

Versailles

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial will cover the topic of Versailles. By the end of this lesson, you'll be able to identify and define today's key terms, describe the stylistic characteristics of the art and architecture from the Palace at Versailles, and explain the influence of Louis XIV on the construction of the Palace at Versailles. This will be accomplished through the exploration of:



BIG IDEA

The Palace of Versailles was a renovated royal hunting lodge that developed into a sprawling palace, park, and town, and is one of the most important examples of 17th-century French architecture and art.

1. Location and Time Period: Versailles

The art and architecture that you will be looking at today cover the time period from 1666 to 1710. Note that this is just a short period during the time of Louis XIV's reign, which was actually over 72 years.



This lesson will focus geographically on the city of Versailles, which is just southwest of—and quite close to—the city of Paris.

2. Louis the XIV

This period of time in France was dominated by the personality, politics, and propaganda of King Louis XIV, also known as the **Sun King**. His reign of over 72 years is the longest of any French king and was ensured by rigorous control, using art and architecture as propaganda, and his belief in divine right or authority. Basically, he believed that his rule was bestowed by God himself. He was considered to be a brilliant politician but an

authoritarian ruler, and he sought to establish his rule and his legacy through the commission of numerous works of art and architectural projects.



DID YOU KNOW

Louis XIV is considered to be the most important art patron of 17th-century France.

In the painting below, the artist conveys a powerful image of the monarch. The king looks out at the viewer, elaborately dressed in his coronation robes, gilded sword and scabbard, wig, leggings, and red-heeled shoes.



DID YOU KNOW

These particular shoes were an invention of the King himself, to compensate for his rather short stature of only 5 feet 4 inches. These shoes can be seen worn by the subsequent kings, Louis XV and Louis XVI, in their own portraits.



Louis XIV by Hyacinthe Rigaud

1701

Oil on canvas

The overall effect of the painting is impressive, however, and creates an image of the absolute authority of the King, which was his intent.

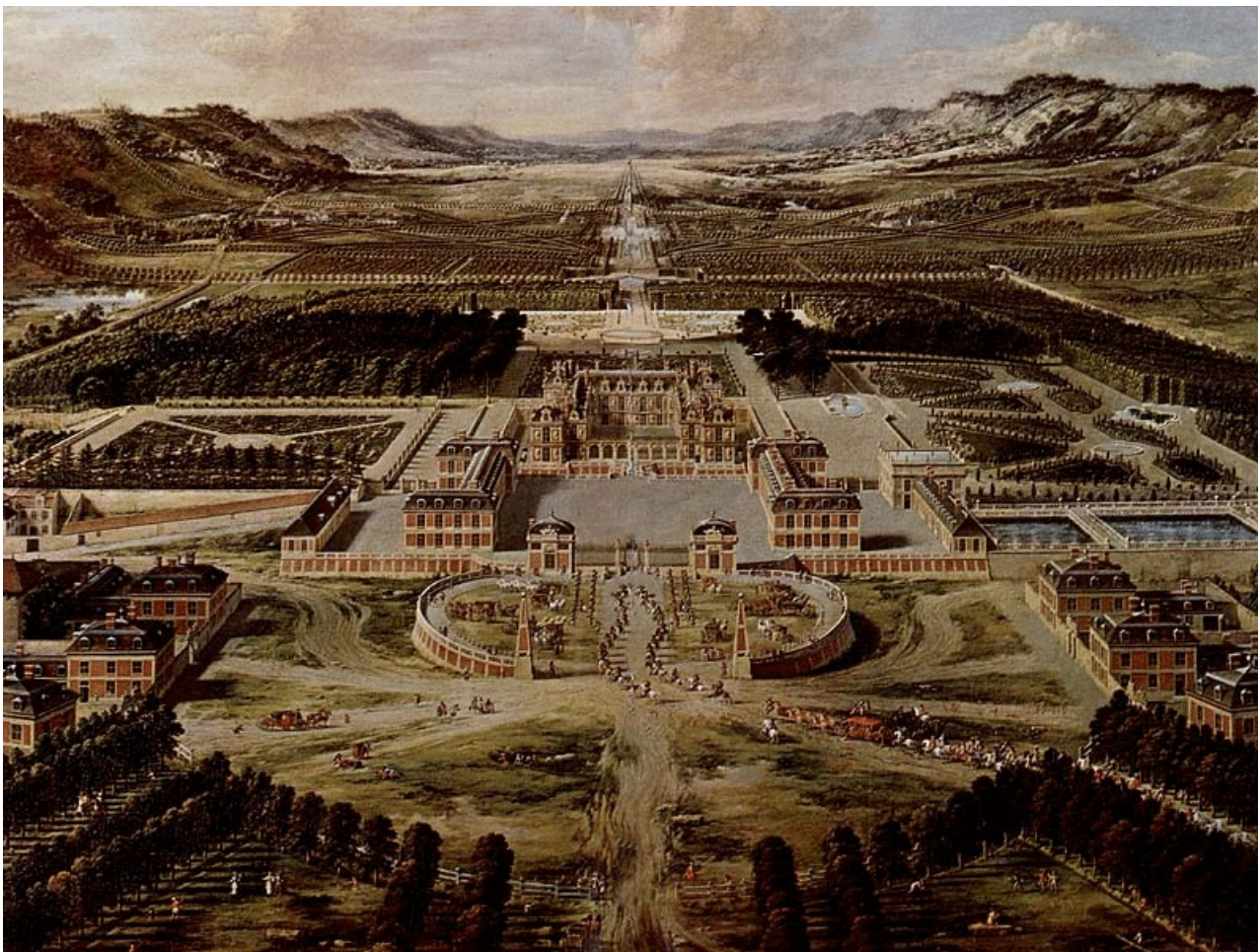


TERM TO KNOW

3. Versailles

As renovations to the east wing of the current palace—called the Louvre—were being carried out, the renovation of a royal hunting lodge at Versailles began as well. The construction of the Versailles palace was an enormous project. It was the biggest French construction project of the 17th century, by far. It began with the King's desire to renovate the hunting lodge at Versailles with the intent of turning it into a magnificent palace. The result, however, included not only a tremendous palace in the French Baroque style, complete with **pavilions**, but also a park and an adjacent city, all of which served to symbolize the power of the King.

Here is an aerial painting of the palace from the front. Notice, though, that the palace is just part of a massive complex.



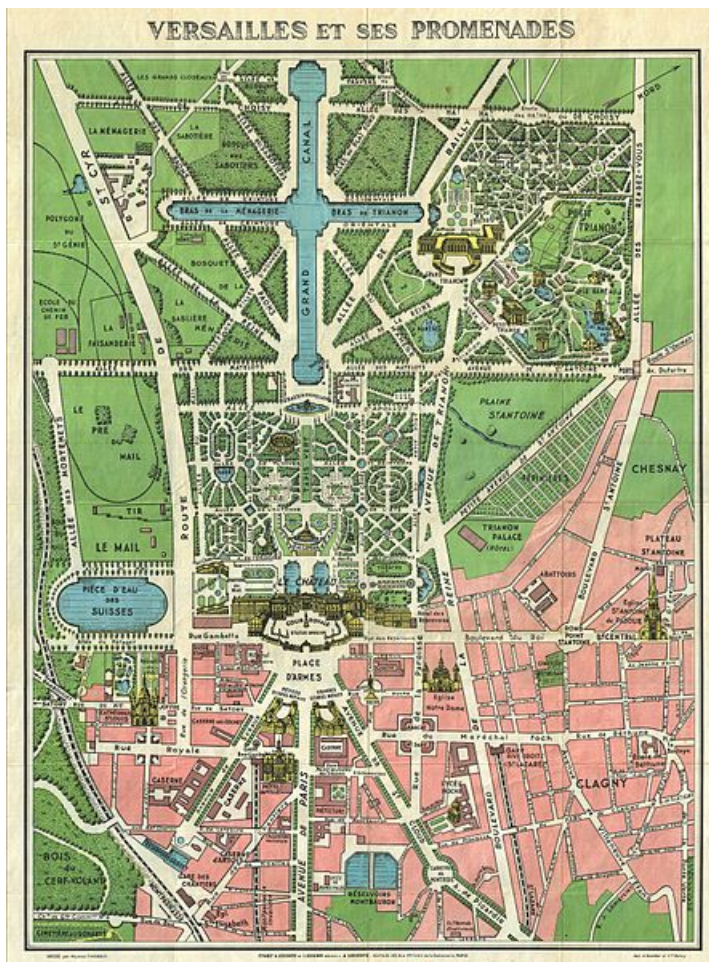
Palace of Versailles

17th century

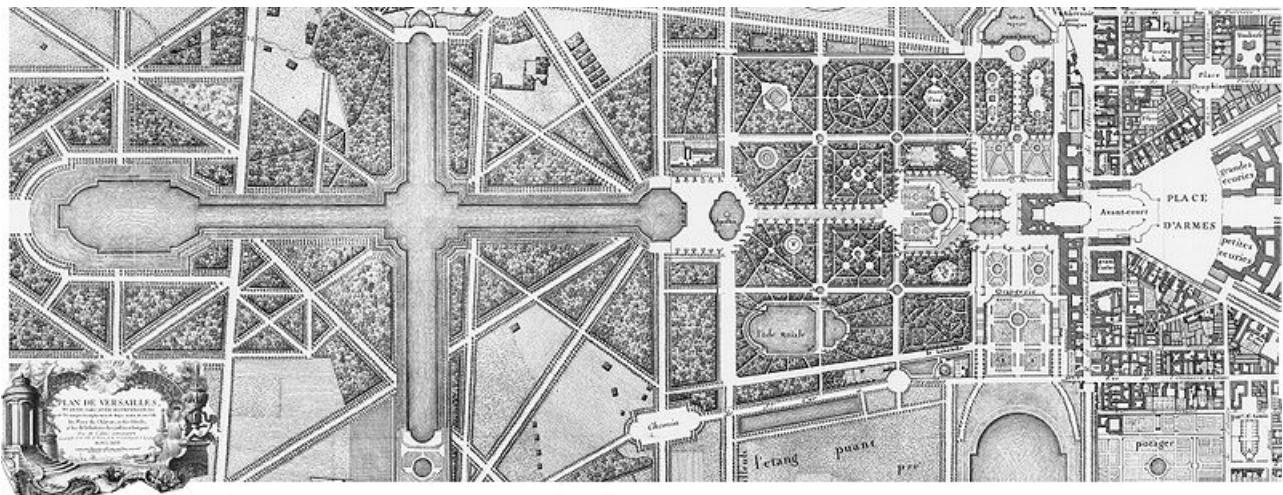
Versailles, France

Here is a view of the complete complex from an overhead view. The palace is in the lower section, just above the pink section, which represents the city, at the convergence of three main roads. Notice how the accompanying park occupies roughly two-thirds of the whole plan. The enormous palace itself is dwarfed by

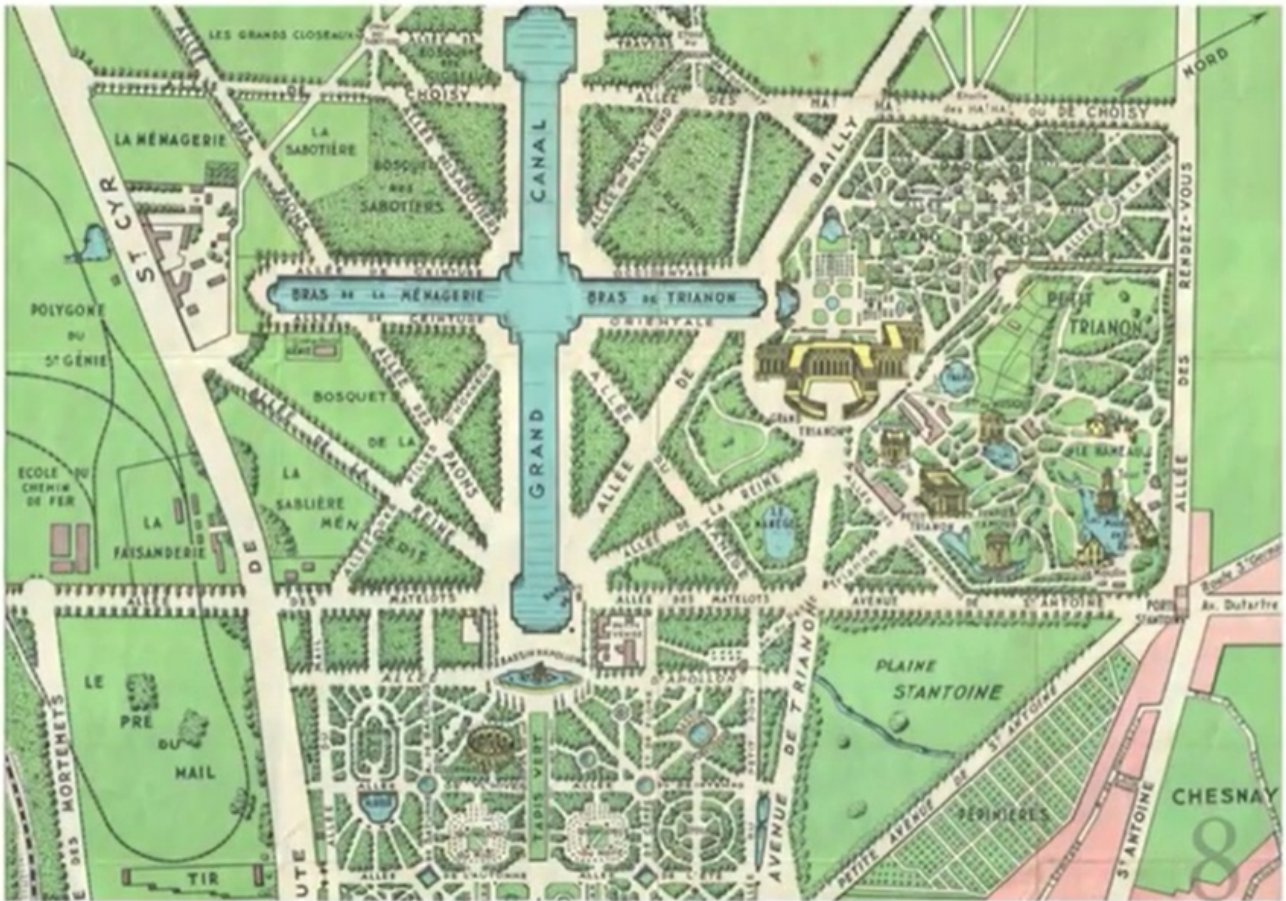
the sheer scale of the entire Versailles complex.



Here's yet another view of Versailles, showing the plan horizontally, with the palace on the right.



This image is a close-up of the park and the Grand Canal in the shape of a cross.



Lastly, here is a close-up of the new city of Versailles, which became the capital of France in a sense, as this became the primary residence of the King, though Paris remained the actual capital. The palace is highlighted in pink within the complex.



Pavilion

An open building used for shelter, it can be separate or attached; in architecture, a projecting element of a façade suggesting a tower.

4. The Art and Architecture of Versailles

4a. Hall of Mirrors

The sheer scale of the entire place is hard to imagine, as is the opulence and extravagance on display in the interior design. One of the most impressive examples is in the so-called "Hall of Mirrors."



The Hall of Mirrors is a brilliant example of the elaborate French Baroque style.

It's a vaulted hallway filled with ceiling paintings by Charles Le Brun, which depict the 17 most important events in the King's reign. The arches of the windows each feature the head of Apollo, who was a sun god. Decorations also include the busts of eight Roman emperors and eight statues of classical gods and goddesses, which are all references to classical Rome.



Hall of Mirrors at Palace of Versailles by Jules Hardouin-Mansart & Charles Le Brun

1680

Versailles, France

The dimensions of the hall are quite enormous: it's roughly 240 feet long—about 60 feet less than an American football field—and 35 feet wide, and approximately 42 feet tall. The entire hall is lined with mirrors that give the illusionistic impression that the hall is actually much larger than it already is. Every single element, down to the doorknobs, was designed specifically for the palace at Versailles, in order to make it the most glorious example of French art and architecture in existence.

4b. Apollo Attended to by the Nymphs

References to classical design and themes can be seen in the statue shown below, which is located in the garden at Versailles. It depicts Apollo the sun god, a reference to the Sun King of France, which is no coincidence. He's being attended to by nymphs, and it's an example of the classical influence of the artist, as well as an example of royal symbolism.



Apollo Attended to by the Nymphs at Palace of Versailles garden by François Girardon

1666-1672

Marble

4c. Royal Chapel at Versailles

Speaking of royalty, the Royal Chapel at Versailles was added in 1698, and designed to emulate the Italian Baroque style of church design. Although it's rather small compared to the larger churches that it's emulating, it achieves a dramatic sense of verticality in the way the Corinthian-style colonnade supports a large clerestory, nave, and apse that are of equal height. The illusionistic ceilings recall earlier examples of Italian ceiling frescoes.



Royal Chapel at Versailles by Jules Hardouin-Mansart & Antoine Coypel

1698-1710

Versailles, France

The chapel exists as a further example of the majesty of Versailles. The entire complex at Versailles, from its use of expensive building materials, like in the Hall of Mirrors, to the gardening and landscaping techniques, like trimming the trees into cone shapes or the French parterres that were in the shape of a tapestry—emphasize the display of wealth, the dominance over the landscape, and the absolute authority of Louis the XIV.



SUMMARY

Today you learned about **Versailles**, one of the most important examples of 17th-century French architecture and art. In addition to learning how to identify and define today's key terms, you also learned about **King Louis XIV** and his influence on the construction of the palace at Versailles. You also learned about the stylistic characteristics of the **art and architecture from the palace of Versailles**—a structure that began as a renovated royal hunting lodge and developed into a sprawling palace, park, and city.

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Ian McConnell.



TERMS TO KNOW

Pavilion

An open building used for shelter, it can be separate or attached; in architecture, a projecting element of a façade suggesting a tower.

Sun King

Louis XIV or Louis the Great, the longest reigning king of France.