



# FABRON HILL

'Sites' collection

NICE  
PATRIMOINE



VILLE DE NICE



The son of a publisher and 'cartellier' from Courtrai (Belgium), Gambart was the London representative for the print publisher Goupil. Later, he specialised in importing copies of artworks and ultimately became an art dealer.

In 1873 he had the Nice architect Sébastien-Marcel Biasini (1841-1913) build [4] a 'palace' over one of the four mansions, known as 'Les Palmiers', featuring a neopalladian façade clearly inspired by English architecture (Chatsworth House) or the style seen on the American East Coast (Rhode Island), and clad in Carrara marble. It was here that he entertained and exhibited works by his artist friends (Sarah Bernhardt, Gustave Nadaud, Rosa Bonheur, Nicaise de Keyser, Alma Tadema, etc.). He died in his villa on 12 April 1902.



[4] Caricature of S.-M. Biasini by CAM, 1905  
Le Petit Niçois

The property was then acquired by Baron Alexander von Falz-Fein, a wealthy Crimean landowner [5]. Along with his wife Vera, the couple transformed the residence into a ballroom laid out in a semi-circle on the western side, annexed to 'Gothic-Troubadour' style turrets, and dug an artificial pond in the grounds.



[5] The "Les Palmiers" villa, Falz-Fein property, circa 1910  
Nice-Côte d'Azur Archive Department

In 1924, Édouard Soulas, who had made his fortune in Argentina's meat trade, bought the villa and renovated its interior design in a neoclassical Louis XV style that can also be seen in his Château de Celeyran (Aude). The landscape designer Octave Godard (1877-1958) replaced the pond and its greenhouses with a French-style garden structured around a central pond, embellished to the south with a false rock garden. Édouard Soulas and his son Santiago Soulas both died in 1943.

In 1956, the estate fell into the hands of a real estate company, which was given permission in 1961 to build wide blocks of apartments that were to become the 'Grands Cèdres' residence, upon one condition: that the garden and villa (listed on the supplementary inventory of historic monuments in 1993) were to be left untouched. The 'marble palace' was given over to the city of Nice, with the latter relocating its municipal archives department here in 1963.

## THE CHÂTEAU BARLA OR VILLA BISHOP

During rebuilding works on 'Les Palmiers', Ernest Gambart stayed in another part of the Gastaud estate at the Château Barla, which he sold in 1874 to an English winter resident, George Bishop, deputy of the Chamber of Commons, and his wife, the singer Caroline-Felicite Davis. Rebuilt in 1877 in the Troubadour style, Barla became an epicentre for the chattering classes.

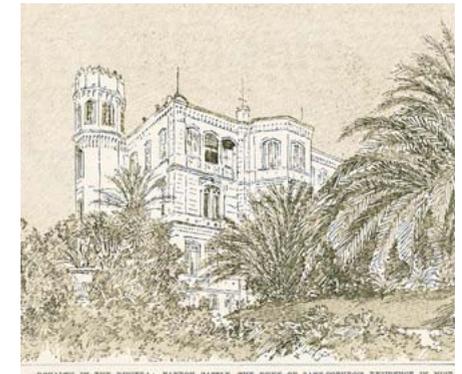
From 1918 to 1939, the estate was owned by Behar Barki, who had ties to the Egyptian royal family. In 1841 the property was split and sold as lots. The tower was preserved, but the Neo-Gothic decorative elements disappeared.

## FROM THE CHÂTEAU DE FABRON TO THE CAROL DE ROUMANIE PARK

Another part of the Gastaud estate, the Château de Fabron, encompassed a rural building, three houses, gardens, 1.6 hectares of olive trees, 1.26 hectares of orange trees, vines, grazing fields and land that could be irrigated, which Gambart sold on in 1873 to Duke Ernest II of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. The latter rebuilt one of the houses, turning it into a Moorish folly featuring two floors (8 and 10 rooms) over a raised ground floor (7 floors), flanked by a bell tower with sweeping views over Nice and the Bay of Angels [6].

After 1893, his nephew, son of Queen Victoria, took up residence for the winter in Nice: his daughter Marie married King Ferdinand I of Romania. Deposed in 1940, their son Carol died in Estoril (Portugal) in April 1953, and the property

was bought by the City of Nice. The castle has since been demolished and the Parc Carol de Roumanie is a vast municipal park of 2.3 hectares.



[6] Royalty in the Riviera: Fabron Castle, the Duke of Saxe-Coburg's residence in Nice, Bibliothèque de Cessole

## ROSELAND ABBEY

This 17<sup>th</sup> century rural property was passed on to the chamberlain of the Duke of Modena, Alexandre-Auguste Lascaris-Vintimille, before being confiscated during the French Revolution. The Jaume family farmed the estate (oil and wine) in the 19<sup>th</sup> century before selling it in 1878 to a Russian prince, Count Apraksin, who turned it into his holiday home.

In 1923, wealthy Parisian antiquarian Édouard Larcade renamed the villa as 'the Abbey', and built a small museum of medieval statues, in keeping with 1920s tastes. In the upper section of the estate's 10-hectare grounds, he built a chapel and cloisters with medieval sculptures taken from a building in Comminges, and columns and paleo-Christian capitals taken from the Daurade cloisters in Toulouse. He placed three Egyptian sphinx statues in the cistern.

He asked the landscape designer Octave Godard to create an amalgamation of different garden styles: French geometry,



[7] Roseland Abbey, 1997  
Photo City of Nice.

rose-lined paths and lawns, an Italian touch lent by sculptures, bowls, ponds and white marble furniture, and English-style curved elements leading up to the cloisters. Mediterranean plants (green oak, olive trees, carob trees, Aleppo pines, cypress trees and broom) rubbed shoulders with exotic vegetation (Judas trees, loquats, Japanese pittosporum, eucalyptus, palm trees, Barbary figs, aloe and agave, etc.).

In 1968, 600 housing units were built in seven apartment blocks, while the abbey and cloisters were handed over to the city of Nice. They were listed as historic monuments in 1996 [7].

## CHÂTEAU SAINTE-ANNE, NOW DEMOLISHED

The present-day 'Château Sainte-Anne' residence at 30 Avenue de Fabron is built over two distinct properties: 'L'Hermitage', formerly the Jaume/Apraksin estate, and 'L'Africaine', formerly the Gambart

estate. In 1896, Ernest Gambart sold the 'L'Africaine' villa to Louis-Alexandre Marnier-Lapostolle (owner of the 'Grand Marnier'), having formerly rented it out to his favourite artist, Rosa Bonheur. 'L'Africaine' was sold on in 1925 to another Parisian industrialist, Étienne Louis Mascré, before being handed over in 1938 to Raymond Patenôte, a press magnate and deputy of Seine-et-Oise. The 'Château Sainte-Anne' or 'Hermitage' was sold upon the dismantling of the Apraksin estate in 1920, going to the notary Charles Grimaldi who entrusted architect Adrien Rey (1865-1959) with rebuilding the villa in a Neo-Renaissance style in 1928, before selling it on to a real estate company in 1934. Patenôte bought the property in 1942, and it was here that Frédéric Ozil set up his 'universal school', a private institute for distance learning. In order to make way for an apartment complex of 275 units, in 1984 permission was granted to demolish the two villas and the chapel, on condition the gardens be preserved and a new park be built, the present-day Parc de l'Indochine municipal gardens [8].



[8] Façade of the Château Sainte-Anne prior to demolition, 1979  
Nice-Côte d'Azur Archive Department

## THE CHÂTEAU SAINTE-HÉLÈNE, TODAY'S MUSÉE D'ART NAÏF ANATOLE JAKOVSKY MUSEUM

This section of the Gastaud estate was first acquired by the director of the Monte-Carlo casino, François Blanc. The villa built in 1882 by his son Edmond was sold

on to a Turkish owner, Nissim-Isachar Léon (1896), followed by the American Henry Welchman Bartol (1904). The latter called on Nice architect Aron Messiah to create a magnificent residence featuring one floor over a ground floor covered by a terrace with balusters. Upon Bartol's death, the property was sold to perfumer François Coty and was passed on to his ex-wife Yvonne Lebaron following their divorce in 1929.

In 1973, the property was handed over to the city of Nice who restored and revised the villa to house the collections of the Musée International d'Art Naïf Anatole Jakovsky, inaugurated on 5 March 1982 [9].

The city was gradually closing in on it. Despite the State's best efforts to "safeguard the character of the Provence-Côte d'Azur coast" (1959) and the Alpes-Maritimes prefect's attempts to take "measures to protect trees, forests and vegetation" (1964), demolition permits were granted and luxury residential complexes gradually encircled these glamorous villas converted into municipal cultural centres tucked away in havens of greenery.



[9] The Château Sainte-Hélène, present-day Musée d'Art Naïf, 2014  
Photo E. Bertino, Nice-Côte d'Azur Archive Department

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