



# The Sayn Palace Museum Guide



## A. Ground Floor

### 1. General Information

The Sayn Palace with its elegant Neo-Gothic façade is a wonderful example of the 19<sup>th</sup> century architecture of romanticism. Situated directly below the 12<sup>th</sup> century family castle of the former *Counts of Sayn* (now *Princes of Sayn-Wittgenstein*), it is surrounded by a 25-acre English landscape garden. The palace has been greatly admired since the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century when King Frederic William IV of Prussia was “totally astounded, blinded, delighted by the magic of Sayn”.

Prince Louis and his Russian wife Leonilla converted Sayn Palace in 1848/50 from a medieval mansion into a comfortable and most elegant princely residence.

At the very end of World War II the palace became badly damaged when German troops, upon the arrival of US tanks, decided to blow up a bridge right in front of the building. The palace fell into decay and was largely forgotten.

A revived interest in the Neo-Gothic style finally led to the recognition of the building as a monument of national importance.

This triggered in 1995 an extensive restoration program, a public-private partnership involving both the princely family and the State of Rhineland-Palatinate.

Since the year 2000 Prince Alexander and Princess Gabriela zu Sayn-Wittgenstein-Sayn have been able to present their house in new glory. The palace with its museum rooms and the palace restaurant is the seat of the princely administration.

### 2. The main Staircase & Princess Marianne's photos



The staircase today presents a well fitting combination of modern architecture and antique decorative elements. A portrait shows Princess Marianne, born in 1919, a well known photographer nicknamed “Mamarazza” by Princess Caroline of Monaco. The opposite wall shows her photos of the glamorous 1955 wedding of Princess Ira Fürstenberg to Prince Alfonso Hohenlohe in Venice, of an encounter with Salvador Dali in 1987 and a visit to Andy Warhol’s New York Factory in 1986.

### 3. The Portrait of Prince Peter in white uniform



Peter, the only son from Prince Louis’ first marriage to the Polish Princess Stefanie Radziwil, inherited the largest fortune of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe: 3 million acres of farmland and forests with some 100.000 serfs working the land. Peter served Russia as military attaché in Paris where he fell in love and married the daughter of an inn keeper from Brittany, a huge scandal of the time. The couple died without issue. Peter’s sister Marie married Prince Chlodwig Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, chancellor of the Imperial German Reich.

## B. First Floor

### 1. The Portrait of Field marshal Peter and the history of the Sayn family in Russia



Peter's father Count Christian was called to Russia around 1740 to help reorganize the Russian army. His son Peter became important during the Napoleonic Wars when he managed to save Saint Petersburg and helped to drive the French aggressor back out of Russia. In 1813 he was made chief commander of the allied armies against Napoleon. Russian Czar Nicholas I. promoted him to field marshal in the Turkish wars, and Prussian King Frederic William III. raised him and his descendants to the rank of princes.

Still today Russian people erect monuments and keep the memory of their great hero. A showcase exhibits new rouble coins and other paraphernalia showing Peter's portrait, even a 50year old cognac was recently named after him (selling for 1813 Euro/bottle!). It was the field marshal's eldest son Louis who together with his second wife Leonilla returned the family to Sayn in 1850.

### 2. The Staircase (Stucco and Portrait Gallery)



The former historic staircase was famous for its elaborate stucco works. Most was destroyed by rain when the building had fallen into a ruin after WW II, but one floor was perfectly restored. Each section on each of the three floors used to frame a family portrait, two of which could be bought back recently. You find them in the adjacent hall.

### 3. The iron Pipe



In 1848 a most modern steam engine system was installed, pumping water from a cistern in the basement through a pipe all the way up the castle hill into an underground basin, providing water with sufficient pressure to feed a jet in the pond and cast-iron fountains in the park below.

### 4. The Chapel



The palace chapel was built in 1860 as a double chapel, modelled on Sainte Chapelle in Paris. Its purpose was to house the precious arm reliquary of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, a wonderful piece of medieval art preserving the saint's arm bone. Today's princely family descends directly from this saint, most popular with Catholics and Protestants alike. The stained glass windows by Moritz von Schwind show Russian Saint Leonilla and Saint Louis of France, the name patrons of the builders couple. Enamel portraits flanking the relic depict Saint Wladimir from Leonilla's family and Saint Jutta of Sponheim, a member to the Sayn dynasty.



A little angel fluttering away in the sky (above the marble Madonna) reminds us of Princess Filippa who died in a car crash a few weeks after she was married in 2001. The drawing was found in her diary which was later published and quickly became a best seller, titled "Filippa's Angel".

The lower chapel represents the family crypt, exhibiting three precious sarcophaguses.

## 5. The Ornamental Cast Iron Exhibition

The Palace houses the Rhenish Museum on Ornamental Cast Iron with one of the most important exhibitions on these very special 19<sup>th</sup> century works of art, also known as "Berlin Iron". The world's largest collection today is exhibited in Birmingham, Alabama.



A maquette shows the Sayn Foundry, built in 1830 and modelled on the form of a basilica. It is considered the first building world wide made from glass and iron, the forerunner of such famous structures as London's Crystal Palace.

This nearby industrial monument is now under intensive restoration and should soon become officially nominated for Unesco's World Heritage list.

Some of the most precious objects exhibited include cast iron jewellery, sculptures, reliefs, vases and garden furniture. The jewellery was created to finance the liberation



war against Napoleon when Prussian ladies were motivated to turn in their golden tiaras, necklaces or ear rings for iron copies.

The famous "Sayner Mücke", a life-size fly, is considered the smallest cast-iron object manufactured in Sayn. It contrasts with huge eagles which used to frame the entrance to the nearby iron foundry grounds.

The exhibition also gives an insight into the factory worker's daily life as well as into the social standing of the owners families, including "Steel Baron" Alfried Krupp.

## 6. The Application of cast iron in Sayn Palace

When Alphonse Girard, head architect of the Louvre in Paris, was commissioned by Prince Louis in 1848 to transform the medieval house into a residential palace, technical innovations and extremely modern materials were implemented. The use of cast-iron elements as the tracery of the pointed-arch windows and dormer windows was unique



worldwide. The same philosophy was applied 150 years later during the restoration of 1995 to 2000 when most of the missing cast-iron elements on the palace's façade were replaced by fibreglass— just as modern and unique in a historic building as cast iron was five generations earlier! The larger museum room still shows iron tracery, whereas the smaller room windows were equipped with fibreglass elements.

## 7. The Princesses Room and Wedding Exhibition

The Princesses Room represents seven generations of the ladies of the house: *Antoinette Snarsky*, a Polish countess, was married to Field marshal *Peter*.



Russian Princess *Leonilla Bariatinsky*, 2<sup>nd</sup> wife of Prince *Louis*, was one of the



beauties of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, portrayed by such famous artists as Franz Winterhalter and Horace Vernet (exhibited in the state rooms which can be visited on a special arrangement). With a life span of almost 102 years (1816-1918) she is listed in the Guinness Book of Records as the oldest member of a royal family.

*Yvonne*, daughter of the Duke of Blacas, came from Château Ussé on the Loire river, home of the fairy tale "The Sleeping Beauty". She married Prince *Alexander*, later known as Count of Hachenburg.





Their eldest son Prince *Stanislaus*' marriage to *Elena Ruffo della Scaletta* from an ancient Roman princely family remained without issue. His younger brother *Alexander* married Baroness *Walburga* of Friesen, daughter of the Saxon ambassador to Bavaria.



*Marianne*, born Baroness Mayr-Melnhof from Salzburg, was married in 1942 to their son *Ludwig*. He died 20 years later when he was run over by a truck. Marianne became a well known portrait and society photographer. Her work was published in four photo books and exhibited in many art shows between Vienna, Salzburg, Munich, Frankfurt, London and New York. Now aged 93, she is still travelling the world and keeps hosting guests from all over the globe at her famous luncheons during the Salzburg Festival season.

Princess *Gabriela* married their eldest son Prince *Alexander* in 1969 at Pommersfelden, the splendid baroque palace of the Counts of Schönborn. Gabriela was active in politics, plays a major role in a large number of social initiatives and civic organizations and very much promoted the revival of tourism in Sayn. She has gained great recognition at home and abroad for her tropical butterfly garden. *Alexander*, a Harvard Business School graduate of 1968, is actively involved in the preservation of national monuments and nature conservation as president of the German Castles Association for 27 years and vice-president of Europa Nostra, the voice for cultural heritage in Europe.

Gabriela and Alexander have seven children and eight grandchildren.

*Henry* and *Alexandra* live with their families in Tuscany. *Casimir* and *Sofia* work in London, *Louis* moved with his family to Austria and *Peter* studies in Spain. *Filippa* died shortly after her wedding with Italian Count *Vittorio Mazzetti d'Albertis* in a tragic car accident returning from Cornwall. In her memory, Princess Gabriela created the foundation "Filippa's Angel", supporting young Europeans engaged in social, ecological and cultural projects all over the world.



The **wedding exhibition** shows wedding dresses worn by Princess Gabriela in 1969 and, slightly altered, again by her daughter Alexandra in 1994, by Princess Filippa marrying Count Vittorio in 2001 and by Countess Philippa Spannocchi at her wedding to Prince Louis in 2011.



Further objects related to these grand princely weddings are exhibited in the illuminated show cases.

A large **family tree** explains the history of the family. Starting some 1000 years ago as *Counts of Sponheim* the family changed names to *Counts of Sayn* in the 13<sup>th</sup> century when marrying the last Countess of Sayn and again to *Counts of Sayn and Wittgenstein* when the County of Wittgenstein was inherited in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. In 1605 the family split into the *Sayn-Wittgenstein-Berleburg* and *Sayn-Wittgenstein-Hohenstein* branches. Count Christian of Sayn-Wittgenstein-Berleburg started a Russian branch in 1740 which after returning to Sayn in 1850 was awarded the title of *Princes of Sayn-Wittgenstein-Sayn*.

The present head of the Sayn branch is *Alexander*, 7<sup>th</sup> Prince of Sayn-Wittgenstein-Sayn.

