rooms are on the ground floor, the royal apartments on the first floor and the second floor was reserved for the gentlemen of court (closed to the public); whereas the basement area contains the castle cellars.



Ground floor. The main entrance of the castle leads into a vast, pillared hall (1), in which the panels of its wooden ceiling are handsomely painted. On one side are the games-rooms (2) and sitting-rooms, from which one can approach the semi-circular veranda that overlooks the valley. The dining-room (3), on the other side of the hall, has ornate pictorial decorations on the walls, fireplace and ceiling-panels and the wood-panelling is carved in a scroll pattern. The so-called « groom's entrance » (4) also in neo-Gothic style, is in the octagonal tower on the north-west corner of the castle.



First floor. An elegant, great staircase in wood, with carvings of griffon-vultures and eagles leads up to the royal apartments. These are preceded by a hallway (5), the ceiling of which bears the well-wishing inscription « Hic manebimus optime » (We well enjoy staying here). The Queen's apartment (6) is ideally situated and from the windows there's a spectacular view of Monte Rose and the entire valley. The adjoining apartment was appointed to the Crown Prince Umberto(7). The King's apartment (9) and that of the marchioness Pes of Villamarina (8), lady-in-waiting to the Queen, are situated on the opposite side of the hallway.

USSEL CASTLE



Standing on a marked, rocky promontory, Ussel castle overlooks the south side of the residential area of Châtillon.

Built by Ebaldo II of Challant in the mid 14th century, the castle marks a change in fortress architecture of Aosta Valley. Indeed, it is the first single body castle in Val d'Aosta, which was the last evolutionary phase of medieval castles, and marked the passage between the contemporary castle in Fénis and the rigid forms in Verrès. Having passed on numerous occasions from the Challants to the Savoys and vice versa, the castle then became a prison, until it was abandoned completely. Having bought the castle from the Passerin

d'Entrèves family, heirs to the Challants, in 1983 Baron Marcel Bich donated it to the regional authority, which restored it and earmarked it as an **exhibition centre**.

With a large, rectangular layout, the castle is an example of good masonry that culminates in blind arcades, not present on the north side, and beautiful mullioned windows each different from the next, with floral and geometric decorations.

The corners on the south side (facing the mountain) have two round towers, which were originally connected via a walkway, protected by battlements.

The **south side** also has an entrance with an overhead machicolation.

The **north side**, which faces Châtillon, has two four-sided towers, with a slightly projecting watchtower in between, a symbolic element of feudal power. The monumental fireplaces remain, with large shelves placed on the same ascending line, exploiting a single flue, and traces of the stairs and floor divisions.

Before restoration work began, the manor was mostly in ruins; however a precise archaeological assessment enabled identification and reintegration of the missing parts. A picturesque **walkway** was added along the battlement, where visitors can admire the Châtillon plain and its historic buildings.

SARRIOD DE LA TOUR CASTLE



According to the 18th-century historian De Tillier, the Sarriod de la Tour family descended from the lords of Bard, distinguished noble family of the Aosta Valley; in reality the existence of the Sarriod noble family is attested since the 12th century - they were indeed linked politically with the lords of Bard.

The castle, the origins of which remain however obscure, is situated on a flat portion of land in Saint-Pierre, close to the national road. The original nucleus included the chapel and the central square-plan tower surrounded by enclosure walls (donjon). This configuration was the same as that of other castles established in Aosta Valley

between the 10th and the 12th century. In 1420 Jean Sarriod decided to have a proper, stately castle built on the site of the pre-existing tower known since the 14th century as the “turris Sariodorum”. This was achieved by building a series of edifices on to the donjon. It was during that campaign of works that the spiral staircase (viret) was built and some cross-windows in freestone, characteristic of the Aosta Valley in the 15th century, were fitted in the keep. In 1478 Jean’s son, Antoine Sarriod de la Tour, refurbished the chapel which was dedicated to the Virgin Mary and to St. John the Evangelist; on the same occasion the panels outside the entrance depicting the Crucifixion and St. Christopher were frescoed and the small belfry raised. A large service room on the ground floor of the north wing has a wooden ceiling; the so-called “hall of the heads”, taking its name from the ceiling decoration, is on the first floor. In the late 15th century the outer enclosure walls were fortified with circular and semicircular towers and a new entrance to the castle was created on the east side; the ogee portal has an archivolt in sculpted stone featuring the Sarriod coat-of-arms. The discontinuity between floor levels attest the complex overlap of building phases carried out in the following centuries. The wing that now forms the east prospect of the castle was built during the 16th century, the north corner tower was elevated in the 17th century and some fragments of wall paintings and a stuccoed fireplace date back to the early-18th century. The castle remained the property of the Sarriod de la Tour family up to the 1923 after which it passed into the hands of the Bensa family of Genova. Since 1970 it has belonged to the regional administration.



THE CHAPEL

The original frescoes are now only fragmentary; the more conspicuous parts remaining are those on the south wall: the upper part of a Crucifixion on the vault, two saints, mermaids and grotesques in the lower part, an Adoration between the windows. The Crucifixion and Saint Christopher outside the entrance are the work of an unknown painter and reflect the Franko-Flemish style of the second half of the 15th Century. The wooden altar, painted to imitate marble, with a canvas depicting Mary Magdalene, dates from the middle of the 18th century.

“THE HALL OF THE HEADS”

The main stateroom of the castle owes its name to the wooden ceiling which is supported by 171 sculpted corbels featuring grotesques, imaginary monsters and animals bearing coat-of-arms now abraded. The fireplace was put in by the last owners of the castle.

BARD FORTRESS



Already during Theodoric's reign (VI century A.D), Bard was a garrison of sixty soldiers, defending the "Clausuræ Augustanæ" (a defence system on the borders of the Empire).

In 1034, it was described as "inexpugnabile oppidum", in one of the oldest references to a castle in Val d'Aosta. The Savoys became the Lords of Bard in 1242, with Amadeus IV, driven by the insistence of the local inhabitants, who were tired of the abuse of power by

Hugh of Bard, who exploited the position of his castle to levy heavy duties on travellers and merchants.

From that time on, the castle was controlled by the Savoys who held a garrison there. In 1661, even the armies from other fortresses of Aosta Valley, including Verrès and Montjovet, converged in Bard.

The castle was once again the protagonist with the passage of the **French army** in 1704 and particularly on **Napoleon Bonaparte's** arrival in **May 1800**, who formed a garrison of 400 Austrian men within the fortress. The defence structures of the fort were so efficient that Napoleon's army took about two weeks to overcome the Austrian defences, with success due only to cunning tactics. The fortress was then dismantled by Napoleon, to avoid further danger.

The current **reconstruction** work was commissioned by Carlo Felice, in the middle of the Restoration, who, from **1830** onwards, turned it into one of the most important military structures in Val d'Aosta. The fortress began to deteriorate at the end of the nineteenth century. It was used as criminal baths and then as a weapons depot.

It was decommissioned in 1975 from military state property and was purchased by the Val d'Aosta regional authority in 1990.

The fortress hosts the **Alps Museum** and temporary exhibitions.